



The Finnish Communists and the Winter War

Author(s): Kimmo Rentola

Source: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Oct., 1998, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct., 1998), pp. 591-607

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260988>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Sage Publications, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Contemporary History*

Kimmo Rentola

The Finnish Communists and the Winter War

The Winter War of 1939–40 is one of the two fundamental experiences in the contemporary history of Finland, the other being the 1918 Civil War. These short shocks, only about 100 days each, involved every citizen, and at stake were the most basic questions: the identity and fate of a small nation beside its immense and incalculable neighbour,¹ the direction and utopias of popular movements, and life and death. In both cases, the consequences were far-reaching, and intertwined.

As a result of the 1918 Red experience and social conditions, communism had a strong appeal in Finland, both among industrial workers and the poor rural population in the north. Many defeated Red Guards found a haven in nearby Soviet Russia, which was considered the second, and sometimes even the first, fatherland of the Finnish communists. These mixed loyalties were tested in 1939 when war broke out between Finland and the Soviet Union, but by then mentalities had been deeply changed by developments in the two countries since 1937.

In 1937, the Agrarians and the Social Democrats formed the first common government of former civil war enemies. Authoritarian right-wing tendencies abated, trade unions recovered, social reforms paved the way for a Nordic welfare state. The Communist Party (SKP) remained prohibited, but communist supporters saw themselves as the left flank of the government front and exploited new favourable conditions.

At the same time, the SKP leadership in Moscow was destroyed in the Stalinist terror, as was the Finnish Red emigrant culture in the Soviet Union. Only a tiny group around Comintern Secretary Otto Kuusinen survived, perhaps by accident. This was held in reserve only, direct contacts to or activity in Finland being banned.²

In Finland, communist supporters had to get by on their own, mainly guided by Mauri Ryömä and his group of young left-wing intellectuals,

This article was prepared on the basis of my book *Kenen joukoissa seisot? Suomalainen kommunismi ja sota 1937–1945* (Which Side Are You On? Finnish Communism and the War, 1937–1945) (Juva 1994). The article contains additional material and research.

1 'You can't change the geography', Stalin said to Paasikivi during the peace talks in 1940, 'and neither can we.'

2 Details in Kimmo Rentola, *Kenen joukoissa seisot? Suomalainen kommunismi ja sota 1937–45* (Juva 1994); see also Rentola, 'Finnish Communism, O.W. Kuusinen, and their Two Native Countries' in T. Saarela and K. Rentola (eds), *Communism: National and International* (Helsinki 1998).

expelled from the SDP in 1937 when the party entered the government.³ This group had a magazine of its own, *Soihitu*, advised and financed by SKP General Secretary Arvo Tuominen, who was sent from Moscow to Stockholm by Kuusinen in 1937, just before the great wave of terror. In Finland, secret communist organization lapsed, but leftist trade-union and cultural activities flourished, and on that basis Tuominen and Ryömä prepared a new legal left-wing party, controlled by communists as in the 1920s. They even supported a Finnish military build-up, seeing nazi Germany as the only possible aggressor.

This was the basic situation in 1939, although hope was now ebbing. The fate of the Spanish republic and Czechoslovakia sowed seeds of pessimism among the left wing, and everybody could sense a great war coming.

On 23 August 1939, Moscow and Berlin concluded a non-aggression pact. In secret, the area between the two was divided into spheres of influence, Finland strictly in the Soviet zone. A week later Hitler attacked Poland, beginning the second world war.

For communists all over the world, the pact with the arch-enemy was a surprise and a shock.⁴ In Finland, some communist worker leaders at first tried to see the pact as a Soviet attempt to stay apart from the imperialist war; a few even hoped for a new Finnish revolution.⁵ But the left-wing intellectuals were thrown into disarray. Some fell silent, others changed sides, like the famous writer Jarno Pennanen, who went over to the Social Democrats, seeing the Soviets now as a threat to Finnish independence.⁶ But his friend Mauri Ryömä still tried to explain the pact in anti-fascist terms; with it the Soviet Union forced the western powers to act against the aggressor, he said. The main issue now was, even to him, the securing of Finnish peace and independence.⁷

With opinions like these, Ryömä was totally isolated from the SDP, which condemned the pact in harsh words. However, his attitude was not acceptable in the new climate in Moscow either.⁸ Talking to Dimitrov on 7 September

3 For the ten years after 1937, in critical situations a left slice was always cut off the SDP, in every case as thin a slice as possible: in 1937, Ryömä and his young socialists connected with the SKP; in 1940, after the Baltic states were incorporated into the USSR and the Finnish political and military élite took the first careful steps towards Hitler, the Group of Six, led by K.H. Wiik; in 1944, the core group of the new 'peace opposition' born after the battle of Stalingrad. Thus, the right wing secured control of the Social Democratic Party. See John H. Hodgson, *Communism in Finland. A History and an Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ 1967).

4 Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London 1996), 192–4; Paolo Spriano, *I comunisti europei e Stalin* (Turin 1983), 87–99.

5 Reports about the discussions on 3 and 8 September 1939 in the police files on Jaakko Kivi (personal file no. 1216) and Huvi Luotonen (no. 134c), The Security Police Archives (EK–Valpo), The National Archives of Finland, Helsinki.

6 Reports of the Soviet mission on discussions with Raoul Palmgren on 29 August 1939, and Aimo Rikka on 23 September 1939, quoted in V. Vladimirov, *Kohti talvisotaa* (Keuruu 1995), 87–8.

7 Mauri Ryömä in *Soihitu*, 16 September 1939.

8 Remarks of Klement Gottwald and Otto Kuusinen in the translation of Ryömä's article,

1939, Stalin expressed no hint of anti-fascism; he put the blame on France and Britain much more than on Germany.⁹ Obviously surprised by the swift German success in the war, Stalin moved to occupy Eastern Poland, now wanting world communists to condemn the western powers; all suggestions of anti-fascism were to be purged from the party jargon. In many countries, Finland among them, the communist parties were to pay for this volte face to the very end.

On 28 September 1939, the day when a new, closer deal with the Germans was settled in Moscow, and when the Soviets forced Estonia to surrender military bases (Latvia and Lithuania soon followed suit), the Kuusinen SKP was taken out of wraps in Moscow, granted a substantial sum of money¹⁰ and allowed to correspond with Finland and Stockholm.

In his first message, Kuusinen saw the times changing fast. The fist of the proletarians would rise, and after striking, 'capitalism and its friends singing praise for the imperialist war will only be a vicious memory of a nightmare'. Analysing the Finnish situation only a couple of months earlier, the Comintern secretary saw no signs of a revolution, but now he was ready to raise the banner.¹¹ On the one hand, there was genuine fervour in this change in the Comintern headquarters' thinking, since a great war was traditionally seen as a seedbed for revolutions, but on the other hand, it was a cynical rhetorical cover to mask Stalin's great power dealings.

On 5 October 1939, the Soviet Union proposed to Finland negotiations about 'concrete political questions'.¹² There is not much information about the reactions of Finnish worker communists. Some seem to have been inspired, even speculating about changes in Finland, but the main mood now was one of diminishing sympathy with the Soviets, and others were depressed and interpreted this new turn as imperialism.¹³

Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of Contemporary Historical Documents (RTsKhIDNI), Moscow, f. 495 (The Executive Committee of the Communist International), op. 16 (Kuusinen's secretariat), d. 74. Gottwald and Kuusinen were not satisfied with Ryömä's anti-fascism and his emphasis on Finnish independence.

9 Dimitrov's diary, 7 September 1939, cited in *Izvestija TsK KPSS*, 12 (1989), 207.

10 20 million Finnish marks, according to Dmitri Volkogonov (*Lenin. Politicheski portret, II* [Moscow 1994, 443], on the basis of the documents in the presidential archives (APRF).

11 Five letters, in the mail book *Ausgang* nos 26 to 30, on 28 and 29 September 1939, RTsKhIDNI, f. 516 (The Communist Party of Finland), op. 2, 1939, d. 29. For an earlier analysis, see O. Kuusinen, 'Die bevorstehenden Parlamentswahlen in Finnland', *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, 6 (1939), 742–6. See also 'Zu den Ergebnissen der Parlamentswahlen. Brief aus Helsingfors', signed by J.K. *Rundschau über Politik, Wirtschaft und Arbeiterbewegung* (Basel), no. 39, 20 July 1939. This article was probably written by Inkeri Lehtinen in the Comintern Information Department.

12 About the negotiations and the developments between the two states, see O. Manninen and N.I. Baryshnikov, 'Syksyn 1939 neuvottelut' in Olli Vehviläinen and O.A. Rzheshesvsky (eds), *Yksin suurvaltaa vastassa. Talvisodan poliittinen historia* (Jyväskylä 1997). The book is the result of a joint Finnish–Russian historians' effort to produce a diplomatic and military history of the Winter War on the basis of newly available material.

13 This is based on a wide selection of police material.

Kuusinen now directed Tuominen and Ryömä. The Finnish people had no cause for alarm because of Estonia, Kuusinen wrote, but on the other hand, Finland had no reason to defy Soviet proposals, because 'a mouse can't hang a bell on a cat's neck'. Kuusinen advised them to give up the anti-fascist line. A couple of months earlier it had been correct to see a dividing line between the Finnish government and the fascists (as Kuusinen himself had seen), but now he lumped the fascists and the government, including the Social Democrats, together in a single anti-Soviet camp. This was not yet the real situation in Finland because the right wing was still irresolute about support for the government and embarrassed by Hitler's sudden deal with the Bolsheviks. But Kuusinen could not afford the luxury of basing his analysis on real facts only. Admitting that some intellectuals might defect from the progressive front, he claimed that they would be replaced by tens of thousands of proletarians, 'sound, brave, combat-effective and an efficient élite strike force'.¹⁴

A Swedish communist later recalled the arrival of this letter in Stockholm. His assertion about its contents was inaccurate, but he caught the atmosphere with mental precision. In the middle of the 50th birthday celebration of party leader Sven Linderot, a secret letter was read by a small group in a back room. 'Had bloody spirits suddenly assembled in the banquet hall? The air was at once heavy to breathe.'¹⁵ Perhaps Ryömä did not show up at the banquet, but he was in the city to read Kuusinen's letter and to discuss the situation with Tuominen. The two men did not believe in war; they thought that the Finnish government would yield to Soviet pressure, and this would open up new prospects for the left wing.¹⁶

Ryömä remained in Sweden for a week, waiting for a messenger from Moscow. Seeing some assurances were needed, Kuusinen and Dimitrov planned to send an SKP central committee member, Communist Youth International official Armas Äikiä, to Stockholm to explain the new line in detail and to enquire about the situation. But they failed to obtain the permission of the Bolshevik Party: the SKP was needed, but not even now fully trusted by the Soviets.¹⁷ So Ryömä had to return to Finland without having made direct contact.

Kuusinen's letter came too late to influence the next *Soihtu* issue, which appeared on 9 October 1939 while the editor was still in Stockholm. *Soihtu*

14 Oskar to dear brother (that is, Kuusinen to Tuominen and Ryömä), 4 October 1939, RTsKhIDNI, f. 516, op. 2, 1939, d. 29, 25–7. See also the mail book, 73–5.

15 Per Meurling, *Kommunismen i Sverige* (Stockholm 1950), 96–7. About the feast, *Ny Dag*, 9 October 1939.

16 The contradictory descriptions by the two men: Arvo Tuominen, *Kremlin kellot, Muistelmia vuosilta 1933–1939* (Helsinki 1956), 389–91 and Ryömä in *Työkansan Sanomat*, 27 December 1956. There is an abridged English translation of Tuominen's book, *The Bells of the Kremlin* (Hanover and London 1983). Ryömä left for Stockholm from Turku harbour on 7 October 1939 and returned on 14 October. 'The travel sheet' in his personal file, The Finnish Security Police Archives (Supo), hm 3498e.

17 Correspondence concerning this issue, between 7 and 25 October 1939, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 269 (Personal files of the Finns), d. 16 (Armas Äikiä alias Paul Hirn).

still leaned on anti-fascism, claiming that in Poland as well as in the Baltic states the Soviets had in effect been constantly pushing back fascism; it was silly even to talk about an alliance between Stalin and Hitler. Contrary to Kuusinen's current wishes, Ryömä did not dissociate himself from the Finnish government nor from the SDP, and even supported the party leader, Väinö Tanner. *Soihitu* was still on the left flank of the government front, albeit more critical than before. In the Comintern press survey, Inkeri Lehtinen criticized Ryömä severely. In her opinion, *Soihitu* wrongly saw the defeat of fascism as the main aim of Soviet policy. One of the worst slips was the magazine's support for the people of Poland.¹⁸

In mid-October, the new Comintern line was finally ready to be presented in a long article under Dimitrov's signature. It was prepared by Kuusinen, Manuilsky and the author himself, and approved by Stalin, Molotov and Zhdanov. In preparatory discussions, German party leaders expressed doubts about the wisdom of condemning social democracy so harshly, but their critique was rejected by Manuilsky. Kuusinen's editing suggests that even he had some misgivings, but if that was the case, he did not say anything. It was not his style to open his mouth in ambiguous situations. In the article, Dimitrov rejected the Popular Front line, pushed through by himself in 1934–5. He now allowed no co-operation with the Social Democrats; between the masses and these lackeys of imperialism gaped the bloody canyon of war. Every communist party should create an iron Bolshevik discipline; the slogan of 'defending the fatherland' was opportunism, to be purged.

In the draft version, the nature of the new war was analysed, but in the published version Kuusinen did not expose this analysis to everybody. Unlike in the first world war, it was claimed in the draft version, this time the working masses had already lost their confidence in the bourgeoisie and capitalism at the beginning, and the Social Democratic leaders had no way of betraying the masses. The prospects were outright revolutionary.¹⁹ The solidity of the governments and the support of the Social Democrats were thus underrated, and the revolutionary potential of the masses overrated. However, in the real world the imperialists and their lackeys showed themselves to be tougher material than had been supposed, and the slogan of defending the fatherland still appealed to millions of proletarians.

Kuusinen now sent a new directive, including the Comintern line in its total merciless barrenness. Unfortunately, the Social Democrats could easily betray the Finnish working class, he lamented, because the workers hated fascism. In general, *Soihitu* had correctly seen the nature of the war, but there were some serious mistakes, like the emphasis on Finland's independence and the designa-

18 *Soihitu*, 9 October 1939 and Inkeri Lehtinen's press survey, RTsKhIDNI, f. 516, op. 2, 1939, 367–73.

19 G. Dimitroff, 'Der Krieg und die Arbeiterklasse der kapitalistischen Länder (Oktober 1939)', *Die Kommunistische Internationale* (Stockholm), November 1939, 1112–25; the draft versions RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 18 (ECCI secretariat), d. 1302a, corrections by Kuusinen, 23, 25, 30, 36, 38; by Pieck and Florin, 133. F.I. Firsov, 'Stalin i Komintern', *Voprosy istorii*, 9 (1989), 17.

tion of Germany as aggressor. Social Democrats must be hit 'like the neighbour's swine', and the main slogan ('Against fascism, for popular power') was now outdated. The working class 'now has a clear opportunity to remove the whole system. (This revolutionary prospect is now real, although there is no reason to shout it out; that would be stupid.)'²⁰

The implications of this directive were not fully carried out by Ryömä, although he dropped anti-fascism. Ryömä was not a party official trained to obey, but a left-wing politician who needed convincing. Stalin let Kuusinen act so late that there was not enough time to push through the change. Ever since the Munich crisis a year earlier, Kuusinen had sensed that the party line in Finland needed revising from the Moscow security point of view, but he had not been allowed to do anything. Now it was too late.

In Finland, the atmosphere was grave. Although Soviet demands for military bases and the removal of frontiers were not published, they could be deduced from the Baltic agreements with Moscow. But the Finns did not yield, and the negotiations brought no results. The Finnish army was mobilized, and 272 leading communists were arrested on 16 October 1939. The interrogations were a surprise even to the security police. Despite the menacing situation, there were no signs of organized SKP activity to harass the government. 'The will to defend the country or at least loyalty towards the government has gained a footing even among the communists', the police reported from Kuopio, a city previously known as the 'Moscow of Finland'. A local communist leader from eastern Finland, twice convicted, said that he did not know any reason that could justify a Soviet attack on Finland, whatever the official SKP line was. Another, who had received officer training in the Red Army, said he would willingly take up a rifle to defend Finland. A former central committee organizer, Huvi Luotonen, said that the Soviet policy now had 'distinct imperialist features'. Some of the arrested were unshakeably pro-Soviet, but there were no signs of their organized activity.

Most of the arrested were released after only three days, on the demand of the Social Democrats in the government. Finally only one man was held.²¹ The incident influenced attitudes among communist supporters. The arrests showed the firm grip of the authorities, but on the other hand, the release showed that civil rights were still to some extent respected and that there perhaps was something worth defending in Finland.

These communist attitudes were influenced by the belief that as a socialist state the Soviet Union could not begin a war, and by the developments in the two countries during the last few years, when Finland had chosen a path worth defending from the point of view of the workers, while the Stalinist

20 Oskar to dear brother, undated, in the mail book dated 20 October 1939, RTsKhIDNI, f. 516, op. 2, 1939, d. 29.

21 Security police case file no. XXIX 32a, EKV. The Government Information Centre survey, 19 October 1939, Government Information Centre papers (VTL), the National Archives of Finland. About the general situation, Juhani Paasivirta, *Suomi ja Eurooppa 1939–1956* (Hämeenlinna 1992), 32–50.

terror raged in the Soviet Union. Many, perhaps most, Finnish communists had close relatives or friends across the border, and since 1937 correspondence had been banned and no news was heard except the horrifying tales of the refugees who succeeded in returning. Prior to 1937 the mood among the communists had been utterly different.

In Stockholm, SKP General Secretary Arvo Tuominen wrote a report for Kuusinen on 26 October 1939. In Moscow, it was translated for Comintern and Soviet leaders. First of all, he wanted to reject the suspicion that the SKP silence in Finland was due to his or other leaders' opportunism. Despite the army mobilization and arrests, the secret party organization was in place, but in the current dangerous situation the party work had to be carried out very carefully. At the decisive moment the party would have 'something to step forth with, and something to strike with'. The situation changed day by day for the better. The mobilized soldiers were discontented and ran away 'asking why are we sitting here?'. The best boys of the party stood firm, only some fellow travellers panicked. 'But when you drive fast enough, the shit always drops from the cart.'²²

Did Tuominen believe his own words? He always was a man of big words and a gambler. My interpretation is that he still hoped for a negotiated settlement between Finland and the Soviet Union. Then his bluff would not be called, and if the government gave in, the left wing could gain new strength and his fiction would become slightly more real. Of course, fictional reports were also a distinctive mark of the system. Soviet foreign intelligence sent 'quite thoughtless' reports on conditions in Finland. What was supposed to be desired by the boss was much more important than the facts.²³

On 31 October 1939 Molotov made public the Soviet demands to Finland. After that, the Soviet Union could not step back. However, the Finnish government did not yield, mainly because it did not seriously believe in an imminent Soviet attack. A pessimist, the commander-in-chief, Marshal Mannerheim, was ready to make concessions.²⁴ His attitude was reported to Stalin (by Soviet spies in London). On the left, the experienced and sombre Karl H. Wiik, former party secretary and the leader of the SDP left wing, believed that war really could break out.

But it was coming. When the Finnish delegates left Moscow without results on 13 November 1939, Stalin said in the war council: 'We will soon be drawn into a war with Finland.'²⁵ He had made his decision a couple of days earlier. The Red Army plans of attack were polished, and the Leningrad military

22 Karl to Oskar (that is, Tuominen to Kuusinen), 26 October 1939, translation in German, RTsKHIDNI, f. 495, op. 13 (Gottwald's secretariat), d. 10. I have not been able to locate the Finnish original in Comintern archives.

23 Viktor Vladimirov, *Kohti talvisotaa* (Keuruu 1995), 163–4. The author, who was the KGB foreign intelligence *resident* in Finland in the 1970s and 1980s, quotes and criticizes a report by his predecessor Elisei Eliseyev (Smitsyn) in November 1939.

24 Volkogonov in his book about Stalin. The British military attaché in Helsinki reported Mannerheim's views to London.

25 A.G. Dongarov, 'Voina, kotoryi moglo ne byt', *Voprosy istorii*, 5 (1990), 36.

district was ordered to form a division of ethnic Finns and Carelians.²⁶ This was part of the political camouflage of the war; the division became the army of the Finnish 'people's government', which was now prepared. After years in limbo, Otto Wille Kuusinen was invited to Stalin's cabinet on 10 November 1939, the day the Soviet leader perhaps made the final decision to attack Finland. After that, his Finnish client was a constant cabinet guest during those dark hours when the *chozyain* made his moves.²⁷

In Stockholm, Arvo Tuominen received an order to return to Moscow for an urgent and responsible task. He decided not to travel, giving poor health as a reason. A Swedish courier took this answer to Moscow,²⁸ along with a report from the Swedish communists connected with the Finnish left-wing politician, Cay Sundström. According to him, export industrialists as well as Mannerheim were ready for concessions, lest everything should be lost. But the government remained firm; one of the most inflexible was the SDP leader Väinö Tanner, who had been a Finnish negotiator in Moscow. Perhaps this report, which reflected more the political antipathies of the author than the facts, played a small part in creating for the Kremlin an image of Tanner as a vicious double-dealer. According to Sundström, the prospects for a new left-wing party were great.

Using the occasion, the Swedish communists asked for an article to be published in Helsinki in a respectable newspaper to honour the upcoming 60th birthday of the boss. The heading was to be: 'Stalin and Finland'.²⁹

'Stalin and Finland' indeed became a major headline, not only in a Helsinki newspaper but in the world press, when the Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939.

It was a terrible shock for the Finnish left wing. Mauri Ryömä's wife tele-

26 N.I. Baryshnikov and O. Manninen, 'Sodan aattona'; N.I. and V.N. Baryshnikov, 'Terijoen hallitus', both in *Yksin suurvaltaa vastaan*, op. cit.

27 Stalin's visitors' books, 'Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalina. Zhurnaly (tetradi) zapisi lits, prinyatyh pervym gensekom', *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 5–6 (1995), 57–61. The preparations were left to the last moment also in the intelligence field, otherwise so important to Stalin. Only three weeks before the attack, new intelligence residents arrived in Helsinki to take care of the offices left vacant when their predecessors had been invited back home and shot. The arrival of Col. Ivan Smirnov of the GRU was announced on 11 November and that of Elisei Eliseev (a.k.a. Sinityn) of the GUGB NKVD on 14 November 1939. The diplomats files, Russia, Fb:6, 6.0, The Archives of the Foreign Ministry of Finland (UM).

28 A Latvian visa was stamped in Moscow on 13 November 1939 in the false Norwegian passport of Armas Äikiä, who was to be sent to fetch Tuominen and explain the situation. Despite Kuusinen's and Dimitrov's urgings, he did not receive Soviet permission. RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 269, d. 16. See also correspondence concerning a Soviet entry visa for Tuominen, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 269, d. 1538 (Tuominen's file). A report by Irja Strand on Tuominen, 4 July 1940, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 74 (Dimitrov's secretariat), d. 501. Arvo Tuominen, *Kirjeeni suomalaiselle työläistoverille ja Georg Dimitroville* (Stockholm 1940), 3.

29 A report on the situation in Finland, in Swedish, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 13, d. 9.

phoned to tell him that Russian planes were bombing Helsinki. 'You are lying, they are only leaflets', Ryömä said.³⁰

It was announced on Soviet radio that Finnish left-wing forces and rebel soldiers had formed a new government in Terijoki 'city' (the border village occupied by the Red Army on the very first day). The prime minister was O.W. Kuusinen.

The atmosphere surrounding this undertaking can be sensed in a Comintern discussion some days earlier. A special commission was considering the correct party line in Germany and in German-occupied countries; it was hard to find a line adaptable to current Soviet needs, and at the same time presentable to German workers. In a long speech on 29 November 1939, Comintern Secretary-General Georgi Dimitrov severely criticized German communist leader Wilhelm Pieck. 'I am not a prophet', Dimitrov claimed, but saw, nevertheless, only three possible outcomes of the current war, the most probable one being Hitler's defeat, together with the internal collapse of Germany.³¹

Dimitrov had a big mouth, but here he must have known the main thread of Stalin's thinking. Perhaps German zeal to bind the Soviets in a closer collaboration³² had led Stalin to believe that the German position in the war was a weak one, and this misjudgment was connected with the Comintern miscalculation on the revolutionary prospects. And if Hitler was judged weak when he was on the threshold of his stunning victories, the Finnish government most certainly belonged to the light flyweight class on Moscow's scale.

The decision to set up a puppet government was made by Stalin and his cronies,³³ after which it was assembled and justified by the Comintern office. The government's declarations reflected the theoretical designations by Togliatti on the Spanish Civil War; socialism and Soviets were not mentioned, the aim was a popular republic.³⁴ As for cabinet members, only five Finns were available in the Comintern, one of them already retired. Traditional communist leaders, well known in Finland, had all been shot, except Kuusinen himself. There were two more 'ministers', a Finnish-born Red Army general, commander-in-chief of the 'popular army', and a Carelian, because the 'government' agreed to exchange the Finnish territory close to Leningrad for a

30 K. Kalemaa, *Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi. Sörnäisten tyttö. Poliittinen elämäkerta* (Juvka 1992), 158 (based on an interview with Ryömä's wife, Elvi Sinervo).

31 ECCI Secretariat minutes no. 514, series of conferences beginning on 23 November 1939, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1298, Dimitrov's speech, 137–9.

32 Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Diplomatischer Widerstand gegen 'Unternehmen Barbarossa'*, *Die Friedensbemühungen der Deutschen Botschaft Moskau 1937–1941* (Berlin and Frankfurt a.M. 1991), 59–61.

33 Dongarov, op. cit., 38. Fleischhauer, op. cit., 130. Baryshnikov and Baryshnikov, op. cit. In his autobiography for the Soviet party in 1948, Kuusinen stated that his government was founded 'with the approval of the CC of the VKP(b)'. Kuusinen's autobiography on 4 May 1948, RTsKhIDNI, f. 522 (Kuusinen's papers), op. 2, d. 114.

34 The people's government and the SKP declarations were published in the Comintern journal. Cf. Palmiro Togliatti, *Opere*, Franco Andreucci and Paolo Spriano (eds), IV: 1 (Roma 1979), 264–5.

lump of Soviet Carelia. Kuusinen thus carried through the idea of Greater Finland, his youthful dream, but only on paper. The Finnish language was again permitted in Carelia (in spring 1939 not even Stalin's own words could be published in Finnish), and surviving Finns were collected from the camps, including Kuusinen's son, Esa, who was appointed a government secretary.³⁵

The Terijoki government minutes³⁶ prove that it had no real power. It was a government-in-waiting, and the waiting was thought to be very short. The Soviets believed that the operation would be quick and easy, as in eastern Poland in September, and the preparations were left to the north-western military districts only. However, the Finnish army put up strong resistance in harsh winter conditions. The Red Army could only advance very slowly and with numerous casualties. If the Soviets really thought to influence Finnish public opinion, the puppet government backfired badly. The conflict was no longer about territorial concessions or military bases on remote islands; what was at stake now was national independence.

The puppet government created a diplomatic deadlock. Finally, on 29 January 1940, fearing imminent French and English intervention,³⁷ Moscow called the Terijoki bluff by agreeing to negotiate with the real government in power in Helsinki.

With the Terijoki fiasco, Otto Kuusinen damaged his reputation to the extent that the Soviet leaders never allowed him to return to Finland, lest he harm neighbourly relations after the war. He had to stay in the USSR for the rest of his life. Perhaps it was what he deserved; as a younger revolutionary he knew that such an attack would be disastrous. In 1919, when an SKP congress argued about Red Army help for the coming Finnish revolution, he came out strictly against it, saying that arriving with an army of 50,000 or 100,000 men was not a revolution, but an imperialist expansive war.³⁸ Now he had tried to come with the bayonets (and tanks) of an army ten times larger, and still failed.

The Terijoki government announced its intention to continue the 1918 Red cause, but it gained hardly any support, not even from the old Red Guards. Finnish communists mainly went along with the mainstream and defended the country, although some still considered the government stupid. Many tough communists condemned the Soviet attack without renouncing their con-

35 Osmo Jussila, *Terijoen hallitus 1939–40* (Juva 1985). The autobiography of Esa Kuusinen, 1 August 1940, in his file, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 269, d. 1341.

36 Only five ceremonial sheets of paper, RTsKhIDNI, f. 522, op. 1, d. 46.

37 The Russian intelligence service has published French 'booty' documents from December 1939 and January 1940 on plans of attack on the Caucasus. *Organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine. Sbornik dokumentov* I, 1 (Moskva 1995), 349, 361–2. Even if the documents were only obtained by the Soviets later in 1945 from the Germans, the facts themselves were known and had an influence. In the post-mortem discussion about the Winter War on 17 April 1940 Stalin accused the intelligence services of providing information about British and French plans of attack which then did not materialize. Ohto Manninen and Oleg A. Rzheshesky (eds), *Punaarmeija Stalinin tentissä* (Helsinki 1997), 344–5. The book includes the verbatim discussion of the military leaders in the VKP(b) CC on the Winter War; the original in RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 165, d. 77.

38 SKP conference minutes, 1919, RTsKhIDNI, f. 516, op. 2, 1919, d. 6, 21.

victions. During the first days of the war, workers' blocks were heavily bombed, a fact denied by Soviet radio. The lie did not console those whose homes were burnt. One Helsinki worker, a faithful party member then and afterwards, said that he accepted bombing of the bourgeoisie, 'but shooting workers is too much'. Another, a Spanish Civil War veteran, admitted to the police (a rare thing for a strong party man) that he was utterly disappointed with the Soviets. However, he did not want to give a complete statement of his earlier activities; this was prevented by his 'idea of manhood', acquired on the docks.³⁹ The next summer he was a front-row leftist rioter. Younger male worker communists as well as left-wing intellectuals usually went to the front. A symbolic case was Gösta Rosenberg, whose father was a Terijoki government member. The son fought in the ranks of the Finnish army until the suspicious army security heard about the father and removed him from the front. Later in life, he became a communist MP.⁴⁰

In the case of one's own country at war with the Soviet Union, 'according to the book' the communists should have put up resistance, organized sabotage, strikes, and guerrilla activity. In principle, this was expected of the Finnish communists.⁴¹ However, during the Winter War there was no active resistance in Finland. And if there was the faintest hint of it, it was met by persistent Soviet suspicion. The Terijoki government appealed to Finnish soldiers to rebel, but in practice the Soviets were not willing to receive deserters. The very few Finnish communist soldiers who went over to the Red Army were instantly arrested and some even shot as spies. As late as 1963, a Finnish communist soldier of the Winter War wrote from Siberia to the SKP central committee in Helsinki, asking for a certificate confirming the fact that as a young man in Finland he had been a communist. He was a free man by then, with a Russian wife and a family, but his children were harassed at school because of their father, who was 'only a Finn and possibly a spy'.⁴²

A couple of days before the outbreak of war, some leading communists in Helsinki received a message from Otto Kuusinen, not through the regular party route via Stockholm but directly from Moscow through the Soviet embassy. Kuusinen announced that war was imminent and ordered the recipients to go north.⁴³ The Red Army plan was to cut Finland in two, but this

39 Police report of 21 December 1939, in the personal file no. 2895 (Reino Kosunen). Interrogation protocol no. 16/40, personal file no 2940a, EKV.

40 Rosenberg's file (no. 3053), EKV.

41 A memorandum, in Russian and in German, on the tasks and forms in active support for the USSR, RTsKhIDNI, f.495, op. 10a (Manuilsky's secretariat), d. 480, about Finland, 15–16.

42 Kustaa Holmsten to the SKP Central Committee, 31 December 1963, SKP Cadres department files, People's Archives, Helsinki.

43 Jaakko Kivi, *Yössä maan alla* (Tampere 1975), 130–2. Autobiography of Urho Väre in 1949, in his file in the SKP Cadres Department papers. Hertta Kuusinen to Otto Kuusinen, 12 October 1940, RTsKhIDNI, f. 516, op. 2, 1941, d. 34, 102–3. In his posthumous memoirs, the NKVD foreign intelligence *rezident* Elisei Sinitsyn paints a vivid, but very inaccurate picture of his discussions with Hertta Kuusinen. According to him, the leading communists should have gone to Sweden. See his *Vaiettu totuus. Salaisen agentin todistajanlausunto* (Keuruu 1995), 59–64. There is also a Russian edition, *Rezident svidetel'stvoet* (Moskva 1996).

turned out to be a devastating military catastrophe for the Russians. Kuusinen's message was read with astonishment by a handful of people, but very few had time to do anything. Kuusinen's daughter, Hertta, went into hiding in the countryside in the north with her male companion, Yrjö Leino. They were not arrested during the war, which gave them a clean 'bill of health' from the Soviet point of view. This was an important asset after the second world war, when a new SKP leadership was formed. Only those who had been in prison or in hiding during the Winter War could be included in the top echelon.

There was a degree of readiness for guerrilla activities among local young communist groups in Kemi, Tampere and near Helsinki, but they were discouraged by the Red Army's lack of success, had neither weapons nor connections, and lacked the conviction that they were doing the right thing, which is essential when risking one's life.⁴⁴ Not a single Finnish civilian was arrested during the Winter War for attempting to impede the Finnish war effort. The situation was fundamentally different during the next war (1941–44) when Finland was an ally of Nazi Germany. Then, hundreds of communists were arrested for sabotage and related activities, and many were executed. During the Winter War, only 199 people were arrested for political reasons, that is, for past deeds or present words. Nobody had actually done anything. Many were released actually during the war.⁴⁵

In Riihimäki prison (near Helsinki), a group of political prisoners planned a kind of mutiny in the event of the approach of the Red Army. It never came, so nothing happened. The leaders of this group were Soviet-educated men who had been in prison for several years and were thus both saved from the Stalinist terror and only moderately influenced by recent developments in Finland. Their stance was not unanimously accepted even in prison; younger leaders, who had been in charge during the latter half of the 1930s, defended the Popular Front line and criticized Soviet actions, as did an old Bolshevik, Adolf Taimi, who had been serving his prison term since 1928. When the new war broke out in 1941 and Finland was allied with the Nazis, the ideological authority of the pro-Soviet prison group was considerably enhanced among the communist élite, and a few years later they would form the new leadership of the Communist Party, with Ville Pessi as general secretary and Aimo Aaltonen as chairman.⁴⁶

44 This is based on a wide selection of police and SKP Cadres Department material, presented in Rentola, *Kenen joukoissa seisot?*, op. cit., 180–4, and the report by Eino Laakso in Belomorsk on 18 October 1941, in his file, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 269, d. 1589.

45 Arrest reports and statistics, case file no XXIX 32b, EKV. In 1941, the Soviets' attitude was different. They welcomed Finnish deserters and instructed them in sabotage and spying.

46 This is based on a vast selection of material, the most important of which are the confessions of Soini Rantanen in 1942 and 1943, in his police file (no. 2973a, EKV), the SKP cadres' official party assessment of Toivo Karvonen in 1946 (in his SKP Cadres Department files and RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 269, d. 146), and a letter by Olli (that is, Hertta Kuusinen to Otto Kuusinen and Toivo Antikainen), 29 March 1941 (RTsKhIDNI, f. 516, op. 2, 1941, d. 34). I have also interviewed Edvin Salonen, who was in Riihimäki prison at the time.

But they only became leaders in 1944. In 1939, the most important communist leaders were Mauri Ryömä and Arvo Tuominen, who up until then had been close allies, but now their paths diverged.

A medical doctor, Mauri Ryömä was ordered to a military hospital far away from Helsinki, with no opportunity for effective political action. On 15 December 1939 he heard the radio speech of the SDP leader Väinö Tanner, who put an end to the initial hesitancy of the Finnish government, blamed the Soviet Union for an attack against a small peace-loving neighbour, and promised that the Finnish working class would resist the attack as hard as it could. Ryömä wrote a long letter to Tanner, blaming him for the catastrophe and claiming that the Finnish workers went to the front against their will, hoping for peace and friendly relations with the Soviet Union. It was undoubtedly true that peace was the first wish of the workers, but after the Soviets attacked, resistance was commonly seen as a better alternative to surrender. Ryömä sent his letter to politicians and to the social democratic newspapers. It was not published and Ryömä himself was arrested. However, a woman friend of his wife learned the letter by heart and travelled to Stockholm, where it was published in the communist press on 7 February 1940. This was welcome news to Moscow, the only significant public criticism of the government by a Finnish left-wing leader during the Winter War. To stress the point, Moscow radio even falsely announced that Ryömä had been killed by the government. Left-wing Social Democratic leaders did not understand Ryömä, but Otto Kuusinen in Moscow never forgot this rare instance of support during the hardest phase of his career.⁴⁷

Released immediately after the Winter War, Ryömä founded the public left-wing movement he had spoken about with Arvo Tuominen in Stockholm before the war. But Tuominen no longer supported the idea.

'Poika' ('The Boy') Tuominen later wrote extensively about his activities. However, he gave the date of his defection from the Soviet side as earlier than it really had been. His refusal to travel to Moscow in November 1939 was not the final break. When the war broke out, he took part in organizing the Swedish communists' support activities in northern Sweden. These were connected with the Red Army plan to cut Finland in two. But when Tuominen realised that the Kuusinen government enjoyed almost no support among the Finnish workers, and when the Red Army advance was halted, Tuominen carefully developed contacts with Finnish Social Democrats then in Stockholm. He did not disclose these contacts to his aides in the Swedish Communist Party, but withdrew from their actions, moving out of Stockholm for reasons of ill health.

A secret contact between Finland and the Soviet Union was established in mid-January, when writer Hella Wuolijoki arrived in Stockholm with the

47 Ryömä to Väinö Tanner, 19 December 1939, a copy in Ryömä's papers, People's Archives. Published in *Ny Dag*, 7 February 1940. Ryömä to his wife, 4 January 1940, in his police file (no. 3498b, EKV). More details in the books by Hannu Soikkanen (the SDP history), Jaakko Paavolainen (Tanner's biography), and Erkki Tuomioja (Wiik's biography).

permission of Foreign Minister Väinö Tanner. She sounded out the possibility of negotiations with NKVD representative Boris Yartsev (Rybkin), who had previous experience of secret top-level dealings with Finland.⁴⁸ Tuominen was aware of this contact and tried to promote himself as a mediator. However, his services were not needed, and on 29 January 1940 Moscow announced the crucial breakthrough, abandoning the Kuusinen government.

After this, and hastened by the publication of Ryömä's letter, Tuominen gave the first public hint of his changing views. His critical attitude to Soviet actions was reported in Finland by transport union leaders arriving from Sweden, and the news was published in Helsinki newspapers on 16 February 1940, though inconspicuously and ambiguously. Tuominen's communist aides in Sweden had no inkling of the news. In Stockholm, Tuominen secretly began to write a letter to a Finnish worker friend, to be published later.

On 11 February 1940, the Red Army began a massive offensive with new reinforcements. The Finns suffered serious setbacks, but their resistance was not broken. Fearing a western invasion, Moscow was ready to make peace, and the treaty was signed in the early hours of 13 March. Finland lost a substantial part of her territory, but preserved her independence.

In a discussion about the peace treaty with his aide Irja Strand, Tuominen expressed discontent that the Soviets did not dictate the composition of a new Finnish government. Ever since the pact of August 1939, his main line had been to push through political changes in Finland and enhance his own position, taking advantage of the foreign political crisis, Soviet pressure and the threat of war. No wonder Tuominen and President Kekkonen years later found many common interests to discuss.

After the peace treaty, Tuominen wrote a letter to Georgi Dimitrov saying that the Terijoki government was 'a heavy crime, which will also in future have great influence on things both in the whole world and in Finland'. However, he did not send the letter, nor mention it to his party friends. In the Comintern, a new 'post-catastrophe' SKP leadership was prepared, and Arvo Tuominen was still one of the four candidates for the new party leadership. Dimitrov once again invited him to Moscow.

To avoid answering and for protection, Tuominen arranged to get himself arrested with the help of Swedish Social Democratic government connections. Meanwhile, the Finnish communists in Stockholm heard about his plans to print an anti-Comintern brochure. After his release from the camp on 6 May 1940, Tuominen finally told his aide that he would not go to Moscow and did not accept the current Soviet line on Finland. This was the final break. The two anti-Comintern letters by Tuominen were printed in Finnish and in Swedish (with the Comintern money at his disposal) and Social Democrats

48 Olli Vehviläinen, 'Tietä rauhaan etsitään' in *Yksin suurvaltaa vastassa*, op. cit. Wuolijoki had a double role. On the one hand, she was a Finnish government messenger, on the other, a confidential NKVD contact. There is a copy of her report to the NKVD on 21 January 1940 attached to V. Merkulov (NKGB) to S.A. Lozovski (NKID), 2 August 1945, Arkhiv vnesnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP RF), f. 0135 (The Finland desk), op. 29 (papakka 158), d. 9, 9–15.

began to distribute them in Finland. The Swedish communists sent a courier to Helsinki to enquire directly about the attitudes of the Ryömä group and the SKP people there, after which a report was finally sent to the Comintern in mid-June 1940. A couple of weeks later, Arvo Tuominen received a Finnish passport.⁴⁹

The Winter War heavily influenced successive Soviet attitudes and policies towards Finland as well as domestic Finnish developments.

For the Soviets, the price of the war was immense. Their international reputation was badly damaged, and, according to Red Army archival information published only in the 1990s, the Soviets lost well over 100,000 men in 105 days, far more than in ten years in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ It seems clear that the relatively moderate Soviet line on Finland after 1944 can be partly explained by the Winter War experience. As an old man, speaking about people's democracies and pondering 'why did we not do it in Finland', Molotov thought that it had been clever to abstain. After a certain time 'an utterly new adventure' would have begun, and those very stubborn people would have inflicted 'a festering wound'.⁵¹ Stalin himself admitted the same thing, indirectly, when he met a Finnish cultural delegation in 1945. The Finns were a primitive people, he said, the inhabitants of marshes and forests, but they had stubbornly defended their independence, unlike the Belgians, a civilized people, who (in 1940) surrendered right away. 'If they had been Finns instead of Belgians, I think they would have fought hard against the German aggressors', Stalin said.⁵²

In Finland, the Winter War tore wide open the rift between communists and other citizens; this was later defined by the sociologist Erik Allardt as a basic feature of Finnish political life. For most Finns, the war was final proof that the Soviets wanted to destroy Finnish independence, and the communists were

49 Tuominen's different memoirs in 1940, 1941, 1956 and 1970. We can discern 'a circumstance which frequently occurs in historical disquisition' (Gibbon); with the passage of time, he added more details. Irja Strand's report to Dimitrov, 4 July 1940, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 74, d. 501, 12–19. Hertta Kuusinen to her father, 1940 and 1941, cited. The reports by Toivo Karvonen (1952) and Yrjö Enne (1950) on Arvo Tuominen, in Tuominen's file in the SKP Cadres Department files. The minutes about internee camps, 9 March, 12 April and 6 May 1940, The General Board of Social Affairs (Socialstyrelsen) papers, A VIII:1, The National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm. A. Sergeev (Dimitrov's secretary) to Toivo Antikainen, 16 June 1940, RTsKhIDNI, f. 495, op. 73 (Dimitrov's secretariat), d. 90, 40.

50 G.F. Krivosheev et al., *Grif sekretnosti snyat* (Moscow 1993), 93–123. Casualty figures published in *Yksin suurvaltaa vastassa*, op. cit., 303. Problems involved in different figures cannot be discussed here.

51 F. Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym* (Moskva 1990), 93 (on 4 October 1972) and 16 (on 28 November 1974). I was able to find only the latter remark in the English version: Albert Resis (ed.), *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics*. Conversations with Felix Chuev (Chicago 1993), 10.

52 Report on Stalin's discussion with the Finnish delegation, 8 October 1945, RTsKhIDNI, f. 558 (Stalin's papers), op. 1, d. 5379.

ready to help. The Winter War further strengthened the intellectuals' exceptionally right-wing convictions. No significant attraction to the left was felt by Finnish intellectuals until after 1968.

In the workers' movement after the second world war, the Winter War was seen in the context of the 'continuation war' between 1941 and 1944, when Finland was allied with the nazis. This alliance became a burden and a disrupting factor in the SDP, but the right wing prevailed, no doubt on the basis of its strengthened ideological position because of the Winter War. The new aggressive generation, the 'socialist brothers-in-arms', made sure that the SDP maintained its integrity and remained strongly anti-communist and in right-wing hands. These features of social democracy are a principal factor in explaining why Finland did not become a people's democracy after the second world war, despite communist strength and Soviet proximity. 'Obviously the biggest failure of the Finnish CP is that it could not break down the social democrats, not even widen the small split they had', Andrei Zhdanov said in 1948.⁵³

The Winter War's impact on the nature of Finnish communism was paradoxical. In summer 1940, the pro-communist left-wing movement rose to unprecedented heights, partly because the government was weakened after a lost war, but also because the communists felt that they had gained full citizens' rights with their blood, by defending their country, and were no longer willing to tolerate restrictions. A unique organization was founded, the Worker Veterans' Association, that is, a communist-led society of veteran soldiers who had fought against the Soviet Union. After the second world war this experience was seen through the prism of the Nazi-Soviet War, and not much spoken about. But the Stalinist party leadership formed in 1944 had to bear a guilty conscience about the Winter War, and could never present itself as a national force in the same sense that Togliatti could in Italy. But national feelings were preserved as a strong invisible undercurrent in party ranks, until they finally broke out. Two prominent leaders of the 'reform movement' which took over the SKP leadership in 1966, the new party president Aarne Saarinen and vice president Erkki Salomaa, both had their political baptism of fire in the worker veterans' movement of 1940, although they did not care to boast about it.

The Winter War was similar to the Civil War of 1918 also in the sense that the country's subsequent history can be seen as a consequence of it.

53 Discussion between Zhdanov and Hertta Kuusinen and Yrjö Leino, 2 January 1948, RTsKhIDNI, f. 77 (Zhdanov's papers), op. 3, d. 88.

Kimmo Rentola

is an assistant professor in the Department of Political History, University of Helsinki, Finland. He is the author of *Kenen joukoissa seisot? Suomalainen kommunismi ja sota 1937–1945* (*Which Side Are You On? Finnish Communism and the War, 1937–1945*) (Juva 1994) and *Niin kylmää että polttaa. Kommunistit, Kekkonen ja Kreml 1947–1958* (*So Cold it Burns. The Communists, Kekkonen and the Kremlin, 1947–1958*) (Otava 1997).