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In the last decades of the nineteenth century, from the 1860s, the Finnish people experienced one of the greatest and most diversified transitions of its history. It emerged in the political, the economic-social and cultural spheres. In economic life it signified the beginning of industrialization, diversification of industries and a rising standard of living. The old, stable rural Society began to become modern, mobile. This is a study of the way in which one of Finland's provinces, Southern Ostrobothnia, which has been considered to include 4 towns and 20 Swedish-language and 22 Finnish-language communes, participated in the process of economic-social changes which started a hundred years ago.

Communications have always been of fundamental importance for the economy. Linking up the long water systems of Finland by canals and the construction of railway lines moved the economic centre of gravity from the West to South, from the Gulf of Bothnia to the Gulf of Finland, at the end of the nineteenth century. The Ostrobothnian river valleys, occupying an excellent position during the old era of agriculture and. manufacturing, were now left on one side to watch the birth of the industrial centres of the south and. the increasing prosperity from the forests of the Finns living inland.

An industrial crisis originated in Southern Ostrobothnia. The cultivation of swamps increased the area of the Ostrobothnian plains under cereals, but not enough for the large number of children in the province. The old sources of subsidiary earnings in agriculture were blocked. The conditions for manufacturing within the province itself did not exist. It was necessary to go elsewhere.

The old industrial life, hunting and fishing, tar distillation, shipbuilding and seafaring had given the Southern Ostrobothnians great vitality. They were mobile, found it easy to set off, and they moved together in the way

that had been customary for centuries in doing the work and chores of the villages along the river banks. When this population in its Financial straits following the years of the Great Famine in the 1860s heard from its men who bad travelled in Sweden and elsewhere in the Baltic area in the search for seasonal work about the remote country of the West where the opportunities were many times better than at home, it was ready to set forth.

According to the passport lists of the provincial governments and city administrations, about 120 000 South Ostrobothnians heard the call of the West in the six decades from the years of the Great Famine in the 1860s to the Great Depression of the 1930s. The greatest numbers emigrated between the 1890s and World War 1. Every third of the more than 360 000 Finnish emigrants was South Ostrobothnian. In proportion to the population, the numbers from the valleys of the rivers Kyrönjoki and Lapuanjoki were greater than those from any administrative district of continental Finland. The Aland Islands alone had a higher per mille ratio of emigrants, and that in the 1920s only. During the emigration period as a whole, 1866-1930, an average of 2.1 per 1 000 inhabitants of the mean population of Finland emigrated; the comparable ratio for Southern Ostrobothnia in 1867-1930 was as high as 7.3.

A relatively greater number of emigrants moved from the rural districts of Southern Ostrobothnia than from the towns. The Swedish-speaking people were readier migrants than the Finnish-speaking though the difference was not great. They may have been more familiar with the sea than the inland dwellers, and the example set by the Swedes was closer owing to the common tongue. The earnings in America tempted both the inhabitants of the main villages and those of the outlying hamlets.

Nine-tenths of the emigrants were farming people although only threeforths of the total population of Southern Ostrobothnia were farmers. As the great population growth had occurred chiefly in the landless group in agriculture, the majority of the emigrants were crofters and cottagers. A great number of them were also farmers' children. The future for all these people held almost no prospects at home. Four-fifths of the emigrants were in the prime of life, between 16 and 40 years of age. Two-thirds of them were men, the majority unmarried.

The mainstream of South Ostrobothnian emigrants flowed to North America, the United States and, later, in the 1920s, to Canada. The numbers emigrating to Australia and Argentina and the even smaller number moving to other countries were -only a small rivulet in comparison. The majority of the persons going to the USA moved to the Midwestern states where both the nature and the climate, and later settlers already established from the home district, attracted new arrivals.

A third of the emigrants travelled on borrowed funds, many of them on a ticket sent from America. In the nineteenth century the journey was difficult,

whether via Sweden, Denmark or Germany, but as the domestic steamship company prospered, conditions on the Hanko–Hull line improved. The Company and its wide network of agents represented good transoceanic shipping companies in which social development was also visible. One condition for the movement, decent or at least satisfactory transport facilities, was thus fulfilled for the South Ostrobothnian 1emigrants.

The economic crisis which brought assistance from abroad was not relieved by money from the forest as it was elsewhere in Finland. Dissatisfaction with existing conditions, a desire to raise the standard of living persisted strongly in South Ostrobothnians as a legacy from bygone days. They wanted to buy the new commodities. This was not possible for all, and the province obviously had a relative surplus population. Its existence favored emigration. The relative surplus population disappeared, it is true, when demographic growth weakened in the present century, but emigration continued nevertheless, influenced by the mass, by the temptation of relations and friends, as by the law of continuity.

The transoceanic countries also retained their economic attractiveness throughout the decades of emigration right up to the Great Depression. They had a higher standard of living and better real earnings than those enjoyed in Finland even by persons in industrial occupations. This is why the industrial trades of the home country did not attract the South Ostrobothnian workers who, earned in America - admittedly through hard work - many times higher incomes and had excellent chances of saving. South Ostrobothnians set great store by the freedom and equality of American society at a time when class distinctions were still oppressive in many ways at home. Hence, both economic and spiritual factors set the Southern Ostrobothnians on their travels. It was not only those who were unable in the period of starting industrialization to raise their standard of living in their own province; others were influenced by the law of continuity and by the spirit of solidarity. And the movement was overseas, not to the industrial districts of their own country, especially as the geographical location and nature of the province and its economic life had in the course of the centuries created psychological prerequisites favoring emigration.

The economic conditions of the transoceanic countries determined the sporadic fluctuations of emigration. When America had good times, the wind blew strongly in that direction; in times of reverse it prevented departures, even brought former emigrants back homewards. A plentiful harvest sometimes postponed the decision to leave, a poor crop could hasten it. Factors such as the heavy strain of compulsory military service of the ”old army” during the period of autonomy, the heavy political pressure of the years of Russian oppression and times of war also help to loosen would-be-emigrants from the domestic soil.

No country has given much thought or space to the emigration movement in the narrowly nationalistic historical research of the past few years. Something of a spirit of ”only rats desert the sinking ship” locked the emigrants out from the vicissitudes of the Finnish people. Emigration took place, and if it was not yet within the scope of international economy it was in the economic area of the Atlantic, as it is called by English researchers. Remote Finland and its humble riparian province Southern Ostrobothnia thus participated in the industrialization and urbanization process of the economic area of the Atlantic. It gave two out of every three immigrants to a distant country, but one of them often returned home enriched with money and experiences.

It is true that the home country lost many strong arms when its own labor market failed to attract them. There was an occasional shortage of labor in the areas of heaviest emigration. Agriculture occasionally suffered, with the men folk beyond the seas. Some left their taxes unpaid, and. the family left behind by the ne'er-do-well became a burden on the poor rates. Population growth weakened, the number of able bodied persons was relatively small compared with children and old persons. The women stayed at home, the men left. Overseas, they sometimes married again and succumbed to alcoholism. American widows constituted a moral problem in domestic Society.

On the other hand, dollars arrived through middlemen and banks. A few notes were sent by letter now and then. American visitors have brought thousands of trunkfuls of goods. Parcels have been of great help, especially to the inhabitants of the old home country and province struggling in the post-World War II economic crisis. American legacies amount to considerable sums. Intellectual outlooks have widened, enterprise and. the desire to try have increased. It is not necessary to calculate the difference between income and outflow. It suffices to understand that the question involves a far-reaching chain of events the final consequences of which cannot be seen.

A mass movement though emigration was, it was also deeply individualistic. The departure or non-departure always depended on the individual himself. The State therefore never got grips on this movement. Apart from certain regulation of the period of Finland's political independence nothing was achieved in the peak years of the exodus but emigration statistics, which have been an invaluable source for historical research.

When emigration was at its strongest the educated class generally adopted a negative attitude to it. This is understandable in that it was easier for the individual embarking on emigration to get involved in moral and spiritual dangers than if he stayed in his secure home Society. Nor was emigration accepted from the nationalistic point of view, because the emigrants gave their best years of work for the benefit of a foreign country. The attitude became more understanding only when the positive economic consequences

of emigration became visible. The educated class sought the reasons for emigration and means of preventing it for decades, but, though it led the nation, was unable to find a remedy.

Rapid improvement of the economy was in fact an insurmountable task in a country that was not independent and was poor. Accordingly, men with initiative broke loose from the domestic milieu to seek an economically better and spiritually freer existence. “The friendly motherly countenance of the old country” and the image of the birth place have been glorified far afield both for those who returned later and for those who settled permanently in foreign fields. “*The wife looked at him as if from somewhere far away and Said: ‘Sure enough I am here in the daytime, but at night I am in Laihia’.”* This is how the constant homesickness of the emigrant is described, although the home district was really the most fundamental reason why he became an emigrant.

The indirect and direct effect on its people of Southern Ostrobothnia, its forests and swamps and tranquil plains of field and meadow cut by the rivers and, finally, the sea washing its shores, has been immense. In that calm scene and the conditions engendered by it developed in the course of the centuries the Special qualities of the people, its unique character, its South Ostrobothnianism. When the world changed at the end of the last century, when tar and the river, shipbuilding and the sea were no longer capable of satisfying their own, South Ostrobothnianism gathered up a part of the children of the plains and moved them to the far West, just as the sundry streams of life of both the province and its people had rolled westward for centuries.