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'The Cold Northern Land of Suomi': Michael Davitt and Finnish Nationalism[1]

Andrew G. Newby

-Paris, past and present, he said. You look like communards.
-Like fellows who had blown up the Bastille, J.J. O'Molloy said in quiet mockery. Or was it you shot the lord lieutenant of Finland between you? You look as though you had done the deed. General Bobrikoff.
[…] -We were only thinking about it, Stephen said.[2]

James Joyce's imagined exchange between O'Molloy and Dedelus took place in the offices of the *Freeman's Journal*, just as news was breaking of a political assassination on the other side of Europe. *Ulysses* eventually made 16 June 1904 one of the most celebrated days in Irish history. The fatal shooting in Helsinki of the Governor General of Finland, Nicolai Bobrikov[3], ensured that the date also achieved notoriety in the Finnish national narrative. As a man roughly equivalent to the British viceroys of Ireland, news of Bobrikov's death reverberated around Europe, and it was in this context of political violence, reminiscent of the Phoenix Park assassinations of Burke and Cavendish in 1882, that Michael Davitt found himself in Finland for the first time. If he required any confirmation of the febrile political atmosphere, it arrived less than a year later. On the same morning that Davitt arrived in Finland for a second visit, 6 February 1905, the Finnish Chancellor of Justice, Eliel Soisalon-Soininen was killed by an assassin's bullet in downtown Helsinki.

Both of Davitt's visits to Helsinki followed on from more extensive tours of Russia, where he was particularly keen to investigate the pogroms

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[1] Quotations from the Davitt Papers are reproduced by kind permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin. Translations are the author's own unless stated otherwise. Some of this material has been developed from an earlier Swedish-language article: See Andrew G. Newby, '"The Manly Spirit of Finlanders": Michael Davitt, Finland och irländsk nationalism åren 1905–1905' in Peter Stadius, Stefan Nygård and Parkko Havtamäki (eds), *Opera Et Dies: Festskrift till Lars-Folke Landgrēn* (Helsingfors, 2011), 131–46.

[2] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922 edition, Oxford, 1993), 129.

[3] In transliteration from Cyrillic, contemporary English-, Finnish- and Swedish-language sources tend to use the spelling Bobrikoff. I have used the modern form Bobrikov in this article, other than in direct quotations.

against the Jews in Bessarabia, as well as the more general question of labour relations in the Russian Empire. For Davitt, social and political activist, and investigative journalist, Russia in 1904–5 was a fascinating land of contrasts.[4] He made comprehensive notes on the state of Finnish society, and filed reports to various newspapers about the relationship between Finland and Russia. On returning to Ireland, Davitt then used Finland as an explicit comparator in political speeches: he highlighted the strength of the Finnish people in developing and defending their constitutional rights, and of the hypocrisy of the British establishment in supporting the Finns whilst denying self-government to the Irish.

Davitt's Background

Details of Davitt's early life are well known, his family emigrating from Straide, County Mayo, during the Great Famine, and settling in Lancashire. Davitt lost his arm in an industrial accident at the age of eleven, and thereafter attended school and worked as a printer's mate.[5] He was attracted to revolutionary Irish nationalism, joining the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and becoming a very active Fenian in England. In 1870 he was arrested while waiting for an arms supplier in Paddington Station, and subsequently suffered seven and a half extremely arduous years in Clerkenwell Prison. In the period immediately after his release on a 'ticket of leave' from Clerkenwell, he was one of the prime movers of the Irish 'New Departure', allying Fenianism, parliamentary agitation, and the nascent land movement in Western Ireland; an initiative that earned Davitt the title 'Father of the Land League'. This period also saw Davitt attain an elevated place in Irish history, but a long and varied career still lay before him, and after 1882 he fought not only for Irish self-government and land reform, but championed the labour movement and various causes throughout the world, including the Scottish crofters, the Russian Jews, and the Boers.[6]

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[4] Antti Kujala, 'Finland in 1905: The Political and Social History of the Revolution' in Jonathan D. Smele and Anthony Heywood (eds), *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives* (Abingdon, 2005), 79–93.

[5] Theodore W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 1846–82 (Oxford, 1981), 1–185; C. King, *Michael Davitt* (Dublin, 2000), 10–14; Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader* (London, 1908), 1–13; L. Marley, *Michael Davitt: Freelance Radical and Frondeur* (Dublin, 2007), 17–33.

[6] Fintan Lane and Andrew G. Newby (eds), *Michael Davitt: New Perspectives* (Dublin,

Finland and Ireland in the Late Nineteenth Century

> Britons are friends of liberty, the strenuous supporters of self-government in every country in the world. Just at present their generous hearts are aflame with indignation because the emperor of Russia proposes to invade the Home Rule of Finland. But prejudice is as a bandage binding British eyes when they look westward over Ireland.[7]

For much of the nineteenth century there were considerable differences between the constitutional relationships between Finland and Russia on the one hand, and Ireland and Great Britain on the other. Anthony Upton's summary of nineteenth-century Finnish history, that 'the 120-years [sic] relationship between Finland and the Russian Empire was one in which for more than three-quarters of the time, virtually down to 1899, the relationship was a positive one and in an overall sense trouble-free … ' does not, even in revisionist historiography, reflect the Irish case.[8] Nevertheless, with debates over Home Rule in the 1880s, and increasing tension in the light of Russification in the 1890s, Davitt had a familiar context in which to situate his observations.

The historical and constitutional parallels between Finland and Ireland were well-known on both sides, and frequently employed as rhetorical devices in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Like Ireland, Finland had undergone fundamental changes in its constitutional status in the first years of the nineteenth century. In 1800, Ireland's parliament was abolished and the island was ruled from London. Nine years later, amidst the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars, Finland was removed from Swedish control under the terms of the Treaty of Frederikshamn, and became a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire.[9] Within these constitutional frameworks, and in the wider context of European nationalisms in the nineteenth century, several superficial

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2009).

[7] 'The One Thing Needed', *Freeman's Journal*, 29 May 1899, being a commentary after a speech by Michael Davitt at Knock, County Mayo, May 1899.

[8] Anthony F. Upton, 'Epilogue' in Michael Branch, Janet M. Harley and Antoni Mączak (eds) *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire: A Comparative Study* (London, 1995), 283.

[9] For a useful summary, see Bill Kissane, 'Nineteenth-Century Nationalism in Finland and Ireland: A Comparative Analysis', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 6 (2000), 28. See also Stein Rokkan, 'Mass Politics and Political Mobilisation: Reflections on Possible Models of Explanation', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 5 (1970), 65.

points of comparison emerged between Finland and Ireland.[10] These points of comparison came into particularly sharp focus during the debates over Irish Home Rule in the 1880s, when the relationship between Finland and Russia was presented by Home Rule advocates as a perfect accommodation between a larger and smaller power, allowing the growth of native ingenuity and identity, within an imperial framework which then benefitted from these developments. Thus, in the early 1890s, Finland was championed by Home Rulers as 'assuredly the best-governed country in Europe', and 'probably the happiest instance in the world of a Home Rule country governed thoroughly well.'[11] Irish nationalists used Finland as an example that Home Rule was not only possible, but desirable; that it could strengthen, rather than dissolve, the union of Great Britain and Ireland, and consequently the British Empire; and that British support for the rights of a 'small nation' like Finland exposed considerable hypocrisy.

Finland's constitutional status was covered in many of the important current affairs journals, and Davitt, naturally, was aware of these international comparisons.[12] At a meeting in Kingstown in 1883, he was present as Thomas Sexton argued that Irish Home Rulers could 'show that the people of Finland, with their bleak sky and sterile land, are happy and free, even under the domination of the Czar of Russia…'[13] Davitt again heard Sexton idealise Finland at the height of the first Home Rule crisis in 1886, at a combined meeting of the Liberals and Irish National League: 'Perhaps the most significant case of all is the case of Russia and Finland. Russia itself is honeycombed with conspiracies. The lives of its rulers are placed in daily peril, while all the time the relations between the imperial crown and the Grand Duchy of Finland are harmonious and peaceful because the Imperial rulers in St Petersburg have had the wisdom to allow the people of Finland to manage their own affairs.'[14] William Gladstone himself stressed that Finland's 'legislative independence' had provided 'complete satisfaction in Finland, and [had] made Finland most loyally attached to Russia.'[15]

Exasperation among Irish Nationalists at Britain's reluctance to accept

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[10] Tony Griffiths, *Scandinavia: At War with Trolls* (2nd ed., New York, 2004), 6, 26, 81, 84 makes various brief allusions in this regard.

[11] *John Bull*, 17 January 1891; *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1891.

[12] Peter Kropotkin, 'Finland: A Rising Nationality', *Nineteenth Century* 17 (March, 1885), 527.

[13] 'Ireland's Cause and the Irish Party', *Freeman's Journal*, 23 September 1885.

[14] 'Great Home Rule Meeting in St James's Hall', *Freeman's Journal*, 24 June 1886.

[15] 'Mr Gladstone at Midlothian', *Freeman's Journal*, 28 October 1890.

Home Rule for Ireland, even in the face of apparently workable examples from Europe, was increased by the concern shown by Britain that Finland's constitutional liberties were coming under increasing threat from St Petersburg. For the British, however, there was no apparent awareness of double standards. British constructions of the Finns and the Irish were divergent, and instructive in the light they shed on Britain's own self-image, international and imperial priorities, and supposed values during the Victorian period. While British reactions to the Great Irish Famine were more nuanced than implied by the nationalist historiography, there seems no doubt that the British press helped to confirm negative attitudes about the ability of the (Catholic) Irish to embrace modernity and become self-sufficient.[16] A decade later, as Finland and neighbouring Sweden suffered from famines, the British public donated considerable relief funds. While the British navy may not have differentiated between Finland and 'Russia Proper' during the Crimean War, British popular opinion most certainly did, and there was a great deal of sympathy for the Finns, not least because of economic ties and Britain's own fluid ideas of race and ethnicity.[17]

When it came to creating divisions within the Russian Empire, the British press were happy to construct Finns as 'Scandinavians', deserving home rule or independence, to allow them to exist alongside other Scandinavian states.[18] The British believed that, within the United Kingdom, the Irish were benefitting from civilising influences. Conversely, however, they also thought that Finnish Home Rule allowed the Finns to distance themselves from the perceived backwardness of Slavism and draw closer to the higher civilisations of Scandinavia. This was the clear implication when, for example, the *Daily News* argued in 1890 that 'there might be little or nothing to say against a Russification of Finland if it were a case of a free, civilized, highly cultured and humane Power endeavouring to raise an inferior one to its own level.'[19]

British distaste for the way in which Russia seemed to be limiting Finnish autonomy grew through the 1890s, and reached a crescendo with

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[16] Michael de Nie, 'The Great Famine and the British Press', *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 27–35.

[17] Anssi Halmesvirta, *The British Conception of Finnish 'Race', Nation and Culture, 1760–1918* (Helsinki, 1990), 158–65.

[18] Andrew G. Newby, '"One Valhalla of the Free": Scandinavia, Britain and Northern Identity in the Mid-Nineteenth Century' in Peter Standivs and Jonas Harvard (eds) *Communicating the North's Media Structures and Images in the Making of the Nordic Region* (Farnham, 2013, forthcoming).

[19] 'A Word for the Finns', *Daily News*, 22 July 1890.

the February Manifesto of 1899.[20] The manifesto laid down strict limitations on Finnish state institutions: from this point, Tsar Nicholas II demanded that language, religion, and currency in Finland were Russified, that the press should be censored, and that the Finnish army should be made subject to Russian regulations.[21] Journals supporting the Finnish cause were edited from London, a means of mobilising international public opinion and of circumventing the regime of censorship.[22] The idea that Russia's policies were self-defeating was also presented regularly, especially as far as this related to military recruitment. The resentment created by the Russification policies actually helped to engender the sense of antipathy that St. Petersburg had feared in the first place, and even though the demands on Finns to participate in the Russian army were limited, the strong reaction made the new arrangements impracticable.[23] Still, however, descriptions of the Finns as 'peaceable, governable, hard-working [and] loyal' differentiated them in British minds from the Irish, and allowed a clear collective conscience in denying that Home Rule would have the same happy effects in Ireland as it had had in Finland.[24]

The 'Finnish Military Service Law' of 1901 sought to 'harmonise' the military apparatus of Finland and Russia, and – importantly from the Russian perspective – increase the Finnish military financial commitment.[25] Finns, previously able to maintain their own regiments as part of their devolved administration, were now supposed to serve as part of an integrated Russian

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[20] See, inter alia, 'A Constitutional Crisis in Finland', *The Times*, 6 October 1898; 'The Russification of Finland', *The Times*, 30 January 1899; 'The Russification of Finland', *The Times*, 25 February 1899; 'A Word for the Finns', *Daily News*, 22 July 1890; 'The Russianisation of Finland', *Daily News*, 29 July 1890; 'Lovers of Freedom!', *The Storm-Bell*, 1 March 1899; 'Poor Finland!', *The Storm-Bell*, 1 March 1899; *Punch*, 5 April 1899; *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 February 1900.

[21] 'Press Censorship in Finland', *The Times*, 10 April 1899; 'Russian Press Regulations in Finland', *The Times*, 15 January 1900; 'Press Restriction in Finland', *The Times*, 6 April 1900; David G. Kirby (ed.), *Finland and Russia: From Autonomy to Independence* (London, 1975), 69–70.

[22] *Finland: An English Journal Devoted to the Cause of the Finnish People* (London, 1899); *The Finland Bulletin* (London, 1900). Copies of these journals are held at the British Library's Newspaper Library, Colindale, London.

[23] John E.O. Screen, 'The Finnish Army, 1881–1901: A National Army in a Russian Context', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 70 (1992), 472.

[24] 'Discontent in Finland', *The Morning Post*, 31 December 1898. Syndicated from Reuters.

[25] Screen, 'The Finnish Army, 1881–1901', 472; John E.O. Screen, 'The Military Relationship between Finland and Russia, 1809–1917' in Branch et al, *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire*, 259–70.

army. One British newspaper pondered the apparent folly of the Tsar in following this course:

> The prospect of serving in what to him is a foreign land, with comrades and under officers who do not speak or understand the only language he knows, is to the young Finnish peasant so distasteful that he will rather, with or without leave of the authorities, quit the land of his birth for ever and make a new home for himself in a new country … the emperor and his advisers are pursuing no novel course in seeking to impose a 'dominant' language on a 'subordinate' race.[26]

This question of military service, in particular, captured Davitt's imagination when employing Finland as an example for the Irish, and would become an increasingly important aspect of more general Irish nationalist rhetoric in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Political and constitutional news did not, however, flow only from east to west. Ireland, and the Irish situation, was well covered in the Finnish press during the 1880s and 1890s. It is also possible to argue that, as censorship in the Finnish newspapers prevented direct criticism of St Petersburg, news of the Irish situation could sometimes be used as a metaphor for Finland. In the spring of 1889, for example, *Wasa Tidning* carried a detailed description of Davitt's early life and career from what might be called a traditional nationalist perspective, as part of a series of articles entitled 'Irländarnes kamp för fädernesland och frihet' ['Ireland's Struggle for Fatherland and Freedom'].[27] As a major figure in late-Victorian Britain, Davitt seems to have been reasonably well-known in Finnish political circles.[28] The developing perception of Davitt from a radical firebrand to a more moderate social reformer reflects his own developing career, as well as British press discourse. For example, reports during the Land War period saw him described regularly as the Land League's true founder and driving spirit, and as a Fenian convict and agitator with a burning sense of injustice, even hatred, against England.[29] After another arrest in 1881 – for violating the terms of his 'ticket of leave' from prison by consistently speaking out in public against the government – *Åbo Underrättelser*

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[26] 'The Finnish Question', *The Morning Post*, 22 September 1900.

[27] *Wasa Tidning*, 17 March 1889.

[28] 'Parnell ja Davitt', *Wiipurin Sanomat*, 2 April 1891.

[29] *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 27 November 1879; *Uusi Suometar*, 1 February 1881; *Morgonbladet*, 7 February 1881; *Oulun Lehti*, 9 February 1881; *Helsingfors*, 17 March 1881.

gave an account of Davitt's transgressions against the British state.[30] As Davitt became involved more with labour politics in the 1880s, he took on the aspect of 'an energetic veteran agitator'.[31] After unhappy spells as a Member of Parliament in the 1890s, Davitt – remaining an outspoken supporter of Irish nationalism and of the labour movement – turned to professional journalism, and was an experienced, widely-travelled reporter by the time he arrived in Helsinki.

Davitt's 1904 Visit to Helsinki

Davitt's journalism, especially his writing on the Anglo-Boer War – published in 1902 as *The Boer Fight For Freedom* – had given him a renewed international profile, and his first visit to Russia took place in 1903, when he was asked by the *New York American* to investigate the anti-Semitic pogrom in Kishinev.[32] His findings were well-reported, and also formed the basis of another book – *Within the Pale* (1903) – which sought to give a balanced account of the situation in Bessarabia.[33] The international situation in May 1904, when Davitt was again sent by the *New York American* to report on Russian affairs, was complex for someone who remained a committed and instinctive Irish nationalist. The Tsar, in his advocacy of Russification, was behaving in a way which would remind Irish observers of their subordinate relationship to London, and provoke sympathy with the Finnish nationalist cause. Conversely, there was an instinctive desire to puncture British establishment orthodoxy – which incorporated often virulent Russophobia – and to take seriously any threat to Britain's international standing as an opportunity to promote a domestic 'Home Rule' agenda in Ireland.[34]

Davitt's purpose in 1904 was specifically to investigate and, if possible, counter claims being made in the British press that Russia's military capability

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[30] *Åbo Underrättelser*, 13 February 1881. See Lewis P. Curtis, *Conciliation and Coercion in Ireland, 1880–1892: A Study in Conservative Unionism* (Princeton, 1963); Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 463–5.

[31] *Finland*, 23 December 1890.

[32] Marley, *Michael Davitt*, 256; King, 'Michael Davitt and the Kishinev Pogrom', 24.

[33] Michael Davitt, *Within the Pale: The True Story of Anti-Semitic Persecutions in Russia* (London, 1903).

[34] There was, for example, strong Irish support for Russia during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, during which time Davitt attacked the Japanese for 'playing England's game' in the Far East. Marley, *Michael Davitt*, 261.

against the Japanese was being weakened by the necessity of quelling worker rebellions in European parts of the Russian Empire.[35] Davitt held extensive interviews, including one with Leo Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, during which Davitt admonished the famous author for conflating 'English' and 'Irish' nationalities. His overall conclusion was that the British were, indeed, exaggerating the state of industrial and political unrest in Russia at this time. After three weeks in St Petersburg, Davitt left by sea on Wednesday 29 June, 1904. Travelling overnight, first-class, on board the *Torneå*, he spent a few hours in a chilly but bright Helsinki, before re-embarking and proceeding to Stockholm.[36] After an intensive schedule in Russia, Davitt enjoyed his passage through the Baltic, praising the *Torneå* as 'an ideal little steamboat, as light as a yacht … with all necessary conveniences. Fitted better for the comfort of the passengers than an average English boat.'[37] Arriving in the port of Helsinki early on the morning of Thursday 30 June, Davitt described the 'very picturesque' approach, and the impressive fortifications of Suomenlinna – claiming that 'not even Kronstadt is as safely defended.'[38] Although only a brief pause, Davitt enjoyed Helsinki: 'we remained three hours in this pretty little city before starting again for Stockholm, which just gave enough of time to "do" this city in the most expeditious globe-trotting manner.' Alighting, he noted the 'scores of small boats' being run by 'big muscular women', selling fish. He also pondered the effect that this fish diet seemed to have on the Finns' fertility – 'every other woman met in the street appeared to be in the family way.' More noteworthy, though, seems to have been the public hygiene of the city. Strolling through Helsinki's market square, adjacent to the harbour, Davitt remarked: 'Place most scrupulously clean – though meat, fish, vegetables, butter + bread sold here wholesale and retail. The cleanliness strikingly manifest from floor to the dress of the dealers, not a particle of dirt or garbage seen anywhere … Have had no similar experience of public virtue of dirtless people anywhere.'[39]

From here, Davitt took a ramble around the city centre, climbing the steps to Helsinki Cathedral, noting the statue of the Tsar and 'the Senate House, where Governor Bobrikoff was assassinated a fortnight ago.' After a stroll down Aleksanterinkatu, he headed down Bulevardi – which he compared with

[35] For a fuller account of Davitt's visit to Russia, see Carla King, 'Michael Davitt and Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy. Meetings 1904, 1905', *Irish Slavonic Studies*, 20 (1999), 71 – 88.

[36] Davitt's Diary, May-June 1904, Trinity College, Dublin (hereafter TCD), DP DN 9579,

[37] Davitt's Notebook, 29 June 1904, TCD, DP DN 9581.

[38] Davitt's Notebook, 30 June 1904, TCD, DP DN 9581.

[39] Ibid.

Berlin's Unter den Linden – before taking a 'neat little breakfast with a small cognac for about a shilling'.[40] As someone whose whole mode of thought had been shaped by Irish nationalism, Davitt paid particular attention to the statue of Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Finland's national poet, and believed its location to be a strong statement about Finland's constitutional relationship with Russia: 'The statue of the poet in the … gardens. Far more prominent position than that of Emp. Alex II, a verse from the poet's song on Suomiland engraved on tablet on pedestal, with female figure, Suomi, placing a wreath upon the composition.' An observation of a military drill in Senate Square also impressed the Irishman: 'Two companies of soldiers drilling. Men of one height about 5.10, all light hair and Swedish-looking, evidently Finns. Fine strapping fellows. Perfect in drill, in every particular. Drill officer a Russian.'[41]

Continuing the journey to Stockholm, Davitt was enchanted by the coastline of southern Finland, describing the 'very pretty effect' created by the fir trees, and the 'beautiful fjords', which were negotiated by the *Torneå*. Although some of his fellow passengers compared the scenery with the Hudson River, Davitt preferred to recall the River Tamar in Tasmania, and the voyage to Launceston which he had undertaken in 1895.[42] At several points between Helsinki and Hanko, Davitt's boat passed squads of Russian torpedo ships, 'very formidable' in 'coats of black paint', ready for 'instant action' against any potential British attack on the Baltic fortress at Kronstadt. After an extremely thorough investigation of the boat by customs officials at Hanko, the voyage continued into the archipelago, leaving Davitt to ponder: 'How on earth Russia and Sweden have terms to an agreement about the ownership of these small islands is a problem I am not to (sic) anxious to solve.'[43] Davitt took the opportunity to spend time in Stockholm, Christiania (Oslo) and Copenhagen on the journey back to Britain, and from an Irish political perspective he was naturally very interested in the rapidly disintegrating relationship between Sweden and Norway. He also noted that Swedes looked 'aggressively healthy, with their blonde hair and blue eyes. Women much better looking than the Russians.' Perhaps surprisingly for the founder of the Land League, and possibly underlining Davitt's own changed priorities in his later life, he seemed to enjoy the metropolitan sights of Stockholm and Copenhagen

[40] This breakfast was taken at Restaurant Kappeli, which remains at the same location today.

[41] Ibid.,

[42] *The Mercury* (Hobart), 28 June 1895; Michael Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australasia* (London, 1898), 313–14.

[43] Davitt's Notebook, 1 July 1904, TCD, DP DN 9581.

to the more earthy milieu of Christiania. He seemed less than impressed with Norway – often held up by contemporaries as the democratic peasant state *par excellence* – and indeed complained: 'Women not attractive.'[44]

Davitt's 1905 Visit to Helsinki

Davitt's second visit to Helsinki followed his third visit to Russia, when he was asked to return in order to investigate shooting of peaceful demonstrators in St Petersburg on what became known as 'Bloody Sunday' (22 January 1905).[45] As well as filing for the *Irish Independent*, he had accepted a commission from W.R. Hearst's *American*, and various other Hearst papers in the United States, for news on the political and social state of the Russian Empire.[46] Although he had been aware of the political context in Finland a year earlier, the brevity of his stay in Helsinki at that time tended to limit his diary entries to cultural and 'tourist'-type observations. In the intervening period, he had maintained or made several contacts in Finland – including un-named 'nationalists' – from whom he received details of Finland's recent history. He was also acquainted with other prominent citizens of Helsinki, such as Viktor Ek, the shipping magnate, who in turn introduced Davitt to Janne Thurman, of *Helsingfors Posten*.[47] During his stay in Hotel Kämp, Davitt also encountered, amongst others, Albert Edelfelt, the renowned Finnish national romantic artist.[48]

He was immediately taken with the lights shining in the windows of the city, a result of Runeberg's Day one day earlier. This, he was informed, was also a response to the way in which Bobrikov had attempted to prevent such illuminations a year earlier – on the centenary of Runeberg's birth – and he noted that, on that occasion, the 'whole city' had 'resolved [to] defy [the] stupid order.'[49] For the most part, Davitt's private thoughts on Finland in February 1905 were similar to those which he expounded in public. Just as he had arrived in the aftermath of Bobrikov's assassination in 1904, he now arrived on the same day as Eliel Soisalon-Soininen, the Finnish Chancellor of

[44] Ibid.

[45] Marley, *Michael Davitt*, 261–4.

[46] 'Dagens eko', *Helsingfors Posten*, 8 February 1905.

[47] 'Photo of Victor Ek, Helsingfors, Finland', TCD, DP DN 9649/88.

[48] 'Anmälde resande', *Helsingfors Posten*, 7 February 1905; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 7 February 1905 ('hr Davitt fr. Paris'); 'Russia Jan. Feb. 1905', TCD MS9582, 34.

[49] 'Russia Jan. Feb. 1905', TCD MS9582, 28.

Justice, was shot dead. This in itself gave Davitt an insight into the censorship which had been imposed at this time – in seeking to wire a telegram about the incident, he discovered that he was not permitted to make any mention of Soisalon-Soininen's murder. Having 'stormed' at the telegraph officer, Davitt was required to seek permission from Mikhail Nikiforovitsch Kaigorodoff, Governor of the Province of Uusimaa.[50] On arrival at Kaigorodoff's residence, Davitt was told that the governor was at the palace of Ivan Mikhailovitch Obolenskii, the Governor General.[51] After being asked to return and await a decision at the Hotel Kämp, Davitt was eventually given permission to write about the assassination, a decision he attributed to his having received support from Robert Sanderson McCormick, the US Ambassador in St Petersburg.[52] In attempting to piece together the day's events, Davitt linked the assassination to the aftermath of the workers' protests in January, which Soisalon-Soininen had borne the responsibility of policing. The costs of the police operation, and the overly zealous response of Cossack militiamen, thought Davitt, had created a situation of great tension around the city. After a stressful day, Davitt at least seemed satisfied with his accommodation in Hotel Kämp, and noted that he attended a pleasant evening concert before going to bed.[53]

Davitt spent the next day examining the background and aftermath of the large-scale workers' demonstration which had taken place in Helsinki on 24 January, and reported in the context of wider riots – indeed a 'blood bath' in the Russian Empire. In relation to the demonstrations, he was convinced that the initial parades – in sympathy with the strikers of St Petersburg – had passed off peacefully.[54] Subsequently, however, 'youths and roughs' created some unrest, smashing windows and fighting with the militia. His report matched the tone of previous dispatches on Russia – that any widespread unrest existed only in the minds of some London journalists:

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[50] Uusimaa is the southern Finnish province in which Helsinki is situated. See, e.g., Tuomo Polvinen, *Valtakunta ja rajamaa: N.I. Bobrikov Suomen keraalikuvernöörinä 1898–1904* (Helsinki, 1984), 189; Tuomo Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland: Bobrikov and the Attempted Russificiation of Finland* (London, 1995), 147.

[51] Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland*, 267.

[52] *New York Times*, 17 April 1919.

[53] See advertisements for Hotel Kämp's 'middag- och aftonmusik', *inter alia*, 'Nöjen i Dag', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 8 February 1905. Attractions included, for example, two young singers who would later find considerable fame in theatre and film: Sigrid Eklöf-Trobäck, and an 'English' opera diva, Daisy Dumont, in fact a young American. An additional draw was a 'humorous' female impersonator called Hr. Lanzette

[54] Antti Kujala, *Venäjän hallitus ja Suomen työväenliike 1899–1905*, *Historiallisia Tutkimuksia* 194 (Helsinki, 1996).

> They drew their sabres, charged and dispersed the crowd, and ended the whole disturbance. Fifteen persons received cuts from sabres, but there were no serious casualties. No military force intervened, and this was the whole extent of the 'scenes of bloodshed,' of 'conflicts between Cossacks and people,' which featured so prominently in the reports published in the London papers.[55]

Despite the implicit criticism of London's anti-Russian agenda, it must also be acknowledged that Davitt's own newspaper, the Dublin-based *Irish Independent*, had commented upon the situation in Finland rather excitedly only a few days before his own report, raising the possibility of a 'revolt in arms'.[56]

Davitt also spent time visiting the House of the Estates, although he found that the only business being enacted concerned motions condemning the assassination of Soisalon-Soininen – which by 7 February was already being dismissed as the act of a disturbed individual, rather than as symptomatic of wider plotting.[57] He noted the relative positions of Finnish and Swedish languages in the Chambers, as well as the presence of 'lady reporters'. He also implied that Russia feared Swedish designs on Finland, and that Sweden was actively conspiring with Norway to bolster Finnish nationalism.[58] In addition to these observations on high politics, Davitt made notes on the replacement of a 'native' Finnish police force with a Russian system after 1899, on the composition of the Finnish Diet, on its schools and poor laws, the nature of the franchise, and also the laws relating to prostitution.[59]

If he did not wish to give succour to British prejudices about Russia, however, Davitt still wrote approvingly of Finland's former constitution, and the struggle to reassert its autonomy:

> The political situation in Finland is most interesting. Up to February 1899, the old National Finnish Constitution existed. It secured autonomy in its broadest sense. The Emperor of Russia was the

[55] *Irish Independent*, 25 February 1905.

[56] *Irish Independent*, 21 February 1905.

[57] 'Russia Jan. Feb. 1905', TCD MS9582, 31.

[58] For example, see the contemporary leaflet, 'Skandinavien och Finland. En lösning af svenska-norska frågan' (1905), presented in translation as 'Scandinavia and Finland: A Solution to the Swedish-Norwegian Question' in Kirby, *Finland and Russia*, 102–3.

[59] 'Russia Jan. Feb. 1905', TCD MS9582, 32–4.

> head of the little nation, but the Diet (Parliament) was virtually supreme in all domestic affairs. The fullest freedom for the 2,000,000 of people who had prospered and flourished in their cold, northern land of 'Suomi'–the Land of Lakes, the ancient and poetic name for Finland–was guaranteed by the Constitution and by the solemn oath of the Russian Emperors to respect and protect it.[60]

Davitt promoted the idea that Russia was pursuing a temporary, counterproductive policy, and that the Finns retained a basic desire to return to the former Grand Duchy constitution with no recourse to an outright separatist revolution. Indeed, he recounted to his Irish audience that although there was rightful indignation and resistance in Finland, he had been assured by 'the highest nationalist authority in Helsingfors' that extremist parties such as 'the Finnish Party of Action' did not exist, and dismissed as irrelevant the presence of Konni Zilliacus[61] at a 'so-called gathering of Extremists in Paris last autumn.'[62] This attitude is once more indicative of Davitt's own personal journey since his Fenian days. Despite the stirring clarion call of his *Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, published in 1904 between his Helsinki visits, he was keen not to give any indication of support for political assassinations.[63] Rather, although he understood the circumstances which led to events such as the murders of Bobrikov and Soisalon-Soininen, he feared that such actions would be self-defeating, leading to repression such as that seen in Ireland in the 1880s. The abolition of the constitution by the February Manifesto was dismissed by Davitt as 'stupid to the last degree of bureaucratic blundering', and he highlighted its counterproductive nature in alienating Finns who had

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[60] *Irish Independent*, 25 February 1905.

[61] Zilliacus, along with Mechelin and other nationalists, had been one of the returning exiles in January 1905. Davitt believed that the return of men who had been banished was a sign that Russia was returning to its senses. See *inter alia*, 'De landsförvisade få återkomma', *Helsingfors Posten*, 23 January 1905; 'Maasta karkotetut saawat palata takaisin', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24 January 1905. For Davitt's views, *Irish Independent*, 25 February 1905.

[62] This refers to *Suomen Aktiivinen Vastustuspuolue* (Fin.) / *Finska Aktiva Motståndspartiet* (Swe.). See *Irish Independent*, 25 February 1905. For details of the programme of the Finnish Active Resistance Party, founded in November 1904, see Kirby, *Finland and Russia*, 99–100. For the Paris meeting, see Antti Kujala, 'Attempts at fostering collaboration among the Russian Revolutionary Parties during the Russo-Japanese War', *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, ix (1991), 137; Shmuel Galai, *The Liberation Movement in Russia, 1900–1905* (Cambridge, 1973), 214.

[63] Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland; or, The Story of the Land League Revolution* (London and New York, 1904).

been, hitherto 'loyal in every sense'. The rejection of the Russian army by Finns fascinated Davitt. Constantly writing with Irish parallels implicit in his prose, he also observed the soured military relationship between Russia and Finland:

> Some 20,000 Finns joined the Russian Army voluntarily when required. No anti-Russian or revolutionary party existed, and no rational explanation has been offered from any Russian source that can justify in any sense this outrage upon the freedom of a brave, sober, and industrious little nation … All party and political difference vanished in Finland in face of this violation of its liberties. No Finns would enlist in the Russian Army. Twenty thousand young men emigrated to the United States rather than wear Russia's colours after this treacherous act of the Emperor's. The whole country, with a fine patriotic spirit, resolved itself towards all Russian authority, and this was the situation now obtaining in what was up to sixteen years ago probably the most loyal part of all of the Tsar's vast Empire … Nothing will move this gallant little nation to be in any sense a consenting factor in the work of its own national spoliation, and in this resolve and attitude it will stand resolute and unflinching until reason returns again to Russia's rulers, and they undo the fatal decree of February, 1899.[64]

Davitt's assessment of the position in Finland was recorded with approval by some of the Helsinki newspapers, especially in regard to the moderate nature of the Finnish workers' protests, and Davitt's countering the prevailing voices from London.[65] His position on Finland was not, therefore, straightforward. While he was squarely behind the restoration of Finland's national rights, and was more than prepared to use Finland as a comparative case for Ireland, there was a long-standing distrust of British newspaper reporting on Russia. Furthermore, during his time as a Fenian prisoner in the 1870s, the apparent inevitability of a long and arduous war between Russia and Britain in the Balkans was seen as a potential opportunity for a Fenian attack on Britain – the enemy of Ireland's enemy being constructed in this instance as an ally.[66] Davitt was convinced, nevertheless, that Russification was a foolish policy, alienating a Finnish

[64] *Irish Independent*, 25 February 1905.

[65] *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 3 March 1905; *Helsingfors Posten*, 2 March 1905.

[66] Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution*, 136–7.

population which had been, prior to the February Manifesto, appreciative of the autonomy granted under the umbrella of the Russian Empire. He saw strong echoes of the situation in Ireland, especially the 'conciliation and coercion' policies which had characterised the 1870s and 1880s and feared that the assassinations of Bobrikov and Soisalon-Soininen would 'still further postpone return of Russia to reason + withdrawal Decree Feb. 1899.'[67]

Finland and Ireland c. 1905–1920–Comparisons and Inspirations

In the months after his visit, Davitt was keen to demonstrate the inconsistency of the British press and politicians as they promoted Finland's claims to autonomy, and condemned Russia's aggression, while at the same time denying Irish home rule. A specific example was on military recruitment. At a speech in Tullow, County Carlow, for the unveiling of a memorial for Father John Murphy, one of the most storied leaders of the Rebellion of 1798, Davitt recalled the 'murders and brutalities' of the British forces in Ireland in 1798 and linked this to the idea of Irishmen joining the British Imperial forces in 1905. He explained that the February Manifesto had marked a drastic decline in Finnish participation in the Russian army, implying further that it was one of the reasons behind an imminent restoration of the former constitution. 'Why', he asked,

> should any Irishman join the English army? Can any honest, self-respecting countryman offer a solitary reason why the same army is or ought to be less objectionable to young Irishmen than the Russian army is to the men of Finland? … When Irishmen learn to emulate the manly spirit of the Finlanders and let the army of their foreign rulers severely alone, believe me the time will have arrived when England will be willing to take her hands off Ireland, and for the peace and welfare of both nations, allow the Irish people of north and south, as Irishmen, and not as rival sects or sections, to rule their own country without foreign interference of any kind.[68]

Alongside Davitt's concrete example of military cooperation or collaboration with the Imperial power, other Irish writers highlighted the apparent hypocrisy

[67] 'Russia Jan. Feb. 1905', TCD MS9582, 32.

[68] *Anglo-Celt*, 5 August 1905; *Irish Independent*, 1 August 1905.

of the British political classes' support for the 'small nations' of the Russian Empire. Davitt's optimism that Russification was coming to an end seemed to be confirmed by the events of November 1905. General Strikes, which characterised the 1905 Revolution throughout the Russian Empire, took place in Finland.[69] In response, the regime in St Petersburg accepted the November Manifesto, framed by Leo Mechelin, leader of the Constitutional Nationalists, which curbed the excesses of Russification, and led to the replacement of the Finnish diet and Estates with a new parliamentary system, based on universal suffrage.[70] These momentous events had a strong resonance in Ireland. An editorial piece in the *Irish Independent* complained about Britain's reaction to the November Manifesto:

> The national struggle in Ireland is for the restoration of her ancient rights. This equitable demand has been resisted with a vehement bitterness by organs like the 'Times' and 'Globe.' These papers are, however, foremost among the English journals in congratulating the Finns on the re-establishment of the constitutional government in their country by the Czar, and in pointing out to Russia how much more advantageous to her is a well-governed and contented Finland than a Finland mis-governed and disaffected. 'The restoration of Finland's ancient liberties,' says the 'Times,' 'will be welcomed with enthusiasm by the whole civilised world.' Referring to the resolve of the Czar to maintain the connection of Finland with the Empire, as indicated by the despatch of warships to Helsingfors, the 'Times' considers the best hope for the unity of the Empire is the conferment of Russia herself of a measure of constitutional government.[71]

Similarly, at a meeting in Battersea, London, in December 1905, Davitt employed the nationalist rhetoric which had characterised his speeches of the 1880s, demanding for Ireland 'what England unanimously asks Russia to give to Finland and to Poland; what she has unanimously lauded Sweden for having done for Norway', thus ending the 'criminal misrule of Ireland by England.'[72]

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[69] 'The November Manifesto Granted by the Tsar, 1905' in Kirby, *Finland and Russia*, 115–6.

[70] 'An Appeal from Finland to the Czar', *Freeman's Journal*, 7 October 1905 ; 'The Rising in Finland', *Freeman's Journal*, 3 November 1905; 'Finland Free', *Irish Independent*, 6 November 1905.

[71] 'Home Rule for Finland', *Irish Independent*, 7 November 1905.

[72] Speech in Battersea, *Irish Independent*, 4 December 1905.

Thus, although Davitt's own attitude to Russia may have been somewhat ambivalent – suspicious of the imperialism on show but also instinctively suspicious of the Russophobia of the British establishment – there is no doubt that he saw parallels in the constitutional positions of Finland and Ireland. Michael Davitt died, rather suddenly, after a failed operation to remove a troublesome tooth, on 31 May 1906.[73] His death was the cause of national mourning in Ireland, but it was also widely reported in the Finnish press, which wrote in terms which would be familiar to a nation defending its own constitutional status.[74] *Åbo Underättelser* referred to him as 'one of the veterans of the Irish independence movement.'[75] In a retrospective article some weeks after his death, *Turun Sanomat* concluded that 'he maintained his love of his fatherland until the moment of his death.'[76] *Uusi Suometar*, in a longer appreciation, commented that: 'Davitt's attention was not taken solely by Ireland, but more generally all countries under oppression, and for this reason he tried to learn as many languages as possible. He was especially fond of the labour movement.'[77] Thus, just as Davitt was able to use the 'manly' example of Finnish nationhood in his later speeches on Irish freedom, so some elements of the Finnish press were able to recognise a kindred spirit in the struggle to re-establish a true nation in Finland.

The parallels between the two countries continued to be exploited by Irish nationalists. Michael Collins, for example, recognised in the Finns a 'quiet race' who did not 'specialise in talk', but who nevertheless defended their national identity and rights fiercely. He saw a direct benefit arising from the murder of Bobrikov, in the concession in late 1905 by a fearful Tsar of free elections, wide adult suffrage and the establishment of a national parliament.[78] The young Collins seemed inspired by these events: 'The analogy between Finland and Ireland is almost perfect', he wrote in his notebook during the Third Home Rule Crisis, '… they won against the might of Russia. Cannot we go and do likewise?'[79] When Finland achieved full independence, rather

[73] Inter alia, *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1906, which reported: 'Irish Nation Plunged into Grief Today'.

[74] Marley, *Michael Davitt*, 286.

[75] *Åbo Underättelser*, 3 June 1906. A briefer obituary in *Hufvudstadsbladet* focused on his earlier career. *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 3 June 1906.

[76] *Turun Sanomat*, 29 June 1906.

[77] *Uusi Suometar*, 7 June 1906.

[78] T. Ryle Dwyer, *The Squad and the Intelligence Operations of Michael Collins* (Cork, 2005), 64–5.

[79] Draft writings by Michael Collins, 1910–15 (Copybook containing draft articles / speeches and minutes of a Geraldine Club meeting). University College, Dublin,

suddenly in 1917, in the context of the Russian Revolution, Irish polemicists and politicians[80] were again eager to explore the lessons which could be learned for their own case, and expose British sophistry in their support for the Finns.[81] Though Asquith and Lloyd George were reluctant, there was an increasing pressure from the British military in 1917 to extend conscription to Ireland.[82] Nationalists responded with their own arguments, with Finland once more a prominent example. Finland was sometimes referred to as 'the Ireland of Russia', [83] was used by Eamon De Valera in *Ireland's Case Against Conscription* (1918), [84] and by George Bernard Shaw, who claimed that 'we have politicians here more unscrupulous than Bobrikoff … '[85]

Conclusion

It was Stein Rokkan who first pointed out the similarities between the histories of Finland and Ireland in an academic context: 'both of them at the periphery of Europe, both of them for centuries subject-territories under representative regimes, both grown out of a long struggle for national identity against powerful oppressors, both latecomers to the community of sovereign political systems.'[86]

UCD Archives, P123/40, http://hdl.handle.net/10151/OB_0002041_AR , accessed 24 May 2012.

[80] For discussions in the House of Commons, see for example, *Hansard*, HC Deb 20 February 1917 vol 90, col. 1190 (Charles Trevelyan); *Hansard*, HC Deb 26 April 1917 vol 92, col. 2707 (H. Dalziel); *Hansard*, HC Deb 10 April 1918 vol 104, col. 1510 (John Dillon). Laurence Ginnell, the United Irish League veteran and vociferous Independent Nationalist MP for Westmeath North, asked of Arthur Balfour in April 1917 'will British Government follow, with regard to Ireland, the example of the Russian government?' *Hansard*, HC Deb 2 April 1917 vol 92, col. 885.

[81] F.P. Jones, *History of the Sinn Fein Movement and the Irish Rebellion of 1916* (New York, 1916), 50.

[82] David Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland, 1900–1922' in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (eds), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), 396–7; P. Karsten, 'Irish Soldiers in the British Army 1792–1922: Suborned or Subordinate', *Journal of Social History*, 17 (1983), 47.

[83] *The Spectator*, Vol 119 (1917), p. 407.

[84] Eamon De Valera, *Ireland's Case Against Conscription* (Dublin, 1918), 7.

[85] George Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island* (New Ed., London, 1918), 8. See also Sinn Féin, *Ireland's Request to the Government of the United States of America for Recognition as a Sovereign Independent State* (Dublin, 1919), 103. Quoted in Kissane, 'Nineteenth-Century Nationalism in Finland and Ireland', 29

[86] S. Rokkan, 'Mass Politics and Political Mobilisation: Reflections on Possible Models of Explanation', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 5 (1970), 65. Also quoted in Kissane, 'Nineteenth-Century Nationalism in Finland and Ireland', 25.

More generally, Joep Leerssen has encapsulated the internationalist context in which Irish nationalist thought operated: 'Irish nationalism at one point was inspired by philhellenism … at another by Hungarian nationalism … The point needs to be stressed: a national movement in a given country is not just the result of the circumstances obtaining within that country, but also inspired by the crisscrossing traffic of ideas all over Europe.'[87]

Although Bill Kissane notes that nationalism in Finland and Ireland had different characteristics in the nineteenth century – he classes Irish nationalism as a predominantly ethnic movement whereas Finland arguably had far more elements of civic nationalism – there were nevertheless enough superficial similarities that politicians and activists on both sides were able to look to each other for inspiration.[88] Although Davitt was only one of many Irish nationalist leaders to be inspired by the case of Finland, he was unique in that he was able to visit Helsinki in person, albeit briefly. During these visits he was able to get a sense of an atmosphere of resistance which pervaded Finnish society in the months leading to the November Manifesto. He was not so much impressed by the political murders of Bobrikov and Soisalon-Soininen, but by the determined way in which Finns appeared to be seeking to restore their constitutional autonomy. While Russia was seen as a guiding light during the first Home Rule crisis of the 1880s, there was great frustration on Davitt's part that Russia sought to limit and extinguish Finland's organs of self-government, and it is clear that he thought this was a foolish and ultimately self-defeating act on the part of the Tsar. Davitt's great admiration for the Finns' refusal to accept Russia's new military strictures, in particular, reflected his frustration at the continued failure of the Irish population to stand firmly against the British Empire.

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[87] Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam, 2006), 169.
[88] Kissane, 'Nineteenth-Century Nationalism in Finland and Ireland', 40.