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IN SWEDEN AT THE TIME OF WORLD WAR II

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ON THE NIGHT of June 22, 1941, Prime Minister of Sweden Per Albin Hansson stayed at his apartment in Olsten near Stockholm from celebrations of the Midsummer Festival, one of the most popular outdoor holidays in Sweden, preferring to have a party at home. “He knew that war may break out any moment and he did not want to leave Stockholm. He had asked [...] the foreign minister and close friends over to have a bite to eat, a couple of drinks and play cards. The party went on until the small hours. Hardly had Per Hansson gone to bed, the telephone rang and he was told that Germany invaded Russia. So the premier took the tram and went downtown.”¹

He learned on arrival that the Germans had demanded, among other things, the use of Swedish railroads to transfer to Finland their 163rd Infantry Division commanded by General Erwin Engelbrecht. The head of Sweden’s Foreign Ministry hastened, behind the premier’s back, to report the German demands to King Gustaf V Adolf who summoned the head of government to appear at his Stockholm residence and threatened to abdicate unless the government met these demands.

This started the political Midsummer Crisis. The premier objected to meeting the German demands and said as much to the monarch at 11 a.m. on June 22, 1941. There were many among the top circles, however, who approved compliance and the prime minister wondered which policy to adopt to consolidate the nation. I ought to note that practically all military officers, and especially generals, in Sweden at that time were traditionally pro-German, since Sweden in general had close historical ties to Germany.

At 3 p.m. the government gathered at the Royal Palace and decided to permit the transfer through Swedish territory of the Engelbrecht Division, on the way to fight against the Russians in the northernmost section of the Eastern Front.² King Gustaf V was so pleased that he patted Hansson on the shoulder and warmly thanked him understanding that it was not easy for the premier, a Social Democrat, to accept this

compromise. He should have also realized that this compromise was not to be the last one. Sweden did soon make another concession to Nazi Germany.

In August 1941, Swedish naval ships escorted German vessels carrying northwards yet another German division through Sweden's closed areas along the rugged coast. In September 1941, the Germans had the Swedes to agree to extend to Germany government credits to pay for their orders with. Swedish medical evacuation trains were carrying wounded Germans to hospitals in Norway from Finland via Sweden. Princess Sibylla, the wife of Crown Prince Gustav Adolf, visited those trains and handed out to the wounded Germans chocolates, coffee and cigarettes! German soldiers also traveled through Sweden on their furloughs.

What was the Swedish monarch doing later? In October 1941, he wrote a letter to Hitler in his faultless German. Here's what he wrote: "Mein lieber Reichskanzler (My dear Chancellor!)! I have had an urge to write to you openly on a question of tremendous importance for me and my country. This is the Russian question. I believe this is of great importance for the future and you can learn what I think about the essence of this question. I saw as early as after the First World War what an enormous danger Bolshevism entails and continues to entail not only to us in the North, but also to entire Europe. I therefore wish to express my warm gratitude for the fact that you have decided to wipe out this pest using all possible means. I congratulate you on your already achieved victories.

"I would also like to assure you that the majority of my people share my views on this question even if they perhaps have not become evident strongly enough. My activities will always be directed to convincing all those who may have doubts about the correctness of my views.

"I ought to ask you to see to it that this letter is not to be made public, at least for the duration of the war (otherwise it would weaken my positions and hamper my activities directed at maintaining good relations with Germany), and I count on understanding on your part. (You are aware, I am confident, of the difficulties that constitutional monarchy entails.) You may rest assured, however, that I will be doing my best to preserve the good relations existing between us.

"With heartfelt greetings, devoted to you, Gustaf"

Before sending this letter to the addressee, the king nevertheless decided to consult his Foreign Minister Christian Günther. The latter had no objections to a step like that but said that it should be a purely personal letter. At the same time, the foreign minister, just in case, informed about it Premier Per Albin Hansson about it. However Hansson was expressly against the idea of sending the letter to Hitler. So the monarch resorted to a trick – on Oct. 28, 1941, he summoned the German ambassador, Prince of Wied, to his palace, read out the message to him and asked him to convey the contents to the chancellor. As soon as at 11:45 p.m. the same day, the message was in Berlin and was to be communicated to Hitler's headquarters at the Eastern Front. Suffice it to mention here that Chapter 11 of the Constitution of Sweden stipulates that all messages addressed to other countries, regardless of their content, should be conveyed via the government...

What do we make of the king's message and its contents? Understandably, the monarch was a bitter enemy of the communist ideology. But think of the tone of the missive! This is yet another proof that Sweden and its leadership (the king was formally

regarded as head of state) were prepared to go to any lengths to avoid having their country drawn into the vortex of worldwide carnage.

Let me note that the entire letter episode was a closely guarded secret and it was made public only many years after the war.

Sweden's fear of Germany, especially among the Social Democrats and Liberals, grew further once the Nazi forces invaded its neighbors Denmark and Norway hands down.

This is why the shipping began of the famous Swedish iron ore from Kiruna ore mine beyond the Polar Circle (incidentally, this mine is still a joint-stock company fully owned by the government) across the Baltic Sea for the needs of Nazi Germany's war machine. According to the Swedish Communist newspaper *Norrskensflamman*, 45,000 tons of high-grade ore were transported daily by sea in 1941. Iron ore supplies in 1943 totaled 11 million tons. Trade between Sweden and Nazi Germany was steadily growing, and Sweden's export to Germany, its satellites, Scandinavian and Balkan countries totaled 72% in 1942. Supplies of iron ore to Germany continued practically till the moment where the Third Reich was already on the road to collapse. When in 1944 no one had any doubt about the outcome of World War II, the Germans were still getting from Sweden 7.5 million tons of iron ore.

The Swedish port of Luleå was specially adapted to handle iron ore shipped to Germany across the Baltic Sea. It stands to reason why Soviet submarines were sinking ships that carried iron ore. This war on the Baltic Sea snuffed out the lives of both Swedish and Soviet sailors.

For example, the Soviet S-7 submarine captained by S.P. Lisin, a Hero of the Soviet Union, was lost in the Southern Kvarken strait, and the S-8 submarine captained by N. Braun was lost off the island of Öland.

Many a Soviet submarine went to their grave in the shallow waters of the Baltic Sea. But who can blame the Soviet seamen for sinking Swedish vessels carrying strategic cargoes destined for Nazi Germany? Sweden's neutrality was flawed; it was pro-German neutrality while the war was about the survival of the USSR and its peoples, the Russian people above all. The Swedes tried all they could to avoid being drawn into the war; the Soviet Union tried to emerge from the war as victor ...

Hitler just read the letter and for a while left it unanswered. In December 1941, after the defeat of the Nazi forces near Moscow, and after Germany declared war on the United States, Hitler's envoy Karl Schnürre arrived in Stockholm to convey to the king Hitler's reply. In that letter the German Fuhrer complained about the Russian winter, snow and freezing cold which, he argued, hindered the successful German offensive and, echoing the Swedish monarch, he argued that all countries and nations waging this struggle (that is to say, struggle against Bolshevism – *Author's note*) in the East were defending with the blood of their soldiers not only their own countries but also the entire European continent. "If Finland falls, the Bolshevik tide will automatically engulf Norway, and finally Sweden," Hitler wrote to Sweden's monarch to say he was pleased with the king's support for his struggle...

Incidentally, a few words about Finland allied with Germany. Soviet armed forces were also fighting against the Finnish forces where soldiers also died – Finns and Soviets.

How did the combat operations in the northern sector end? Who and how was involved in helping them to end?

When a correspondent in Sweden, I turned up many publications with pieces of evidence that appreciable role in bringing those combat operations to an end belonged to the Soviet envoy to Sweden, the legendary Aleksandra Kollontai, and the Swedish entrepreneur Markus Wallenberg. Many people know this but some little-known details will expand their knowledge.

On February 12, 1944, a prominent Finnish political figure, Juho Kusti Paasikivi, and his wife arrived in Stockholm ostensibly for his wife's health. Three weeks later, however, the Swedish papers dished out a sensation: he was in Stockholm for something more than consulting doctors about the health of his wife. Paasikivi was having meetings at Grand Hotel Saltsjöbaden with the head of the Soviet diplomatic mission Aleksandra Kollontai, and the subject they discussed was of utmost urgency: Finland's withdrawal from the war. Contacts between Paasikivi and Kollontai were helped by "one Swedish industrialist." The whole things seemed intriguing and the Soviets were obliged to react. On March 1, 1944 the Soviet foreign ministry information office issued an announcement entitled "On the Issue of Soviet-Finnish Relations" which said among other things: "Of late the foreign press has been spreading all manner of rumors and inventions alleging that talks are being conducted between the Soviet Union and Finland regarding the stopping by Finland of military operations against the USSR and Finland's withdrawal from the war. In reality, official talks between the Soviet Union and Finland have not begun yet and the matter concerns preparations for such talks.

"In the middle of this past February," the announcement went on, "one prominent Swedish industrialist turned to Soviet envoy to Stockholm Aleksandra Kollontai to announce that a representative of the Finnish government, Mr. Paasikivi, was in Stockholm with instructions to try to sound out the terms for Finland's pulling out of the war..."

This industrialist was Marcus Wallenberg, or "Dodde" as his friends called him, who had great affection for Mme Kollontai. He was Sweden's tennis champion, one of the first Swedes to compete at Wimbledon and had a gift for diplomacy. Swedish papers wrote that even Stalin would like to see him as Sweden's envoy to Moscow despite Marcus Wallenberg's hatred of socialism and most negative views of the USSR...

This writer worked in Sweden and looked through many books and memoirs written by prominent Swedish political figures and diplomats. Reading these accounts, including those of Leif Leifland, who was secretary general at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1970s, I could conclude that Kollontai received, at the end of 1941, instructions from Moscow to convey to the Finnish government that the Kremlin was interested in concluding a separate peace with Finland. In Stockholm they made it plain to her that they could not help her with this "ticklish matter" through official channels. That was true because how could Sweden, whose every effort was directed at not getting drawn into the war, officially help Finland, Germany's ally, get out of that war? This course would be utterly rejected by Germany and could provoke it into actions Sweden did not bargain for, all the less so because Swedish intelligence knew about the Blue Fox plan envisaging German occupation of Sweden. This plan was not to be realized owing largely to the Soviets' winning the battles of Stalingrad and especially of Kursk, for which the Swedish envoy in Moscow voiced gratitude in his discussion with a deputy Soviet foreign minister on June 14, 1943...

That was when Kollontai thought about the Wallenbergs. Her first meeting with the Swedes to discuss Finland's withdrawal from the war took place late in November 1943, of which wrote in his memoir entitled "På Vakt" (In the Service) Erik Boheman, secretary general of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the war. "My mediation contacts," Boheman wrote, "began at the end of 1943. But before that there were contacts between the Finns and Russians with mediation of the Belgian Ambassador to Sweden Prince De Croix, which, however, resulted in nothing. On November 20, Mme Kollontai asked me to come to visit her. She was ill and received me sitting in a wheel chair (recovering from a stroke). The reason for the sudden invitation was, according to her, that she had received "a very important and urgent communication" whose substance was as follows: if the Finnish side had a wish to send its representative to Moscow to exchange views with regard to a future treaty, they were ready to receive him in the Soviet capital. At the same time Kollontai explained that the Soviet government had no ambitions to turn Finland 'into a Russian province...'"

I drew this information from Aleksandra Kollontai's letters to the leader of the Communist party of Sweden Sven Linderot. (His adopted daughter, Inna Linderot, let me have some time ago 38 letters from Kollontai to him and his wife.)

Some Swedish press reports at that time said that the Swedish capital was likely to host a conference of three powers. The newspapers expected the USSR and its allies to attend the conference. The subject of discussion was to be a possible separate peace deal between the Soviet Union and Finland. (The Swedish papers wrote that Kollontai was to be elevated to the rank of ambassador so that her diplomatic status could measure up to the high level of the meeting. I might note that Aleksandra Kollontai was signing her letters to the Linderots as Foreign Ministry adviser even if she was of course doing the job of ambassador. But her innate tact and the rules of subordination (she was not given the rank of ambassador after all) dictated that she should sign papers precisely like she did). We can only guess what the physical and psychological stress she experienced as head of the USSR diplomatic mission in the Swedish capital at that time.

During one of their meetings, Kollontai hinted to the secretary general of Sweden's Foreign Ministry that it would not be bad if Boheman could help with getting a reply from Finland stating its opinions. A couple of weeks later, he handed the Soviet envoy a document detailing Finland's position...

It is interesting to learn that Kollontai, at Boheman's suggestion, played, as we can see, a considerable part in the future of Finnish General Gustav Mannerheim. Boheman told in a conversation with Kollontai about his fear that Moscow could demand putting the general on the list of war criminals. In fact members of the anti-Hitler coalition began to increasingly discuss military criminals and what punishments they should be given once the war was over. Mannerheim could quite possibly be put on the list of such criminals. This would reduce to nothing all the diplomatic efforts to seal a deal between the USSR and Finland.

Boheman asked Kollontai without beating about the bush whether she could guarantee that no such thing could happen. Otherwise, he said, he would not be able to go on with his mediatory mission. "She mused and finally said she knew what I had in mind and that she would turn to Stalin bypassing Molotov to avoid possible complications. She had a direct channel to the Russian dictator, but she could give me an answer four or five days later. Not long after she let me know that, following her consultations at the top

level, she could assure me that no demand of the sort I mentioned would be ever made. Unlike in many other cases, the Russians kept their word.”

In the meantime, the Kremlin was insisting that the Finnish representative traveled to Moscow. The Finns must have been playing for time in hopes to get a clearer explanation of all Soviet terms. At this point they hit on the idea to send to Helsinki the well-known banker Marcus Wallenberg. “Asked by Gunther and Mme Kollontai,” Boheman wrote, “Wallenberg traveled to Helsinki to persuade the Finnish leaders, whom he knew well, to send Paasikivi to Stockholm.”

The meeting between Paasikivi and Kollontai took place, as I already mentioned, in February 1944 at the Grand Hotel Saltsjöbaden owned by the Wallenbergs. During the meeting the Finn was given the terms of the Soviet side. Later, on March 8, Boheman conveyed to Kollontai the Finnish government’s reply confirming Finland’s aspiration for peace and proposed that the issue of German forces deployed in the Finnish territory be settled through talks. This was an extremely complicated question because some 150,000 German soldiers and officers were deployed in Finland...

There were yet many more obstacles to overcome to get Finland out of the war: Paasikivi was to visit Moscow for very difficult talks concerning the seven Soviet articles of the proposed armistice agreement; still ahead was the Soviet summer offensive at the Karelian Isthmus, which was to worsen the position of the Finnish forces and the situation inside Finland; still to take place was the visit to Helsinki by Ribbentrop resulting in President Risto Ryti’s sending a letter to Hitler to assure him that Finland would not surrender an inch of its territory without Germany’s endorsement; still ahead was Ryti’s resignation and Mannerheim’s becoming president. As late as the end of August, the Finns began clamoring for peace. The treaty on armistice between Finland and nations which were in a state of war against it was signed in Moscow on Sept. 19, 1944.

The lines in Kollontai’s letter to the Linderots of Sept. 8, 1944 that catch the eye are “I had a very difficult period. But I hope the result will be good this time around...” I think in this instance she did not mean her own state of health but the Soviet-Finnish talks whose result was quite satisfactory for the USSR.

One can only admire the envoy’s brilliant efforts in coping with a task assigned to her by the central authorities which was hard in all respects and had a momentous importance for the entire planet.

No wonder she was nominated in 1946 for the Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to getting Finland out of the war even before Germany’s defeat. The Stockholm-based *Aftonbladet* reported on October 30, 1946 that behind the nomination was a group of Finnish politicians including Prime Minister Paasikivi and many members of his cabinet. Kollontai did not become Nobel laureate, but the fact that despite her political convictions many reputed political figures in northern capitalist countries nominated her for this most prestigious prize speaks for itself...

There is yet another episode that interested me during my posting to Sweden. I have in mind the bombing of Stockholm in February 1944. I remember well when once O.A. Grinevsky, Russian ambassador to Sweden, asked me: “Do you know that Stockholm came under air bombing?” Seeing me surprised he cried out: “What do you mean? Having worked for years in Sweden and writing about this country and not knowing a thing like that?” Stung by his remarks, I went to the Royal Library to read the papers of that period.

And finally I read these headlines in the *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*: “Russian Bombs Fell on Stockholm!” and “Sweden Makes Protest against Moscow.” The newspapers reported that bombs fell on February 22 on the southern areas of the Swedish capital. Crowds of city residents gathered to look at the huge craters. A neutral Sweden had never seen anything like that before and even the police later admitted they thought the city had been hit by meteorites!

What kind of protest was it and how did Moscow react? I called an official, Joste Grassman at Sweden’s Foreign Ministry to inquire. He told me that documents pertaining to this episode had been declassified and put into the State Archives. There I was provided with copies of several dispatches exchanged in February 1944 between the Soviet foreign ministry and the Swedish mission in Moscow.

Here are snatches from the coded message sent to Moscow on Feb. 25 1944: “In the night of February 22 and 23, between 8 p.m. and 00:40 a.m., foreign aircraft appeared over Stockholm from the east. ... Found on the fragments of the dropped bombs was Russian lettering. Some material damage was done to the cities of Stockholm and Strängnäs. Several people sustained minor injuries. You ought to bring the above to the attention of the Soviet government and point out that the bombs were dropped probably from Soviet aircraft which were taking part in operations over Western Finland mentioned in the report of the Sovinformburo [Soviet Information Bureau]. Although the report also said that Soviet aircraft did not fly over the area in Stockholm ... the Swedish government, however, pointed to the possibility that four Soviet planes which, according to the report, returned to their bases, could have strayed into the Swedish airspace. ... The Swedish government once again asks for measures to be taken to preclude a repetition of such cases. (Reading the communication, I paid attention to the words “once again asks.” Does this mean a similar thing had happened before?)

The reply from the Swedish mission followed on Feb. 27. The communication said at the start that the four planes did return to their airfields after all. The coded message then once again cited Moscow’s official opinion arguing that no Soviet planes appeared over the territory of Sweden. As is obvious from the communication, Sweden’s charge d’affaires to the USSR Hegglef listened to the opinion of the Soviet Union and said that on occasions during the war bombs and mines made in Britain fell to the Swedish territory, but the Brits admitted their errors and the Swedes took this with understanding.

The Swedish diplomat was summoned to the Soviet foreign affairs committee in the evening of Feb. 28, 1944, where he was told that “the air raid on the area in Stockholm, mentioned in the note of the Swedish Mission, was obviously carried out by German or Finnish planes for the purpose of provocation. In connection with the foregoing, the Soviet government rejects the protest of the Swedish government contained in the note of the Mission as absolutely groundless.”

Having read the telegrams exchanged between the diplomats, I decided to turn to the Military Archives of Sweden. I just wondered what the Swedish air defense was doing and why did it not fire at the foreign planes intruding into the country’s air space.

The archives provided me with Xeroxed copies of documents, in particular, reports of the defense headquarters intended for being transmitted via the Swedish Telegraph Office. The report of Feb. 22, broadcast towards the night said that a small

number of foreign planes were flying over Stockholm and Strängnäs. Those flying over the capital sent out distress signals for which reason they were not fired at. One plane flying north of Stockholm caught fire where it supposedly crashed. It proved impossible to establish the nationality of the planes.

As I was studying the documents, I thought of several versions of what could have happened. Let's suppose the planes were indeed Soviet for they did approach Stockholm from the east or from Finland which Soviet aviation was bombing with gusto.

And what do I make of the claim that taking part in the Stockholm bombing were Finnish planes? I did not believe in the latter version. It was the moment when Paasikivi arrived in the Swedish capital for "a private visit." Why should the Finns bomb Stockholm in such a situation? Ridiculous...

Could the planes have been German and dropped bombs "for the purpose of provocation?" Then what was the aim of the provocation? In 1944, there were no longer doubts about the outcome of WWII and sensing it, the Swedes began to roll back their ties with the Third Reich. Therefore, the hopes for worsening the Soviet-Swedish relations (not ruling out, perhaps, breaking them off) were more than illusory.

What if these planes were British or American bombers which dropped bombs on the wrong targets?

Finding no answers to my own questions I called Peter Bratt of the *Dagens Nyheter* ...

"All that was because of Sidorenko," my Swedish counterpart explained. "People in Stockholm were discussing at that time a proposition that the Russians bombed the city to make the Swedish authorities release a certain Mr. Sidorenko who was, at the start of the war, head of the Intourist office in Stockholm. He was arrested, charged with espionage and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment."

A new twist in the story: What kind of person was he? "Do you think it strange," I asked Bratt, "that Moscow decided to secure Sidorenko's release by dropping bombs on the capital of a neutral country?" "That's probable," he said. "On the other hand, isn't it odd that Sidorenko's arrest made Molotov himself fly into a rage and caused the expulsion of the Swedish ambassador from Moscow?" And there the Swede suggested that I read the memoirs of the former Swedish Ambassador to Moscow Vilhelm Assarsson entitled "I skuggan av Stalin [In the Shadow of Stalin]" but before that he told me briefly about Vasily Aleksandrovich Sidorenko.

At the time of his arrest Sidorenko was 26. He was eager to be sent to the front, but all the roads to Moscow – even via Britain – were blocked and he had to stay in Stockholm. In the spring of 1942, he met a 16-year-old Swedish girl, Margot Valin and fell in love with her. This feeling, however, did not prevent him from getting from her father, an armor regiment sergeant, specifications and performance characteristics of the armored vehicles shipped to Finland and used in the Soviet-Finnish sector of the front. He gave the father of his sweetheart 400 kronor for this information. In the summer the same year, Sidorenko met a young Swede soldier, Alf Juhansson. Sidorenko showed great perseverance with regard to military secrets and finally Alf reported that to the police. Sidorenko was arrested and put in custody as were Margot's father, his wife and daughter as well as Juhansson himself who was found to have been working for both Swedish special services and German intelligence.

This story made me ask a string of questions. For example, how could Sidorenko have been trying to go to the front living in Stockholm? Was the Intourist office in the Swedish capital a private shop with its head telling all and everyone about his plans? Even if that was true, what did he do it for?

I started reading the memoirs of Assarsson to find out that on Sept. 18, 1942, after the liberation of Bryansk by the Red Army, he was received by Molotov in his Kremlin office. “Congratulating him on this new victory, I conveyed to the people’s commissar for foreign affairs greetings from His Majesty. Molotov thanked me, wagged his head and then burst into loud laughter. This was the first time I saw how he laughed. But he soon snapped back to being his serious self and putting on a stony expression intoned: ‘The only thing I could understand from what you’ve said is that the Germans, who stirred up the Sidorenko mess to damage our relations, are still granted the right to operate in Sweden and decide everything there the way they deem necessary.’”

As the ambassador’s memoirs said, Molotov reminded to him that the Swedes permitted transit through their territory of German troops and, in the USSR’s view, generally hoped for German victory. “And could they still be hoping for it?” he asked, his eyes gleaming menacingly. “Before I could say anything in reply – and Molotov obviously wished to hear no answer – he called the Finns, for no comprehensible reason, ‘refined vegetarians...’”

The Swedish diplomat remembered well the reception arranged at the Foreign Ministry mansion in Moscow to mark the liberation of Kiev. “When Molotov, wearing the new diplomatic uniform, approached me, he only wagged his head and muttered something about the need for better relations with Sweden. He then suddenly said in a higher tone of voice that the Sidorenko case was a dark cloud in our relations. Following which he turned his back on me and walked toward the next ambassador.”

But why was the Kremlin so protective of “a certain” Sidorenko? The former ambassador hazarded the supposition that behind Sidorenko was none else but Beria. But he did not explain why he thought so. In December 1943, Assarsson noticed that two Lubyanka agents were tailing him. And he soon discovered why. A cable from Kollontai came to Moscow from Stockholm on Dec.18, 1943. She reported that the Swedish military attaché was feeding to Hitler’s headquarters secret information about the Red Army and insisted that the attaché and ambassador be immediately sent out of the Soviet Union. “I had expected many things but not an expulsion,” the ambassador remarked in his memoirs.

Anyhow, both the ambassador and military attaché had to go home by way of Stalingrad, Baku and Tehran. Later Sidorenko was pardoned and dispatched in an unknown manner to Moscow where all trace of him was lost. He was pardoned soon after the Stockholm air bombing. That must have given rise to guesses that Soviet planes bombed the Swedish capital to bring pressure to bear on the Swedish government.

This supposition is mentioned in Carl-Olof Bernhardsson’s book “Spionpolisen går på jakt [Security Agencies in a Spy Hunt]” brought out in 1952. One whole chapter in the book is about the case of Sidorenko who was arrested in his Intourist office on Vasagatan in central Stockholm on Sept. 25, 1942. He proved a hard nut to crack for Swedish police. He confirmed what his full name was and that he was born on Jan. 1,

1915 in Poltava, was married and arrived in Sweden in October 1940. He flatly refused to answer all further questions, went on a hunger strike and when the doctors feared for his psychological condition and wanted to put him in the psychiatric hospital, he offered resistance to two strapping orderlies and police had to be called.

Judging from the book, Sidorenko was behaving confidently during questionings and insisted on his release. When a member of the Soviet mission in Stockholm by the name of Vetrov visited him, he complained of the bad food: “The food is so bad I wouldn’t recommend it as a feed for swine in the Soviet Union.” Another visitor who came together with Vetrov was also Soviet diplomat by the name of Semenov. Both, according to the book’s author, were reminding to Sidorenko that behind him was “the great Soviet Union” and that “he laughs best who laughs last.” Sidorenko behaved courageously and even said that “if the Swedes think of making me work for them they are making a mistake. I would rather die for my country than to fall victim to Swedish police.” And still was there a connection between the bombing of Stockholm and Strängnäs and Sidorenko’s release? What happened to him on his return to his own country? That is what I think about looking at Sidorenko’s picture in his passport reproduced in the book: a young open face, lips pressed tightly together and a firm gaze, the rubber stamp with the state emblem and the inscription: People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs...

The double-dealing of the then-Swedish monarch and Sweden’s pro-German policy represent only one side of the story about this northern country at the time of World War II. Let’s look at some other facts.

The Swedes collected and shipped six tons of humanitarian aid to residents of besieged Leningrad in 1944.

Swedish industrial workers and women’s organizations were behind the setting up of the Joint Committee for Aid to Leningrad Children. Young women gathered together after hours to stitch clothes for children. “I remember well the enthusiasm with which we, and everyone else in Sweden, went to work to make it easier for little children who had been suffering during the siege,” recalls one of the participants in the relief campaign. The cargo consisted of medicines, clothing and utensils. There were 190 relief committees in Sweden and it was a veritable “Russian boom” in this Scandinavian country.

The humanitarian cargo collected by people in Sweden somehow reached Leningrad by sea, even before the breaking of the blockade, by way of Finland which was still in the state of war with the USSR. Once again, Aleksandra Kollontai played an important part in getting the cargo into Leningrad. One piece of proof is a letter addressed to Kollontai and signed by the then-head of the Executive Committee of the Leningrad City Council, P.S. Popkov, containing heartfelt thanks from Leningrad residents to working people of Sweden for disinterested help.

Yet another such positive episode was the Scandinavian premiere of Dmitry Shostakovich’s 7th Symphony, widely known as the Leningrad Symphony. It was a tremendous success in Göteborg on April 8, 1943. Conducting the local symphony orchestra was Carl von Garaguly, an ethnic Hungarian and anti-fascist; the score of the symphony was delivered to Sweden by way of Asia, Africa, America, and London.

The applause at the end of this first performance was perhaps more than a tribute to the Soviet composer's success but also a tribute to the entire Soviet nation already poised to score the Great Victory.

NOTES

¹ Thorsell S. *Mein lieber Reichskanzler*, Stockholm, 2006.

² Ibid

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Key words: King Gustaf V of Sweden, Aleksandra Kollontai, J.K. Paasikivi, Gustav Mannerheim, the bombing of Stockholm, humanitarian aid.

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