Finnish Nationalism

By international standards, national consolidation advanced calmly and steadily in nineteenth-century Finland. The changes were accompanied by rather little conflict.¹ What seems essential, and to a certain degree exceptional, is that in Finland not only the middle class but also the upper class had strong incentives for nationalist mobilisation. In explaining this development, the nature of both Finnish state-making and Finnish class structure – or, basically, the development of Finnish nationalism in the interface between Sweden and Russia – seems crucial.

1 The Dual Nature of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe

In an influential essay, Ernest Gellner portrayed nationalism as ‘a phenomenon connected not so much with industrialisation or modernisation as such, but with its uneven diffusion’.² The tidal wave of modernisation has struck various parts of the world in succession, mobilising the latecomers in nationalist defence against those territories already modernised and bringing about struggles for independence in the territories defined by nationalist criteria. In the nineteenth century, this wave moved from the west to the marchlands of Europe.³

In this view, nationalism is inherent in the process of modernisation. In an industrialising society that is increasingly centralised, specialised, and occupationally mobile, literacy and education acquire an importance greater than ever before. Near-universal education becomes essential to social mobility, which requires communication. There is an objective social need for a cultural homogeneity. From the individual’s point of view, full citizenship presupposes access to a common language and culture. Consequently, the language acquires a new and crucial role in defining social boundaries. If the friction that inhibits mobility is not overcome, or is overcome only partially, new ‘national’ boundaries may be born. This is likely to happen, for example, in a situation in which one of the languages in a state – often the language of the old heartland of an empire –

¹ Klinge 1975, p. 54; Thaden 1981a, p. 6.
² Gellner 1964, p. 166.
becomes the language of the modern organisations and the new industrial, governmental, and educational institutions. A hierarchical cultural division of labour may arise, as Michael Hechter has called the division of labour in which ethnic groups are differentially stratified.

Gellner’s definition of nationalism applies to movements of national self-assertion and liberation, particularly those not linked to an existing or even historically remembered polity (the ‘unhistoric nations’), where nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness but rather the inventing of nations that never existed. Nationalism arose with the introduction of mass education in those latecomer regions where language or other ethnic differentiae provided a strong incentive as well as a means for the backward population to think of itself as a separate ‘nation’ and to seek independence – liberation from second-class citizenship. Several nationalist movements in the nineteenth-century multinational empires are good examples.

Besides being a mode of confronting the consequences of later modernisation, however, nationalism has another aspect, which is also implied in Gellner’s definition. Nationalism is, to cite E.J. Hobsbawm, a ‘civic religion’ for the modern territorially centralised state. A territorial state that functions through a direct linkage between the individual citizens and a strong centre must develop a set of motivations in the citizens that gives them a primary and overriding sense of obligation toward the state and eliminates the various other obligations they feel toward other groups and centres within or outside the territory. In the era of capitalist economic development and mass participation in politics, nationalism has functioned as the ideology by which the population has established a sense of identity with the modern state.

The two sides of the phenomenon – or, rather, the two phenomena – are historically linked, at least in the sense that nationalism has functioned as the ‘civic religion’ of the new state after a successful national liberation struggle.

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4 The most detailed presentation of this argument is Gellner 1983. See also Gellner 1964, pp. 158–64. The idea is implicit in some of Karl W. Deutsch’s formulations of the importance of language for social mobility in the age of industrialisation; see Deutsch 1953, pp. 75–7, 153–4, 162.

5 Hechter 1978, p. 312.


In nineteenth-century Europe, however, the importance of these two aspects differed in different parts of the continent, as has been explicitly suggested by Tom Nairn. In the established Western European states, the ascendancy of the dominant nationality was maximised during the nineteenth century, whereas in East-Central Europe nationalism arose as a protest of underdeveloped peoples. For the latter, nationalism became the way of mobilising and trying to catch up with the already industrialised areas in the West.

Nairn links the nationalism of the late developers of East-Central Europe to the uneven development of capitalism. It was, in essence, a forced reaction to the spread of capitalism. The majority of the better-off groups saw themselves excluded from the material progress of the advanced lands and mobilised against this ‘progress’. In the process of mobilisation, a militant, interclass community was consciously formed and made strongly, though mythically, aware of its separate identity vis-à-vis outside forces of domination. A nationalist mobilisation against ‘progress’ was the only way for the backward, dominated lands – or, more precisely, for certain social strata in these regions – to seek access to this progress. As Iván T. Berend and György Ránki put it, the Eastern European peripheries had to modernise in their own way in order to protect themselves from the West and to successfully respond to the Western challenge. This process presupposed a struggle for nationhood and national self-determination.

In other words, in the earlier phase of state-making nationalism generally developed only after the strong states had been formed, as a consequence of conscious efforts by the central power. But in the Eastern European latecomer states, the process was reversed: ethnic similarities led to national consciousness before the formation or re-establishment of a state. In this ‘autonomist nationalism’, common culture preceded political structure and provided a basis for it.

Nairn’s analysis demonstrates the close relationship between the two nationalist phenomena. Also essential in nationalism as the protest of underdeveloped peoples (though in an embryonic form) is mobilisation across class boundaries, the creation of an interclass community.

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11 Yet another formulation of the ‘diffusion’ of nationalism is that of A.D. Smith (1978, pp. 240, 243). He takes, not modernisation or the uneven development of capitalism, but rather the centralising reform in the ruling bureaucracy and the concomitant demand for a new type of trained personnel, the secular intellectuals, to be crucial in explaining the rise of a nationalist movement against domination.
13 Orridge and Williams 1982, pp. 23–1.
Citing Miroslav Hroch’s study of nineteenth-century nationalist groups, Nairn states that nationalism as a reaction to underdevelopment normally involved first the intelligentsia, then wider strata of the middle classes, and finally the masses.\(^{14}\) Hroch’s study is a unique piece of comparative research on the structure of ‘patriotic’ groups in the phase immediately preceding nationalist mass mobilisation among seven small European nationalities: Czechs, Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, Norwegians, Flemings, and Slovaks. Besides being small nationalities they are, for Hroch, ‘repressed peoples’, repression meaning an unequal cultural and political position in a larger political unit.\(^{15}\)

The overwhelming importance of such intellectual groups as university graduates, teachers, and priests was, understandably enough, typical of nationalism in these cases. Moreover, petty officials – in contrast to higher bureaucrats – and small merchants and artisans – in contrast to entrepreneurs and large merchants – tended to provide activists and supporters to the nationalist movements in this early phase. The ‘patriots’ studied were predominantly upwardly mobile, the sons of parents from the lower ranks, who had risen just as far as was possible for persons of such parentage.\(^{16}\)

In Hroch’s study the Eastern European cases in particular displayed these traits, which fits in well with the suggestions by Gellner and Nairn that nationalism is a reaction to underdevelopment. At the same time, the social structure in these cases bore strong marks of the feudal past. The activists were recruited not only from outside the nobility and high bureaucracy or from outside the ruling class of feudal society (which largely identified itself with the repressing culture), but also from outside the new rising bourgeoisie, which was likewise culturally alien to the nationalist groups. It was these activists who were instrumental in spreading the nationalist ideas to the masses and in mobilising them in the next phase.\(^{17}\) In the core capitalist areas of Western Europe, in contrast, the main bearers of nationalism were intellectual groups linked to the bourgeois ruling classes. There the key was nationalism as a ‘civic religion’, the need for a unifying ideology that would overcome the destabilising effects of class conflict.\(^{18}\)

\(^{14}\) Hroch 1968; Nairn 1977, p. 117.

\(^{15}\) Hroch 1968, p. 16.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., pp. 125–37; also Plakans 1974; Chlebowczyk 1980, pp. 95–105; Koralka 1971, pp. 57–8, 62–7; Portal 1971, pp. 97, 100.

\(^{17}\) Hroch 1968, pp. 16–17, 32–3.

At first glance, the position of Finland – or, to be precise, that of its large Finnish-speaking majority – in this twofold division of nationalist phenomena seems fairly clear: Finland was one of the ‘unhistoric nations’. The Finns were also one of the ethnically distinct minority groups of the multinational empires of the time, in all of which there arose national movements – or, more specifically, an autonomist nationalism that claimed institutional recognition within a larger state. Karl W. Deutsch presents the Finnish development as an example of national conflict against the predominant language or culture. In Hroch’s study, the Finnish case appears as an example of national self-assertion by a repressed people, being more reminiscent of the Eastern than the Western cases. For Hugh Seton-Watson, the Finnish national movement closely resembles the national movements that arose in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The same holds for Andrew W. Orridge and Colin H. Williams’s list of Eastern European cases of autonomist nationalism.

In all these respects Finland was certainly one of the late developers of the East. Yet it is not quite correct to picture Finland as a colonial territory or as an Eastern European periphery struggling through nationalism to free itself from the dilemma of uneven development. It may be hypothesised that the Finnish ‘deviations’ from this pattern, which resulted from its interstitial position and are linked to both state structures and class relations, go a long way in explaining the steady advance of national consolidation and nationalism in Finland.

First, political dependence was comparatively limited. A Finnish polity was founded decades before the politicisation of ethnic differentiae, that is, before the rise of nationalism. In a more fundamental sense than was true for any of the other small nationalities in Hroch’s study except Norway, Finland was an autonomous unit, with its own administrative apparatus. This was so especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. The necessity of fighting for a separate status, which faced nationalist movements elsewhere, was not a primary problem in Finland. Moreover, as indicated above, the formation of a national economy had advanced very far by the end of the last century, to the point of Finland being economically ‘overdeveloped’ relative to Russia. Whereas the linguistic and religious distinctiveness vis-à-vis the metropolitan country was

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19 Orridge and Williams 1982, pp. 23–1.
similar to that of many other minor nationalities, institutional and economic distinctiveness was unusually marked in the Finnish case. Second, Finnish class structure was peculiar in two respects. Although ultimate control was exercised in St. Petersburg, domination within the country – political, economic, and cultural – was in the hands not of the Russians but of the Swedish-speaking upper class. Thus, although linguistic, social, and educational barriers coincided within Finland, the local elite was not an extension of the metropolitan elite. This situation was not common in Eastern Europe, where the aristocratic upper classes often identified themselves both politically and culturally with the metropolitan power: in a number of areas, for instance, German or Magyar landlords confronted Slav peasants speaking a different, strictly local language.

True, some cases did resemble Finland: German nobles in the Baltic Provinces and Polish landlords in Lithuania were, like Swedish upper classes in Finland, culturally distinct both from the dominant power and from the subjugated population. Yet another feature of the class structure sets Finland apart even from these cases. During the Swedish period, a non-feudal class structure with a large and strong indigenous peasantry had consolidated itself in Finland. Consequently, the authority of the upper class rested on an exceptionally fragile foundation. This is perhaps the most important divergence in the Finnish situation. Elsewhere, the power of the upper classes lay on a seemingly solid basis, thanks not only to the guarantees of the metropolitan power but also to the prolongation of feudal class domination. In Finland, however, the upper classes had no solid basis in landownership; rather, their position was based almost exclusively on the central role they played in the administration of the emerging state.

To recapitulate, in both types of nationalism mobilisation across class boundaries or the creation of an interclass community was of central importance. The function of this mobilisation – whether as a civic religion for the state or as the protest of underdeveloped peoples – was closely connected with the position of the country or region in the international state system. In the established Western states, which were also core areas of capitalism, nationalism was closely linked to the ruling class; in the periphery, it was linked mainly to middle-class groups seeking popular support against alien economic and political domination.

The early phases of the Finnish case resemble the latter type. During the Swedish period, there arose a hierarchical cultural division of labour, with a Swedish-speaking upper class. At the same time, most of the Finnish-speaking regions were backward in comparison both to the core of Sweden and to Western Europe in general. Immediately before the rise of nationalism, however, this picture was radically altered. Finland was established as a polity, which soon began the process of economic integration. It became dependent on an empire that separated the thin Swedish-speaking upper class from the former Swedish core and endowed this local class in Finland with the central role in the administration of the new political unit, the grand duchy. These conditions point to the possible importance of nationalism as a ‘civic religion’.23

3 The Consolidation of a National Culture

All these factors combined to create a nationalism in which both aspects – nationalism as protest of underdeveloped peoples and as civic religion – seem to have intertwined exceptionally closely. Nationalism in Finland did not play the role of a liberating force in the typical Eastern European way; practically from the beginning it served strong elements of a ‘civic religion’ for the territorially centralised state as well. The upper classes in Finland, with their Swedish culture, found exceptionally strong incentives to adopt or accept the language and culture of the large majority of the people, both because of the country’s political dependence on a great autocratic state, Russia, and because of their own need, as state bureaucrats, to establish a sense of obligation to the Finnish polity. As a consequence, a rather unified national culture grew up.

This suggestion implies that in Finland, unlike elsewhere in Eastern Europe,24 strong incentives for nationalist mobilisation existed not only among the middle classes, the majority of freeholding peasants included, but also among the upper classes. This hypothesis is supported by Hroch’s findings. He focused on the development of nationalist movements in the phase when a

23 It is true that economic ‘overdevelopment’ vis-à-vis an empire contains varying elements. Nairn (1977, pp. 185–7) cites such overdevelopment as causing nationalist movements for liberation and self-assertion. But if viewed as a factor in the consolidation of the emerging state, as in late nineteenth-century Finland, it may also strengthen the inculcation of a sense of obligation to the state. Which aspect predominates depends on how tight or loose political dependence is and the extent to which this dependence limits economic freedom of action. In Finland the economic limitations were few.

group of ‘patriots’ had already attempted systematically to spread ‘the national idea’ but had not as yet penetrated the masses to any extent. In Finland this phase occurred in the 1840s and 1850s, at the same time as economic and social reforms were initiated at the administrative level. During these decades the nationalist movement, or Fennomania, which originated within the Swedish-speaking upper class, began to take on a clearly sociopolitical character under the leadership of J.V. Snellman. According to Hroch, upper-class representation among the nationalist activists of the period was larger than among corresponding activist groups elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The proportion of nobles and high bureaucrats was particularly high. This picture is completed by the pattern of recruitment of activists in Finland, where recruits were less often sons of parents from the lower ranks and less often geographically mobile than elsewhere.25

Hroch’s results are highly suggestive, even though the role of bureaucrats seems a bit exaggerated. He treats as patriots all members of the Finnish Literary Society, which brought together many high bureaucrats in the 1830s. At that time the society played a role in government efforts to promote the Finnish language and thus weaken traditional ties with Sweden, in accordance with a ‘bureaucratic-patriotic idea of Finland’ adopted by the leading stratum during the first decades of autonomy.26 Actually, in the 1840s and 1850s the nationalist activists in the intellectual community came into open conflict with the domestic administration by redefining the language question in explicitly social terms. Institutional tensions between the academic community and the high bureaucracy (see Chapter 2) appear to have played a significant part in the rise of Fennomania in this period.

This qualification should not be taken as casting doubt on the upper-class character of the activists. Hroch’s conclusion is supported by an analysis of the leading Fennomans associated with the editorial boards of Helsinki’s newspapers. Unlike the ‘Old’ Fennomans of the 1850s, who in many cases had been upwardly mobile and to whom the Finnish language was familiar from childhood, the so-called Young Fennomans of the late nineteenth century were definitely of upper-class origin. They became spokesmen for Fennomania in the new political phase, after 1863. ‘It was the younger men of solid gentry background, with Swedish as their initial language, who laid the basis for conscious

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25 Hroch 1968, pp. 83–167 passim; also Klinge 1969, pp. 189–98. Hroch’s results for Norway (1968, pp. 95–100) are largely similar to those for Finland, but because Hroch focuses on the whole Storting (the Norwegian Diet) membership in the decades after 1814, the results for Norway are not fully comparable to the other analyses in the study.

political organization and took the initiative in defining an exclusive party program opposed to that of the Liberals.27

Snellman’s aim was to establish national unity on a Finnish cultural foundation. He urged Finns with university training to adopt Finnish as a working language and to create cultivated literature that was both popular and patriotic. Over a longer period, national unity and patriotic indoctrination were to be achieved through revision of the school system. A Finland united in language, culture, and loyalty might resist the dangers resulting from the country’s dependent position and might also develop further. The concept of the nation as the natural unit of human achievement in history, the identity of nationality and language, and the belief in the power of national culture and consciousness to determine national evolution received definite expression in Snellman’s writings. His philosophy of nationality was refined and extended, but not basically altered, by later Fennomans. Complementing Snellman’s ideas was the publication in 1835 (enlarged edition, 1849) of the Kalevala, a compilation by Elias Lönnrot of ancient folk poems, which was immediately to consolidate itself as the Finnish national epic.28

Concrete demands were mainly cultural in nature. The emphasis on culture is reflected in attitudes toward popular groups, which in the Fennoman ideology were equivalent to the independent peasantry. As discussed in Chapter 2, church and university intellectuals, together with the independent peasantry, formed the backbone of the movement. Leaders were typically from the church and university, which had been undermined by economic development in the late nineteenth century: a shift away from the corporate distribution of power tended to put the clerical groups at a disadvantage relative to new commercial and industrial groups. In these circumstances the nationalist activists turned more or less consciously to the independent peasantry. The connection of this group with the (lower) clergy was manifest in the vigorous revivalist movements which, in contrast to the situation in Sweden, were soon accepted by the church.29 For Snellman, the peasantry constituted the core of the nation, and the landowning peasants had a central place in the Fennoman programme. The goal that they be activated and brought into public life was realised in part in 1863, when their participation in the Diet was revived. But other modalities were also needed: the adoption of Finnish as an administrative language, the establishment of public elementary schools in rural districts, and the development of local parish government. All these contributed to the civic education

28 Selleck 1961, pp. 131, 144.
of the freeholding peasants, making them aware of the needs of the nation and their patriotic duties, which transcended the narrow interests of any particular parish or class.\textsuperscript{30}

This programme did not include any substantial demands for structural change, however. The new measures were intended to increase the political consciousness of the peasantry without altering the group’s agrarian character. The Fennomans’ aim was the linguistic conversion of the existing gentry, to be completed, it is true, by men of peasant origin, who would then be personally assimilated into the gentry. The new gentry was to differ only on the vital point of language. A Finland united in language and culture was to establish itself not by dismantling the traditional structure of power, but by subjecting it to guidance by a patriotic intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{31} As one student of the phenomenon puts it: ‘The fact that the Finnicisation movement was directed against the exclusively privileged Swedish-speaking upper class of that time did not imply that the upper class should have been eliminated in order to found a democratically organised society, but that the upper class speaking Swedish and oriented to the Swedish culture should have been replaced by an upper class speaking Finnish and oriented to the Finnish culture’.\textsuperscript{32}

The above elements of the Fennoman programme provide further support for the view that the two aspects of nationalism were closely intertwined in Finland. On the one hand, Fennomania clearly worked for national self-assertion and liberation from Swedish cultural dominance and against the dangers arising from political dependence on an external power. In this respect the Fennomans’ advocacy of both the adoption of Finnish as an administrative language and the establishment of public elementary schools in rural districts was essential, for it allowed the cultural emancipation of the independent peasants. Upward social mobility from the peasantry to the educated class was not insignificant either, although it became important only in the recruitment of the clergy. Another group that benefited directly from the reform of the school system was the small but rapidly growing Finnish-speaking middle class.\textsuperscript{33} The Fennomans also created the first Finnish mass organisation, the temperance movement, from the 1880s (see Chapter 6). All in all, by urging linguistic reform and the broadening of the social basis for school attendance, the Fennoman movement contributed to the emancipation of new groups and to their recruitment into the upper class in the latter half of the nineteenth cen-

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp. 147, 173–7, 184, 189, 204; Lundin 1981, pp. 400–1.
\textsuperscript{32} Wuorinen 1935, p. 273.
tury. The movement also acted for the consolidation of the country vis-à-vis Russia. It is true that preference for linguistic over institutional reforms led the Fennomans to ally themselves tactically with imperial interests and to display a loyalty that was quite pronounced when compared with that of the liberals. At a more fundamental level, however, it was linguistic and cultural unity that, in the Fennoman view, enabled the country to resist Russian dominance. The thin and culturally isolated upper layers of society were far too weak to perform this task alone.

On the other hand, the movement strove to create an integrating ideology for the state. The linguistic conversion of the gentry was necessary in order to establish a sentiment of solidarity with the large Finnish-speaking masses, which in turn would help to make the people accept the prevailing relations of power and authority. For all their populism, the Fennomans revealed a strong tendency toward social conservatism, and their view of society was essentially paternalistic. For them, the state had a central role to play, and the long-range goal of linguistic development took precedence over the short-range aim in institutionally guaranteed freedoms. The movement was highly critical of the more volatile urban and industrial groups, which seemed to threaten the traditional structure of society, which was based on corporate representation. In the last decades of the century the Fennoman movement provided an agrarian and religious ideological alternative for the emerging state.

The calm and steady pace of national consolidation characterised the attitude of the liberals, who from the 1860s on constituted the main group opposing the Fennomans. (In the 1860s a Swedish nationalist movement also arose, leaning ideologically on the Swedish-speaking agrarian and fishing population in the coastal areas; its significance remained limited, however.) The liberals derived their support from the rising bourgeois groups, and even from the bureaucracy, the interconnections between which were consolidated during the late nineteenth century (see Chapter 2). Thus the changeover from a ‘bureaucratic-conservative’ upper-class ideology to a ‘bourgeois-liberal’ one proceeded in Finland with little tension, and many elements of the bureaucratic culture were transferred to the liberal one.

Although mainly Swedish speakers, the liberals did not focus their main opposition on the cultural aspirations of the Fennoman movement. They opposed the creation of a unilingual Finnish national culture, but for them constitutional legality – that is, the preservation of existing political institutions –

34 Klinge 1968, pp. 74, 114; Selleck 1961, pp. 147, 177, 184, 189, 204.  
35 Klinge 1980b, p. 43.
and the continuity of the cultural heritage of the Swedish period were more important than language. Consequently, they were prone to stress Finland’s position as a separate political unit more sharply than the Fennomans did. It was particularly in liberal circles that the use of some central national symbols, such as the so-called Maiden of Finland, was proposed. They also preferred a national flag that would have been definitely more un-Russian than the one suggested by the Fennomans. Moreover, dominant tendencies in the nationally oriented cultural life fit poorly in the strictly political division. To take only one example, the central artistic movement toward the end of the century, the national-romantic Karelianism, was politically mixed – or, rather, the openly political front lines were irrelevant to it.

In these circumstances, both the Fennoman and the liberal nineteenth-century upper-class cultures shared certain central elements. Structural cleavages remained limited, moreover, notably between the prospering Finnish-speaking peasant landowners and the rising, largely Swedish-speaking industrial and commercial class (see Chapter 2). Finally, the continuing advance of the Finnish language soon began to reduce tensions between the dominant groups. By the end of the century, Finnish had achieved a strong or even predominant position in the central institutional spheres of society. The aim, crystallised in the Fennoman movement, of creating an upper class culturally united with the majority of the people, largely by linguistic conversion, was materialising rapidly. As has been pointed out, there was some upward mobility into the elites, but in the main the old upper stratum, consisting of established noble, burgher, and, in particular, clerical families, was to remain in charge up to independence in 1917 and far beyond.

In the long run all these factors led, despite the linguistic division, to the emergence of a comparatively united nationalistic culture among the upper classes and such middle-class groups as teachers and lower civil servants. The three main party groupings belonged to this culture, and in the 1880s and 1890s the (Old) Finnish party of the Fennomans, the Young Finnish party of ‘Finnish-minded’ liberals, and the Swedish party consisting of liberal, aristocratic, and Swedish nationalist elements were consolidated.

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36 Klinge 1975, p. 20.
40 Klinge 1975, p. 17.
4 Conclusion

In the ‘small’ nations ... the dissolution of feudalism was accompanied by the predominance of a bourgeoisie whose culture evidently diverged from that of the ‘people’. Such ‘small’ nations had a very distinctive make-up: they lacked a native aristocracy and were subject to a landed class with an alien language and an already-formed nationality; they lacked a claim to historic statehood or political independence; they had no strong or continuous tradition of high culture in the native language; and they frequently lacked a strong native bourgeoisie. In these circumstances the nationalist movement necessarily drew on a familiar popular coalition: a new secular intelligentsia ... eventually mobilizing large numbers of the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry.41

This summary of Hroch’s central findings allow us to sketch the similarities and differences between Finland and other small nations in which autonomist nationalism arose.42 Like the others, Finland lacked a native aristocracy; the tradition of high culture in Finnish was weak; and for a long time the Finns had no strong native bourgeoisie. But unlike the others, there was a distinct political unit (though one without any claim to historical statehood); the ‘denationalised’ aristocracy was weak as a landed class; and the central landed class consisted of native freeholding peasants.

Eventually the gentry’s weakness as a landed class and their position in the state structures led them to adopt Finnish as their own language. This development was exceptional among the small nations: the gentry was nationalised without coercion. Indeed, it promoted the process. The fact that central parts of the Finnish dominant class actively sought an interclass community and national integration on a common cultural basis with popular groups is in line with Barrington Moore’s hint that the degree to which a dominant class resists popular demands depends on the extent to which its own livelihood is based on the incentives and opportunities it has to use political power – or state structures – to subordinate labour. In Finland both the incentives and the opportunities were modest compared with Eastern Europe. First, few of the gentry ran large agricultural establishments dependent on disciplined wage

42 Orridge and Williams (1982, p. 21) consider most of the Balkan states, Czechoslovakia (especially Bohemia), Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland to be Eastern European examples of countries displaying autonomist nationalism that achieved independence permanently or temporarily.
labour, and even fewer ran large manufacturing establishments. Second, they had an interest, as state bureaucrats, in generating tax revenues that were likely to increase with peasant commercial activity. And third, they needed, as managers of a vulnerable state apparatus, allies against Russian domination. In this perspective it seems clear that the dominant class in Finland had no strong incentives to attempt the subordination of the peasants or the workers with repressive political methods, but rather had good reason to promote the attachment of the popular groups – notably the freeholding peasantry – to the emerging state. As will be seen in Chapter 6, the relatively tolerant approach of the Finnish dominant class was to manifest itself more clearly a little later, in reaction to incipient mass organisation at the turn of the century.

In the Finnish context it is understandable that linguistic and political radicalism long remained separate. Early Fennomania was grounded in tensions within the upper classes. On the whole, the church and the large peasantry supported the movement, while the industrial and commercial class stayed apart or opposed it. Fennomania greatly contributed to the rise of an independent peasantry and of a Finnish-speaking middle class, but it was also a movement of traditional intellectuals who felt their position threatened by the emerging coalition of bourgeois, technical, and aristocratic interests associated with liberalism. The liberal programme of constitutionalism and of increasing economic freedom meant a reduction in the influence of traditional intellectuals and the corporations they represented. The language issue was employed both to forestall this change and to seek countervailing support from the independent peasantry. Understandably enough, it was the gentry, and not the peasantry, that initially required new language skills. As Roberta Selleck concludes in analysing the pre-1863 situation:

By identifying linguistic division as the basic source of social tension, and prescribing linguistic reform as a corrective, the Fennocists were able to maintain two important positions. On the one hand, they carried on a contest with the bureaucracy for the exercise of political power through traditional institutions. On the other hand, they were able to resist Liberal attempts to alter these institutions. The linguistic issue concentrated attention upon the cultural identity of persons exercising power, but minimized the importance of governmental structures regulating power.

Cf. Moore 1966, pp. 433–5, 438, 444. I am grateful to Charles Tilly for suggesting the significance of the specifically economic aspects in the gentry's attitude. Obviously the decline in the role of the land tax toward the end of the century, indicated above, is no evidence against the second proposition.
Thus, the Fennocist party, by 1863, was in effect attacking the bureaucrats while implicitly defending the administrative system of government.44

Only with the rise of the Finnish language to a predominant position toward the end of the century did Finnish political liberalism find its expression in a party grouping – the Young Finnish party. In a sense, then, Fennomania was a cultural response to the challenge of modernity: it used cultural means to defend the traditional agrarian and corporate societal structure against the threats of industrialisation. The conflict never reached great dimensions. By the early years of the twentieth century, with the advancement of the Finnish language in the upper classes, with the increase in Russian pressure, and with the organisation and mobilisation of the working class, linguistic conflicts receded into the background.

44 Selleck 1961, p. 203.