"Lion or Eagle: Sovereignty, a Postal Authority, and the Mails, Finland 1890-1918"

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Abstract: A central postal authority was established in the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1811. It first issued postage stamps in 1856. Five subsequent issues denominated in penni and mark also featured the Finnish crest of arms, the rampant lion. This postal authority was an original signator to the General Postal Union (GPU) on July 1, 1875. Change first began in 1891, when the Czar required the Finnish Post to work under Russian rules. As an example, as of January 1, 1892 (circular 12/1891) required all postal items sent to the Russian Empire be franked only with kopeck valued stamps.

The big event however was the February Manifesto of 1899 which decreed an end to Finland’s “special status”. This had implications well beyond the postal system but its early impact was on the postal system, requiring the exclusive use of Russian design stamps by January 14, 1901.

The Manifesto opened the “Period of Oppression” which lasted until early 1918. There were both prompt and persistent efforts to passively resist. This session demonstrates several forms of this passive resistance including the selection of postage stamps by the public, the mails reflecting the legal case for autonomy and of national identity, and the mails as a social media platform. This area of postal history provides an opportunity to reflect on current international problems as well.