HELSINKI POSTCARD

THE THAW

By Steven Beschloss

When Matts Dumell fell, there was a big noise in Finland. Headlines, debate, a court verdict of high treason. He had passed letters from Denmark to a Russian "friend," and was found guilty in 1982 of spying for the Soviets. He lost his T.V. reporting job, his family, his apartment. He went

to prison in 1984 for four months. He didn't know what hit him. How could he? Until then, having a *kotiryssa*, a "personal" Russian, was a guarantee of prestige.

Ten years later, on a bitter winter day, Dumell reluctantly agrees to meet me in a Helsinki cafe across from the Svenska Theater, up the tree-lined Esplanade from a turn-of-the-century, gazebo-style restaurant built by the Russians. A handsome fortysomething man with an ingratiating manner, he is still bothered and bewildered by the whole experience. He blushes, laughs, nervously squeezes an empty wrapper for a last cigarette. Not because he thinks he was guilty of espionage, but because he believed that honesty was the best policy when police arrested him. He also believes that what he did by no means distinguishes him from dozens, probably hundreds, of other Finnish journalists, artists and politicians who regularly traded information, gifts and favors with their Soviet contacts. "Honesty," he confides, leaning close, "never conquered the world."

This is not advice I pass on to the Center Party's Paavo Vayrynen, who faltered in the presidential election that took place earlier this year. During the campaign Vayrynen was plagued by the charge—made by former KGB Chief Viktor Vladimirov—that as foreign minister he gave the Soviets sweetheart deals with Finnish state industries. Though he aggressively denied the accusation, the issue remained a sore spot for many Finns weary of the backroom deal-making and the political careers that depended on Soviet help throughout the quarter-century rule of President Urho Kekkonen, which ended in 1981. Consequently, Vayrynen finished out of the running. (His credibility wasn't helped by his claim that he had read the collected works of Fyodor Dostoyevski in a weekend.) The victor, Social Democrat and former U.N. diplomat Martti Ahtissari, won on his reputation as an internationalist outside day-to-day Finnish politics. "There's a kind of hangover at the moment," says one old Communist pol turned Social Democrat. "Like maybe we talked too much to the Russians—and they used it for their own benefit."

These are uneasy, painful times for many Finnish politicians, especially those who allowed the Soviets to exercise considerable influence on officially neutral Finland's foreign and domestic affairs. (The tiny Nordic country shares an 800-mile border with Russia and has long suffered an inferiority complex because of it.) Now that the Eastern bloc has collapsed, the criticism is coming from within. Last year the Finnish press documented the money flow from the Soviet Communist Party to the Finnish Communist Party, the hard-drinking junkets taken by various Finnish parties on the Soviet tab and even speeches by Finnish politicians that were written with Moscow's input. Historian Timo Vihavainen's 1991 book on "Finlandization," which helped inaugurate a new chapter in Finnish-Russian relations, pulled no punches. Its title: *A Nation Flat on Its Face.*

To get a bead on the strange ways of Finland, I sought out a Russian, which, oddly enough, is not so easy to do here. An autonomous duchy of the Russian empire for more than a century until the Bolshevik Revolution, Finland has the most homogeneous population in Europe. I finally found Inna Rogatchi, a journalist and playwright who came to Finland from Leningrad five years ago. The Finnish countryside was so clean and comforting, and the Finns so kind, that the Rogatchis thought they were in a fairy tale.

Rogatchi wrote a warm book about that first year, *My Finnish Family*, but she gradually began to take a harder look at her new home: at the refusal of Finnish authorities to allow Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* to be published (the government argued that the Soviets might cut off oil exports); at the pro-Soviet student and youth movement in the '70s that zealously published the *musta kirja*, the black book, which listed intellectual works considered questionable, including Freud. Her worst fears were confirmed last fall when Oleg Gordievsky, the KGB double agent now in London and co-author of *KGB: The Inside Story*, told her that hundreds of "fully-recruited agents" and "confidential contacts"—from President Kekkonen on down—were supplying information well into the '80s. "In the Soviet Union there was the Gulag. It was hard to resist," Rogatchi says sadly. "Here I think it was collaboration for their own profit."

Of course, the country is not without mixed emotions for the days of the Soviet empire. To an American visitor who grew up under the shadow of nuclear Armageddon, it's amazing to discover that there are people who don't remember fearing Soviet aggression. The schizophrenia extends to the younger generation. Last summer 50,000 mostly young people jammed into Helsinki's cobblestone Senate Square for an ironic consecration of the cold war's demise: amid potted palms, the former Soviet Red Army choir came to play and sing with the Leningrad Cowboys, a Finnish rock 'n' roll band that sports comically exaggerated pompadours and wears mock military uniforms. To the embarrassment of many older Finns, the young Finns and old Soviets joined voices for such buoyant anthems as "Happy Together" and "Those Were The Days" (and, in a festive nod to America, "California Girls").

And beyond irony? It may take a longtime Communist from the so-called Stalinist wing, undisturbed by doubt or regret, to reject (self-interestedly?) the new impulse for purging. "During the Soviet Union there was a certain status quo and not just countries falling into turmoil and chaos," Jaakko Laakso says, sitting with me in the grayish-green cafeteria of the Finnish Parliament, where he's been a member since 1976. "I'm not the only one who has good memories for the old days." He complains about journalists who now accuse him of being a Russian spy: "They are the same ones who got help from me."

Laakso was a powerful man. He helped create a youth and student movement that once tallied more than 50,000 members, attracting many of the country's young intellectuals and artists. He experienced Kekkonen's pragmatic "cigar and cognac" diplomacy, joining

other young radicals at the president's home for an evening that often ended with a chorus of "The Internationale" by the piano. He visited the Soviet Union more than 100 times and organized trips for politicians from across the ideological spectrum; some trips included a thorough physical exam in Moscow followed by a holiday at a Black Sea sanatorium.

Those were incredible times, says Laakso, now a left-wing leader in the Council of Europe. As he shows me out of the Parliament, he tells me he's traveling to China this spring for the first time. He's pleased. Finally, the Chinese are prepared to forgive him for his close ties to the Soviets. His own people, however, may not be quite so generous.

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ON THE HILL