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- Finland -

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FOREWORD

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MURMANSK -- A RAPIDLY DEVELOPING CENTER

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Following is a translation of an article by Aarne Tanninen in Uusi Suomi, Helsinki, 1 May 1960.

Moscow, 26 April --

In Murmansk, houses must be heated from 300 to 320 days each year.

Such figures as these make a great impression on the southern European members of an international party of newspapermen who in Moscow had dug out their overcoats, already put away in naphthalene mothballs, in preparation for a trip to the snows, ice, and abnormal day of Murmansk, one of the most northerly harbor cities of the world. To a Nordic, to whom a long winter and a short summer, a three-month night and a three-month day, are more familiar, other factors became more important; for instance, why, despite this familiarity, did it seem as if one had entered a different world?

After riding 46 hours on the train, it was a pleasant relief to step out on the station platform in Murmansk. For some time, the train had traveled along the edge of a fjord, and we had observed tens upon tens of ships riding at anchor in the open waters of the harbor, with a backdrop of beautiful tundras. There was not much snow remaining on the tundras. The streets were pleasant and the rainwater stood in puddles in some of the unpaved side streets.

Gray and Monotonous

The first impression of Murmansk was that it was a gray, smoky, and monotonous city. It was larger than we had expected. It extended 16 kilometers on a narrow strip of shore between the tundras and the fjord. A small proportion of the dwellings extended up the slopes of the tundras. The movement on the streets was surprisingly brisk. Busy people were going about their business, the men in long black raincoats, with the everpresent long-stemmed pipes hanging from the corners of their mouths, and the women with their market shopping bags, carrying home loaves of white bread and bottles of cultured milk.

The greatest part of all this has been built in the decade since 1950. The center of the city destroyed in the war -- 70 percent of the buildings in the center of the city having been laid waste in the war -- has been entirely rebuilt, this time out of stone.

Tens upon tens of thousands of people from all parts of the Soviet Union have in recent years moved to Murmansk, so that it has grown into a center that has a current population of 230,000. Of all the people whom I asked during the next three days where they were from, only two said they were born in Murmansk.

Murmansk has grown as violently as some American Klondyke city -- which, because of the similarity of the conditions, offers the best comparison -- after the discovery of gold. Three years ago Murmansk had 80,000 fewer inhabitants.

The same is true of the entire Kola peninsula. There are currently 568,000 people, or nearly twice as many as 20 years ago, living in the Murmansk economic area.

A Voluntary Migration

That is a result of Moscow policy, which in recent years has strived by all methods to effect an atom-age voluntary migration of people, on the one hand into the Arctic regions, and on the other, into the regions beyond the Urals. Murmansk needs people and labor, and apparently there always are those who are anxious to come when they are offered wages that are from 10 to 15 percent higher than standard, and when 18 days of paid summer vacation are offered above the regular amount of annual vacation. And perhaps some have been influenced by the fact that moving to these barren areas is presented to them as a patriotic duty.

We spent three interesting days in Murmansk during which conflicting impressions and feelings were aroused. Only two or three foreign newspapermen had visited Murmansk before us. We were allowed to see everything we wished and all our requests were fulfilled, the only restrictions being in the matter of photography. We were not allowed to take outdoor photographs at the power generating area, and panoramic views of the city and the harbor were prohibited. That, and some small warship lying at anchor in the fjord were the only reminders of the fact that Murmansk is also one of the important bases of the Arctic Fleet.

Tour of the City

As the first item on the agenda, our hosts took us on a tour of the city. The residents of Murmansk do not live in very dispersed fashion. They currently have about 5 or 6 square meters of living space per capita, so in that respect they are not in a more advantageous position than their other countrymen. In the center of the city they live in stone houses of three to five stories, which are of the standard type for the cities of the Soviet Union, but in the outlying areas small one-story houses of the individually owned type could also be seen. Speaking about the curious aspects of this country, we were told that there are gas ranges in many of the houses in the city, for which natural gas is brought by railroad car from a distance of thousands of kilometers from Bashkir.

The city architect told us that construction costs in Murmansk are from 35 to 40 percent higher than in the more southerly areas. Construction by means of prefabricated units has already reached into this latitude, and it is presently possible to continue construction operations throughout the year. The most astounding construction project that we encountered was the one he showed us in the very heart of the city. There they had made an immense excavation for a stadium to accommodate 12,000 spectators, with a standard length racetrack. "What can you do with a stadium here, where there are only a few snow-free months a year and only a few weeks of passable summer?" we asked.

"We intend to roof it over, so that races can be run on this cinder track throughout the year," the architect answered with obvious pride.

Of the Classical and the Monumental

Even this architect was not a native of Murmansk. He had moved to the city from an area that had been treated more kindly by nature, and everything about him gave the impression that he was deeply disturbed about how to overcome the oppression of capricious weather, the long winter, and the extended night of darkness, so that those who had moved to the city could live better lives there. He himself, as an architect, was trying to solve the problem by drafting plans, on a classical pattern, of a city verging on the monumental, of another Leningrad at the foot of barren tundras, by building roofed stadiums, theaters, and "houses of culture." Here no doubt, was one of the coercive reasons why even a Nordic felt as if he were in another, a new world here.

Each one of us individually made our own personal inspection tours of the city during those few free hours that the closely scheduled program would admit. But they were hardly worthwhile. The selection of goods was the same as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the prices were the same, and the heavy crowds the same. In the matter of fruits, however, the situation was better than in Moscow at the same time. The city had its "Lenin Main Street," the same as all the other cities of the Soviet Union, along which there was to be found the customary poster censuring the "zoot-suiters" and those who had been apprehended for misdemeanors. This time the one being censured was the manager of a store who had charged 11 rubles a kilogram for apples, when the official price was 9 rubles.

A Maritime City

Although these hurried glimpses into the streets and stores of Murmansk, and the two evenings that later were spent among the youth in the "culture houses," and the Polyarnaya Pravda and the television programs, all told that the residents of Murmansk lead their lives in the same atmosphere as anywhere else in the Soviet Union

the sea and shipping nevertheless give the city an added color of its own. Murmansk is a city of the sea. The hoarse voices of ships' foghorns was the usual music of the evenings, and seamen on shore leave so filled the restaurant of the Arktika hotel that our hosts had seen it best to reserve a diningroom for our use.

While the Murmansk area has been inhabited for centuries, it did not gain any national significance, this remote corner of earth so short-changed by nature, until the completion of the Murmansk railroad in 1917. It then provided Russia with an ice-free harbor throughout the year, that she so sorely needed to the open sea, and access to which -- unlike the Baltic and Black Sea harbors -- the other countries could not prevent, even under the conditions of a crisis.

It proved to be impossible to obtain an accurate numerical picture of the present economic significance of the Murmansk harbor. Statistical figures of the flow of goods through it were not made available to us. It is obvious, however, that its significance is increasing yearly. Murmansk is the natural starting point for the fabled northeast passage which our countryman Nordenskjold first navigated nearly 80 years ago, and which gradually has developed into an important route between the widely separated communities on the coast of the Arctic Ocean. As far back as 1953, about two million tons of goods were transported along this northerly sea route. The Seven-Year Plan now calls that this icy course of 6,000 kilometers be made into a "main thoroughfare of traffic." According to official reports, the icebreaker "Lenin" is going to have its test on this route during the navigational season that is currently opening.

A Highly Mechanized Harbor

We were familiarized with the shipping conditions in two ways: by touring the harbor and by making a brief visit late one evening to the seamen's club. The chief engineer of this harbor, that is sprinkled on both sides of the fjord, told us that he was interested mainly in showing us the mechanized features of the harbor, to which end the greatest attention had been given during recent years. In this respect, the equipment of the harbor undoubtedly can compete with any. The chief engineer showed us a concentrator designed for the loading of apatite. The apatite is transferred directly into the ships from the railroad cars along conveyor belts, and all the operations are controlled from a single control panel. Only three men are required to operate this machine, which has a loading capacity of 500 to 800 tons each six hours. The engineer explained proudly that, when the machine was completed in 1953, it became possible to transfer 80 men with shovels into other kinds of work.

That evening some of us had an opportunity to stop briefly in the seamen's club, in which foreign seamen spend their time. We entered a lobby filled with tobacco smoke, in which girls were repairing their external appearances at large mirrors. From some upper story came the sound of rhythmical dance music, and here and there on the walls of the lobby there were large pictures of "brigades of Communist labor," with captions in English. We were taken further into the building, where we saw seamen playing table tennis, sitting around, and writing postcards and letters. It was a fairly enjoyable place. All the tables were covered with English and German translations of the publications of the USSR political publishing house. On the walls there were illustrative charts with foreign language texts explaining the objectives of the Seven-Year Plan.

Large-scale Fishing

The sea supports Murmansk in still another way that at this time may be of ever-increasing importance. Its protected fjord is the base for the northern fishing fleet and the site of a large fish processing plant. Fish barrels, both full and empty, can be seen everywhere. Last year, about 300 million kilograms of fish were caught and processed in this area, and even during our visit in Murmansk a main article in the Polyarnaya Pravda urged the fishing fleet to catch more than a million kilograms a day, in order to keep within the objective.

We visited aboard a fishing vessel that then was being prepared for another two-month fishing voyage in the Arctic Ocean. It was a new and orderly vessel, and a good example of the present objective in that deep within it there was a small true fish processing plant. The objective now is that each fishing vessel will process its own products to the greatest possible extent, and the processing plant in Murmansk will then only put the finishing touches on the product before sending it to the markets. We were told that of the 30 million kilograms the Murmansk plant canned last year only 15 million kilograms were processed from beginning to end at the plant, and that the other 15 million kilograms arrived at the plant in semiprocessed condition.

One of the results of this situation is that increasing numbers of women are employed on the fishing vessels to handle the catch. In the vessel we visited they were quartered in cabins for four persons and these had undergone a major redecoration: the eye-catching pin-ups of girls had been replaced by photographs of male motion picture stars and by other feminine knick-knacks. The meals are eaten together in a fairly spacious and comfortable common mess hall, the walls of which were decorated with a photograph of Khrushchev, slogans, various seaman's knots, and photographs of good catches.

The ships usually remain two months at sea before returning to port to unload their catch; this procedure goes on throughout the year.

Nearly 4,000 women are employed in the Murmansk fish processing plants. It is actually a complex of plants consisting of a fish smoking facility, a cannery, two deep freeze installations, and a plant in which herring are packed into kegs. According to the manager, the entire plant will not be expanded much further, since the principal objective is to do more of the processing right on the fishing vessels.

The Murmansk Economic Area

Murmansk has an economic area in its own right. It is large, consisting of 140,000 square kilometers of tundra, arctic mountains, and coniferous forest zone -- three times the size of Denmark. We have already mentioned the record population increase in this area. It appears probable that in large measure it is a result of the discoveries of rich natural resources in the Kola peninsula. Already for 30 years, apatite has been mined here -- and the creation of the city of Kirov is based on this find -- and bauxite has been discovered there in the postwar years. The Murmansk nickel mines are also a part of the Murmansk economic area.

Just as in the case of the harbor shipping statistics, it was impossible to obtain figures on the current production of apatite, nickel, and bauxite. They are kept secret. But all indications point to increasing economic development, in which even Finland is participating. The Tulema river hydroelectric plant, construction of which by the Imatran Voima Oy firm of Finland has already been agreed upon with the Soviet authorities, will provide electric power for this area. The chief engineer of the Murmansk electric power installation, who had become familiar with the Kaitakoski hydroelectric plant, on learning that I was a Finn became interested to the extent of granting me a private interview. He praised the work of the Finnish hydroelectric plant constructors in very forthright and sincere language. Every now and then he would repeat, "They do good work, very good work."

Thus far this has been a factual and unembellished account of the workaday Murmansk, but what goes on when the working day ends? The two evenings we spent in Murmansk "house of culture" may illustrate one aspect of that matter.

Evening Amusement

We were guided to the first row in a large hall having a capacity for an audience of more than a thousand. The chairman of the Murmansk area economic council, with whom we had already become acquainted during an interview, and several other high officials of the city were seated in a box. Two program announcers in brown costumes appeared before the silk velvet curtain, the lights dimmed, and the program began. There followed one folksong after another, accompanied at times by accordion and at times by piano, tricks of magic, various dances, and accordion music, in an uninterrupted stream for two hours. At the termination of this program we went into another hall where dancing was going on. As anywhere else, the young men crowded the entrance and the girls, giggling and dressed in their best, were in a group further in the hall. They danced with serious expressions to somewhat outdated tangoes and foxtrots played by a small orchestra, until it became time to return to the first hall to view the documentary motion picture "Vladimir Ilyitsh Lenin."

The overall impression of Murmansk gained by the visitor in a hurry is one of a mixture of praise and wonderment. Praise for the fact that so much has been accomplished in so little time, and wonderment of the fact that Murmansk differs so greatly from other cities in northern Scandinavia. Murmansk appears as if a piece of central USSR had been moved intact into the midst of the barren arctic wasteland

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