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North American Studies
Inauguration Ceremony**

**“MUCH MORE THAN PROHIBITION: AN OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENCES
IN ATTITUDES AND POLICY TOWARD ALCOHOL IN FINLAND AND
THE UNITED STATES”**

First of all, I would like to thank the University of Helsinki for inviting me to be part of this prestigious occasion. Although this Fulbright Chair began with my teacher Robert Crunden thirty-four years ago, I’m quite certain that this is the first time we have been part of this celebration. I like to think that this reflects the continued and perhaps even increasing commitment to international understanding of our two nations.

But I also must thank two international organizations for my presence here. Without the Fulbright Center it goes without saying that neither I nor my predecessors would have had the opportunity to experience and for many Helsinki students to experience American professors in their study. But I also must thank another international organization centered here at the University of Helsinki both for inadvertently helping me formulate this topic and for me being here in this position this year. Although I had visited Finland on several occasions, I had never been here except in the winter and had never been able to participate in the prestigious Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference one of the oldest American Studies symposiums in the world at twenty-four years and the only United States/Canadian conference in Europe. And it’s held in May here in Helsinki. But I didn’t have a topic to fit the comparative theme of the conference. It was then that I focused on the fact that not only did the United States and Finland have Prohibition of alcohol at almost exactly the same time but that there were the only two western countries to ever have a strong and lasting national commitment to Prohibition. They accepted my paper; I saw Helsinki in May; and, in short, here I am—and like the rest of Helsinki waiting for May.

The subject of my presentation is “Much more than Prohibition,” because the paper I presented at the conference

emphasized the extensive similarities that existed between the two nation's alcohol policies during the 1920s. Much of the scientific temperance literature used in advocating for Prohibition in Finland originated from American temperance groups. As the decade progressed and Finland had the same negative experiences with Prohibition as the United States, Americans heard more about Finland than they had ever heard before. Indeed, probably the only times that Finland has received more press in the US was during the Winter War and several months ago when the magazine Newsweek rated it first in quality of life.

Yet, as I dug deeper, I uncovered something that is common in comparative studies. That is, just because a result is similar, it does not mean that their precedents will be the same. Moreover, similar experiences seldom lead to parallel consequences. Simply put, similar Prohibition laws and responses to them of Finland and the United States during the 1920s came out of similar attitudes toward alcohol but different institutional movements and resulted in completely contradictory alcohol policies after the elimination of Prohibition in both countries.

A noted American sociologist specializing in alcohol and drug issues Harry Gene Levine has tried to determine what characteristics lead to nations having temperance organizations regarding alcohol. He noted nine temperance nations, five of them English speaking Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom and the four Nordic countries of Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Each of these met his two characteristics. First of all, they traditionally drank spirits/hard liquor rather than beer or wine. Certainly Finland and the United States met these criteria. Both had grain surpluses caused by isolated agrarian hinterlands with inadequate transportation systems to urban markets. In Finland's case even these markets were inadequate to handle the grain and especially potatoes produced, and farmers were encouraged to turn their produce into alcohol. A law passed in 1800 in the waning years of Sweden's control of Finland gave all landowners the right to manufacture and sell all alcoholic beverages. Its goal was to dry up surplus grain and force up prices allowing farmers a sufficient income. Its

inadvertent effect was to make all home manufacture of spirits practically unlimited creating universal access at low prices. In the United States, the results were the same without legislation. Along the lawless western frontier, Scotch-Irish immigrants brought their distilling skills to an area flowing with excess grain. Corn whiskey became so pervasive that it was used for currency. When the early Federal government tried to tax it in 1791, the frontier erupted in rebellion and threatened secession in the largest threat to the united nation until the Civil War.

But not all nations who drank primarily spirits developed temperance organizations. Russia, Poland, the Canadian province of Quebec, Ireland, and even Denmark never showed any interest in restricting and certainly not in eliminating alcohol. Levine has postulated that the difference is the existence of evangelical Protestantism in the temperance cultures. All the other listed nations of spirit drinkers are Catholic or Orthodox with the exception of Denmark whose Lutheranism is much more conservative and hierarchically dominated than its Nordic neighbors. In both Finland and the United States the early—and in the United States almost all—temperance organizations were outgrowths of evangelical Protestant organizations. In Finland the first adamant anti-alcohol movements were pietistic reforms within the Lutheran church such as the Laestadians in the North and the followers of Henrik Renqvist in the Southeast. The American Temperance Society, an outgrowth of the American Tract Society which distributed five million Bibles and religious pamphlets throughout the nation, was the first and became the model for later temperance organizations.

Although they began similarly, temperance in the two nations shifted at this early stage. In the United States all major temperance organizations with one large working class exception retained their religious nature. The ATS founded in 1826 soon had 8000 chapters and one and a half million members all of whom pledged never to drink. It shared along with the other reform movements of the time especially the abolition of slavery a basis in moral perfectionism and the belief that the Millennium, the end of time, was near. Or as its most prominent minister quoted

Matthew, “Be ye therefore perfect even as your father which is in Heaven is perfect.” Or put more colloquially, “Do you want Christ to come at the Judgment Day and find you drunk?”

All of these reform organizations disappeared during the Civil War where they were sacrificed to keep the nation together. Yet temperance, alone of the reforms, quickly reemerged, becoming the first reform led almost exclusively by women. Women in America—unlike in Finland—had always been involved in temperance. First, women lacking any legal protections were at the mercy of their husbands and fathers whose descent into alcoholism could leave them and their children destitute. Secondly, women traditionally were more active in the church than men. Out of this combination arose the Women’s Christian Temperance Union the largest all-women’s organization in American history. Later the male-dominated Anti-Saloon League founded at a religious college by ordained ministers used its denominational connections to form a voting bloc that with recently enfranchised women would eventually succeed in passing national Prohibition. They called themselves “the Church in action against the saloon.” By concentrating exclusively upon the saloon and its largely Catholic and Jewish working class clientele, the ASL even more explicitly than its predecessors identified the true nation as middle-class rural Protestants.

Finland’s temperance organizations developed in a completely different way. The original supporters of temperance like the Laestadians, while supporting individual and voluntary abstinence and personally scorning drinkers, opposed coercive Prohibition and condemned its supporters as self-righteous. Rather, temperance in Finland developed as a nationalistic movement attempting to form a positive Finnish identity based upon enterprise. In 1834 the cultural nationalist Elias Lonnrot founded the first temperance organization in Finland. A year later he published the Kalevala. Drink came to symbolize poverty and the prevention of mental and economic progress among the peasantry. The first priority of temperance, indeed, was to eliminate the landowners’ right to produce alcohol and replace it with heavily taxed and more expensive factory-produced liquor or

better yet beer. Indeed, almost alone among temperance cultures, the problem was seen as one of agricultural society for the obvious reason that Finland was still primarily rural.

It was also seen as an agricultural problem because, unlike the States, workers were seen as allies and part of the modernization movement within Finland. While only 9% of Finns lived in towns in 1885, 63% of temperance members lived there. In Tampere 89% of temperance members were workers. Still, middle class leaders saw the purpose of their society as “a change of customs” and thus demanded that workers accept their “true place.” Increasingly, workers came to accept Prohibition as a way of improving their lives but also demanded a say in the movement.

As the cataclysm of World War I approached, the temperance movements of the two nations found themselves in similar strong positions. Alcohol consumption had shrunk drastically with annual Finnish use declining voluntarily to an amazing less than one liter per capita, while the United States dropped its consumption seventy percent to less than seven liters. They also had successfully occupied the nationalistic high ground convincing much of the population that temperance represented the best for the nation as a whole. In 1905 the leaders of the Great Strike immediately imposed total Prohibition. Two years later the leader of the Prohibition forces traveled to the United States to study local Prohibition. When the Russian government blocked implementation, temperance leaders formed the Prohibition League in their words “an organization similar to the Anti-Saloon League.” A unanimous vote in favor of Prohibition was one of the first actions of the first Eduskunta in 1917. In 1919 Prohibition was put into effect and would remain so until 1931.

The Anti-Saloon League and other pro-Prohibition forces in the US similarly used patriotic feelings stirred by the war to impose national Prohibition. In 1917 the dry majority imposed a temporary prohibition on the production of alcoholic beverages on the weak argument that grain was needed for the war effort. By 1919 three fourths of the states had passed the amendment leading to national Prohibition in 1920. Repeal of an amendment

to the Constitution requires three quarters of the states, something that had never happened. One of Prohibition's most fervent supporters guaranteed its continuation; "There's as much chance of repealing the 18th Amendment as there is for a humming bird to fly to Mars with the Washington Monument tied to its tail." Its leading ministerial cheerleader chortled that "Hell will forever be for rent."

For nations so different, their actual Prohibition experiences were amazingly similar. The early years seemed to meet the utopian goals of the Prohibitionists. Consumption decreased even more as did alcohol-related diseases such as cirrhosis of the liver. Savings especially by the working class increased, and familial violence plummeted. This was surprising in at least one context since both nations had chosen to enforce the law with underfunded, inefficient, and nepotistic organizations.

Soon, however, momentum shifted. It would be difficult to think of two nations more unsuited geographically to prevent smuggling—the United States with its endless coastlines and unprotected borders and Finland with its innumerable islands. By the end of the 1920s Sweden complained bitterly about smuggling from Finland. Finnish apothecary sales of alcohol quintupled, while unscrupulous bootleggers in both countries sold poisonous grain alcohol. Local authorities in urban areas in both countries refused to enforce legislation, and punishment was extremely lenient. In fact, since possession of alcohol was itself legal, enforcement essentially ignored the middle and upper classes.

Both societies also turned away from Prohibition for similar reasons. In addition to its increasing corruption and inefficiency, the world depression made the return of lost tax revenues essential. In Finland numerous official and unofficial polls noted growing opposition; for example, in 1931 the University Students Temperance League, half of whom were teetotalers, voted 80% against the law. In the national plebiscite, 71% of voters, roughly half women, voted against it. In the States the same year found the Anti-Saloon League facing bankruptcy. Two years later the United States Senate voted 63 to 23 to repeal the law; of the twenty-two

senators who had voted in favor of Prohibition seven years earlier, seventeen changed their minds. While the passage of the Prohibition Amendment had raced through in a record thirteen months, its repeal happened even more quickly in a still record eight months.

One of the problems faced with the repeal of Prohibition was that neither society had developed alternatives besides a return to the discredited past. Moreover, the more important issues raised by the depression made alcohol policy secondary. Unsurprisingly, Finland turned to Sweden whose regulatory policy of rationed alcohol had proven much more successful. Surprisingly and generally unknown, many United States policymakers likewise admired the Swedish system. In 1893 a group of American scholars and policymakers made an extensive study of alcohol policy, castigated the Women's Christian Temperance Union as ignorant moralists, and championed Swedish policy over enforcement. Throughout the years leading up to Prohibition, they represented a small but legitimate alternative to the Prohibitionists. As the United States became more crime-ridden and lawless, many of the leading millionaires such as Pierre Du Pont and John D. Rockefeller who had been the leading financial angels behind Prohibition withdrew their support and formed the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment. Their publication timed to coincide with the end of Prohibition, advocated that each state follow the Swedish model and assumes a governmental monopoly over retail sales and eliminates private profit.

While a number of states and Canada did follow this lead as well as strictly regulated public consumption, its ideological basis was too far removed from America's religious attitude toward alcohol. The Swedish and post-Prohibition Finnish policies make the assumption that alcohol is a negative, even evil, substance and must be controlled. Whether that control is through the Swedish motbook which controlled how much alcohol was available to the individual or Finnish policy restricting access and increasing cost, the goal lies in the difficulty of alcohol access and use. Alcohol, rather than the user, is the negative force.

In 1932 immediately after repeal Finland founded the government monopoly Oy Alkoholiike Ab, now known as Alko, to control sales of alcohol. In 1950 Alko funded but did not control two related research institutes the Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Sales and the Social Research Institute of Alcohol Studies. These two bodies engaged in innovative but practical scientific research which the alcohol monopoly and even the government often followed. A number of these, most obviously the attempt to stop binge drinking by encouraging drinking at meals, failed miserably. Due to their generous funding, the relative lack of similarly funded Finnish social science research institutes, the emergence of a number of internationally recognized figures such as Pekka Kuusi and Kettil Bruun, and the later emergence of admiring institutes in Sweden, Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States, the Finnish institutes became and remain world leaders in seeing the drink rather than the drinker as the problem.

In the United States the continuation of an individualistic and moralistic approach to drinking made the regulatory model unacceptable. For Americans the drinker not the drink was the guilty party. After all, wasn't it true that most drinkers could drink moderately with no damage to themselves or others? In the United States, especially at that time a large number of men and a majority of women were and are teetotalers and never drank at all. Interestingly, the leading reform alternative to alcohol control emerged in the 1930s in the United States. In 1935, two self-proclaimed alcoholics in an attempt to keep themselves sober developed an outreach program to other alcoholics soon known as Alcoholics Anonymous. Blame for alcoholism was placed upon the individual's lack of character and that individual's powerlessness over alcohol that could be rectified only through an individual spiritual awakening. The substance was unimportant; only the individual's strength counted.

Of course, this duality is not perfect. The Finnish proportion of AA members to population is estimated as third behind Canada and the United States. American social scientists, especially in the field of drug research, have followed the Finnish model assiduously and deride the personal model as "pharmacological

determinism” and a function of the government’s unwillingness to address poverty and social issues. Still, the distinction remains largely true and a reflection of how different societies can come to different conclusions from essentially the same historical experience. So in looking back, I realize that the title of this paper should not have been “More than Prohibition” but rather “More and Less Than Prohibition.”