

Bad blood and humiliation: Finns' experiences of the Moscow peace negotiations in 1940

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Abstract: The Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union broke out 75 years ago, on November 30, 1939. From the viewpoint of the global situation, this was only a minor event on the northern periphery of Europe, but for Finland and its 3.5 million inhabitants, the state of war with this major socialist power was emotionally a question of life and death and an almost impossible test of survival. For the Finns, this bloody conflict symbolized their struggles for sovereignty, their Finno-Ugric language, the Lutheran religion and Western cultural traditions. The most heated debates during the Moscow negotiations from March 6 to 13, 1940, nevertheless dealt with the concrete matter of the exact location of the new border between the two countries. This paper will focus on the Moscow meetings from the perspective of Väinö Voionmaa, professor of history and a full member of the Finnish delegation. He made notes on the discussions held during these encounters in his diary, which have been the main source of information for the paper. In previous studies Voionmaa's role has been totally ignored, which inspired the author to analyse his roles and feelings in those dramatic days. Both choreography and culture of peace negotiations have got only little attention in historical studies as well. One surprising result of this study is the observation of how emotionally the top Russian leaders reacted to the Finns' demands for minor border adjustments.

Keywords: Peace negotiations, 1940, Väinö Voionmaa, Finnish-Russian border demarcation, diary as a source, emotions, experience

Peace negotiations on focus

The Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union started exactly 75 years ago, on November 30, 1939 when Russian troops attacked to Finland without the declaration of war. The violent hostilities lasted the next 105 days. The peace treaty of Moscow was signed in March 12, 1940 and it came into effect in the next day. The last act of the war, however, began on 6th March 1940, when the Finnish peace delegation left for Moscow. The journey was regarded as a dangerous one, as the two countries were

still at war all the time the negotiations were going on, and it was therefore not thought advisable that the Prime Minister, Risto Ryti, should be in the party, as there was a risk that he might not be allowed to return (von Fieandt 1970, 164). Eventually he did join them, however, to add weight to the delegation. The other leading figures who made up the party were State Counsellor J.K. Paasikivi, General Rudolf Walden and professor Väinö Voionmaa (1869–1947), representing the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Finnish Parliament as a whole. He was a long-standing Member of

Parliament, a former government minister and chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee. The historian Tuomo Polvinen has suggested that Voionmaa was “practically excluded” from the public discussions that formed part of the Moscow negotiations (Polvinen 1995, 141, 145), and at least it is known that his selection as SDP representative in the delegation was by no means unanimous, since the cooling of relations between him and the Foreign Minister, Väinö Tanner, in the course of the war had meant that the latter had not supported his appointment at first (Soikkanen 1987, 132). In spite of everything Voionmaa did come to be chosen for this assignment, however, and Paasikivi later proposed him for the position of Prime Minister in 1946 (Lähtenmäki 2014, 15). We will be concerned in this paper with how Voionmaa viewed the negotiations in March 1940 that brought the Winter War to an end and eventually what role he played in them. The other aim of this study is to open a view into the Finnish negotiators’ ways to communicate with each other and with the Russian delegation.

Voionmaa’s experiences of the journey to Moscow will be analysed here on the basis of his unpublished diary pages for the period 6.–13.3.1940, amounting to 43 separate, numbered handwritten sheets altogether.¹ Private diaries are especially rewarding as source material as they also convey something of the writer’s feelings and mood, i.e. they delve into the world

of subjective experience. On the other hand, the diaries of political figures can be deliberately phrased in the manner of manifestos, i.e. they may be specifically intended for publication. The diaries of well-known figures are something special, however, and can be made use of virtually in an encyclopaedic manner, as they have been estimated to be sufficiently reliable (Dawson 2000, 407–431; Stowe 2002). This status has been achieved in Finland by the edited and published diaries of president J.K. Paasikivi for the years 1914–1956.

Voionmaa’s diary of his journey to Moscow is essentially a narrative, in the form of notes made by an eye-witness, and it would appear that he never intended his diaries to be published as such but that they served as notes for his own political memoirs or other political writings. On the other hand, he was himself a historian and knew the documentary value of diaries. The public that he intended these diaries for was thus the Finnish people. Voionmaa was one of the leading figures in the Finnish workers’ education movement, a popular and prolific speaker who laid emphasis on open access to knowledge and the enlightenment of the less privileged classes, and his diaries were written not only with an air of personal reflection and discussion but also with a view to the production of information. He wrote them immediately after the events, partly in order to dispel the stress, expectations and disappointments that had accompanied the negotiations. He often commented on conversations with other members of the Finnish delegation, evaluated their views and his own and deliberated on the lines of argument selected by the group, its actions

1 Voionmaa and Paasikivi travelled to Moscow a second time on 18.3.–9.4.1940 to finalize the agreement, and Voionmaa again kept a diary, amounting to a further 80 pages. He had also written a diary during the Tartu peace negotiations of 1920. Väinö Voionmaa archives. National Archives, Helsinki.

and its relations with the government in Helsinki. Thus his diaries provide an onlooker's perspective on the discourse taking place while the Winter War was still going on. But even so, he is not speaking solely as a politician and historian but is also examining the issues from the point of view of Finland as a whole. In this respect the diaries are of a wider, national interest.

The humiliated Stalin refuses to meet the Finns

Since there were still fierce battles going on between the Finnish and Soviet armies on the Karelian Isthmus, the Finnish delegation travelled first to Turku by car and then to Stockholm (Sweden) by air, from where they continued to Moscow via Riga (Latvia). There were no other passengers in the aircraft apart from the delegation and its interpreter, secretary and typist. As the journey was a clandestine one, the Finnish negotiators were all provided with falsified passports by the Swedish Foreign Ministry. Voionmaa's identity was "Erik Magnus Bergkvist, office manager" (Voionmaa's diary 6.3.1940).

The six and a half hour flight from Stockholm to Moscow was quite an experience for Voionmaa, since air travel was not at all common at that time. Once they came into Soviet air space the terrain was dominated by forest, although this became sparser as they approached Moscow. The city of Moscow was not entirely unknown to Voionmaa, as he had visited it as a member of the Finnish delegation to the Tartu peace conference in 1920. It would have been easy from the low-flying aircraft

to pick out the very typical Russian villages with their main streets, and they would also have seen the occasional church or factory as well before they landed on the edge of a gigantic built-up area that formed part of Moscow. The aircraft ended up in a heap of snow at the end of the runway and had to be pulled out by a tractor and towed to the airport. The men clambered out and were met by an official of the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the head of protocol from the Russian Foreign Ministry. Russian cars took them to a small but well-appointed mansion on the Ostrovskaya Ulitsa in the centre of Moscow. It was not a hotel but a sizeable private palace. Its rooms were resplendent under their crystal chandeliers and there were delightful flower arrangements, vases and paintings everywhere. The furniture was of expensive hardwood and the salon had a grand piano in it. It transpired that the Foreign Minister of Nazi Germany Joachim von Ribbentrop had stayed in this same mansion when he visited Moscow in August 1939 (Voionmaa's diary 7.3.1940), and during his stay he signed the so called Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement. According to the pact Finland was a Soviet sphere of influence.

The Friday 8th March 1940 was to Voionmaa's mind an enormously exciting one. The men spent most of the day preparing for their visit to the Kremlin. Their principal aim in the evening's negotiations was to ensure that the originally Finnish-Karelian city of Viipuri (Vyborg) remained a part of Finland, in spite of the fact that they were perfectly aware that the Finnish government had already agreed in principle to accepting the boundary laid down in the Treaty of

Uusikaupunki (Nystad) concluded with Peter the Great in 1721. The first known peoples in the Viipuri area were Finnish speaking. After the Winter War Russian government started to propagandize Viipuri as 'an ancient Russian city' (Shikalov 2013, 27). As Voionmaa wrote, "there was no other way but to follow the advice of Madame Alexandra Kollontai and rely on Stalin's magnanimity" (Voionmaa's diary 7.3.1940). This meant that they should try to think up all manner of heartrending reasons why Viipuri should continue to be Finnish. They should explain that it was the capital of the whole of eastern Finland, that it was of great symbolic significance to the Finns and that it was important for the economy of the eastern part of the country on account of its location at the mouth of the Saimaa Canal. For these reasons Viipuri, the canal and Uuras (Vysotsk) should remain within Finland, and if Viipuri could not be retained, at least they should attempt to ensure access to the mouth of the Saimaa Canal as a corridor into Finland and a shipping route to Uuras.

Alexandra Kollontai was Soviet ambassador to Sweden at the time. She acted as an intermediary in the peace negotiations between Finland and the Soviet Union. The German ambassador in Helsinki, Wibert von Blücher, underlined later that Kollontai's role was extremely important in the turns of Finland's dramatic war time history. Kollontai had a direct telephone line with Stalin and, according to Blücher, it was Kollontai who succeeded to proselytize Stalin to make peace with the Helsinki government on March 1940. Kollontai was very familiar with the Finnish issues due to her Finnish mother Aleksandra

Masalin. Kollontai spoke Finnish and knew the country well. As a child, she used to spend her summers in the country house of her grandfather in Muolaa on the Karelian Isthmus (Kollontay 1946, 14–17).

The negotiations in the Kremlin began on March 8, 1940 at 7.00 p.m. The men were taken to the Soviet "holy of holies" in two cars, with a third one following behind. As they got out of the cars they were escorted into Vyacheslav Molotov's presence by a group of smartly dressed, efficient officers. Voionmaa easily recognised Molotov from photographs he had seen. Another man present was the young, rotund but lively Andrei Zhdanov (Voionmaa's diary 8.3.1940). Yuri Zhdanov has later recalled that his father had been reading together with Joseph Stalin a translation recently made for them of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and had had endless discussions with him about the pros and cons of an alliance with Germany (Montefiore 2004, 316). Voionmaa described Zhdanov as Finland's worst enemy and Stalin's most probable successor. Also present in the room were Alexandr Vasilevsky (Vladimirov 1995, 234), "a small, bony, very serious and sullen young man", and Molotov's secretary and interpreter, whose command of English proved to be poor. The Finns were greatly disappointed that Stalin himself was not there. The opposition's line-up did not bode well, thought Paasikivi (Paasikivi 1958, 177).

According to Voionmaa, Stalin's absence had a depressing effect on the Finns, although they still hoped that he might join them at some stage. Stalin's decision to remain aloof from the negotiations was most probably connected with the unexpectedly adverse course of the war.

He had promised to march into Finland in a couple of weeks, but this was not to be. This tiny nation had humiliated a major world power, and this had given rise to purges within the Red Army that were to continue throughout the spring. As the war had drawn on, Stalin had come to reconsider the whole enterprise: “Could we have avoided this war? In my opinion it was inevitable... A few months’ delay would have meant postponing it for twenty years...” (Montefiore 2004, 339). What he meant by postponing it for twenty years has never been explained. It is possible that he was implying that he himself would have lost his opportunity to conquer Finland, since he was 61 years old at that stage and had been ruling the Soviet Union with a heavy hand for the last twenty years or so.

It is quite extraordinary that Stalin, who held all the reins of power in the Soviet Union, should have been reluctant to come face to face with the Finnish delegates, although it is true that his opponents within Russia had clear opinions on his attempted invasion of Finland. The exiled Lev Trotsky, for instance, maintained that Stalin had mistakenly assumed that he could bring Finland to its knees simply by threatening an invasion, and there is no doubt that the latter had underestimated the legacy that the struggle for independence had left in the minds of the Finns, whose stubbornness had shown Stalin to be a victim of his own policies. Trotsky looked on Stalin as a man who had never had either a foreign policy or an internal policy of his own and had always lived on the strength of ideas put forward by others. By the time of the events of 1937–1939 he had destroyed a large proportion of his advisors, and this was

reflected in unfortunate occurrences such as the war with Finland. As Trotsky wrote, “thus began a shameful war, unnecessarily, without any clear goal, without any moral or material preparation and at a moment when even the calendar was warning against such an adventure” (Pursiainen 2011, 393). By the calendar Trotsky was referring to the onset of winter, with its deep snow and severe frosts. During the fights the temperature was often minus 30°C. On the other hand, Stalin as the dictator of a super power was not interested in the opinions of small countries like Finland; in the arena of world politics they had nothing to say.

Molotov accuses Finland of starting the war

The meeting between the Finnish delegation and the Russians began with Molotov reiterating the conditions for peace that the Soviet Union had put forward earlier. The Finns had no papers related to these conditions with them, but Risto Ryti read out Finland’s official reply in Russian “which was constructed in a peaceable, respectful tone and expressed the most fervent hope that Russia would display moderation and a sense of justice in the peace negotiations”. Molotov answered with a protracted speech in an accusing, intransigent style in which he emphasized that the prevailing conditions called for the creation of a wider security zone around Leningrad encompassing the whole of the Karelian Isthmus, the city of Viipuri and the Bay of Viipuri as far as Peter the Great’s boundary (1721). In addition, he voiced new requirements with regard to the safety of the Murmansk railway line and

demanded that the whole of the Rybachy Peninsula (Finn. Kalastajasaarento) should be ceded to the Soviet Union. Mention was also made of Hanko (which is 130 km from Helsinki to the west), not forgetting the surrounding islands, and he also drew attention to the need for a rail connection from the Murmansk line at Kandalaksha via Kemijärvi to Tornio and into Sweden and Norway. This would in effect have been a peaceful means of isolating Lapland from the rest of Finland. Voionmaa had the impression that the whole speech was an accusation against the Finns: Finland was hostile towards Leningrad and was siding with the western powers (Voionmaa's diary 8.3.1940).

To back his words up, Molotov took out a map on which the course of the new boundary between the two countries had been marked. There was also a black ring around Hanko. Voionmaa was horrified, and wrote, "I wouldn't have believed all that if I hadn't seen those black lines on the green map". The other Finns were similarly aghast. Paasikivi tried in his own speech to remind the Russians that Stalin had been content with far fewer territorial demands before the war and had regarded those as sufficient for the defence of Leningrad. Voionmaa noted, however, that no real effort was made any longer to argue for the preservation of Viipuri within Finland. They were reluctant to waste their ammunition on "crows" when the main person they intended to influence, Stalin, was to their great disappointment still not forthcoming and indeed remained so to the very end. Voionmaa then drew out the boundary demanded by the Russians and Peter the Great's boundary on a new base

map, noting that in both cases Viipuri and its surroundings would be left in Russian hands (Voionmaa's diary 8.3.1940). The Finns were also greatly put out by the fact that a large part of the discussion time was taken up with Zhdanov's attacks on Finland on the grounds that the Finns were acting in the interests of the western powers, claiming that nothing whatsoever had been done in Finland to counter the policies pursued by the western newspapers *The Times* and *Le Temps* (Voionmaa's diary 8.3.1940).

Later the Finnish envoy in Berlin reported to the Finnish Foreign Ministry that a German informant had claimed that Stalin had been opposed to an armed conflict at first but that his anger had been aroused by "a statement made by one of our negotiators that he had regarded as a personal insult" and had commenced hostilities. Stalin had probably been referring to the Finnish Foreign Minister Väinö Tanner. After that it had evidently been hard to persuade Stalin away from the war, which had succeeded only after much persuasion on January 12, 1940. At that point he had even planned to demand control over South-West Finland as a protection against Sweden, but the Germans had induced him to abandon this idea (Report by the Finnish envoy in Berlin 1.6.1940).

Finland got only sympathy of a major power

On Saturday 9th March 1940 Voionmaa awoke early and drew the Peter the Great boundary on the map more accurately. The negotiators spent the day in their mansion

and were looked after splendidly. The meals were magnificent: caviar, Siberian salmon, a mixture of crab and lobster, gherkins, soups, pasties, pork steaks on a bed of buckwheat, giant smelt, cheeses, fruit, coffee, wines and mineral water... “and that was only one of our ordinary meals”, Voionmaa exclaimed in gratitude (Voionmaa’s diary 9.3.1940). A number of alarming messages arrived during the day regarding the events of the war in the areas of Tali and the Bay of Viipuri, but towards evening a telegram came that upset the whole peace procedure, in which Colonel Aladár Paasonen informed the negotiators of extensive plans made by the British that Finland could make use of to put pressure on the Russians. Neither Foreign Minister Tanner in Helsinki nor the peace delegation in Moscow believed in this possibility, however. There had already been quite enough wild talk and rumours, but very few deeds on the part of the western powers (Voionmaa’s diary 9.3.1940).

The day’s deliberations at the delegation’s mansion were interrupted by visits from the head of the Swedish legation, Vilhelm Assarsson, and the United States’ spirited and dashing envoy, the American Jew Laurence Steinhardt. The latter had called on Molotov earlier and was of the opinion that Finns should make peace at all costs, unless Finland could survive another six months of war. Like Assarsson, Steinhardt also regarded the Peter the Great’s border as a preferable alternative to an occupation of the whole of Finland, and he consoled them that borders did not seem to be terribly permanent at that time (Voionmaa’s diary 9.3.1940). Molotov had been particularly favourably disposed towards Steinhardt

and had treated him to a particularly alcoholic lunch in order to engender new confidence in Soviet-American relations (Nevakivi 2000, 316). By this stage Finland had become resigned to having to cede some territory, and the moment of decision came about on Sunday 10th March, leading Voionmaa to write “We are prepared at once to relinquish the Karelian Isthmus, Viipuri and Käkisalmi, the whole of the Isthmus, that is. We have promised to include Viipuri even though it can be of no military or other significance to Russia” (Voionmaa’s diary 10.3.1940). It was evident that the loss of Viipuri was a ghastly thought for Finns: “Terribly, terribly, terribly”, wrote Voionmaa (Pakaslahti 1970, 302).

At two o’clock in the afternoon of 10th March, the Finns were taken back to the negotiating table, but only to hear that the Soviet Union was not prepared to make any concessions with regard to its demands. Voionmaa was embarrassed that his minimal knowledge of Russian and hardness of hearing prevented him from taking accurate notes during the sessions. Paasikivi was the Finnish negotiator who spoke most readily, although Ryti gave what Voionmaa reckoned to be an excellent general summary of the situation. After receiving this news of the hopelessness of their cause, the delegates sent telegrams off to Helsinki asking for authority to make peace and an indication that the conditions for peace had been accepted. What they received by return mail were slightly dubious assessments of the situation. It was not until the following morning that notice of acceptance of the conditions and authority to sign a peace agreement arrived, the wording being that “Circumstances

compel the government to accept the conditions as they stand". At 11.00 a.m. on the following day, 11th March 1940, Voionmaa wrote, "It is accomplished". The negotiators had in any case been informed that the predicament of the Finnish troops at the front was such that a truce should be brought about as quickly as possible, and Voionmaa perceived a bitter sense of urgency among the delegates, as if every moment that they prevaricated in Moscow the catastrophe on the front was getting worse and the blood of young Finnish men was being spilled to no avail (Voionmaa's diary 10.3.1940).

Those responsible for drawing up the peace agreement in Moscow went about their task in very low spirits. Voionmaa began drawing the course of the Finns' proposed boundary on the map and adapting the clauses of the Treaty of Tartu for this new purpose. The final meeting began at six o'clock in the evening and lasted two hours. Molotov was unrelenting, and it was only when Ryti pointed out that the great power was apparently getting everything it had asked for that he gave in a little and Voionmaa was able to draw in a little extra land for Finland at the latitude of Värtsilä. The negotiators laughed, and Molotov took out his pen and cut some of that area back, so that in the end he would consent to only minimal adjustments. The delegates were very much on edge when they return to the mansion, and Walden accused Paasikivi of giving in to the Russians' proposal, which the Finns then had to accept. Walden maintained that it had been specifically agreed that a joint committee should be appointed to draw

up the peace treaty. In the end the dispute went on for a considerable length of time (Voionmaa's diary 11.3.1940).

Many factors have been brought forward in attempts to explain why Stalin made peace with Finland so quickly and during the time when the Red Army finally began winning. Lev Trotsky's explanation was that he feared that Britain and France would ally themselves with Finland, which would have precipitated an all-out war between the Soviet Union and the western powers, which Stalin did not want at that stage. On the other hand, Trotsky also pointed out that Hitler may have demanded that Stalin should abandon his plans for the Russification of Finland because he himself perceived this policy as a threat to his own plans for occupying the Nordic countries. Trotsky believed that Hitler was not interested in Finland as such but in the country's role as a buffer between Germany and Russia (Pursiainen 2011, 394). On March 5, 1940 Molotov recorded that the danger of a foreign intervention is great (Rentola 2013, 1103). Hitler was afraid that if Stalin were to occupy Finland the Germans would lose the bases for their own troops that they intended to establish there. Some researchers have underlined that Stalin's attack on November 30, 1939 to Finland was based on serious misjudgement. According to this interpretation Stalin felt safe in attacking Finland on the basis of intelligence and diplomatic reports, and the treats against Baku and problems in Turkey hurried him to make peace with Finland in March 1940 (Rentola 2013, 1096, 1089–1112). To Finns the Winter War was a question of national existence, life and death.

It also became evident in Finland in the course of the interim peace that the Treaty of Moscow had been a controversial matter for the Soviet Union up to the very last moment. Opinions in the Supreme Soviet had been divided into two camps: those in favour of peace and those against it. The commanders of the Red Army had campaigned energetically for a continuation of the war and the total occupation of Finland, while the Communist Party pointed out that the war had already been too costly and called for the signing of a peace treaty. The party believed that Finland could in any case be taken over later by means of a revolution. The heated discussion that ensued failed to yield any clear result and the matter went to a vote, in which the party's opinion prevailed and the decision was taken to bring hostilities to an end (Suomen ja Neuvostoliiton suhteet sodan jälkeen. Helmikuu 1941; Post-war relations between Finland and the Soviet Union, February 1941).

Disappointment vents itself in disputes

The Finns set to work on completing the formulation of the peace agreement on Tuesday 12th March, but at the same time their tensions and disillusionment welled up in the form of an embittered search for those guilty of causing the war. Walden vociferously blamed the Minister of Defence, Juho Niukkanen and the former Prime Minister Aimo Cajander, while Risto Ryti vented his anger on the Rural Party and Paasikivi expressed his desire to “put

a bomb under” the Foreign Ministry and most of its ambassadors and cursed Sweden as being “a load of dirt” and the Swedes as “a useless nation with their *smörgåsbord* and *belan går* national anthem”. Even at this late stage the Moscow negotiators received a further message from the Finnish Ambassador in London, G.A. Gripenberg, intended to be consolatory but in fact quite irrelevant, to the effect that Britain would come to Finland's aid (Voionmaa's diary 12.3.1940). The borders of Europe were in still in transition: Exact two years earlier (March 12, 1938) Hitler's troops had occupied Austria and during the next day Austria incorporated to Nazi Germany.

Two meetings were held in the course of that same day, 12.3.1940. At the first of these the Finns attempted to make a few improvements to the agreement, but only managed to gain amendments to a few small points, while at the second, which began at 10.00 p.m. – so that it was again held at night – they managed to get a few clarifications approved. When they returned to their mansion they began work on translating the document into Finnish, so that it was ready by morning. Wednesday 13th March 1940 was the day on which the delegation was due to return home. The men went to sign the Finnish copies of the treaty, to which the Russians had made a couple more corrections, and then they bid a cool goodbye to their Russian counterparts, went back to the mansion to eat and then left by car for the airport. They were seen off at the airport by the Russian head of protocol, V. Barkov, and the head of the Swedish legation, Vilhelm Assarsson, together with the Swedish military attaché.

Assarsson tried to relieve the tension of the situation by praising “the wise men who had opted for peace” (Vladimirov 1995, 244).

Voionmaa’s final evaluation of the first phase of the journey to Moscow was that there were no immediate prospects of an overthrow of the “Soviet model”. The Soviet system seemed to have simply become consolidated both internally and externally in the course of time. This fact should be taken into account in Finnish politics, he surmised. Finland should avoid all skirmishes that could lead to a new war and concentrate its efforts on strengthening the international system of justice, as this could provide improved security for small countries, allow them to cooperate among themselves and provide opportunities for invigorating Finnish culture (Voionmaa’s diary 1.4.1940).

Paasikivi and Voionmaa returned to Moscow for the period 18.3.–9.4.1940 to polish the final version of the treaty, and this period of working together helped Voionmaa to understand Paasikivi’s opinions on various Finnish politicians. In Paasikivi’s opinion, “Mannerheim was not a great wartime leader but merely a celebrity, although a man of wisdom in other respects”. As for Tanner, Paasikivi had supported him for the post of Foreign Minister because he could have restrained any excessive enthusiasm for making war,

but he had been unsuccessful as a minister during the Winter War (Voionmaa’s diary 29.3.1940; Polvinen 1995, 166). Voionmaa agreed with Paasikivi that the basic reason for the misfortune that had befallen Finland lay in the movements that favoured either passive resistance or right-wing activism, as these had between them given rise to an excessively tense spirit of independence. It was on this latter that the country’s future had been built up, forgetting that the might of a great power is a more potent factor than the rights and independence of small states. They came to the conclusion that a monarchy – as was mooted in 1918 – might have saved the country from this fate, and they also perceived a danger that the same men would continue in the Finnish political leadership and bring the country into the same predicament over again. Paasikivi’s outburst on this topic was manna to the pacifist Voionmaa, and he revelled in the former’s ranting against men who are more concerned about striving for the presidency than about the country’s future (Voionmaa’s diary 7.4.1940). What he had experienced left him with a powerful feeling that the Winter War could have been avoided with a few minor territorial concessions and some cautious diplomacy, and indeed, Mannerheim, Paasikivi and the influential Coalition Party politician Edwin Linkomies all concurred with him in this.



Figure 1. Väinö Voionmaa (right) with the leading figure of the Social Democratic Party of Finland Väinö Tanner. Photo: The Finnish Labour Archives. Helsinki.

Expert advisor and Paasikivi's therapist

If we set out to evaluate Voionmaa's roles as a member of the Finnish delegation at the Moscow peace talks in spring 1940 we find that they were surprisingly varied. In the first place, he was Finland's leading specialist in the nature and history of the country's eastern border, a notable scholar in matters concerned with Karelia and a

professor of history who had laid emphasis on Finland's northern dimension. His principal work in this field had been his *Suomen karjalaisen beimon historia* (History of the Karelians, 1915). Voionmaa looked on Finland above all as an Arctic country and had published his views on this in the works *Suomi Jäämerellä* (Finland beside the Arctic Ocean, 1918) and *Suomen uusi asema* (Finland's new status, 1919). At a more concrete level, he was a cartographer who

was able to draw the various boundary lines on a map and adjust them where necessary and an expert advisor who could be active in the background and ensure that the boundaries were correctly defined and indicated on the map. Secondly, he had the reputation of being a man of moderate opinions both in his own party, the Social Democrats, and in national politics in general, and it was for this reason that he was sent to Moscow in preference to his controversial party colleague the Foreign Minister Väinö Tanner. Nikita Hruštsev, for instance, named in his memories Tanner and Mannerheim as the first enemies of the Soviet Union. According to the Soviet leader, Tanner was certainly an old social democrat but was in spite of that an implacable enemy of Marxism-Leninism until his death (*Hruštšev muistelee* 1971, 136).

Thirdly, Voionmaa had wide experience of foreign policy matters and peace negotiations, having been a member of the delegation sent to the Tartu peace conference in 1920, like Paasikivi and Walden, and having been foreign minister in 1926–27 and deputy foreign minister in 1938, when he had met the informal Russian negotiator Boris Yartsev. Before this he had been instrumental in spring 1918, at the beginning of the Finnish Civil War, in tracing out the new boundary between (Red) Finland and (Bolshevik) Russia.

Fourthly, one largely forgotten but highly essential role played by Voionmaa in the Moscow negotiations of 1940 was to act as a confidant, listener, critic and therapist for his friend Paasikivi, a companion on whom the latter could test the validity of his ideas. A very similar situation had existed in the

Tartu negotiations of 1920, where Väinö Tanner would test his theories and acquire new factual information in conversations with Voionmaa. In view of the above roles, Voionmaa cannot be regarded as having been a bystander at the Moscow peace negotiations but rather he was a significant and influential advisor working assiduously in the background.

All in all, the Moscow negotiations in 1940 were surprisingly emotional, featuring expressions of anger, resentment, a desire for revenge, disappointment and disrespect. The imbalance between the delegations was very obvious from the very beginning. The Finnish negotiators were anguished and insulted by the absence of Stalin and the accusations and inflexibilities of Molotov and Zhdanov. In addition, the negotiations took place often in the late evenings or during the night time which was very exhausting for the Finnish, mostly elderly delegates. Paasikivi was already 70 and Voionmaa 69 years old. In the broader context of historical peace negotiations, the Moscow talks remind one of the conclusions reached in Versailles in 1919, when the victors simply found Germany guilty of causing the war and denied its delegation any opportunity to comment on the peace conditions (Lesaffer 2004; Vollrath 2004). Although Finland had not received any military help from the Allies, the Russian delegation at the talks in Moscow in 1940 accused the country of being the instigator of the war. It was not until the 1960s that Russian historians proved that it was the Soviet Union that had initiated the hostilities. The results of the negotiations in Moscow were a shock for Finns, as their military and political leaders

had misled them into believing that Finland had a better negotiating position. People in every part of the country flew flags at half-mast on March 13, 1940, the first day of peace. All in all, Finland lost 10% of its surface area, including the city of Viipuri and the Karelian Isthmus. It is reasonable to argue that the hostile behaviour of the Soviet negotiators in Moscow increased the Finns' desire for vengeance and their willingness to allow German troops to pass through Lapland from September 1940 onwards, and finally to make a comrade-in-arms agreement with Germany in the summer of 1941.

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