

Rosvall and Voutilainen: Two Union Men Who Never Died

Satu Repo

THE ADVANCES MADE by E.P. Thompson in expanding historical writing about the working class to include the experienced, "lived" quality of history, the way the past felt to the contemporaries, are not easy to apply to Canadian working-class history. There are several reasons for this. Not only is it hard to find records from which to construct the subjective side of working-class lives, (this is presumably the case everywhere), but these records, even when they do exist, speak in the numerous languages of our ethnically fragmented population. The precondition to access to some of them requires a kind of double identity, an ability to be on intimate terms with some "other" Canadian experience, and at the same time the capability of communicating that experience to the mainstream culture. An additional problem, of course, is the highly selective nature of *any* such records. For obviously it is not some homogeneous working class, but certain self-conscious and articulate minorities who are likely to leave a record of any kind. Thus in this country, just like in Thompson's England, it is easier to hear the voices of politically conscious and active minorities: utopians, syndicalists, socialists, union activists. Yet if the task is to be undertaken at all, it will have to begin with such minorities and the significant events that these groups have deemed worth recording and remembering.

This paper will attempt to reconstruct one such "significant event," both as it happened, and what it signified and continues to signify to the Finnish Canadian left-wing movement,¹ as can be gleaned from its publications and from the oral history records of its members. I will conclude with

¹ The backbone of the Finnish Canadian left-wing movement is the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC), which was originally founded in 1911. The FOC, which formerly used a different name, has been in the past a language local of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), the Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC), and the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). Since 1925 it has been an independent cultural organization with ideological links with the CPC. It is estimated that before World War II the left forces among the Finns had the largest organizational strength. Besides FOC, these forces have included trade unions and producer and consumer co-operatives. FOC has not been able to recruit members from the post-World War II immigrants and is now a dying organization.

a note on the Finnish immigrant radicals and their Canadian experience.

The event is the disappearance and death of two Finnish union organizers, Viljo Rosvall and John Voutilainen, during a lumber strike near Port Arthur in 1929. In November 1979 50 years had passed since the two organizers disappeared during a union mission and were never again seen alive. That same year a November issue of *Viikkosanomat* (Weekly News), a Toronto Finnish-language labour paper, was dedicated to their memory.² This commemoration was part of a long tradition among the left-wing Finns to honor these men. It is also a rare example of both oral and written history being made inside a working-class community. Rosvall and Voutilainen are remembered both locally and nationally. Their memory is part of the industrial folklore of Thunder Bay, where the Finns are a significantly large minority group³ and where the left-wing Finnish Organization (FOC) still has an active local. But the two unionists are also known to all Finns across the country who are members of FOC and read its national newspaper. Through participation in union activities in the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union (LSWU) and as members of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) the Finns have also passed this history to people outside their group who share their counter-hegemonic worldview. Both the *Ontario Timber Worker*, a union publication, and the CPC paper *The Worker* have carried stories about the death of these two unionists.⁴

I

The Shabakwa Strike and Its Aftermath: The Case of Rosvall and Voutilainen

THERE WERE THREE major protagonists in the perennial show of strength between organized lumber workers and the timber companies, which characterized the labour scene in Port Arthur in the two decades before World War II: the unions, the industry, and the local power structure. In the now legendary 1929 strike the alignment of forces followed a standard pattern: the unions battling individual subcontractors in inaccessible camps; the companies, in this case the American Pidgeon River Timber Company, outwardly ignoring the strike, yet making sure strike-breakers were available; the local power structure, in tacit complicity with the industry, providing it with both ideological support in its newspapers and the necessary authority and muscle through the court system and the police force.

The 1929 strike, however, was complicated by another constellation of factors which also tended to recur in the Port Arthur union struggles during this period: the factionalism among the predominantly Finnish bushworkers, which was an expression of deep splits within that particular immigrant enclave.

² *Viikkosanomat* (Weekly News, Toronto), 27 November 1979.

³ According to the 1971 Census, the Finnish population in Thunder Bay was 11,105. The population of Thunder Bay at the time was 108,411.

⁴ See also Donald Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979), 125.

There were, to begin with, two competing radical industrial unions, one owing its allegiance to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the other to the Communist movement. Added to this was an ideological split in the community, which went back to the bitter civil war in Finland in 1918, in which members of the Finnish working-class movement battled their nationalist compatriots and lost. Augmenting this ideological split, which by no means corresponded to class lines, was the growth of actual class differences among the Finnish immigrants. The most important manifestation of this was the increasing number of Finnish subcontractors working for the large timber companies. The vehemence and perhaps even the tragedy of the 1929 strike owed a great deal to the intra-ethnic confrontation triggered by a strike like this.

But while the industrial conflict in the timber industry was mediated through confrontation between the often hard-squeezed ethnic subcontractors and the foreign-born workers, its sources lay in the policies of large companies. Perhaps the most important of these was the insistence on piecework at pay-rates that hovered close to subsistence and below. The Port Arthur timber contractors provided, in the main, wood for either local or American pulp and paper companies. In 1929 the bullish Canadian pulp and paper industry had itself another record year: Canada that year was the world leader in the production of newsprint.⁵ This had also meant a buoyant year for the Port Arthur timber companies. Local papers reported that the pulp and lumbering camps were so short of manpower that operators had promised to pay the fares of workers to and from the pulp camps.⁶ Nevertheless the piecework rates kept sliding, and the gains made one year through union negotiations were lost the following season. The Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada (LWIUC) had established its rates at \$5.00 for an eight foot cord and \$50.00 and board for the monthly men. A general strike in the local industry in 1926 had achieved these rates. However, by 1929 the rates were down again. A pre-strike report from one of the Pidgeon River Timber Company camps in the Mattawin river valley, west of Port Arthur, complained that the scales were down to \$4.00 a double cord and below. Men were said to be dissatisfied and many had left the camp.⁷

A more concrete description of the lumberjack's plight was provided by Alfred Hautamaki, the Secretary of LWIUC, in a story in *The Worker*: "It takes an average of one hundred and five five-inch logs to make a cord. They have to be piled in half a cord lots. In the case of a double cord, it is easy to see that a man earns his four cents a stick," he wrote, and continued: "An experienced

⁵ In 1929 Canada was the largest producer and exporter of newsprint in the world. (*Canada Year Book*, 1930, 399.) The wood and paper manufacturers were the largest industrial group in the country that year in terms of capital, number of employees, salaries and wages paid, and net value of products. (*Canada Year Book*, 1932, 317.)

⁶ *The Fort William Daily Times-Journal*, 18 March 1929.

⁷ The report appeared in *Industrialisti* (The Industrialist), a Finnish-language IWW paper published in Duluth, Minn., on 27 October 1929.

man can cut one and a half cord of four foot wood daily. This nets him \$4.50, less the usual dollar a board. The average season works out at 130 days. They lose two days a month because of wet weather, etc. Travelling eats up \$10 a season; mitts \$6; shoes and stocking \$25; working clothes \$35; the doctor \$1. Being forced to buy their supplies in camps means 20 to 30 per cent tagged on to city prices. Even a moron can see that the pulp cutter gets very little of the natural wealth that the capitalist press, travelling imperialist minded bishops and retiring governors rave about."⁸

The 1929 Shabaqua strike was mainly fought over the low rates of pay, although other dissatisfactions were also mentioned in reports of the strike, things like poor camp conditions and compensation for the inferior quality of the timber.⁹ No doubt union recognition was also an issue among those — usually a minority — who held cards in either union. The striking camps were sprinkled along the valleys of the Mattawin and Shebandowan rivers, some 50 miles west of Port Arthur. Shabaqua was the closest settlement nearby, a small whistlestop for the CNR trains to and from Winnipeg.

It seems that almost from the beginning the predominantly Finnish bushworkers could agree on little else besides the demand for the union scale achieved in the 1926 strike: \$5.00 for a double cord and \$50.00 and board for the few on monthly wages. The major dispute appears to have been over the leadership of the strike: some wanted it to be run by the camp delegates independent of any union, as a kind of *ad hoc* workers' committee, others leaned either towards the LWIUC or towards the IWW local, which had a confusingly similar name: the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, Local 120.¹⁰

The crucial mistake in the managing of the strike was perhaps made by the strongest faction in it, the LWIUC. Having at least initially the majority of the camps behind it, it decided to lead the strike, rather than share the leadership with the rival IWW union. The 1926 strike had succeeded, because both the unions were at the helm.¹¹ The Shabaqua strike, which was called on 22 October, faced from its beginning the spectre of a jurisdictional quarrel.¹² While the IWW union, which was a remnant of the One Big Union, was a shrinking formation, it could destroy any strike by undermining the always fragile morale among the less politically committed workers. The Communist-led LWIUC, which had been formed in 1920 as a break-away from the One Big Union, gradually squeezed out its rival and eventually, by the mid-1930s, joined the mainstream labour movement by affiliating with the International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners as the Lumber and Sawmill Workers

⁸ *The Worker* (Toronto), 16 October 1926. The description was made during the 1926 general strike, but the situation was no different in 1929.

⁹ *Industrialist*, 27 October 1929.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 December 1929.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *The Worker*, 11 January 1930.

Union.¹³ While it was the dominant union among the bushworkers, it needed throughout the 1920s and 1930s the support of its rival for effective bargaining.

Throughout the ill-fated 1929 strike the rww members kept organizing rival meetings and criticizing the strike leadership. To the confusion among the ranks was added the refusal of some camps to join the strike at all. These camps, run by Finnish subcontractors, were dominated by recent immigrants from Finland, politically inexperienced farm-lads whose families had fought on the nationalist side in the Finnish civil war. They became strongholds of White Finnish anti-unionism, and repeated efforts by the strike committee to close them down only led to violent and futile confrontations.¹⁴

Because of the factionalism among Finnish bushworkers the first necessary condition for a successful strike, the closing down of all the camps in a given area, was never accomplished in the Shabaqua strike. The Pidgeon River Timber Company, which essentially ignored the strikers, only had to make one move to undermine their efforts: to arrange for the recruitment of strike-breakers from Winnipeg. The power structure in Port Arthur would accomplish the rest: first, through a complete news black-out about the existence of the strike;¹⁵ second, by making sure that the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) appeared in sufficient numbers at the Shabaqua station to guarantee safe passage for the strike-breakers. According to reports, the OPP were also harassing the strike committee in Shabaqua, arresting picketers, and searching them for weapons.¹⁶ Clearly the situation in the spruce forests around Shabaqua was dangerous and explosive: with the OPP, the strikers and the strike-breakers carrying arms, and with trainloads of foreign-born workers coming in with little idea of the situation they were facing.¹⁷

It is likely that the strike was already lost by the time the desperate LWIUC decided to send two organizers to the Pidgeon River camps at Onion Lake, 20 miles east of Port Arthur, presumably with the aim of pressuring the recalcitrant company into negotiating, by expanding the strike to another area. The organizers Viljo Rosvall and John Voutilainen left for the Onion Lake camps on 18 November. Two days later the IWW-led strikers held their first meeting in Port Arthur. The Wobblies decided to send a fact-finding mission to Shabaqua.

¹³ A.T. Hill, "Basic Highlights of Labour History — Lakehead and Canada," unpublished manuscript, Lakehead University, 1.

¹⁴ *Vapaus* (Freedom, Sudbury), 16 November 1929.

¹⁵ One oblique reference to a strike was made in *The Fort William Daily Times-Journal*, under Port Arthur Briefs, on 12 November 1929. It dealt with a court report on a bushworker called Salmi. Apparently this man had been arrested in the Mariaggi Hotel by Port Arthur police and charged with creating a disturbance. The report quoted Salmi as saying there was a strike at one of Don Clark's camps and he was trying to prevent bushworkers going to the camp and "scabbing." The report did not mention the location of the camp.

¹⁶ *Vapaus*, 16 November 1929.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The mission returned after several days, submitting a report which stated that the 15 camps, with an estimated worker capacity of 459, had 297 men working in them. Their recommendation was that the strike be called off.¹⁸

It is not very easy to understand, in retrospect, the union rationale for sending organizers to the Onion Lake camps this late in the strike. The camps were run by a Finnish subcontractor "Pappi" Maki, one of the pillars of the conservative Finnish faction. He employed close to 100 men and reputedly chose them among those who, like himself, had no sympathies with union activity or left-wing politics.¹⁹ Perhaps the decision to send Rosvall and Voutilainen out there was a desperate last-ditch effort to save a doomed strike by doing something rather than nothing.



Viljo Rosvall. (Photo courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)

There are indications that even LWIUC members had misgivings about the mission. According to some reports, names of the organizers were chosen by a draw from which married men were excluded.²⁰ A retrospective story in the union paper recalls that "some comrades had warned Rosvall against going to the Maki camps because Maki had threatened to drive away organizers by any

¹⁸ *Industrialisti*, 11 December 1929.

¹⁹ Taped interview with Toimi Poyhola, 604 Dublin Ave., Thunder Bay, in the archives of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

means necessary."²¹

Viljo Rosvall and John Voutilainen probably accepted the assignment out of loyalty to the Finnish left-wing community, which was the largest faction among the Port Arthur Finns.²² They were not professional union organizers. They carried union cards and had probably taken part in organizing drives in lumbercamps where they worked, but when the strike broke out, they were working elsewhere. Rosvall had a job as a maintenance man for the CNR and Voutilainen was getting ready for a season of trapping at Onion Lake.²³ Their willingness to step in when needed is consistent with the general community support for strikes among the Finnish Left. The Shabaqua strike, like many similar strikes, could count on support from sympathetic farmers who donated food, roominghouse keepers who gave credit to strikers, and progressive businessmen who made financial donations. In addition there was institutional support from the FOC locals in the area, from International Co-operative stores, from the Thunder Bay Co-operative Dairy, and the co-op restaurant "Vigour" at 316 Bay Street. Fund-raising for the strike was done by organizing concerts and dances in the Finnish organization halls in Port Arthur and in rural settlements and by appealing for funds in the Finnish labour paper *Vapaus*, published in Sudbury.²⁴

Irrespective of how they were chosen, the consensus seemed to be that Rosvall and Voutilainen were competent men for the job. The union paper describes Rosvall as tough and resilient, a somewhat impetuous man who was known for his courage. He had earned his credentials as a fighter in the Finnish civil war and had been active in union camp committees. Voutilainen was said to be quiet and unassuming, but an experienced woodsman who knew the Onion Lake area like the back of his hand. He had kept traplines there for several years.²⁵

Rosvall left Port Arthur on Monday, 18 November, by foot, meeting Voutilainen in Tarmola, a small Finnish farm community in Gorham Township, ten miles north of the city. From Tarmola the two unionists headed east, towards Onion Lake, whose southern tip was another ten miles away. A week later, the following Sunday night, two Finnish trappers from Onion Lake showed up at the union office in Port Arthur. They were agitated, because Rosvall and Voutilainen had not arrived at their cabin, as had been planned. The trappers feared that they had had a confrontation with Maki's men and had perhaps been murdered. The union called an emergency meeting and decided to send a delega-

²¹ *Metsätyöläinen* (Lumberworker), published by the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada in Sudbury, Ont., No. 3, 1930.

²² This is an estimate based on the institutional strength of the left-wing Finns.

²³ *Metsätyöläinen*, No. 3, 1930.

²⁴ Taped interview with Einar Nordstrom, 250 S. Algoma Street, Thunder Bay, in the archives of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto.

²⁵ *Metsätyöläinen*, No. 10, 1932.

tion of five "brave men" to ask questions at the Maki camps.²⁶

The party of unionists arrived late on Tuesday night to the Onion Lake camps, nine days after the organizers had disappeared. According to reports Maki was brusque with them and told them to leave. However, when the delegation persisted, he reluctantly invited them in and allowed them to stay overnight. They did not learn much that satisfied them.²⁷ The organizers had never arrived at the camp. Maki said that he had seen them on 19 November, several miles from his main camp. He and some of his workers had been warming themselves over a fire, taking a break from hauling supplies. He had warned them to stay away from his men and had seen them last crossing the ice in the direction of his camps, he said.²⁸

While the search party went looking for Rosvall and Voutilainen, the union also submitted a story of their disappearance to the local paper. This time they



Search party of unionists on Onion Lake. (Photo courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)

got coverage: in a frontier town the disappearance of individuals in the wilderness always is good copy. While the strike was not mentioned, *The Port Arthur News-Chronicle* reported that these men had been missing for nine days and identified them as union organizers on their way to the Maki camp at Onion Lake.²⁹

When the search party returned empty-handed, the union also notified the OPP. The union officials soon began to feel that the OPP was not handling the investigation with sufficient zeal, and decided to put the case in the hands of the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL), a Communist front-organization. The next move made headlines in *both* the papers. A Toronto barrister, J.L. Cohen, acting as a lawyer for the CLDL, asked the provincial Attorney General to probe the disappearance of the two organizers. Besides headlines, this event

²⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 3, 1930.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 10, 1932.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 3, 1930.

²⁹ *The Port Arthur News-Chronicle*, 27 November 1929.

generated more detailed stories in each paper. Even the strike received mention, for now the news was good: "The employment service was notified this morning by the LWIU that the strike in the lumbercamps had been called off," reported the *News-Chronicle* on 18 December. Both papers gave a great deal of coverage to statements by local OPP officers who assured the reporters that everything possible had already been done to investigate the circumstances surrounding the case. The men had drowned going through the ice while crossing Onion Lake, was the official version.³⁰ The OPP and town public opinion never wavered from this interpretation of the events.

The union's side of the story was that the investigation consisted of nothing more than questioning Maki, who in halting English repeated the story he had already told the search party, adding a few improbable flourishes, such as claiming that he had invited the organizers to warm themselves at the camp fire and had cautioned them to stay close to the edge of the lake, so they would not drown on the way to organize his camp!³¹ What they wanted was an expanded investigation that would include interviews with Onion Lake trappers and lumberworkers who suspected foul play, both because they had received contradictory information about the event from Maki himself and because they were convinced, knowing local conditions, that drowning in the shallow Onion Lake was a very unlikely occurrence.

It appears that after the CLDL move the case was, in fact, reopened in a perfunctory fashion. In a letter dated 30 January 1930, E. Bayly, Ontario's Deputy Attorney General, informed Cohen that he had been in touch with the Crown Attorney, Mr. Langworthy, at Port Arthur "who had been active in this case and kept in closest touch with the Provincial Police." Langworthy was said to have interviewed Maki in a very thorough fashion. Bayly assured Cohen that "Mr. Langworthy is a man of great experience and states that there is no reason

³⁰ The highly efficient Mr. Cohen had actually done a great deal more since he accepted the case. He had written letters to both the provincial Attorney General and the Minister of Lands and Forests outlining the case and expressing the union concern that the OPP was not investigating the case thoroughly, sending copies of these letters to *Mail and Empire* and *Toronto Star*. In addition he had been in touch with A.R. Mosher, President of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees and W.T. Burford, Secretary of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour in Ottawa, urging them to take the matter up with the federal Minister of Labour. The Minister of Labour was, in fact, contacted by Burford and had promised to "look into the matter" but decided, finally, that the issue was outside his jurisdiction. According to correspondence between Cohen and E. Bayly, Ontario's Deputy Attorney-General, the matter was in the end put in the hands of the Commissioner of Police. In a letter dated 7 January 1930, Bayly writes: "The suspicion in the minds of the Union that these men have met with foul play does not appear to rest upon very substantial grounds. I am submitting your letter to the Commissioner of police and might state, however, for your information, that the investigation in this case is being continued." J.L. Cohen papers, MG28A94, Vol. 1, File 10, Public Archives of Canada (henceforth PAC).

³¹ *News-Chronicle*, 18 December 1929.

whatever to think Maki is in any way connected with the disappearance of those two men."³²

Meanwhile the LWIUC, giving up on the authorities, took the matter in their own hands. They dispatched a permanent search party to Onion Lake in late December to make sure the bodies could not be removed secretly. A cramped trappers cabin a mile-and-a-half from the Maki camps became their headquarters. Several unionists stayed there until the spring thaw, patrolling the area on skis and fishing and trapping for food.³³

Before the year ended the Rosvall-Voutilainen case merited an editorial in the *News-Chronicle*. The editorial was critical of "an organization called the Labour Defence League," which kept challenging the OPP findings. It concluded ominously: "If the charges of foul play are not founded on something more than fancy, then those who are responsible for spreading the alarming rumours should be brought to book."³⁴

The disappearance of Rosvall and Voutilainen was the final misfortune that broke the Shabaqua strike. It was called off by the LWIUC on 17 December. It had reached none of its objectives, and had generated the usual counter-reaction among the employers: known union men found themselves black-listed.³⁵ Over the long winter months that followed only the search party patrolling Onion Lake kept the case of the missing unionists alive. Then on 19 April, after the spring thaw had begun to melt the rivers and the lakes, the body of John Voutilainen was found.



The search party with body. (Photo courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)

³² J. L. Cohen papers, File 10, PAC.

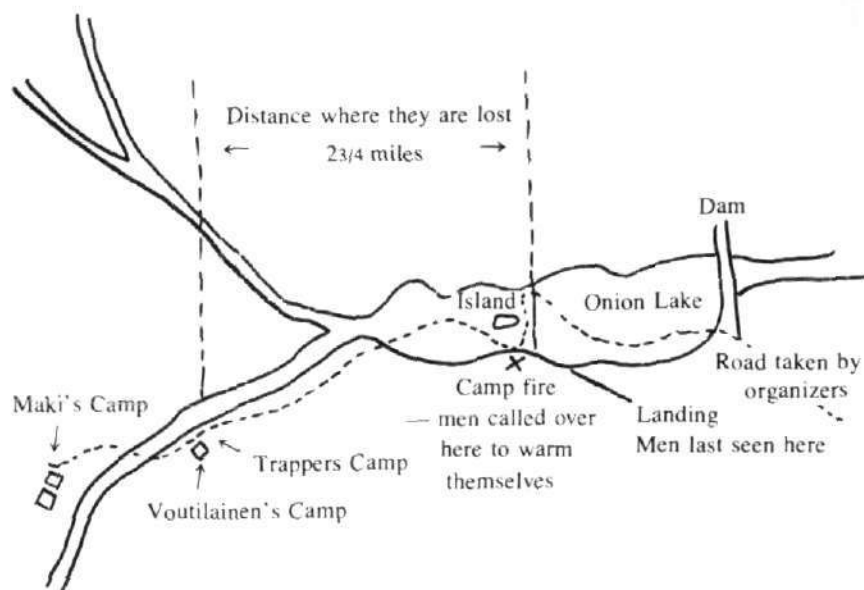
³³ *Metsätyöläinen*, No. 3, 1930.

³⁴ *News-Chronicle*, 28 December 1929.

³⁵ *Industrialisti*, 29 December 1929; 17 January 1930.



*The body of Voutilainen transferred from horse sled to motorcar on Onion Lake Road.
(Photo courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)*



The stories were somewhat conflicting, but it seems that it was discovered at the south end of Onion Lake by members of the union search party. The body was apparently in about 30 inches of water, at the edge of the Onion Lake dam, in a stream near the confluence of Current River, the river which had guided Rosvall from Port Arthur to Onion Lake. The *Fort William Daily Times-Journal* speculated that when the dam was opened earlier in the spring, the



Body of Rosvall as found on the bank of the creek. (Photo courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)



The body of Rosvall. (Photo courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)

water receded, leaving Voutilainen's body exposed on the bottom. The story stressed that there were no marks of violence on the body. "The man was lying on his back, his packsack still on his shoulders, about 5 feet from the shore. His watch had stopped at 2:40, corresponding approximately to the time when the two men would have started across the Lake, after leaving Maki camp about 1:15 on the afternoon of November 18."³⁶

Four days later a large search party found Rosvall's body a few hundred

³⁶ *Times-Journal*, 22 April 1930.

yards away, on the bank of the same creek. The bodies were transported by the OPP to Port Arthur where they were taken to the Everest Funeral Home. A large number of Finns apparently visited the Funeral Home, paying their respects and also examining the state of the bodies. There was a Coroners' inquest into each death. Prior to that, at the *post mortems*, the union insisted on having its own representative present. The autopsies were conducted in the presence of three doctors, Coroner Dr. C.N. Laurie, Dr. J.A. Crozier, and Dr. G.E. Aikens, representing the union.³⁷

On 23 April the inquest into the death of Voutilainen produced the verdict "accidental drowning." The LWIUC stuck to its guns and brought its own lawyer to cross-examine the witnesses at the Rosvall inquest which took place on 5 May, seven days after a large funeral celebration for the two unionists. But the second jury was equally unmoved by the evidence. Writes the *News-Chronicle*: "Although more than two hours was required to present the evidence to the jury, and to listen to the cross-examination of the several witnesses by J.L. Cohen, Toronto lawyer, representing the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, it took a Coroner's jury, sitting in the Police Court last night, but eight minutes to arrive at a verdict of accidental drowning in the death of Victor Rosvall, whose body was taken from Onion Lake a few days ago."³⁸

Were the causes of the death as clear-cut as the juries argued? No record remains of the first inquest, but what is known of the Rosvall inquest certainly leaves room for reasonable doubt. J.L. Cohen, who was to become an eminent labour lawyer of the next two decades and who was appointed by Mackenzie King to the National War Labour Board in 1943, wrote a carefully worded report to the LWIUC of the hearing he participated in. His overall conclusion was that "there seemed to be an inclination on the part of the public and official witnesses to minimize any facts which would tend to cause any doubts as to the findings on the doctor's post mortem of accidental death by drowning."

To substantiate his claim Cohen described the behavior of key official witnesses. The first one of these was Dr. Crozier, the Coroner. According to Cohen the Coroner under cross-examination had admitted that his medical findings were not inconsistent with the possibility that Rosvall was unconscious when he struck water. However, he grew increasingly more hostile as Cohen probed the evidence on which he had based his verdict of "accidental drowning," until he finally lost all emotional control, stomped out of the witness box, and ran out of the court room shouting abuses at Cohen on his way out. Cohen wrote: "It was, of course, very evident to the whole court room that this man was either labouring under some peculiar excitement or was partly intoxicated, but the whole exhibition was so startling and hysterical and disgraceful in its nature that it was marked by the whole court room, and certainly does not help to make one confident in the examination of the body by the doctor."

³⁷ Bob Ekholm, "An eclipse mystery: The case of the two dead unionists," *The Chronicle-Journal*, (24 February 1979), p. 11.

³⁸ *News-Chronicle*, 6 May 1930.

The police also seemed to have based their conclusions on flimsy evidence. They were questioned by Cohen as to the depth of the water where Voutilainen's rifle was found: the spot where, it was agreed, the men had entered the water. It was their opinion that the water at this location was eight feet. Under cross-examination the policemen admitted that the estimate was based on hearsay only. Their evidence was contradicted by witnesses brought forward by Cohen, experienced Onion Lake trappers who were adamant that the water at this spot was never more than three-and-a-half feet deep.

The Coroner's jury also seemed to ignore the contradictions in the evidence given by the official star witness, Maki. Cohen writes:

3. The third outstanding feature of the evidence is the story given by Maki himself. Firstly his recital of the conversation between himself and these men as they left him to march towards his camp was a most naive and unbelievable account of what must have occurred at the time. According to Maki's description the conversation was friendly and cordial one notwithstanding that Maki knew that these men were going to organize workers in his own camp. Maki seemed to have gone out of the way, in his own evidence, to emphasize how definitely he warned Voutilainen of the conditions of the ice in certain spots and of the fact that there were open spaces of water.

(b) The next feature in Maki's evidence is that although he admits following these men *within forty minutes*, he at no point on the trip noticed broken ice.

(c) The third feature in Maki's evidence, and brought out in the course of cross examination by me, was his reaction to my cross examination as to the conversation between himself and his employee, Paavo Vaanaven. This conversation took place as Maki approached his camp. Vaanaven was on the way to meet Voutilainen as had been previously arranged, and Maki's statement to Vaanaven, as I have been informed, was, "Do not bother going to meet the delegates, I have sent them away." When I cross-examined Maki on this conversation he admitted that Vaanaven, as a result of what he had been told, had returned to the camp. He admitted implying to Vaanaven that there was no use going to meet Voutilainen because Voutilainen would not be there, but when I asked him categorically if he had stated to Vaanaven "I sent the delegates away" he refused to answer directly and stated "What is the difference what I said?" I left Maki's cross examination at this point, his answer indicating very definitely his unwillingness to give evidence freely and frankly as to the occurrences.³⁹

Despite the inquests, the death of Rosvall and Voutilainen continued to cause speculation, because there was one possible scenario which was never explored: what if the men were first beaten unconscious and then pushed into the creek where they drowned? There were indications that both the bodies may have had injuries and that Rosvall's arm was broken.⁴⁰ Is it possible that the more rational alternative of declaring the verdict "open," in view of the indeterminate nature of the evidence, was rejected for political reasons by the juries? The local press continued to express concern over the "propaganda value" the Communists derived from making martyrs out of these two men. One such

³⁹ J.L. Cohen papers, File 10 PAC.

⁴⁰ *Metsuryolainen*, No. 3, 1930.

editorial during the time of the inquests attacked *Vapaus* for spreading unfounded rumours of murder and asked, rhetorically, how long the government was going to allow publications to exist which "vilify" society.⁴¹

Another explosive incident took place between the inquests. On 1 May, the International Labour Day, there had been a clash between local citizens and foreign-born May Day demonstrators, who had decided to march despite the fact that they had been denied a permit. The city police intervened and arrested five of the demonstrators. The *tone* of the news report covering the incident speaks volumes: "When Communists, marching through city streets of Fort William for the purpose of spreading their propaganda yesterday afternoon, attempted to stage a special demonstration in the front of the Soldier's Memorial, near City Hall, citizens, roused in the belief that it was a studied insult to the war dead and to those who had survived, as well as the established institutions of Canada, interfered."⁴² Respectable public opinion both in Thunder Bay and across Canada was already coming to the conclusion that one way of combatting the Depression and the turbulence caused by unemployment was to outlaw the Communist party and any organizations linked with it. Could the death of two Communist organizers under ambiguous circumstances be expected to receive a dispassionate hearing in this heated atmosphere?

The town people who served on the jury were also perhaps made jittery by the imposing funeral demonstration which took place between the inquests. A joined funeral was arranged on 28 April. The *News-Chronicle*⁴³ carried the following description:

The largest funeral cortege that ever passed through the streets of Port Arthur, a demonstration made up chiefly of members of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, augmented by affiliated societies connected with the Communist movement in the Twin Cities, proceeded this afternoon from the funeral chapel, 299 Arthur Street, to Riverside cemetery, where the bodies of Victor Rosvall and John Voutilainen, drowned last Fall in Union Lake, were buried.

The Cortege was headed by a brass band playing funeral dirges. There were upwards of 2,000 persons in the parade, men, women, children and babes in carriages, and forty automobiles. Six men carried the plain black casket containing the body of Rosvall. Voutilainen's body was taken to the cemetery before the procession. The casket carried by six bearers this afternoon rested upon three large red sashes, these being twined over the shoulders of the bearers. Honorary pallbearers carried ever-green wreaths, tied with red ribbon. The immense cortege proceeded East along Arthur Street, to Cumberland, South on that street to Bay, and West along Bay street to Secord. Persons standing upon the balcony of the Communist headquarters on Bay Street when the cortege passed there, saluted with emblems of red. From Secord Street the procession proceeded to the cemetery. No religious ceremony was held. The Communist burial ritual was the only semblance of a service of any nature at the cemetery.

Whatever the reasons, there was no ambiguity about the official verdict on

⁴¹ *News-Chronicle*, 30 April 1930.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2 May 1930.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28 April 1930.

the death of Rosvall and Voutilainen. They were found to have drowned accidentally while crossing Onion Lake. If the foreign-born radicals insisted on making martyrs of them, that was their affair. At least they were denied access to any official support for their version.

II

The Community Response

INSIDE THE FINNISH enclave, however, it was not as easy to dispose of the Rosvall-Voutilainen case. There had been skeptics, particularly among the IWW and the politically conservative elements, when the LWIUC first declared that the men were missing. A couple of stories circulated by doubting Thomases suggested that they had either got scared and taken off on their own or had been sent away by wily Alf Hautamaki to help save a sagging strike.⁴⁴ The decision by the LWIUC to patrol the Onion Lake area through the winter was perhaps linked with a need to demonstrate that the organizing drive to the Maki camp was no hoax. However, by the time the bodies were recovered, there were few among the Finns who did not suspect foul play. The IWW reports, which until then had been highly critical of the actions of the LWIUC, seemed to be as suspicious of the official verdict as the Communist-led Finns.⁴⁵

There were a number of reasons why the Finns were skeptical. The area of wilderness between Port Arthur and Onion Lake was chiefly settled by Finns and many of them knew the region intimately. No local settler could believe that the creek where the bodies were found was a place where two experienced woodsmen could drown. It was known to have no more than two to three feet of water except during spring floods.⁴⁶ In the unlikely event that one of the unionists had fallen through the ice, surely there would have remained at least the other to tell the tale, it was argued. It was also widely known that supplies had been hauled over the area where the bodies were found from early November on. The supply route to Maki's camps went over this very creek. The newspaper stories, speculating that perhaps the bodies had floated to their location when the Onion Lake Dam was opened, also defied local experience. Why was Rosvall's gun found near his body if that was the case, people asked. The Finns did not believe that the bodies had moved significantly since they first landed in the creek in November.

Those inside the community also knew how bitter and violent the confrontation between union and non-union forces could be during strikes and organizing drives. Reports on the Shabaqua strike in *Vapaus* had described incidents in which hostile sub-contractors and strike-breakers had brandished

⁴⁴ Taped interview with Ray Koski: The Thunder Bay Labour History Interview Project, 1972: Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ont.

⁴⁵ *Industrialist*, 30 April 1930.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

weapons and threatened to shoot any unionists who showed up at camps where they were not welcome.⁴⁷ It made perfect sense to most people to assume that Maki was, in fact, prepared to prevent Rosvall and Voutilainen from arriving at his camp by "any means necessary." The conservative Finns would not have condoned murder, of course, but they would have assumed that, acting in self-defence, the Maki forces had somehow overstepped rational limits. Because the autopsies indicated that they had drowned, the consensus among the Finns was that they had been killed, or at least beaten unconscious, before they drowned.

For the union Finns, at least, whether they were IWW members or Communists, Rosvall and Voutilainen were martyrs for a common cause and deserved a hero's farewell. It is likely that the mass funeral organized by the LWIUC saw many IWW members in the procession.⁴⁸ For the left-wing community the funeral was the beginning of a tradition to commemorate Rosvall and Voutilainen. It was reported in detail in the LWIUC paper and it is also described in oral history records. This is how the funeral appeared, constructed from these sources.

An estimated 5000 people of different nationalities marched in the procession which wound its way through the city streets from the funeral parlour on Arthur Street up the hill to the Riverdale Cemetery. The procession was headed by a Finnish Organization brass band, augmented by players from the Finnish IWW. "The march got off with a simple, yet dramatic start," reports *Metsätyöläinen* (The Lumberworker).⁴⁹ "Silently the six pall bearers, each of them one, two or three inches over six feet, grabbed hold of the coffin and began to march. The band ahead of them began to play 'The International.' Everybody, even the burghers (on the sidewalk) uncovered their heads, willingly or unwillingly. After the coffin marched 18 stern looking men, waiting for their turn to provide a last service for their comrades who had died for a common cause. The two sturdy woodsmen, walking in front of the procession, carrying between them a broad red sash with the union cards of Rosvall and Voutilainen attached to it, also made a strong impression."

The procession kept the police busy by tying up traffic for several hours. It was a sunny April day and a lot of onlookers had gathered to watch the cortege and to listen to the revolutionary funeral marches. At this point nature added its own flourish to this massive demonstration of grief and solidarity. While the cortege was moving slowly through the city streets, an eclipse of the sun took place. A dark pall fell over the city. Although the

⁴⁷ *Vapaus*, 16 November 1929.

⁴⁸ This is a contentious issue. The LWIUC publications deny that the Wobblies participated in the procession. However, both the reports in the *Industrialisti* and in *News-Chronicle* seem to suggest a favourable attitude towards the funeral. It is known that the IWW band joined forces with the PO brass band in front of the procession.

⁴⁹ *Metsätyöläinen*, No. 3, 1930.



The funeral. (Photos courtesy of the Finnish Society, Thunder Bay.)



eclipse had been predicted in the local paper,⁵⁰ it caught many of the participants and onlookers by surprise. One of the pallbearers, Reino Keto, recalls that they were halfway to the cemetery when the sky suddenly turned almost completely dark. "We didn't know anything about the eclipse," Keto explained. "I thought surely the world was coming to an end. I was terrified, but kept marching on. When we reached the cemetery, the sun was shining again."⁵¹

Alf Hautamaki, the Secretary of the union, gave the funeral speech. Among Finns, Hautamaki was renowned for his oratory, and according to those present,

⁵⁰ *News-Chronicle*, 28 April 1930.

⁵¹ Taped interview with Reino Keto, 35 Old Orchard Grove, Toronto, in the archives of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto.

not an eye remained dry by the time he finished.⁵² He even managed to work in the eclipse. Ignoring the customary left-wing juxtaposition between "religious superstition" and "scientific worldview," he described the supernatural effect of the darkening of the sun, concluding that "God himself has shown us today that, he, too, is ashamed of this heinous crime, ashamed that the murderers remain free."⁵³ Later in the day the Finnish community gathered at the FOC hall on Bay Street for more speeches and reminiscences and some refreshments.

Soon after the funeral there was another local ceremony for Rosvall and Voutilainen. It consisted of a play performed by the left-wing community on the stage of the FOC hall. The play was written by Hautamaki, who like many Finnish "left" leaders, combined the role of a union activist and *politico* with that of a journalist, playwright, and poet. The play has not been recovered, but it is mentioned in oral history records. Keto, the pallbearer quoted earlier, played Rosvall in it. It was a one-act-play, Keto recalls. His description of it suggests that it stressed the confrontation between striking and strike-breaking Finns. It is very likely that it enacted the assumed murder of the two unionists by a group of company men, thus giving visual images to a scene which already existed vividly in the communal imagination. Keto is able to recall "diabolically looking scabs sneaking through the forest," and he also remembers choking in a make-shift "grave" during the funeral scene, while the Finnish Organization choir stood on top of him, singing. In the same interview⁵⁴ Keto also made an interesting reference to audience reaction. He remembered creating quite a stir when he mingled with the audience after the performance, still made-up to look like Rosvall. People came over, wanting to touch him. For some, at least, the play had temporarily blurred the distinction between reality and make-believe. For them he had *become* Rosvall. One can almost hear them exclaiming: "Vilho, so you're alive, after all! We knew they could never get you!" Brought up on folklore and religious beliefs, even the Communist Finns found it hard, at times, to banish the ghost of supernatural beliefs. Miracles, especially if they were seen first hand — the darkening of the sun, the vivid "Rosvall" — could at least temporarily shake their materialist worldview.

While the official commemoration of Rosvall and Voutilainen after 1930 shifted to the union and to the national newspaper *Vapaus*, the Port Arthur Finns were left with their stories. Recent collections of oral history records in the area indicate that many of these stories are still alive today.⁵⁵ As can be expected from such recollections, they both support and contradict each other. Here are some typical examples:

Ray Koski from Thunder Bay was a barber in Port Arthur during the

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Taped interview with Toimi Poyhola, also in the same archives.

⁵⁴ Reino Keto interview.

⁵⁵ Major oral history collections which include interviews with Port Arthur Finns are: Thunder Bay Labour History Interview Project and the collection at the Multicultural History Society of Ontario.

Shabaqua strike. He remembered how hard it was for people to believe that Rosvall and Voutilainen had disappeared at Onion Lake.⁵⁶ Many felt they probably just skipped town because of the danger involved. According to one rumour somebody had received a letter from Rosvall afterwards, postmarked Toronto. Koski also recalled that posters went up with a picture of a Finn who was accused of murdering them. The police, apparently, ordered the posters to be taken down. Koski had gone with many others to the funeral parlour to take a look at the bodies. "It made me sick," he says, "There was a hole in the forehead of Voutilainen, covered up."

Ivar Seppala, also from Thunder Bay, mentions a bullet hole, but according to his recollection it was in Rosvall's head.⁵⁷ Seppala told a remarkable story about meeting one of Rosvall's and Voutilainen's murderers during a visit to Finland. The man, a former immigrant to Port Arthur, had let him know that he was one of a gang of seven men hired by Maki to keep union organizers away from his camp. This self-proclaimed murderer had described how the seven of them were hiding, waiting for Rosvall and Voutilainen, after making a hole in the ice. They then surprised and overwhelmed the two unionists. Voutilainen was knocked unconscious with a piece of wood and shoved into the icy creek. Rosvall put up such a fight that he had to be shot. Is this an actual recollection, a dream, or an instance of story-teller's licence? One cannot know for sure. Later on in the same interview Seppala states that he had himself seen the bullet hole in Rosvall's head. He examined it with three other men and put a match through it.

Edwin Suksi, who now lives in Sudbury, was a former organizer for the LWTUC in the Port Arthur area. At the time of the Shabaqua strike he had changed occupations and was working as a barber. He remained ideologically close to the union, however, and no doubt many of his customers were strikers. Suksi believes that the organizers were murdered, but he doubts that they were shot. He recalls that two of the men who worked for Maki during the incident afterwards returned to Finland. It was his hypothesis that these men were responsible for the deaths.⁵⁸

Mrs. Taimi Davis, a Toronto resident, who formerly lived in the Lakehead, was recently interviewed by the *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal* in an article headed "An Eclipse Mystery: The Case of the Two Dead Unionists."⁵⁹ According to the *Chronicle-Journal*, Mrs. Davis is the daughter of Antti Pitkanen, a well-known Finnish pioneer in the district and the sister of the man who found Rosvall's body. Incensed by the deaths, her father at one point began to build a cairn on the site where the men were found. "Oh yes, they were murdered all right," she is quoted. "There were marks on their bodies, in fact, I think they

⁵⁶ Ray Koski interview.

⁵⁷ Taped interview with Ivar Seppala, The Thunder Bay Labour History Interview Project.

⁵⁸ Taped interview with Edwin Suksi, Multicultural History Society of Ontario.

⁵⁹ *The Chronicle-Journal*, 24 February 1979.

were bullet holes." Mrs. Davis, who received her information from people who had found the bodies, went on to say that one of the men definitely had a hole in his head. A bushworker examining the body put a match into the hole to prove it was there and to see how deeply it went, according to her.

The stories remembered by the Port Arthur Finns illustrate the creative aspect of the oral tradition. While the general outline of a given dramatic event remains constant, there is always room for individual elaboration by the teller of the tale. In the examples cited above, each interviewee has established a special relationship with the Rosvall-Voutilainen case. He or she either added something acquired through first hand knowledge or through a connection with somebody who was an eye-witness. If this connection is missing, there is still room for an individual interpretation or a new hypothesis or perhaps some sweeping generalization, such as "in those days workers had no rights."⁶⁰

While the Rosvall-Voutilainen case retains this fluidity in the oral tradition among left-wing Finns, the written versions, by contrast, follow a more standard pattern. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the retrospective stories in union publications and in *Vapaus* is their didacticism. It is the political significance of the deaths that is paramount. Rosvall and Voutilainen are seen as martyrs and heroes to their class and to the union movement. The intra-ethnic aspect of the conflict is not stressed. Instead Maki and his anti-union workers are seen as "hitmen" for "American lumber barons."

Here are some samples of this kind of interpretation:

The Finnish union paper *Metsätyöläinen* carried stories about Rosvall and Voutilainen in 1930, 1931, and 1932.⁶¹ The English-language *Lumberworker*, which first appeared in 1932, also ran a story on them.⁶² All the articles stressed that the unionists had been casualties in a class struggle between capitalists and workers. "The memory of these comrades who sacrificed their lives demands that we continue their mission, the struggle to overthrow the capitalist reign of terror, and continue it with renewed vigour. It is the only salvation for a working class suffering from hunger and slavery. Let us honour the dead." This is the conclusion of the 1932 Finnish retrospective.

In 1949 the twentieth anniversary of the death of Rosvall and Voutilainen was remembered in both the union paper and *Vapaus*. The LWIUC had now become the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union, affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. Its publication *The Ontario Timberworker* ran their pictures with a caption "Lest We Forget" in the 17 February 1949 issue. The same issue also carried a more detailed article, retelling the events of the Shabagua strike and its aftermath, and drawing out the history lesson about the harsh conditions during the pioneering days of union organizing.

That same year *Vapaus*⁶³ also carried a story and an editorial on them.

⁶⁰ Reino Keto interview.

⁶¹ *Metsätyöläinen*, No. 3, 1930; No. 7, 1931; No. 10, 1932.

⁶² *Lumberworker*, 1, 3 (December 1932).

⁶³ *Vapaus*, 17 November 1949.

"The graves of Rosvall and Voutilainen do not have monuments on them like other graves," stated the editorial. "However, they have a monument which is both greater and more valuable. It is the lumberworkers' large organization. In the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union live the ideals of Rosvall and Voutilainen, and therefore their memory is immortal also." In 1951⁶⁴ Hautamaki wrote a reminiscence in *Vapaus* titled "Rosvall and Voutilainen — two brave lumberworker organizers who were murdered in a despicable fashion 22 years ago." He stressed the inspiration they had provided with their sacrifice to other working-class activists. "5000 workers showed up at the funeral, determined to carry on the struggle," he wrote.

The Cold War buried the memory of Rosvall and Voutilainen in "Lumber and Saw," but the Finnish left-wing community did not forget them. In 1979 in its 27 November issue, the FOC newspaper, now called *Viikkosanomat*, reminded its readers that 50 years had passed since Rosvall and Voutilainen gave their lives in a struggle to establish unions. This time their death is examined in the context of other Canadian union struggles and casualties. Wilho Eklund wrote: "Canadian workers have always lived with the knowledge that business, and particularly large monopolies, will resort to violence and the use of strike-breakers, if necessary, to protect their narrow class interests. Finnish-Canadian workers, being part of the Canadian working class, have paid their dues in this struggle, providing their share of martyrs to the cause of working-class advancement. They have done it as workers in mines, lumber camps and construction camps, and as union activists and demonstrators in rallies for the unemployed."

III

The Finnish Immigrant Radicals

AS OUTLINED ABOVE, the death of Rosvall and Voutilainen has a very special place in the collective memory of left-wing Finnish Canadians, and it has also made some inroads into a wider audience of Canadians, both in Thunder Bay⁶⁵ and in labour circles around the country.

The Finns who paid tribute to Rosvall and Voutilainen in November 1979 are elderly people. Most of them arrived in Canada in the 1920s or early 1930s. In Finland at that time organized working-class activity was a powerful social force. It found expression not only in political parties and unions, but also in consumer co-operatives and cultural organizations, ranging from literary societies and theatre groups to athletic leagues. While the majority of working peo-

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 November 1951.

⁶⁵ The story is well-known in Thunder Bay and continues to inspire artists and writers. In the past year there has been a feature story on Rosvall and Voutilainen in the local paper. Robert Smith at Confederation College has produced a semi-documentary film on them called *Union Men*. William Roberts, a local playwright, is currently working on a play which will feature the incident. It has been commissioned by the Kaminisqua Theatre in Thunder Bay.

ple were not necessarily highly politicized, many nevertheless participated in some form of institutionalized working-class culture.

The Finns who immigrated to Canada had some knowledge of these cultural traditions. While most of them had grown up in rural Finland, as children of farmers or agricultural workers, they were part of a surplus population which could not make a living inside the rural economy. Many had therefore worked as industrial labourers before immigrating, coming in contact with class-based organizations in urban centres. Even those who had never left their home village before departing for Canada knew at least indirectly about working-class organizations.

Despite this familiarity, the Finnish immigrants did not deliberately set out to reproduce Old Country working-class institutions when they first arrived. They came as individuals, wanting to improve their lot. In many cases they saw themselves as temporary workers in Canada, with a superficial attachment to this country. Some came to accumulate capital, hoping to save enough to establish themselves in Finland by buying a small farm or setting up shop in town. Others were simply fleeing depressed economic circumstances at home, hoping to make a living somewhere else until conditions improved in Finland. In other words, many of them came to Canada, because they wanted to escape being workers for the rest of their lives. It was their Canadian experience as industrial labourers that intensified their class-consciousness and provided the impetus to create working-class institutions in Canada.

What was this Canadian experience like? Donald Avery, who has looked at the radical response of foreign-born workers during the first four decades of this century, stresses that there were two dominant factors in the Canadian situation which gave rise to labour radicalism.⁶⁶

First was their work experience. Finns, like other foreign workers, became predominantly labourers in resource industries: miners, loggers, construction workers, agricultural labourers. Canadian immigration policies between 1896 and 1932, Avery argues, favoured the industrialists who wanted a capitalist labour market in which "the employer is confident that workers will be available whenever he wants them; so he feels free to hire them on a short term basis, and to dismiss them whenever there is monetary advantage in doing so."⁶⁷ As a result of these immigration policies there was, during this period, an oversupply of labourers, which drove down wages to subsistence level and below. Not only were most immigrant workers unable to accumulate savings in order to settle on farms or return to their homeland with a stake, they were rarely able to find permanent work here. Avery writes: "Immigrant workers drifted across the country in a desperate search for work."⁶⁸ "Low wages and irregular seasonal employment was their lot. For the most part they existed near

⁶⁶ Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners.'*

⁶⁷ H.C. Pentland, "The Development of Capitalist Labour Market in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* (November 1959), 450, as quoted in Avery, *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

the border between subsistence and destitution."⁶⁸ He stresses that employers were universally hostile to unions and, with the assistance of the state, were able to prevent successful organizing in resource industries during this period.

The second factor was the hostility of Canadian society towards newcomers. Not only were social services to immigrants lacking, but many native-born Canadians thought that European workers were culturally inferior. Although few Canadians were interested in the socially undesirable jobs to be found in mines, lumber camps, and at "the end of steel," there was continuous anxiety that foreign workers might threaten their livelihood by bringing down the wages of the more skilled urban workers. Organized labour, farmers' associations, and "patriotic" organizations frequently joined forces in denouncing Canadian immigration policies, which in their view forced 1,000s of their countrymen "to seek employment under the Stars and Stripes while the CPR and the CNR Railways flooded the country with the riff-raff of Europe."⁷⁰

Until World War II (and past that for some) the Canadian experience was such that the foreign-born worker had to turn to his own countrymen for social institutions to protect himself. The Finnish community, like other ethnic communities, had its right-wing and left-wing factions, as the story of Rosvall and Voutilainen illustrates. Each faction created its own institutions. The dominant Finnish response, during this period, was to create class-oriented institutions similar to the ones in the Old Country. Through these institutions the Finnish immigrants forged links with Canadian workers by participating in class-oriented political parties (such as the Socialist Party of Canada, the Social Democratic Party of Canada, and the Communist Party of Canada) and in radical industrial unions.

By itself the death of Rosvall and Voutilainen could obviously lend itself to many interpretations. It could be a story of ethnic in-fighting, a story of a defeated strike, a story of how a union perhaps unnecessarily sacrificed two young men in their prime. Of all the possible meanings the Finnish left community, which made the story its own, selected one: for its members it signified heroic resistance to class oppression. In composing this epitaph for Rosvall and Voutilainen these Finns have perhaps composed their own epitaph. For, as I have already stressed, this episode embodies much of their own experience as resource workers in a hostile society. It is also remembered, I think, because it reminds them of ways they themselves have resisted the oppressive conditions they found. Because neither the experience, nor the forms of resistance, were unique to Finns, the story also captures something significant about being a foreign-born worker during this period. Perhaps this is the reason why it has also made some inroads into a wider Canadian imagination.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.