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 ***“We Don´t Believe You Anymore!” – Writing Factory Workers in Finland in the Early 20th Century***

Socialism conquered Finland in the Great Strike of 1905. I analyze Finnish socialism from the perspective of language in the context of the largest factory of the time, namely Finlayson & Compagnie located in Tampere. This cotton factory had a very religious reputation throughout the 19th century. However, in 1905 the workers established a socialist trade union and carried out several of their bosses. They also started to publish a handwritten union newspaper that appeared from 1908 to 1917. Ordinary working men and women wrote in their free time and their texts were read out loud at the workers´ monthly meetings.

I shall interpret these diverse texts both quantitatively and qualitatively. The key concepts of factory socialism will be found by a statistical analysis and their meanings will be revealed by close reading methods. I claim that one major function of the workers´ writings was to liberate oneself from the old authorities: not only the factory owner, but also the Tsar of the Russian Empire and even God.

My presentation is based on my doctoral thesis “The Language of Finnish Socialism, 1905–1918” which I started writing in September 2014. I combine approaches from labour history, conceptual history and digital humanities.