

**Mika Rantanen**

## **The image of Finnish-American immigrant pastors in caricatures**

**Plump Director of Souls – or just Bolstering up  
the Class Society**

*This article is also published in Siirtolaisuus - Migration, 1/2002 (p. 31-33)*

**Siirtolaisuusinstituutti – Migrationsinstitutet**

**Turku - Åbo 2002**

<http://www.migrationinstitute.fi>

## The image of Finnish-American immigrant pastors in caricatures

### Plump Director of Souls – or just Bolstering up the Class Society

-- "What the devil do we need pastors for now that there are planes to take you to heaven - said Mäkitaipale to the collector of church taxes."  
 (-- "Piruako nyt enää papeilla tehdään, kun lentokoneillakin taivaaseen pääsee - sano Mäkitaipale kirkollisveron karhulle.")

### The parson's image in caricatures before and after the Finnish Civil War of 1916-1921

This saying, which appeared in 1916 in the socialist comic paper Kurikka, is an apt description of how the status of a pastor had crumbled among the common people. The labour movement's programme relating to religion policy had been recorded already in 1903 in the party conference of Forssa, in accordance with the German model. The programme demanded e.g. that religion be declared a private matter, that the Church be separated from the state and that religious tuition be removed from the school curriculum.

The party organizations were also spreading booklets against religion and the Church, some of which were foreign translations. The socialist image of the pastor parodied the clergymen's hypocrisy as well as human weaknesses. As the Civil War was getting closer, the socialists increasingly portrayed the pastor with the hateful characteristics of an exploiter, hence bolstering up the class society. The pastor was even depicted as chumming up with the devil himself.



In the conservative camp the anticlerical attitudes of the liberals and the Swedes did not reflect on the right-wing pastor image to any greater extent. The external characteristics of the pastor drawn by the conservatives resembled closely to those of the socialists,

even where it concerned the very situations in the caricatures and the dialogue between the pastor and the common people. A frequently appearing figure in the caricatures is an obese pastor who meets the common people in the main street or who the people pay a visit. The difference is, however, that the wittiness, which the socialists associate with the common people, is interpreted as rudeness of manners or even as plain stupidity among the conservatives. Consequently, the parody arose mainly from the different lifestyles and value systems between the pastor and the common people. A similar aspect also appeared in the Swedish caricatures, although there the plump pastor with a huge belly was replaced by a lean scholarly character with a pointed beard.

## **The pastor in the turmoils of war**

During the Finnish Civil War around 250 parishes were left on the red side. The operation of Turku and Porvoo cathedral chapters was at a standstill practically for the entire period of war. Nevertheless, more than half of Finnish parishes remained with the Whites. The socialist hatred toward clergymen was increased by the fact that pastors participated in the war, taking up arms along with the Whites. On the other hand, only a handful of the 1000 pastors within the Church can be proved to have risen in arms. Instead, the pastors gave the Whites their support by helping to establish civil guards and by assisting in their activities. In the regions under the red occupation the pastors primarily refused cooperation with the Reds and did not e.g. read their public notices. With respect to the caricatures during the war, the pastor was not directly associated with the actual war events in either of the camps. The socialists hated the conservatives as a whole but, despite the shared ideology, the pastor was not supported by the bourgeoisie, either.

## **Socialists out of ban to beset the pastor**

During 1919 the pause in the publication of the socialists' comic papers, caused by the Civil War, came to an end. The newspaper Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti, too, had been licensed for press already in the August of 1918. Internationally speaking, this was quite exceptional. To allow the loser a freedom of speech and press so soon after the end of war was unusual, particularly so since the fate of the red prisoners was yet unsolved. In the socialist caricatures even the sufferings of the Civil War had not cultivated the pastor's crooked character. The pastors were drawn as rejoicing over the great numbers of the dead in times of the Spanish influenza or as "tormenting" the red captives in the prison camps. The socialists ridiculed the alleged alcoholism and moral corruption of the pastors. Either the farm-help ('renki') of the parsonage was carrying the intoxicated pastor i.e. the "sermon gadget" ('saarnavärkki') on his back, or the caricature depicted pastor Sikapahna ('Hogstraw') keeping company to a pig.



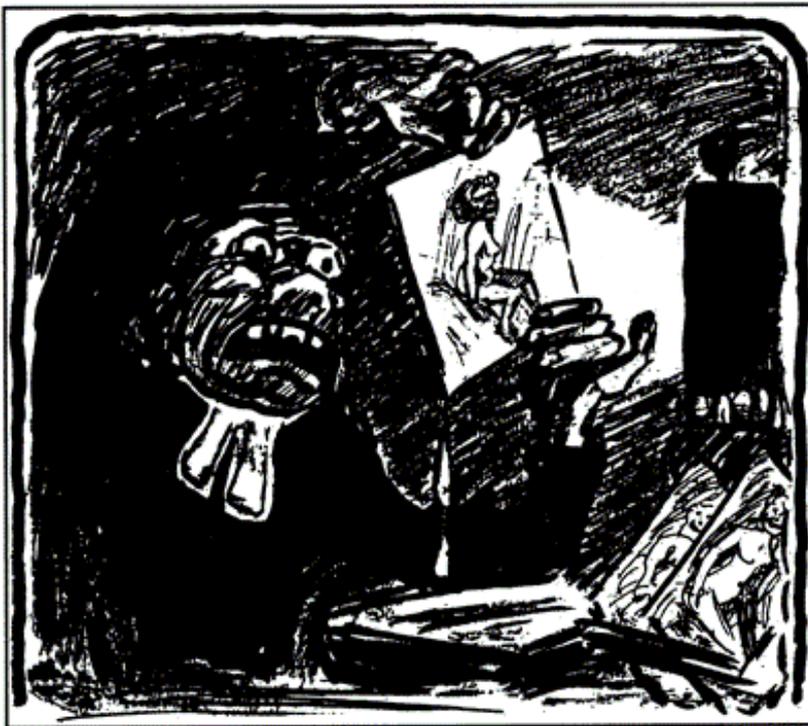
A sullen and markedly obese pastor, typical view of the socialists, preaching to the red prisoners. - Murikka, autumn issue, 1919.

In reality the pastor's use of alcohol was reduced by the movements of the Free Church and the revivalists together with the socialist temperance movements, which all expected the pastor to serve as a model for the congregation. The cantors, who had been left somewhere between the clergy and the ordinary people, had no regular source of income and were therefore more subject to ongoing drinking. This certainly strengthened and also partially contributed to the creation of stereotypes associated with clergymen's drinking. Moreover, the pastor's romantic adventures were also subjected to ridicule; the pastor was depicted wearing his neckbands and looking for lost female souls in a dark park, offering the maids "innocent" company. The socialists ironically interpreted the pastor's large abdomen to be a sign of having been filled with the holy spirit; "for wasn't this why the pastor so puffed and bulged out his belly when delivering a sermon?"



Parson (to Vessuliini, who habitually comes to complain about his unfaithful wife): "Well, I imagine your wife too has learnt to appreciate the holy union of matrimony more now that the Russian forces aren't in the country? " Vessuliini: "I reckon my old lady has always been more inclined towards that union of nations." - Murikka, autumn issue, 1919.

The Right Wing, on the other hand, aspired to work the Church up into a place of service for the public good, or into a national church which was to teach the people to respect the authorities and the law. In the caricatures of the conservatives the pastor's outward appearance remained almost the same, although one would have expected the bourgeoisie to create a charismatic character who would cross all class frontiers and be easy to identify with. The pastor's role now was merely to appear as a compulsory figure in caricatures and folk stories, without the blasphemy typical of the socialists. In a sense the pastor was left standing on his own in the right-wing caricatures, which is brilliantly illustrated in the comic paper *Tuulispää* by one particular drawing of a preacher who is forced to use both hands to support his enormous belly: "yes indeed, my beloved listeners, we all must carry the burden bestowed onto us."



The sinful Director of Souls secretly looks at pictures of naked women. - Kurikka nro 4/1917.

Among the Finnish immigrants in North America a mixed religious field had been formed with the three main denominations of the Suomi Synod (founded in 1890), the National Church and the Laestadians. Out of these the Suomi Synod, with its leaders in particular, were pronounced conservatives laying stressed emphasis on negative attitudes toward socialism. The National Church showed more moderation in their attitudes, while the Laestadians were divided into two main divisions. On the individual level, the immigrant pastors' and preachers' outlook on the Finnish Civil War varied according to their individual set of values.

For more information on the image of immigrant pastors in caricatures, see the upcoming article in the next issue.

## References

- Ehrnrooth, Jari: Sanan vallassa - vihan voimalla. Sosialistiset vallankumousopit ja niiden vaikutus Suomen työväenliikkeessä 1905-1914. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 167. Suomen Historiallinen Seura. Helsinki 1992.
- Heikkinen, Jacob W.: The Story of the Suomi Synod. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 1890-1962. New York Mills, Minnesota.
- Helin, Matti: Päästä meidät pahasta - uskonto SKDL:n politiikassa 1944-61. Saarijärvi, 1996, 9.
- Kena, Kirsti: Kirkon aseman ja asenteiden muotoutuminen itsenäistyneessä Suomessa 1918-22. Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Toimituksia. Helsinki 1979.
- Reitala, Aimo: Karikatyyri ja pilakuvataide Suomessa. In: "Kuva ja historia". Eds. Timo Soikkanen, Vesa Vares. Turun Historiallinen Arkisto 50. Turku 1996.
- Reitala, Aimo: Suomi-neito. Keuruu 1983.
- Uino, Ari: Suomen Lehdistön Historia 8. Editor Päiviö Tommila, Gummerus. Jyväskylä 1991.
- Vares, Vesa: Mannerheimia ja "Hoffmannia" odottaessa. Porvarillinen eliitti punaisessa Suomessa keväällä 1918 muistiinpanojensa valossa. In: "Turun Koulu", Juhani Paasivirran 70-vuotisjuhlakirja. Editor Timo Soikkanen. Turku 1989.

## Comic Papers

- Ampiainen: 1918, 1919
- Fyren/Nya Fyren: 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921
- Hovnarren: 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921
- Kerberos: 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921
- Kurikka: 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921
- Meikäläinen: 1917
- Murikka: 1919, 1920
- Paukku: 1921
- Tuulispää: 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921