

¶ Kaa Eneberg, *Tvingade till tystnad. En okänd historia om några svenska familjeöden*. Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, 2000. Pp. 187. ISBN: 91-89080-58-0.

Wandering the decks of the ship bringing me back to the United States in the summer of 1966, I came across a woman of a certain age throwing coins into the sea. I enquired why she was throwing money into the water and what kind it was. The coins were Russian, she said, and added with great feeling that she hoped never to see them again. I said I had never seen a Russian coin, and she gave me the last one.

She turned out to be a Finnish-American, whose father, disappointed with capitalism after emigrating to the United States, had decided in the early 1930's, along with many other American Finns (and some Swedes), to take his family to the promised land, Soviet Karelia. She described for me a truly bleak and miserable existence of almost unimaginable hardship, neglect, and oppression, from which she longed to get away. I cannot now recall the woman's name nor where she was headed, but the details in this sad and occasionally terrifying study under review confirm the truth of the events she told me.

Kaa Eneberg is a much-respected political journalist, now-retired from *Dagens Nyheter*. What she gives us is a series of personal stories followed by an unemotional presentation of the facts in each matter. This does not mean the book is without passion, but the passion comes from engaging the reader, between the lines, so to speak.

The book has two narratives. The first presents the issue at hand, the encouragement and recruitment by the Swedish Communist Party, and the emigration in the early 1930's, of several hundreds of Swedes (perhaps more) to Soviet Karelia and something of their fate there. The second recounts the author's own engagement with the project of recording and detailing the history

of this emigration and concludes with remarks about the reactions to it of various people, including that of the leaders of the successor political party, Vänsterpartiet, itself.

The stories she has to tell are gruesome. The idealistic and the cynical tumble over each other. Giant building projects next to squalid housing, enthusiastic propaganda in place of good food, and then the cold, the Terror, the denunciations, the Gulag, the death quotas (1116 required on one order), the executions. These were the staple fare of once-hopeful immigrants on a one-way train. Eneberg has interviewed or tried to interview as many of the survivors as she could. For some reason, most of the Swedes were allowed to retain their passports and, when the “thaw” came, those who survived and wanted to leave had an easier time of it than their Finnish comrades, whose passports were generally taken away. Still, in addition to a list of the names of the Swedes known to have been executed, she has a long list of Swedes who emigrated, many of whose fates and whereabouts are unknown, and these may not be all.

Not the least interesting part of this book, however, is her own story of how she came to the project. Eneberg is a *finlandsvenska* and began by being curious about the role of her father during the war. She discovered that part of his war-duty had taken him to Soviet (at that moment in the war, Finnish) Karelia and thither she went. There she met Jurij Dimitrijevič, a Russian local historian who was trying to excavate and consecrate as a memorial a woods where many of the Scandinavians and other immigrant nationalities were shot. This led her to look into this forgotten episode in Swedish history and she eventually learned about Astrid Eriksson Kalla and her sister, Alice. She also met Astrid’s two children, Lena and Leo Eriksson, who had been attempting, with varying degrees of success to explore and tell the story of these Swedes. A series of newspaper articles in *DN* followed which have been rewritten with new material for this book.

One chapter is given over to the story told by the Eriksson Kalla sisters. They tell of being moved in trucks to a work camp, which was like a prison camp, except that they had not been tried by a court for anything. After a brief time in school, where they were taught that they were enemies of the people, at fourteen, they, too, had to start with the heavy work in the forest. All during the war, they nourished vain hopes of getting free. A relationship with a Russian dentist landed Alice in a punishment cell, where she caught malaria, which probably saved her life, as she was transferred to a sick-bay, though she was later sent to Siberia. Astrid returned to Sweden in 1956, but Alice could not come back before 1992.

It is clear that this book, which won two journalistic prizes in 2001, is intended as an interim report in an ongoing investigation. At its end, Eneberg appeals for more information about still-missing Swedes. Though she lists her sources in a considerable bibliography, Eneberg does not here document each assertion, though it is implicit that she can do so.

The reader will also be quickly aware that there is a polemical edge to this book: she ends with a series of pointed questions that still need answering, not least about the role of the Communist Party in encouraging, supporting, and, as she argues, suppressing information about this historical moment. The book is generally well-organised, but it is not always easy to find one's way back to a specific point. The single index, of names, is, alas, incomplete.

Eneberg hopes these Swedes will not be forgotten. I still have the coin.

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