

Mikko Kemppainen:  
Socialism, Religion and Working Class Author Hilda  
Tihlä

In my presentation I focus on the relations between socialism and religion through the literary work of Finnish working class author Hilda Tihlä (1870–1944). Releasing three novels, three short story collections and numerous of writings in working class papers Tihlä became the best-known Finnish female socialist novelist before the Finnish civil war in 1918. In addition to her work as a writer, Tihlä was a significant figure in the Finnish labor movement giving speeches on socialism and editing a journal *Ihanne* (*Ideal*), which aimed to educate children and youth to become aware social democratic citizens.

The main themes in her writings were children education, women's (sexual) freedom and especially religion. Tihlä lambasted the Christian church as an institution of oppression founded to serve the capitalist order and violent regime.

However, attacking the church mean the rejection of the Christian ethics itself. Even though Tihlä defined herself as a socialist, the greatest influence she adopted from Leo Tolstoy who emphasized Christ as a messenger of love and peace. Like Tolstoy, Tihlä wanted to purify religion from the false doctrines of the church and restore the true legacy of Christ based on altruism and equality. In addition to Tolstoy, Tihlä was interested in mystic and occult worldviews, such as Theosophy.

Since the 1960's historians have emphasized that Finnish working class in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Finnish working class movement adopted the principles of materialist socialism. After definition of policy around the general strike in 1905, the movement excluded Christianity and other spiritual tendencies, such as the Tolstoian ideal and theosophy, which gave considerable inspiration to socialists in the turn of the century. However, Finnish history of ideas in the context of the working class movement have focused mainly on political texts of the male leaders of the Social Democratic Party.

As a known socialist and author, Tihlä is a great example how Christianity and other spiritual tendencies overlapped with socialism after general strike. In my presentation, through Tihlä's literary work I aim to ponder the complexity and diversity of socialism in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Finland.