

The first steps in a Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy

A new antisemitic stereotype in the Finnish Press
after the October Revolution

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ABSTRACT • At the turn of the twentieth century, Jews were mostly blamed for small-scale and local conspiracies, but during and after the First World War global antisemitic theories started to emerge. In 1917, even before the Communist revolution, rumours spread around Russia that there was a close connection between the Bolshevik movement and Jews. Fear of Communism was prevalent in Finnish society, especially after the Civil War in the spring of 1918. This article focuses on one of the main manifestations of this fear, the development and spread of the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy theory in the Finnish press after the Russian Revolution. The main sources for this article are Finnish newspapers and magazines published between 1917 and 1920. The goal is to describe how and whence the idea of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy spread to Finland, and how new antisemitic ideas were connected to the millennia-old hatred of Jews.

Preface

What is a Jew in Russia today?

– *A commissar.*

What are two Jews?

– *A committee.*

What are three Jews?

– *A city administration.*

What are 99 Jews and one Russian?

– *A soviet.*

What are 99 Russians and one Jew?

– *The Red Army.*

THE Finnish-American periodical *Totuus* published this joke in December 1920 as part of a text that dealt with Jews and the post-revolutionary reality in Soviet Russia. The text describes how instead of building a new and better society for Russia, Jews were trying to benefit from the process: they had been seeking opportunities around the world for

centuries, and now Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, had found a golden cow to milk. The writer considered it obvious that if the situation in Russia developed in a more unfavourable direction, Jews would pack their bags, move elsewhere, and turn to deriving profit from Western societies.¹

Judaeo-Bolshevism refers to the notion that Jews created and supported Bolshevism and are therefore responsible for its crimes (Hanebrink 2018: 14). In other words, Jews were behind the revolution, and they controlled and exploited post-tsarist Russia. When this viewpoint is developed and combined with the idea of Jewish world domination, we approach the core of the Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy. The idea of Judaeo-Bolshevism was originally created in Russia, but by the time the joke

¹ *Totuus*, 2/1920: 57.

above was published in December 1920, the idea had spread around Europe, travelled across the pond, and was known even in the Finnish communities on the other side of the Atlantic.

This article describes how a rumour, or maybe an observation that many leading Bolsheviks were Jews developed into the idea of a Judaeo-Bolshevist conspiracy in Finland during the final stages and the aftermath of the First World War. I will divide the development of the idea into four different phases. This article also shows how quickly certain antisemitic ideas became known and commonly accepted, and how little they were questioned in public. The main sources of this article are Finnish newspapers published in the years between 1917 and 1920.² My goal is to show how the idea of a Jewish Bolshevism spread in the general press in Finland, how it developed into a full-scale conspiracy, how it was primarily disseminated and by whom, and if anyone had any suspicions or doubts about the idea or other antisemitic claims.

- 2 The main source material is collected from the digital materials of the National Library of Finland, and consists of twenty-four newspapers and four periodicals (in 1917, there were a total of 114 newspapers or periodicals published in Finland). If ranked by circulation and how frequently they were published, one could claim that seven out of nine of the most important Finnish newspapers are included in the source material, with *Helsingin Sanomat* having the largest circulation of 65,000. Only five of these papers had a circulation of less than 5,000. It is also worth mentioning that circulation does not indicate the number of readers, because papers were shared within the community. All papers referred to in this article come from the right and the centre (agrarian) of the political spectrum. The language of the source material is Finnish (with one exception; see footnote 18); all translations are by the author of this article (Salokangas 1987: 202–4; Tommila 1988 (5): 14, 67, 101, 133, 152, 162, 175, 287, 289, 326; Tommila 1988 (6): 119, 232, 351; Tommila 1988 (7): 9, 53, 191, 198, 201, 203, 207, 351).

Antisemitism and Jews in Finland before the Russian Revolution

From 1809, Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. The Grand Duchy of Finland was allowed to keep most of its own laws, that is old Swedish legislation. According to these laws, Jews were allowed to live in only three specific cities, each of them outside Finland.³ So, if there had been any Jews in Finland before the 1850s, they had been occasional visitors or converts (Jacobsson 1951). In the Nordic context, Finnish Jews have quite a different history compared to Sweden and Denmark. Similarities can be found with the situation in Norway, where Jews were not allowed to enter or reside before 1851 (e.g. Harket 2014).

However, several Jewish boys were drafted by the Imperial Russian Army and sent to ‘canton schools’ to serve in the military for twenty-five years (see Petrovsky-Shtern 2009). Tsar Alexander II (1818–81) offered these soldiers an opportunity to settle in their posting cities after they were released from the army, so from 1858 these Jewish soldiers and their families became the first settled Finnish Jews.

A debate on the civil rights of Finnish Jews started in the 1870s. Blatant antisemitism was present in the Finnish parliamentary discussions in the late nineteenth century, and the Diet of Finland rejected proposals and postponed a decision for more than twenty years. When the estates were finally ready to grant civil rights to Jews in 1897, the case became stuck in the St Petersburg bureaucracy. The Finnish Jews’ civil-rights struggle was not over until Finland declared its independence in December 1917, and the first Finnish Jews were granted full and equal rights after the

- 3 According to the Jewish ordinance issued in 1782, Jews were allowed to reside in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Norrköping.

Civil War in the autumn of 1918 (Torvinen 1989: 45–6, 65–77, 81–92, 98–103).

The question of antisemitism in Finland has at least three key elements. First, the element of religion, that is Christianity. Antisemitism has its roots in Christian teaching and the history of the church, and Finland has predominantly been a Lutheran country since the Reformation. Even though there were practically no Jews living in Finland before the latter half of the nineteenth century, it is likely that a negative image of Jews or even Christian antisemitism was present in Finnish society and the Lutheran church.⁴ Secondly, modern political antisemitism spread to Finland at the end of the 1870s and in the 1880s. Anti-Jewish propaganda played a key role in the parliamentary discussions of the so-called Jewish question, and it strengthened the idea that it was hard or almost impossible for a Jew to integrate into Finnish society – according to antisemites, their values and customs simply differed too much from the values and customs of Finns and posed a threat to Finnish society. Thirdly, there was a web of political issues – most significantly tied to the geographic closeness to Russia and to the Russian Revolution. The fear of Communism and Bolshevism is a key element in the analysis of antisemitism in independent Finland: anti-Communism or anti-Bolshevism was probably the main reason for Finnish antisemitism between the two world wars. This also partially explains why the idea of Judaeo-Bolshevism was accepted in Finland. Bolsheviks were Communists, the worst kind of anti-religious socialists, and the idea of Judaeo-Bolshevism was a combination of two strong ideas, anti-Communism and antisemitism (Ahonen 2017: 326–7; Ahonen 2023).

4 No research has been conducted on perceptions of Jews in Finland before the period of autonomy (see also Laitila 2014: 43–4).

Phase One: The most important Bolsheviks are Jews; Bolshevism is a Jewish idea

The idea of a revolutionary Jew was established in the nineteenth century, and was known in Finland. Jews had been blamed for adopting revolutionary and anti-religious ideas originating from the French Revolution. (e.g., Ahonen 2023: 62–3). During the Russian Revolution, rumours of a close relationship between the Bolshevik movement and Judaism spread around Russia. It did not take long for them to find their way to the neighbouring areas and other parts of Europe. The rumours were launched by nationalist army officers and officials of the Kerensky regime, which was established after the crisis in the Russian Provisional Government in June 1917. They began to distribute lists of revolutionary Jewish or otherwise foreign-sounding names in the summer of 1917, and within a few months, Bolshevik leaders were suspected of being involved in a German Judaeo-Bolshevist conspiracy against Russia. Common war-time nationalism was combined with the stereotype of a leftist revolutionary Jew, and by 1918, the rumour had developed into the prevalent view that the Jews were behind the Bolshevik Revolution (Lindemann 1997: 396–7, 424; Johnson 2003: 2; Herbeck 2007: 177–9).

The first reference in a Finnish newspaper to the Jewish origin of a Bolshevik leader was published in the newspaper *Haminan lehti* in November 1917, just two weeks after the October Revolution. At the end of the short article about the Bolshevik uprising, there were two pictures: the first of the Bolshevik leader Lenin (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, 1870–1924) and the second of the Foreign Minister, Lev Trotsky (1879–1940). According to the caption, Lenin's picture had been received by mail from Russia, and it is claimed the picture clearly shows Lenin's appearance to be of Jewish



According to *Haminan lehti* in November 1917, both Lenin and Trotsky are Jews.

origin. The caption under Trotsky's picture also states that he is of Jewish descent, and in addition, that it is something 'he tries to cover up with the Russian name he has taken'. A day later, the newspaper *Uusi Suometar* also published a picture of Trotsky. According to the caption, Trotsky 'is a Jew by nationality, like several other Bolshevik leaders'. He was also described as a revolutionary writer, a persistent Bolshevik and a crafty businessman.⁵

Before the end of 1917, a couple of Finnish newspapers referred to the Jewish background of Bolshevik leaders or suspected them of having one. Apart from mentioning these individuals, some newspapers emphasised that these were not isolated cases. On the contrary, they claimed a substantial number of Bolshevik leaders were Jews. In addition to the names of Lenin and Trotsky, Nikolai Krylenko and Nikolai Avksentyev were mentioned as important Bolsheviks with a Jewish background.⁶

5 *Haminan lehti*, 22 November 1917; *Uusi Suometar*, 23 November 1917.

6 For example, *Uusi Aura*, 30 November 1917; *Länsi-Suomi*, 6 December 1917; *Suomen*

There was hardly any history of Jews being close to the leadership of Russia, so this news was really the first attempt to understand a new and complex situation. Claiming that individual Bolsheviks had a Jewish background and that many Bolshevik leaders were Jews led also to a suspicion of the ideology they represented, and it did not take long for Bolshevism to be called Jewish. In the Finnish context at this point, the overall picture was most likely influenced by Russian White propaganda that strongly opposed Bolshevism. The anti-Communist mood did intensify in Finland before the Civil War broke out in January 1918, but it seems more likely that immediately after the revolution newspapers primarily published bits and pieces of information they were able to get from Russia. This viewpoint is also supported by the fact that Finnish newspapers did not connect Jews and Bolsheviks during the Civil War in January until May 1918 at all.⁷

The Finnish Civil War broke out at the end of January 1918. Just before the war, Finnish Jews had finally been granted civil rights, and it was likely they wanted to be trustworthy and loyal to their homeland. However, the situation was difficult, because even though Finnish Jews emphasised their desire to participate with the rest of the population in building their homeland, war-time loyalty to the wrong side could have been fatal. Most Finnish Jews probably supported the Whites: there were apparently none fighting in the ranks of the pro-Communist Reds, and only a few on the side of

kuvalehti, 49/1917: 665. Names like Krylenko and Avksentyev also indicate that the situational analysis of Russia and the who-is-who of the Bolshevik movement was far from clear for the Finnish press in 1917.

7 One reason is also perhaps that during the Finnish Civil War, the publication of many magazines and newspapers had to be stopped as a result of fighting or for ideological reasons.

the anti-Communist and pro-constitutional Whites (Ahonen 2017: 60).⁸

In Finland, socialism had been called a Jewish idea years before the Russian Revolution.⁹ Yet, the connection between socialism, Bolshevism and Judaism took several months to develop. It was not until the summer of 1918, after the Civil War, that this connection could be found in Finnish newspapers.

In June 1918, after the war, Santeri Alkio (1862–1930), a newspaperman, a member of

8 There are only a few sentences of research on Finnish Jews and the Civil War since they played absolutely no role in the events of spring 1918. The same goes with Finnish Jäger and antisemitism. We know some Jäger adopted antisemitic ideas during their time in Germany, but there is no research showing any kind of rise of antisemitism from the presence of Jäger in Finland (Swanström 2022: 55–7, 110). The Finnish Civil War strengthened anti-Communist sentiments in Finland, but it seems that its impact, for example on what newspapers wrote about Jews, was next to none.

9 Modern, political antisemitism started to spread from Germany at the end of the 1870s. Adolf Stoecker (1835–1910), the founder of the Christian-Social Party (Christlich-Soziale Partei) tried to find alternative solutions to working-class problems, and replaced his competing political ideas, socialism and social democracy, with a Christian option. Theorists of socialism, such as Karl Marx (1818–83) and Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–64), had a Jewish background, but somewhat surprisingly, their Jewishness was not targeted by Stoecker or other antisemites at first. Political antisemitism created issues with Jewish emancipation and assimilation and its propaganda targeted for example professional over-representation of Jews in certain fields, or rich and educated Jews in general. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that socialism was considered a Jewish idea, and the anti-religious programme of socialism was interpreted as an outcome of a millennia-long Jewish hatred of Christianity and Christ (Lindemann 1997: 142–8; Perry & Schweitzer 2002: 90–1).

parliament and the founder of the Agrarian League (Maalaisliitto, later the Centre Party of Finland, Suomen Keskusta) pondered the reasons for the outbreak of the bloody Civil War in Finland. Apart from domestic initiators, Alkio wanted to look at the situation from a wider perspective and place the war in an international context. For Bolsheviks, the Finnish Civil War was supposed to be a first step towards the great international revolution. This plan and the reasoning behind it were well known, in Alkio's opinion, so he probably referred to some kind of revolutionary socialism. Less known were Lenin's and Trotsky's 'fundamental reasons', and Alkio did not believe these could even be fully clarified. Nevertheless, he suspected that in part Lenin's and Trotsky's actions were motivated by the fact that they were Jews. 'It is probably not far off the mark to think that these Jews were partially driven by a will to take revenge on Russia, Finland, and all of Europe for the centuries of the suffering of Jews', he wrote.¹⁰ Alkio's text is worth mentioning, because it provides quite a rare explanation or motive for the negative actions of individuals considered to be Jews. Jews were often blamed for evil deeds just because they were Jews. Yet in this case, the negative actions of Trotsky and Lenin came down to the question of avenging the historical wrongdoings of Christians.

Another member of parliament (of the Finnish Party, Suomalainen puolue, later the National Coalition Party, Kokoomus) and one of the leading Lutheran pastors of Finnish awakening, Wilhelmi Malmivaara (1854–1922), was also searching for answers after the Civil War. He was afraid that democracy and free elections could steer society in the wrong direction and expose it to the dangers of socialism. He believed the sole purpose of socialism was to crush the current society and its religion.

10 *Ilkka*, 6 June 1918.

As an explanation, he claimed that the idea of socialism originated with the Jews – the same Jews who were now ‘making mankind happier with Bolshevism’, he added.¹¹ Malmivaara was probably one of the first Finns to publicly regard socialism and Bolshevism as kindred ideas, and to connect them with Judaism.¹²

In December 1918, *Helsingin Sanomat* published a text by Constantin Greaves. Greaves was a Russian writer with a military rank of colonel and, apparently, had been close to Tsar Nicholas II. The original text was from a Norwegian newspaper, *Tidens Tegn* (see Ahonen 2017: 99–100). The article emphasised the over-representation of Jews among the leaders of Bolshevik Russia. The Russian population was over 90 per cent Slavonic, yet 74 per cent or 318 out of the 430 highest officials were Jews.¹³ These Jews were not quiet and diligent craftsmen. They were, according to Greaves, the ones ‘who had abandoned both their people and their faith’, and they tried to exploit every situation they could. Because of their evil deeds, public opinion had turned against all Jews. According to Greaves, this inevitably led to new pogroms, and the victims would not be the ones responsible, but ordinary Jews whom he had compassion for:

- 11 *Uusi Suometar*, 9 June 1918; see also *Ikaalinen*, 14 June 1918; *Satakunnan kansa*, 1 August 1918.
- 12 Rev. Malmivaara makes this connection already at the beginning of 1918. Apart from socialism, he was worried over rising materialism and the lack of appreciation of the church and religion – the same things Finnish churchmen often blamed Jews for: *Hengellinen kuukauslehti*, 1/1918: 5–6. See also Ahonen 2017: 65–70, 208–9, 254, 321.
- 13 Several eyewitnesses spread the idea of Bolshevik leaders being mainly Jews. Graham Macklin writes about a similar case, a British journalist working in St Petersburg who was imprisoned by the Bolsheviks during the revolution. For more on these eyewitness testimonies, see later in this chapter and Macklin’s contribution in this special issue.

Once, after the Revolution broke out, it became clear that the Steklovs, Kamenevs, Sinovevs and many others were in reality Nahamkes, Apfelbaums, Rosenfeldts, etc. And I remembered, says Greaves, that some poor, but diligent and skilled cobbler, in desperation, secretly cursed these great Israelis: ‘When the time comes, they will save their skin, but we, we will be the ones who pay.’¹⁴

This list of names, these numbers, percentages and information were published in the most important Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and later in several other newspapers around Finland. There were only a few mentions of Jews and Bolsheviks during the months following the revolution, but in the latter half of 1918, it became common for Finnish newspapers to state that most Bolshevik leaders were Jews. Especially after the article in *Helsingin Sanomat*, it is quite safe to say that by the end of 1918, the idea of leading Bolsheviks being Jews, and Jews being over-represented in the Bolshevik administration, had reached Finland and was widely accepted.¹⁵

14 *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14 December 1918.

15 This claim was not entirely false, as relatively many Bolshevik leaders had a Jewish background. Thus, in the autumn of 1917, this was the case with six out of twenty-one members of the Central Committee: Lev Kamenev, Grigori Sokolnikov, Yakov Sverdlov, Lev Trotsky, Moisei Uritsky and Grigori Zinoviev. During the first five years after the revolution, between 15 and 20 per cent of representatives were of Jewish background in party meetings. The proportion was significant, because at the turn of the century, about 4 per cent of the entire Russian population were Jewish. This difference could be even more significant, because most Jewish settlements were located in rural regions. Yet, there are several explanations for the relatively high numbers and why Jews might have been interested in movements aiming at change. One of

It is not fully clear why certain papers chose to publish these lists of names and aliases. It seems that by labelling someone a Jew or Jewish, the intention was to diminish that person's dignity or/and raise suspicion. A similar implication of unreliability could be made by revealing a Jewish individual who had attempted to hide his Jewish identity by changing his name to a non-Jewish-sounding one.

Phase Two: Jews control the Bolshevik regime and exploit Russia

The fact that there were well-known Jews amongst the Bolshevik leaders was enough to cast a shadow over the Bolshevik movement and its goals, and it did not take long for the first Finnish newspapers to declare that the whole movement was in the hands of Jews. The negative image of Jews could also affect ideas and ideologies: if an idea was interpreted as being of 'Jewish origin', it raised suspicion among antisemites. Already in the nineteenth century, it was possible to call certain 'isms', such as materialism, rationalism, liberalism or capitalism, 'Jewish ideas' – they, as it were, embodied a so-called 'Jewish spirit' (Perry & Schweitzer 2002: 90–1). Antisemites considered 'Jewish ideas' as means for Jews to benefit from society. At the same time, antisemites believed these ideas destroyed the traditional

the most important reasons was the societal status of Jews in tsarist Russia: they had no civil rights. Jews had also experienced serious violence during the waves of pogroms in the 1880s and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Jews obviously wanted to participate in improving the system. The claim of Jewish over-representation in the Bolshevik movement is, on the other hand, problematic in itself: many of the most important Bolshevik leaders, who were allegedly Jews, were completely alienated from Judaism. The majority of politically active Jews sought to improve their societal status rather with the Jewish Labour Party Bund (Ahonen 2017: 96–7).

values of a Christian state. In the Finnish press, Bolshevism emerged as one of these destructive ideologies, especially when information about the harsh reality on the other side of the eastern border slowly made its way to Finland.

In the summer of 1918, there was a strange exchange of words between two columnists in two Karelian newspapers regarding a topical issue, namely whether there should or should not be a king in Finland. Somehow, these columnists managed to include Jews in the discussion. Kauko wrote in *Karjalan sanomat* under the title 'Them Jews', starting with an old antisemitic stereotype by stating how Jews could reach every place in a society and how they stuck their hooked noses everywhere. He blamed Jews for trying to destabilise the throne anywhere they lived: Jews had done so in tsarist Russia, and they were currently doing the same thing for the Bolsheviks. The writer tried to write in a humorous manner and his reasoning might have fallen short, but anyhow he did suspect that Jews would benefit considerably if Finland selected a king as leader. His fellow columnist Kuka, who obviously supported the idea of a kingdom of Finland, replied a few days later in *Karjalainen*, writing that the other columnist seemed to know 'his Jewish friends poorly'. Russian Jews were not against Lenin's regime, they were part of it: 'The fact of the matter is that the current Bolshevik government in Russia is totally in the hands of Jews.'¹⁶

A few days later, a similar idea was presented by Karl Tiander (1873–1938), a literary historian who had fled Russia right after the revolution. He wrote several articles for *Hufvudstadsbladet*,¹⁷ and he analysed the post-war situation from a wide perspective, but his

16 *Karjalan Sanomat*, 14 June 1918; *Karjalainen*, 18 June 1918.

17 For example, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 22 June 1918, 20 July 1918, 1 August 1918, 17 September 1918.

main interest seemed to lie with Russia, where the years of war and months of post-revolutionary turmoil had started to seriously take their toll. Jews were not his main issue, but he pointed out that Jews had been key players in the Bolshevik movement all along, and after the revolution, they had gained control over almost every branch of the administration in Russia. Tiander wrote his articles in Swedish, but this article was partially translated into Finnish (including the section on Jews) and published in *Perä-Pohjalainen*.¹⁸

The problems of Bolshevik society became better known to Finnish-speaking readers after Finnish newspapers started to receive more eyewitness testimonies and publish reports about the situation, from November 1918 onwards. The first of these reports was published in *Etelä-Saimaa*, and it described how the new government had failed miserably in St Petersburg. There were no reserves, no funds, and no proper jobs available. Shortage of food and other supplies led people to commit crimes. Soldiers were circulating the farms around St Petersburg, looking for food, and they stole as much as they could. However, Bolsheviks did not take any blame for the situation. On the contrary, it was forbidden and dangerous to criticise the new regime. The only ones who seemed to be doing better were Bolshevik officials, who were, according to the testimony, almost invariably Jews.¹⁹

Similar patterns of shortage and success can also be found in other eyewitness testimonies. *Hämeen sanomat* interviewed someone who had lived in the city of Tver. After the revolution, the city was run by an executive committee with limitless power and a nineteen-year-old chairman. Shortage of food was severe. If something was available, the lines

were endless, and because private selling of goods was forbidden, all trade fell into the hands of speculators. According to the testimony, only one group seemed to be doing well in these extraordinary circumstances: Jews. They were well dressed and walked the streets feeling safe. The interviewee explained this sense of security by the fact that Lenin and Trotsky too were Jews. Jews controlled illicit trade and made fortunes, especially with real gold, after the new government had ordered a replacement of all gold rings with fake ones.²⁰

During the winter of 1918 and 1919, there were several eyewitness testimonies, both real and fictional, and most of them had Jews as benefiting from the new system. An eyewitness said in an interview in *Karjala* that Jews called Bolshevism 'a lucrative Geschäft'. Bribery was no stranger to tsarist Russia, but after the revolution it had become even more common. Various commissars were Jews, and they profited by collecting payments for 'propuskas', different kinds of certificates. The same interviewee testified that Jews were leading the whole Bolshevik movement, but only in public offices: they seemed to avoid the Russian Red Army, especially if the troops were about to face action.²¹

This interview was a fictional anecdote, a causerie, but it tells something about the way the position of Jews and the situation in Russia was seen in Finland. It also repeated the old assumption that Jews did not want to fulfil their duties in the army. This anti-Jewish accusation had become well known in the German military a couple of years earlier, during the First World War. In 1916, rumours were spreading of how Jews were trying to avoid the military service. To make things clear, the war minister ordered a so-called *Judenzählung*, a 'Jew count' (Lindemann 1997: 399). The real motive for

18 *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 23 June 1918; *Perä-Pohjalainen*, 27 June 1918.

19 *Etelä-Saimaa*, 2 November 1918.

20 *Hämeen Sanomat*, 5 November 1918.

21 *Karjala*, 15 November 1918.

the count remained hidden, as did the results, until the end of the war. It is obvious that the whole counting process was humiliating for Jews, just as it is obvious that the reason for *Karjala's* implication was to make Jews seem untrustworthy. Reluctance to fight can also refer to another suspicious element, a lack of manhood: antisemites pictured Jewish men as more feminine, and advertising their incapacity to perform on the battlefield strengthened such claims (see Schüler-Springorum 2018).

Soon stories of harsh Soviet reality and ruthless Jews gained such imaginative features that they were most likely fictional, even though they were presented as facts. *Hämeen Sanomat*, for example, published a story in January 1919 that was allegedly told by a Finnish citizen who just had returned from St Petersburg. The story was supposed to show that there was a solid connection between Bolshevism and Jews even if anyone might have doubts about Bolshevism being a completely Jewish movement. The story described how when walking along Nevski Prospekt one would see starving, usually working-class, mothers feeding their babies in freezing weather. One of these mothers had asked for alms from a Jewish lady who was walking by, covered in a rustling blanket and with her fingers covered with expensive rings. The Jewish lady gave an impolite and rude answer to the beggar: 'I will not give you a single kopek, because now it is our time, and we will have our revenge on Christian dogs for the thousand years of oppression against us.' The eyewitness suspected that the Jewish woman went her way to have a chat with her comrades about the bliss of Bolshevism.²²

Many of the earlier eyewitness testimonies were anonymous. Published interviews and stories provide only limited information. If the reader is not provided with the context of where the information came from, the line

22 *Hämeen Sanomat*, 25 January 1919.

between fact and fiction may become unclear, as in the previous example. There was one booklet published in 1919 that has value as an eyewitness testimony, because it is possible to trace the writer's steps back to St Petersburg and his work there.

At the time of the revolution, the area around St Petersburg, Ingria, was populated by Finno-Ugric people. Finnish Lutheran pastors worked there among the Ingrian Finns. Most of these pastors had to flee Russia during the first years of the Bolshevik state. In Finland, their stories found keen listeners, and some of them told their stories very willingly. On the other hand, the area the pastors fled from was heavily influenced by Russian White propaganda and the events in the capital, so their views on Jews were quite grim, to say the least (see Ahonen 2017: 110–25; Ahonen & Stjerna 2022: 184–5).

The first Finnish Lutheran pastor to flee to Finland, as early as 1918, was Artur Malin (1871–1939), the vicar of the Swedish Congregation of St Petersburg.²³ Malin had been an active churchman, and it did not take long for him to settle in Finland and get a job as a pastor in the military. There was also a place for his expertise in issues related to the situation in Russia. The Education Office of the Church published a series of books and booklets for propaganda purposes, to be handed out to the Red prisoners of war. Malin was asked to contribute (Ahonen 2017: 110–25), and wrote a

23 Several Finnish pastors talked about their experiences in Soviet Russia, either in interviews or in writing. These testimonies were considered realistic and reliable, and because they fled from Ingria, the area around St Petersburg, they had confronted different levels of antisemitism, for example Russian White anti-Jewish propaganda. Their testimonies give one plausible explanation for how antisemitism spread to Finland after the First World War (Ahonen 2017: 110–25).

booklet with the title *What is Bolshevism?* He did not use his name on the cover but called himself 'a Citizen' (*Kansalainen*).²⁴ In his book, Malin described the atrocities of the Soviet regime. The Bolshevik regime was the worst enemy of the people: its leaders oppressed the working class but acted in the name of the working class. They attacked the very people they claimed to be fighting for. The system was violent and corrupt, and its only aim was to drive people into poverty and misery. Malin's book was written for propagandist purposes, so he also made reference to Finland. Bolshevik leaders often escaped abroad after taking bribes and collecting assets, and in those cases, in Malin's opinion, they acted in a similar manner to the leaders of the Finnish Reds.

Jews were not the main subject of Malin's book, but he wrote that many Bolshevik leaders were Jews, in Russia and elsewhere, and mentioned a few of them by name: Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Zinovyev and Krylenko from Russia, and Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and Kurt Eisner from Germany. Right after this, he emphasised that he did not want to provoke any anti-Jewish sentiments, but he thought he should remind readers why Jews had risen to the leadership of the Bolshevik movement:

Not to attack Jews in any way, we can remember that many members of this race have a special ability to avoid real work, to live at the expense of others and by cheating them. Therefore, it cannot be just

24 The pseudonym 'Kansalainen' has been associated with another Malin, Aarno Malin (1892–1972, after 1930 Aarno Maliniemi). The mistake was understandable because both used the same abbreviation, 'A. Malin'. However, there is clear evidence that the pseudonym 'Kansalainen' is Artur Malin, who fled from St Petersburg to Finland and had a motive to write about Bolshevism (see Ahonen 2016).

a coincidence that the main Bolsheviks are Jews.²⁵

Here, Malin presents two age-old antisemitic stereotypes and linked them with the new situation. Jews had long been blamed for avoiding real, hard work. In addition, the whole emancipation process, for example in Finland, was overshadowed by the accusations of how Jews were dishonest and would surely take advantage of anyone's carelessness if an opportunity presented itself (Kuparinen 2008: 141–2; Ahonen 2023; see also Ahonen 2017: 178–9). If counting leading Bolsheviks with Jewish backgrounds falls into the category of observations, the way Artur Malin portrays the situation is clearly antisemitic.

Phase Three: Jews lead revolutions in Germany and Hungary

The earliest writing suggesting that there was a plan for a global Bolshevik state run by Jews was written by Martti Pihkala, a Jäger recruiter and nationalist activist, who later became one of the best-known Finnish fascists (see Silvennoinen et al. 2016: 58–60). In *Keskisuomalainen*, Pihkala addressed societal issues and elections, with the aim of raising patriotic spirits. He finished his text by calling for all the Finnish-minded right-wing and agrarian parties (Whites) to take a stand against 'Bolsheviks, those who are planning a global Bolshevik state, an oligarchy, a dictatorship of thugs who call themselves poor and are, in most cases, Jews'.²⁶ Pihkala clearly refers to some kind of international threat, but it seems that some parallel events, that is other revolutions, were required for the fear of Bolshevism to develop into a full-scale conspiracy. Two revolutions became essential for the idea of Judaeo-Bolshevism: those in Germany (1918–19) and Hungary (1919).

25 Kansalainen 1919: 3–20.

26 *Keskisuomalainen*, 16 November 1918.

The first politician outside Russia connected with these revolutions who started to raise suspicions in the Finnish press was Kurt Eisner (1867–1919). He was a socialist and became a short-term prime minister of Bavaria in November 1918. Finnish newspapers followed the development of the situation in Germany after the revolution keenly, and when Kurt Eisner faced difficulties, several newspapers reported that Eisner was expected to fall, and be replaced by a real German called [Erhard] Auer. Eisner was a Jew from East-Galicia, and his real name was Salomon Kosnowsky, it was reported.²⁷ Eisner's name remained in the Finnish news until he was murdered in February 1919. Apart from Eisner, a number of Finnish newspapers also reported on anti-Jewish protests in Berlin arising from the number of Jewish members in the new German government (Haase, Bernstein, Cohn and Landsberg). In addition, Russian Bolsheviks had allegedly sent three million rubles to expedite the revolution in Germany. Hence, it seemed there was a real connection.²⁸

In mid-December 1918, *Uusi Päivä* summed up the situation with an article entitled 'Jews as leaders of Bolshevism'. This stated that, before the Great Revolution, Jews had gained a leading position in several extreme

movements, and right after the revolution, most of the People's Commissars were of Jewish origin. Abraham and Bronstein, that is Krylenko and Trotsky, just like Wolodarsky and Schneekopf, were clearly Jews. The writer was quite certain that almost the entire Soviet government were 'Israelis', except for Lenin (!) and a couple of others. And where Bolshevism took its most severe form, there it was run by Jews: 'In Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and even in Latvia the children of Jacob are holding the highest ranks of Bolshevism.' When old leaders were replaced in Germany after the revolution, familiar names rose to the top: 'Haase, Bernstein, Cohn, Simon, David, and Eisner, just to mention a few.' These names had led people to wonder, according to the article, if the Bolshevik Revolution was in any manner a national Russian specialty. After all, the common feature shared between the Russian and German movements was Jewish leaders. It seems that these Jews had created an international organisation, and not by accident. Their monetary power had been growing and they had gained equal rights. For the writer, it was apparent that Judaism was not only a nationality, but also an ideology. It sought to recreate the world through Bolshevism and had prepared itself against the current world order. Judaism is a danger, and even if the outcome is not clear, it is obvious that Judaeo-Bolshevism seeks to benefit only one group of people: Jews.²⁹

The Spartacist uprising was the next event that was associated with Jews and Bolshevism. The Spartacist leader, Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919), had been in Finnish newspapers even before the uprising at the beginning of January 1919. He already had a reputation, and *Hämetär*, for example, compared him to Lenin, calling him 'a sower of bitter hatred'; it continued: 'For the new Germany he is a dangerous man,

27 For example, *Uusi Päivä*, 2 December 1918; *Uusi Suometar*, 2 December 1918; *Vaasa*, 2 December 1918.

28 For example, *Uusi Päivä*, 3 December 1918; *Vakka-Suomi*, 3 December 1918. There had already been news about the International Socialist Academy, founded by the Soviet government, and its members: Bukharin, Larin, Stutshka, Radek, Rosanow and Bogdanow (Russia), Rosa Luxemburg, Ledebur, Kautsky, Mehring and Liebknecht (Germany), and Otto Bauer (Austria). This news did not mention Jews or Judaism but provided information about the international co-operations of socialists and Bolsheviks. 'Venäjän uutisia', *Wiipurin*, 3 July 1918.

29 *Uusi Päivä*, 13 November 1918.

even though it is not likely that he will get as far as Lenin has, for Lenin is more devious and cunning as a Jew.³⁰ Liebknecht led the uprising with Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), who was born and raised in a Jewish family, unlike Lenin or Liebknecht. They were both murdered only a few days later. Despite their short time in the spotlight, the Finnish press remembered them as revolutionary Jews for years to come.³¹

Many Finns already had connections with Hungary in the nineteenth century, and Hungary, along with Germany, was an important example when Finnish politicians were looking for answers to the so-called Jewish question. The relationship between Hungary and Finland was also deepened by the idea of the populaces both being Finno-Ugric peoples, so there was a great confusion in Finland when in March 1919 the Soviet Republic emerged in Hungary, with Béla Kun (1886–1938) as the supreme leader. Béla Kun's Jewish background was not, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, an issue during his supremacy. Finnish newspapers reported events from Hungary, and they often used foreign newspapers as their sources.³²

Jews were connected with the situation in Hungary in July 1919 after Kun appointed Tibor Szamuely (1890–1919) as People's Commissar. Finnish newspapers called Szamuely a blood-thirsty man, and from the beginning, it was stressed that he was a Jew.³³ However, opposition to the Communist regime increased and antisemitism was on the rise. Finnish newspapers explained this by the fact that most of the people's commissars in Hungary had been

Jews.³⁴ Béla Kun's administration ended in August 1919, and Finnish newspapers reported that he had fled the country. Szamuely shot himself during interrogation.³⁵

Hungary's brief Soviet rule did not increase antisemitic writing in the Finnish press. However, the period in question remained as an example of Judaeo-Bolshevik rule and was later used in antisemitic texts and analyses.

Phase Four: The International Judaeo-Bolshevik Conspiracy

In my previous research on antisemitism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, I have ascertained that 1920 was a turning point. Post-war antisemitism in Finland consisted mainly of nationalistic accusations, some hints and allegations on suspicious activities and anti-Jewish remarks and characterisations. During and after 1920 antisemitism became more comprehensive in its content.³⁶ New observations and accusations seemed to have been combined with old antisemitic stereotypes. In the context of religion, this meant, for example, that the idea of Judaeo-Bolshevism was included in Christian antisemitism. Jews were considered to be cursed, and their presence brought this curse upon other nations too, this time in the form of Bolshevism. Their false idea of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God led them to pursue success in this life, with their final goal being world domination. War-time and post-war events were also connected with eschatology. Between 1920 and 1925, Finnish churchmen published a considerable number of books, booklets and other texts that addressed the role of Jews in world events

30 *Hämetär*, 28 December 1918.

31 For example, *Maailma*, 9/1919: 292; *Savonmaa*, 26 February 1920.

32 For example, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 31 March 1919; *Karjalainen*, 4 March 1919.

33 *Uuden Suomen Itälehti*, 30 June 1919; *Aamulehti*, 4 July 1919.

34 *Savon kansa*, 3 July 1919; *Uusi Aura*, 3 July 1919.

35 *Maakansa*, 6 August 1919; *Keskisuomalainen*, 7 August 1919.

36 A similar timeline seems to apply to the development of post-war antisemitism around Europe; see Hanebrink 2018: 11–45.

and their pursuit of their own goals through both Communism and capitalism (see Ahonen 2017: 139–212).

Finland was on the front line when *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* spread outside Russia after the First World War. Apparently the very first edition printed outside Russia was a Swedish translation, and the place and the time of publication was Hanko, Finland, in 1919.³⁷ In addition, there were at least two Finnish versions and one Swedish version published in 1920 (Laitila 2014: 141–3). Bolshevism did not play any role in early editions of *The Protocols*, but it did not take long for antisemites to connect new political realities with old prejudices and conspiracies.

The first such connection in the Finnish general press, a comprehensive and thorough conspiracy theory on Jews and Bolsheviks, was published in *Uusimaa*³⁸ in September 1920, less than three years after the first Bolshevik was accused of being Jewish. The author of the text is not mentioned, so he was likely to have been part of or close to the editorial staff. The title of the article was ‘Strange phenomenon’. In the following, I will present the main content of the article, the first full-blown version of the Judaeo-Bolshevist conspiracy presented in a Finnish newspaper.

According to the author, anyone who had followed the latest international news must have wondered how all the shocking events seemed to be directed by Jews. In Russia,

commissars, chairmen of the councils, the most important army commanders and the very leaders of Soviet Russia were all Jews. They ruled by terror, and their authority was secured by loyal Jewish minions. Therefore, it had occurred to the author that maybe the Great Russian Revolution was only a step towards an even greater goal, Jewish world domination. Anarchist riots and Spartacists in Germany and the Soviet regime in Hungary were run by actors like Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Haase, or Béla Kun, Szamuely and others – all Jews, according to the author. It was obvious that if someone made an attempt at a Bolshevik revolution, you could always find Jewish fingerprints there.

The author took a historical perspective and described how Jews had been serving mammon since they were dispersed around the world. Their living conditions had often been hard, and they had faced persecution and contempt. However, despite the circumstances, Jews had always been able to gather gold: it grew into a passion, and they developed incomparable skills in it. Even when Jews ‘walked in rags’, they had the ability to make fortunes. The wealthiest Jews ended up being bankers, while intelligent and educated Jews found their ways to the top of their societies. Ordinary, simple Jews did not stay in one place for long, but according to the author, even they were intelligent enough to make their Christian neighbours their debtors. This had happened in Russia, Austria, Hungary and Romania, where careless peasants and workers had been driven into poverty by Jews.

According to the author, the wealth of the world has slowly been shifting into the hands of Jews, and nothing indicated that this trend was going to change. Jews had exploited the opportunities opened by the world war, and they had profited and gained ‘infinite riches’. The author also remarked that Jews were the cause of the current difficult global economic

37 In Norway, Denmark and Britain, *The Protocols* were first published in 1920. See the articles by Nicola Karcher and Kjetil Braut Simonsen, Sofie Lene Bak and Graham Macklin in this special issue.

38 *Uusimaa* is a newspaper from Porvoo and the eastern Uusimaa region, founded in 1894. It supported the National Coalition Party. There are no exact numbers of circulation available for the year 1920, but in the first decade of the twentieth century the number was 6,500 (Tommila 1988 (7): 195–8).

situation: 'Their fingers have been everywhere, they have gathered for themselves, in addition to the gold, all the necessary materials, multiplied their prices and then again gathered new piles of gold.'

However, the goal of Jews was not only to obtain wealth. 'Wealth is power', as the author puts it, and the true motivator behind Jewish greed was their aim of gaining power, because they were seeking world domination. That is why they were acquiring land holdings, taking over industry and striving for a position in world trade where they could set prices. Jews owned influential newspapers, so that public opinion would adapt to their actions, and with the help of their agents, they were aiming to influence states, churches, schools and even family life. Social and economic conflicts served Jews, and in the author's opinion, they even tried to create them:

He may be a monarchist today, a supporter of a republic tomorrow, or a socialist or a Communist, whatever seems to be most beneficial to their own purposes. And where there is carrion, there they gather as ravens. Circumstances in Russia offered Trotsky, Zinoviev, Litvinov, Joffe and numerous other Jews an excellent playground. They made their way to the leadership of the revolutionary movements there and took them over so thoroughly that today Russia walks like a weak-willed animal on the leash of Jews. That was the first great attempt to make Jewish world domination real. Liberalism, Socialism, Communism and Anarchism are now all at the service of Jewish purposes, that is, the grimmest of the grim, capitalism.³⁹

The author also brought up the question of recently granted civil rights for Finnish Jews.

39 *Uusimaa*, 27 September 1920.

The liberal and especially Swedish press had successfully created a Jewish-friendly atmosphere, and as a result, the legal decision was made immediately after Finland's independence. At that time, there was no information available about the suspicious role of Jews in the First World War or the events in Russia. Nevertheless, he suspected there were still some socialists in Finland who appreciated what 'Jews have achieved in Russia', and old liberals who wanted to believe everything good about Jews. According to the author, many had opened their eyes and noticed how Jews were increasing their power and possessions in Finland, openly involved in investments and businesses, and in dishonest activities. He also believed that the Finnish Civil War was an attempt to oppress Finland, led by Jews from Bolshevik Russia. Thus, the author concludes, granting of civil rights was probably a mistake; he continues:

We are still not able to fully imagine how far the Jewish Hawk-eye is already aiming in the affairs of Finland. And our regret may be too late. In our country, like in many other countries, eyes were closed to the truth that a Jew, no matter where he settles, remains a Jew with his own religion, his own national and international traditions, which he pursues in silence, unnoticed, but decisively and unceasingly. The reins of world politics seem to be in their hands.⁴⁰

The article in *Uusimaa* clearly shows how the Judaeo-Bolshevist conspiracy was combined with old antisemitic theories. A peculiar detail is the hierarchy of 'isms': in the article, Jewish capitalism was raised to the highest level and other 'Jewish isms' were subordinate to it. As the article is the first attempt

40 *Uusimaa*, 27 September 1920.

to portray all the confusing events that had taken place during and after the First World War, the statement of the author seems genuine: 'The answer is starting to become clear.' He believes he is revealing or describing something that has been hidden or not truly understood before. These ideas probably seemed valid for him, and his text seems to open up a possibility of a similar interpretation to that which I have offered before: post-First World War antisemitism did not only arise from the hatred of Jews (although there was plenty of that to go around, too), but it also could have been a real attempt to understand complex events in a complex world with practically no real answers or valid knowledge to help with the analysis.

Yet, the writer seems to be someone who had been following the debate over the 'Jewish question' in Finland for a while, and his thinking seemed to lean in a nationalistic and conservative direction. There are also some traces connecting the article to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The role of capitalism, the press, societal turmoil and, of course, gold are key elements in *The Protocols*. Especially the ideas related to the gathering of gold, in the article, may derive from it. Even the timing makes it possible that the author could have had a fresh copy at hand. On the other hand, there is no concrete proof to support any of this. In addition, the ideas of *The Protocols* had spread as oral tradition for a long time, so the existence of physical copies did not necessarily play a decisive role in the dissemination of these ideas (Cohn 1996: 130). So, the text in *Uusimaa* was a presentation of old antisemitism combined with bits and pieces of new information published in Finnish newspapers starting from the very first weeks after the October Revolution. This combination, and these ideas, were the basis of the Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy belief.

Results

This article is about Jews and Bolsheviks and how they were portrayed in the general Finnish press after the October Revolution. It is also about a strange idea about Jews that spread throughout post-war Europe. Jews were accused of several international events, such as revolutions in Germany and Hungary, which seemed to be connected to the events in Bolshevik Russia. Slowly, different pieces of information and propaganda developed into a Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy belief.

The Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy was a global idea, but historical ties and Finland's geographical proximity to Russia make it possible to follow how the pieces of the puzzle fell together 'locally' in Finnish newspapers. The myth of Judaeo-Bolshevism was of an expansionist nature: it started as a loose connection of some hints and anti-Jewish stereotypes, and evolved into a full-blown conspiracy belief, all in less than three years.

As this article shows, the process consisted of four different phases. Starting from 1917, the first step towards the conspiracy was a claim that some leading Bolsheviks were Jews, and soon even those with no ties to Judaism could be called Jews. In the second phase the press started to consider the whole Bolshevik movement Jewish. There were also serious accusations of how Jews used power in Soviet Russia: they ruled with terror and exploited society for their own benefit. Writings on revolutions in Germany and Hungary formed a third step, that is an international perspective on the idea, and a full-scale Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy connecting old antisemitic claims with the new situation was revealed for the first time in the Finnish press in September 1920. Jews were using both Communism and capitalism as means to pursue world domination.

This article demonstrates that antisemitic

ideas were present in the post-First World War Finnish press. Anti-Jewish propaganda was not recognised as antisemitic, or maybe it was, but it did not matter at a time when anti-Bolshevik tensions and the fear of Communism were running high. Antisemitic ideas were published amongst or as actual news and analyses. So, as this article shows, antisemitic claims were not considered propaganda. One of the goals of this article was to find out if anyone had any suspicions or doubts about antisemitic ideas. According to the Finnish newspapers published between 1917 and 1920, the answer is clear: no. No one stood up and opposed these claims in public.

However, Jews seldom played a leading role in the news, and various texts about Bolshevik Russia were published in almost every issue of every newspaper during the period in hand. The Finnish press also wrote on Jews' sufferings during the war and in post-war pogroms. Fear of Bolshevism or conspiracy speculations did not mean there was no compassion, yet, as mentioned, not a single newspaper in Finland defended Jews against conspiratorial accusations.

Finland had a small Jewish minority, but they were not the ones who were accused directly. The ideas portrayed in this article are mainly products of the imagination. There seemed to be no proper answers and explanations in a confusing world situation. And if a good and reasonable explanation was missing, a bad and irrational one had to fill the blanks: and that was the Jews. ■

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