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Translation

The following text is a submission by Ambassador René Nyberg to the festschrift of Arto Mansala, Finland's former Secretary of State and Ambassador. Mansala's career path in Russia and Germany was similar to that of the younger Nyberg. Here, Nyberg recalls an incident in Moscow in 1975 where, as an inexperienced attaché, he innocently took it upon himself to forward a letter from the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny to Finland's President Urho Kekkonen. Neizvestny's letter requested the Finnish President's assistance in pressuring the Soviets to let him emigrate. Kekkonen was a fan of Neizvestny's work, but politically the timing of letter could have hardly been worse.

Nyberg's essay draws on memoirs and archive materials (some only made available recently). He makes observations on the Finnish-Soviet relationship from his evolving perspective as a young attaché, vice consul and ambassador coming to grips with the world of Russia's nonconformist artists.

René Nyberg

The brutal charm of the Soviet Union

We don't want the Soviet authorities to fly off the handle. But we don't necessarily need their consent either.

Urho Kekkonen, 1965

“It just came”

In the margin of a missive to Finland's Moscow Embassy dated 29 July 1975, President Urho Kaleva Kekkonen (UKK) made the short comment:

5.8.-75 No grounds for action on our part. No response necessary as the letter was dropped off at the Embassy on 25.7.1975 after business hours and delivered via a third party.

In the lower margin, UKK added:

*Why did an Embassy representative accept a “propaganda letter” delivered by a “third party”?*¹

Klaus Törnudd, acting head of the Foreign Ministry's political department, delivered the news of UKK's query to the Embassy on 15 August. I, in turn, got the news from my boss Arto Mansala, the Moscow Embassy's political counsellor. Arto's response to the query about who had accepted the letter on the Embassy's was diplomatically non-specific: “It just came.” I swallowed hard as it dawned that I might have committed a career-ending *faux pas*. I'd done nothing to cover my tracks, going so far as to add a cover memo about Neizvestny with the letter. There were no immediate fireworks, however. Ambassador Jaakko Hallama was on vacation in Finland at the time of the incident and Neizvestny's letter was sent to Finland by our Chargé d'affaires Jyrki Aimonen. Indeed, it was only 36 years later, in

¹ Urho Kekkonen Archives, 1/81, 1975.

the winter of 2011, that Arto showed me Ambassador Hallama's letter to Undersecretary Yrjö Väinänen dated 25 September 1975 on the "Nyberg Incident":

"The boy isn't stupid, far from it, and has many good sides. But he is terribly undisciplined and doesn't follow my advice or instructions even in the most general sense. It would be just like him to forward Neizvestny's letter to the President. Nyberg got lucky this time; the incident has been completely overshadowed by the President's 75-year birthday celebrations. As a result, the President of the Republic never had time to get to the bottom of the incident as he likely would have in other circumstances."

It was probably the closest I ever came to a ride home on the "milk train."² My mistake was deciding to forward the letter. I remembered initially hesitating, but did it anyway because I'd promised Neizvestny I would do it. What I didn't know, and in my inexperience could not even imagine, was that a pressured Neizvestny himself would release a copy of the letter to the international press corps a week before the CSCE meeting opened on 1 August 1975 in Helsinki. That made Neizvestny's correspondence a "propaganda letter" in UKK's eyes.

Refusnik

Ernst Neizvestny was at the peak of his artistic career in 1975, but it was the denied request to emigrate from the Soviet Union that made him a *refusnik*, a concocted English term for a Soviet citizen refused permission to emigrate (*otkaznik* in Russian). It had only been a year since Nikita Khrushchev's grave monument, Neizvestny's most famous work, had been unveiled at the Novodevich Cemetery. In the meantime, Alexander Solzhenitsyn had been arrested and deported to Frankfurt and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich left for the US on a Soviet passport that was eventually cancelled in 1978.

In his memoirs, Neizvestny describes how Khrushchev's son, Sergei (accompanied by Sergei Mikoyan) showed up the day after Khrushchev's death to commission a gravestone. Sergei Khrushchev said it was his father's wish that Neizvestny be commissioned for the job. Neizvestny replied he had been anticipating Sergei's visit since he'd learned Khrushchev had died.

Neizvestny's memoirs include a colourful description of the long struggle to erect Khrushchev's monument. After he was deposed in 1964, Khrushchev became a non-person so no official in Moscow dared issue the necessary permits for a memorial. Only after Khrushchev's widow, Nina Petrovna, wrote a letter to Premier Alexei Kosygin that the permits were issued. The unveiling of the grave monument on the third anniversary of Nikita Khrushchev's death was sparsely attended by his close family, the sculptor and members of the international press corps. The accomplishment was celebrated later that day at the home of Sergei Khrushchev

² In Finnish military slang, the expression "sent home on the milk train," i.e. the slow train, is a term of shame applied to persons who wash out of reserve officer training.

with the opening of an old bottle of cognac given to Nikita Khrushchev by Charles de Gaulle.³

Nonconformists

Moscow was my first foreign mission. I sought out the company of artists along with my wife Kaisa, other diplomats and foreign correspondents. Our Russian was already fluent enough to easily make friends, and soon we were in contact with leading nonconformist artists. “Nonconformist” was a label applied to artists not admitted to the the Artists’ Guild. The nonconformists were a pretty closed circle; each was a dissident in their respective lines of work. For them, correspondents and diplomats provided a breathing hole and an extra source of income. As a Finnish diplomat, I was quite careful around the most militant dissidents. I was surprised when a colleague at the Norwegian Embassy showed me his closet of full of copies of the Russian version of Solzhenitsyn’s just-published *Gulag Archipelago* (1973). He was apparently handing them out around, which is not what a Finnish diplomat would have done. The kicker, though, was that neither of us was aware that our mutual friend, the Swedish correspondent Stig Fredriksson, was one of Solzhenitsyn’s most important contacts.⁴ I hung out a lot with Fredriksson and together we bought art from the nonconformists, but “Stigu” never made the slightest mention of his special role.

Getting to know nonconformist artists was enriching and fascinating. Almost without exception, these nonconformists had been rejected by the Soviet system and lived unpretentious, apolitical lives outside the strict norms of society. Most never voted in Soviet “elections.” Those unable to sell their work to foreigners or the rare Russian art collector often turned to manual labour to earning their livings.

Pianist Svyatoslav Richter was one of those rare Russian art collectors. He lived in a yellow-brick house apartment building for the Soviet elite in downtown Moscow in the upscale Pioneer Ponds neighbourhood. Historically known as Patriarch Ponds (*Патриаршие пруды*), it is Moscow’s equivalent of Park Avenue and provides the backdrop for the beginning of Mikhail Bulgakov’s classic novel *The Master and Margarita*.⁵ It was in Richter’s spacious apartment in 1974 that we saw Dmitri Krasnopevtsev’s exhibition.

In general, art prices were not too steep, even for a young bureaucrat, so we bought several works. They have held their artistic meaning, and provide constant inspiration.

³ Ernst Neizvestny, *Govorit Neizvestny*, Posev-Verlag, 1984, Frankfurt a. M. pp. 24-27.

⁴ Stig Fredriksson, *Alexanders kurir, ett journalistliv i skuggan av det Kalla kriget*, (Alexander’s courier, a journalist’s life in the Cold War’s shadow), 2003.

⁵ A simplified and ideologically streamlined version of Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel *The Master and Margarita* was printed in the newspaper “Moskva” (Moscow) in 1966. Though the Cold War thaw period had ended, a fragment of the novel was still published. A fuller version was released in 1973 and the definitive version in 1990.

The Hallamas

It pleased me to learn in 2008 that the Tretyakov Museum was arranging an 80-year jubilee retrospective of the painter and graphic artist Oscar Rabin. Rabin had a tough life. His son died under murky circumstances and he himself had to leave the Soviet Union in 1978. Things only began to look up after he and his artist wife Valentina Kropivnitskaya settled in Paris and took French citizenship. We knew the couple well and bought art from both of them. Rabin was one of the central nonconformists and the kitchen of their cramped apartment was the gathering place for artist circles.

At the Tretyakov exhibition, I recognized a painting (or possibly a copy of a painting) that Anita Hallama had purchased from Rabin in autumn 1975. Jaakko Hallama had later returned the painting and Anita Hallama had switched it for still-life entitled *Vodka i seldyotka* (“Vodka and herring”), which today hangs at their son’s house.

I was always open about my movements in Moscow. When I took Anita Hallama in 1975 to Oscar Rabin’s apartment to buy art, I drove her there in my bright orange Volvo. Jaakko Hallama realized very well what I was up to, and it probably hastened my transfer from Moscow to Leningrad.

Before beginning his second stint as Finnish Ambassador in Moscow in 1974, a brain operation had impaired Hallama’s speech. His mental faculties were otherwise fully intact, but he could only work on a limited basis. My own limits were tested, however, by a visiting member of Finland’s parliament, who first nonchalantly took swig from his hipflask as I escorted him into the Ambassador’s office and asked me as an aside why the Ambassador talked so funny.

Today we know that Hallama was focused on staying in good graces with President Kekkonen. He doubled salaries at the embassy, which Kaisa and I appreciated greatly. Indeed, despite his health issues, Hallama was only summoned home after the power shift in 1982. He wholeheartedly entrusted Arto Mansala with reporting duties. Where he couldn’t sit on the sidelines was in Foreign Ministry assignments and promotions. In the “Nyberg Incident” letter, for example, Hallama goes on to suggest to Undersecretary Väänänen that I be sent to Ralph Enckell’s discipline school in Paris so that I wouldn’t end up at “nice” Dick Tötterman’s embassy in London (my requested posting).

Thanks to Hallama’s active involvement, the Foreign Ministry deployed me as a vice consul to Leningrad – a move that profoundly affected my career. It was only in Leningrad that my understanding of the Soviet Union began to click. It led me ever deeper into the complexities of Russian existence and a struggle to understand that I remain engaged in to this day.

The Hallamas, of course, were familiar with Moscow’s artist circles, even the unofficial ones. The portrait of Anita Hallama painted by Ilya Glazunov in 1958 is

one of his best works, a fact noted during the exhibition in Helsinki's Kiasma Museum of Modern Art in autumn 2010.

Glazunov always liked exhibitions of his work. At his Finnish exhibition, the old man still revelled in his dissident artist persona – a dissident in the sense that his religious and mysticism-filled themes were nationalistic and conflicted with the official atheism. Ironically, it was this very attribute that endeared him to many in the party *nomenklatura* and gave Glazunov both protection and substantial economic advantage. Among the nonconformists, Glazunov was always suspect because of the privileges he enjoyed.

“We don’t want the Soviet authorities to fly off the handle”

Contrary to what one might imagine from Kekkonen’s 1975 reaction to Neizvestny’s letter, the Finnish president was quite familiar with the artist. In 1965, Kekkonen had received a gift from Premier Kosygin: Neizvestny’s granite sculpture *Mother Earth*, which stood prominently in his parlour at the presidential mansion in Tamminiemi. In his journal, Kekkonen notes that on 18 February 1966 he attended the opening of the Museum of Modern Art in Tampere to which he had loaned “Neizvestny’s sculpture *Mother Earth*, which I received from the Soviet Union’s government.”⁶

In what Kekkonen described later as a “propaganda letter,” Neizvestny specifically refers to the thank-you note from Kekkonen for the sculpture.⁷

Indeed, Kekkonen had a genuine interest in Neizvestny’s work. In November 1965, he instructed Ambassador Jorma Vanamo to approach the artist. The president’s methodology illustrates Finnish foreign policy in a nutshell:

“... I would like you to find out if there is any way one might purchase a sculpture and possibly some graphic work by Neizvestny. Naturally, your enquiry should be phrased appropriately (which obviously I don’t need to tell you) as we don’t want the Soviet authorities to fly off the handle. But we don’t necessarily need their consent either.”⁸

In 1968, Neizvestny approached Kekkonen through his friend Jaakko Kaurinkoski, the correspondent for the newspaper *Uusi Suomi*, and through the Finnish Embassy. Neizvestny wanted to give Kekkonen a number of drawings that he had made for a new edition of Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. The Embassy couldn’t locate enough high-grade “white mounting board to make the collection a presentable whole,” so the Embassy turned the Foreign Ministry’s press office for help.⁹ In the same letter, the Embassy mentioned Neizvestny’s desire to exhibit in Helsinki. “... ”

⁶ Juhani Suomi (editor), *Urho Kekkonen päiväkirjat 2, 1963–68*, (Urho Kekkonen’s diaries, vol. 2, 1963–68), Otava, 2002, p. 252.

⁷ Neizvestny, p. 88. (The records indicate Kekkonen sent a thank-you letter to Neizvestny, but no copy was kept in the presidential archives. RN)

⁸ UKK’s letter of 9 November 1965 to Vanamo.

⁹ Finland’s Embassy in Moscow, No. 1635, 19 July 1968, Antti Karppinen.

he took it upon himself to remind the President of the Republic about the once-uttered idea that an Neizvestny exhibition could be staged in Finland.” Among the comments in the margin of the letter, Kekkonen scribbled “POR (President of the Republic) 23.6.68: Unfortunately, I have no time to receive this.”

Embassy Counsellor Aarno Karhilo penned in his own comment that Neizvestny “via Kaurinkoski can leave the gift with the Embassy, who will forward it to the President.”¹⁰

Neizvestny

We became acquainted with Neizvestny relatively late in our Moscow posting. It was the final year of our stay in 1975. His studio was a dilapidated workshop located in the courtyard of building 4 on Prospekt Mira 41. The apartment building itself in decent shape and centrally located. Neizvestny would proudly point out that it was just eight minutes from the Kremlin.¹¹ The parade of visitors to that little workshop included the big names of Italy’s Communist Party, a Dutch princess, US Senator Robert Kennedy, French prime minister Edgar Faure and an endless string of diplomats and other travellers. The civil servants in charge of the cultural department of the Soviet Communist Party’s Central Committee encouraged Neizvestny to respond to the obvious question about the studio’s state of dilapidation by explaining that it was a temporary solution and that he would soon be given a new studio. Naturally, he never received one.¹²

Neizvestny was a legend and a symbol of courage. Everyone knew of his clash with Khrushchev at the exhibition in the Moscow Manege in December 1962. The political thaw, however, came to an end that year with the humiliation of the Cuban Crisis. The artist could feel the change in the political climate just a month later at the Manege exhibition. The subsequent events are well documented. The opening of the Soviet Central Committee’s archives even brought to light a transcript of a conversation involving the Soviet Premier, the First Secretary of the Communist Party and the artist.¹³ This occurred in from of the entire politburo as was the custom in Khrushchev’s time. Before the transcript came to light, there had been numerous versions of the exchange, but it was clear that Neizvestny’s ability to hold his ground had an impact on Khrushchev. In a reference to the artist’s name, Khrushchev made the obvious pun: “You are unknown (*neizvestnyi*).” Deputy premier and former KGB chief Alexander Shelepin made veiled threats about sending Neizvestny to a “logging camp.” In Neizvestny’s embellished version, he explained to Kaisa and me that Khrushchev asked how Neizvestny had acquired the bronze used in the statue. The question was raised because the Soviet Union suffered a chronic shortage (*defitsit*) of bronze. Neizvestny said he was completely frank in his response: “I stole it like everybody else.” According to the Central’s Committee’s official transcript, Neizvestny denied he had stolen the metal, and

¹⁰ Finland’s Embassy in Moscow, PM 21 June 1968, Aarno Karhilo

¹¹ Neizvestny, p. 70.

¹² Neizvestny, p. 107.

¹³ Vyskazivania N.S. Hrusjtjova 1.12.1962 (*Istochnik* insert to *Rodina* magazine 6/2003, p. 159).

instead claimed he'd made it out of "copper" laying around in the corner.¹⁴

Neizvestny was distinct from many artists in that he exuded self-confidence. Aside from his art studies, he had also studied philosophy at Moscow University and even had literary ambitions. In his studio, we met his peer, the philosopher Alexander Zinovyev, author of the novel *Yawning Heights*.¹⁵ Zinovyev mercilessly criticized the Soviet system in the book, which was first published abroad in 1976. In 1978, Zinovyev was exiled from the Soviet Union, but like many others he never found his place abroad. In the end, he accused the West of dooming the Soviet Union.

The pieces we bought from Neizvestny include the series of above-mentioned illustrations of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. He was also the only artist we actually helped. Our children and grandchildren have been baptized under a bronze crucifix he gave us as a gift.

"Leningrad is a cruel city"

Just before we moved to Leningrad in January 1976, Neizvestny gave us a signed print of a work he had produced for the Nobel Committee. He then warned us that "Leningrad is a cruel (*zhestokii*) city."

Indeed, we had barely gotten settled in Leningrad when one of our sole artist acquaintances there, Yevgeny Ruchin, was murdered in an arson of his studio.¹⁶ Kaisa attended the funeral alone, as I was preoccupied with a ministerial visit. But it pleased me when I found Ruchin's work in the Tretyakov Museum during my stint as Ambassador in 2000-2004.

I quickly found myself swamped with work in Leningrad and everything had to be handled in Russian. The Consul General Antti Karppinen, a Slavist by education and who had spoken Russian since childhood, made me interpret. This role forced me to learn. In everyday life in Leningrad, the world's biggest small town, my exciting life as a diplomat in Moscow seemed distant. There was only a handful of foreigners in Leningrad, and virtually all were tourists. Just as Neizvestny had warned, the vibe was completely different, and not in a good way.

Among my duties as a vice consul, I was charged with monitoring the well-being of Finnish students. At the time there were over 200 in the city. A careful assessment revealed that about 80 % of them belonged to the Leningrad Academic Socialist Society (LASS),¹⁷ which created its own set of headaches. At the time, the news service (or more precisely, the infotainment service) of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE), produced a program entitled *Naapurinlännes* (Neighbour's

¹⁴ Neizvestny, pp. 164-165.

¹⁵ Alexander Zinovyev, *Зияющие высоты* (Yawning Heights), 1976.

¹⁶ John McPhee, *Venäläisen taiteen lunnaat*, Otava, 1996. English original, *The Ransom of Russian Art*, 1994.

¹⁷ Akademiska socialistsamfundet (Akateeminen sosialistiseura, The Society of Academic Socialists, or ASS) was established in 1925 and became the radical wing of the of the Social Democratic Party in 1937. After WWII, ASS and Finland's Communist Party formed a cover organisation (Demokratiska Förbundet för Finlands Folk/ The Democratic Society for the Finnish People). In the 1970s, ASS served as a "Stalinist" nerve centre for student radicalism.

Quarter), which in all seriousness praised the wonders of the Soviet Union's social security system and other miraculous achievements.

I well remember a history student doing his thesis work on the Battle at Kiimasjärvi. I knew, of course, he was interested in the skirmishes after the Finnish Civil War battle in which the Finnish White expeditionary troops fought the Finnish Reds in the early 1920s. Nevertheless, I couldn't help pulling his leg by referring to a battle in the same place two decades later. I commented that it was an especially important battle because Urho Kekkonen's younger brother, Captain Jussi Kekkonen, lost his sight in that battle. (The Kiimasjärvi battle where Captain Jussi Kekkonen was seriously wounded took place at the start of the Continuation War in July 1941.)

The dogmatic student hardly noticed I was teasing him; his mission as he saw it was to recount the heroic deeds of Red Army Commander Toivo Antikainen at the Battle of Kiimasjärvi in January 1922, a tale story immortalized in the 1937 Soviet film *For the Soviet Fatherland*. Interestingly, Antikainen escaped Stalin's purges because, to his good fortune, was sitting in a Finnish prison when they happened.

One of my most challenging tasks as an interpreter took place at the Saimaa Canal. Ele Alenius, a rebellious socialist inside the front organization for the Finnish Communist Party and a director at Finland's central bank, the Bank of Finland, became a target of a cruel joke by the Leningrad region's Communist Party Second Secretary. Armed with the knowledge that Alenius was a teetotaler, his Soviet hosts rudely offered a toast to the friendship between the Soviet Union and Finland. Alenius stood his ground as I sweated through my translation duties. He refused to imbibe, eventually forcing down the awkward situation with his determined calm. After the event, the somewhat shaken and slightly embarrassed Second Party Secretary asked me if he had perhaps been a bit over the top. I pointed out that even in Finland there were people who don't drink. In Leningrad at the time, it was a common sight to see drunken Finnish tourists staggering around the streets.

The brutal charm of the Soviet Union

My mentor and friend Keijo Korhonen recalled that our Consul General in Leningrad Arvo Rytönen had visited him for a heart-to-heart in 1972 or 1973. Rytönen described the Soviet reality as a "system based on lies and violence." I carefully stored that phrase in my mind because it was so true. But in those days in Finland, one was expected to discover this on their own. To quote Timo Vihavainen's spot-on observation: "A big symbolic belief that required one to hang their brain at the cloakroom before entering the hall of political discourse."¹⁸

The great riddle of the 1970s was (and will always be) how Finland's otherwise intimate knowledge of Russia suddenly vanished. The brutal charm of the Soviet Union had apparently fulfilled its purpose. The superpower's strength fascinated

¹⁸ Timo Vihavainen, *Itäraja häviää* (The Eastern Border disappears), Otava, 2011.

and stole the courage of the observer just when courage was needed to make an honest assessment.

One cannot recommend Jari Tervo's novel "*Myyrä*" (The Mole) to a person lacking this knowledge of our political history. To the uninformed, it would be in the same as a person sitting in front of the tv on Saturday evening trying to figure out what is fact and what is fiction.¹⁹

I especially like Tervo's way of emphasizing Keijo Korhonen's role as a leader of foreign policy during the final years of the Kekkonen era.

"I (undersecretary Keijo Korhonen) must now dash to the Eastern border to issue an unparseable official statement."²⁰

The Soviet Union was a gargantuan challenge. Either you traversed the long and winding road, or you ended up in the ditch. I remember that it bothered me to find myself in situations with people who had an un-nuanced love or loathing for the Soviet Union. Squeezed between these attitudes, we were supposed to do our official duties with honour. Ever since, I've thought about how much simpler collaboration with Russia would have been if there were more people who better understood the country, its culture and its language.

Like Alice in Wonderland

At every step, first as a student of Russian language in Leningrad, then as an attaché in Moscow, and finally as a vice consul in Leningrad, I constantly had a hard time coming to grips with the Soviet Union. Looking back, it felt a bit like falling down the rabbit hole in Alice in Wonderland. I followed the lives of interesting people; artists who went their own way, only to find myself pulled deeper and deeper into an unknown and unfathomable land. At the same time, I understood Finns as a rule in the 1970s knew virtually nothing of the Russian day-to-day experience.

About half the inhabitants of Leningrad lived in *kommunalki*, massive stone buildings divided into apartments with one family per room. The kitchen, bathroom and toilet were shared with others. While allowing a foreigner into a *kommunalka* was officially forbidden, it didn't stop us from forming acquaintances with many people.

Anatoly Chubais is about ten years younger than me. In his biography, he reveals that he and his wife lived within walking distance of the Finnish vice consul's residence. When his wife went into labour, the couple walked from Furshtaskaya to the Chernyshevskaya Maternity Clinic next door to us.

¹⁹ A Finnish tv talk show of the era featured Tervo presenting photos with the question: "Fact or fiction?"

²⁰ Jari Tervo, *Myyrä* (The Mole), WSOY, 2004, p. 40. The Finnish phrase translates literally as "I will now run to Finland's Eastern border to formulate a sentence of dazzling incomprehensibility."

The Chubais family lived in 14 m² room in a *kommunalka*. In some ways, the lack of floorspace was balanced by a four-metre-high ceiling. The combined salaries of the working parents was just 190 rubles a month. For the group of young economists Chubais led, the challenge was to find a place out of sight and hearing distance from the authorities where they could discuss the forbidden topic of reforming the Soviet economy. None of them had their own apartments. Chubais and his Moscow colleague Yegor Gaidar later stated that they were engaged in the sort of activity that only leads to two places: prison camp or a government job.

At my initiative, Chubais' biography was published in Finland in 2009.²¹ At the publication event, I had the chance to tell Anatoly Borisovich Chubais that only a few decades earlier Finland's young vice consul had lived with his family in the same neighbourhood but in "a golden cage." We lived in an 200 m² apartment with a Russian housekeeper and a Finnish nanny. By Kaisa's estimates, we spent about 1,000 rubles a month on food, shopping regularly at the upscale Farmer's Market (*Kolkhozy Rinok*).

In retrospect, we now know that our years in Moscow and Leningrad 1973-77 coincided with Brezhnev's Golden Age. Living standards and the availability of food improved. It was only later that the country began to grind to a standstill. When Andrei Amalrik published his essay "Can the Soviet Union last until 1984?"²² he was off the mark by about five years. I ordered a copy of the book, which had been published in Paris, through the Academic Bookstore in Helsinki in 1973. I can't remember meeting a single person at that time who took Amalrik's prediction of Soviet collapse seriously.

Right and left

The picture of Soviet dissidents and nonconformists eventually came into focus. Most Soviet archives (with the notable exception of the KGB archives) have been opened to the public and a vast number of memoirs and documents have been released.

The lion's share of the intellectuals, who saw themselves at the time as dissidents, nonetheless tacitly approved of the Soviet system and the logic of the Cold War. They lived in an information vacuum and were actually proud of their Soviet identity. After the death of Stalin, they pinned their hopes on Khrushchev's thaw, which ultimately was short-lived. Over the decades, both their faith in socialism and their belief in the system's persistence waned. The harsh demands of Soviet reality killed the belief that society could be reformed and democratized from inside. It is likely that Mikhail Gorbachev only came to understand this in August 1991.

The historian Vladislav Zubok, who emigrated to the United States just after the fall

²¹ Andrei Kolesnikov, *Taustalla ja tulilinjalla, Venäjän yksityistäjä Anatoli Tshubais*, (Background and firing line, Russian's privatizer Anatoly Chubais), WSOY, 2009.

²² Andrei Amalrik, *Kan Sovjetunionen bestå till 1984?* (Can the Soviet Union Make it to 1984?), Bonniers, 1970.

of the Soviet Union, gives a complete description of developments after Stalin in his book *Zhivago's Children, The Last Russian Intelligentsia*. Zubok crudely divides the dissidents into right and left. The left, led by Andrei Sakharov, condemned the abuse of human rights, while the right, led by Alexander Solzhenitsyn condemned the extermination of Russian people.²³ In Russia today, one speaks of liberals and conservatives. In the time of the czars, the equivalent divide was between the *zapadniki* and the Slavophiles.

WWI was Europe's *Ur-Katastrophe*, but for Russia collectivization was the catastrophe from which the country never recovered. Khrushchev ultimately broke the rural spine by forcing a second wave of migration from the countryside to towns and cities. Kolkhoz workers were earlier bound to the land much like serfs during the Czarist era. With the 1962 change, they were given a domestic passport. It was the piece of ID they needed to leave the kolkhoz.

Zubok says the Cold War thaw created two competing narratives on Russia in the 20th century, at least until the breakup of the Soviet Union. (Russia's recent history is still unwritten.) Zubok elegantly describes Alexander Tvardovsky's Jacobian wrestling match. Tvardovsky was Solzhenitsyn's benefactor and editor-in-chief for the newspaper *Novy Mir*. His paper helped break the Communist Party's monopoly on defining good literature, and ultimately strengthened the moral authority of the intelligentsia.

Vasily Grossman's major work *Life and Fate*,²⁴ which describes the dilemma of the Jews caught between the Nazis and the Bolsheviks, had a huge impact on Tvardovsky. In his journal, however, Tvardovsky reveals that he still felt uncomfortable with Grossman's assessment. For Tvardovsky, the central themes of the 20th century were the tragedy of the Russian revolution and the demise of Russian peasants, not the fate of the Jews in WWII. Because they didn't allow themselves to be touched by the fates of Russian culture and the peasants, cosmopolitan intellectuals rejected both Tvardovsky and Solzhenitsyn.²⁵

Both the literature preceding the Russian revolution and that written during the Great Emigration helped fuel the Soviet Union's anti-Semitism. Similar sentiments gave way to the Jewish dominance in the Bolshevik Party leadership. "[The Jewish] doctors' conspiracy" in 1952 would likely have led to a bloodbath had it not been for Stalin's death on 5 March 1953.

Discrimination was a fact of life in the Soviet Union. There was a ban on Jews holding public posts and unofficial quotas to limit the number of Jews admitted to university. The Fifth Column in the Soviet passport was to include nationality – a constant source of gallows humour. The use of "Jewish" as a nationality was sometimes alternatively described as "invalid of the fifth degree."

²³ Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children, The Last Russian Intelligentsia*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2009.

²⁴ Vasilij Grossman, *Liv och öde*, (Life and Fate), Harper&Row, New York 1985.

²⁵ Zubok, p. 247.

Neizvestny epilogue

Neizvestny today is 86, and spends most of his time between New York and Moscow. I've met him on two occasions since he emigrated in 1976 from the Soviet Union. Although he initially moved to Geneva, he was living in New York by 1977. The first occasion was during a visit to my friend Pentti Kouri in Greenwich, Connecticut in the late 1980s. Pentti was already a well-known collector and patron of the arts. His impressive gardens were full of big statues, including works of Henry Moore. He had invited a passel of artists including Ernst Neizvestny, who expressed his aspirations to Pentti. I overheard the Neizvestny's punch line: "*I want to be rich!*" The second time I met him was in Moscow in the mid-1990s at a gallery showing of his work.

While a large part of the dissidents and nonconformists were Jews, not all were. Ernst Josifovich Neizvestny's father, Josif Moiseyevich Neizvestny, was a medical doctor and his mother, Bella Abramovna Dizhur, was a famous poet. Both were born Jews. In his letter to Kekkonen, Neizvestny asked for help in getting an emigrations visa to Israel, but the authorities would have insisted on a divorce before granting the visa. It was not enough for his wife's permission. He was also denied the treatment given to Rostropovich, which was to simply leave and retain his Soviet passport.

The symbolism in Neizvestny's is pronouncedly Christian. At 17, he volunteered to be sent to the front. Eventually he became an officer and was severely wounded. His story is fairly common for men of his age. As long as he was content to exist in the no-man's land between official Soviet culture and unofficial art, he was openly tolerated and secretly admired. But once he had had enough, and asked permission to emigrate, it was one move too much for the authorities. He was humiliated by "Fifth Column" comments and denied his visa.

The Jackson-Vanik Act passed by the US Congress in 1974 is interesting artefact from this era. The legislation tied the right to freely emigrate to most-favoured-nation trading status. It is still an issue in the US now that Russia has been admitted to the WTO. On the other hand, there is no longer any visa requirement for travel between Russia and Israel, and any Soviet citizen who has lost Russian citizenship can have it reinstated.

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René Nyberg (born 1946) grew up in bilingual (Finnish-Swedish) surroundings in Helsinki, and matriculated from Helsinki's German School (Deutsche Schule Helsinki). In 1969, he took his master's degree from the University of Helsinki's Department of Political Science with a double major in international policy and political history. While working at the Ministry of Education, he completed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's two-year training course in international affairs (KAVAKU 2) in 1971. Much of his career in Finland's diplomatic corps was devoted to Russia and Germany. During his 1982–83 sabbatical at Cornell University in New

York, he wrote *Pohjolan turvallisuus ja Suomi: ydinaseiden vähenevä merkitys* (Nordic security and Finland: The declining significance of nuclear weapons), published by Kirjayhtymä in 1983.

Nyberg served as CSCE Ambassador in Vienna in 1992–95, and as Finland’s Ambassador in Moscow (2000–2004) and Berlin (2004–2008). In 2009, he retired from foreign service and joined the newly created East Office of Finnish Industries, an organization based in Helsinki and Moscow that promotes Finnish investment projects in Russia. Nyberg is a Reserve Major in the Finnish Army and holds the Finnish Cross of Freedom (1st class).

Kaisa and René Nyberg have three adult daughters and three grandchildren.

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Neizvestny's 15-meter tall monument to the Gulag, entitled "Mask of Sorrow" (*Maski skorbi*), was unveiled in 1996. Photo 1 was taken during President Dmitri Medvedev's visit to Magadan in 2008. Photo 2 shows President Urho Kekkonen in his salon at his Tamminiemi residence in 1977. Neizvestny's sculpture *Mother Earth* appears in the foreground. Photo 3 shows Neizvestny examining his bust of Khrushchev



