



*Ed. Note—Our Washington correspondent was among the six American women who recently spent six weeks in Finland as guests of the Women's Press Club of Helsinki. Flying by way of American Overseas Airlines, the party arrived in the Finnish capital late in August when the Communist-inspired strike was at its crisis. The calendar for the visitors included comprehensive interviews with political and cultural leaders, journalists, industrial workers, farmers and housewives; visits to strike centers, the Russian border, and the area of Lapland which was devastated by the retreating German Army during the last phases of World War II. The following is the first of three articles on Finland written by Mrs. Miller after learning, from the Finns themselves, the inside story of a valiant little nation whose hopeful and thus-far effective struggle to maintain its democratic independence should be an inspiration to all freedom-loving people.*

HELSINKI, FINLAND (By Mail) SEPT. 12.

WE ARE still alive . . . and we have no intention of dying!" President Julio Paasikivi, most widely beloved and respected official in Finland, was speaking. He had slipped away from the magnificent reception room of the President's Palace, where he and his wife had just greeted several hundred tea-time guests, to talk to a group of us in an adjoining salon. We were eleven—six Americans and five Britishers, all recently arrived in Finland as guests of the Women's Press Club of Helsinki; and the interview—first of its kind—had been arranged at the request of the club president, Mrs. Anni Voipio-Juvas, as she had guided us down the reception line a few minutes earlier.

We gathered around the venerable Chief Executive, who has served his country in many high official capacities for more than thirty years. I am sure the others were wondering, as I was, whether he would answer our questions; or, if he did, whether he would mute our reports with the Finnish equivalent of that familiar Washington refrain, "Don't quote me."

He was the first official who had granted us an interview since our arrival in the country which the uninformed consider as being in the shadow, at least, of the Iron Curtain. What could he say to us? What would he say?

He spoke in English. He welcomed us to his country, expressed the hope that we would stay long enough to learn all about it, and to understand its position in the world picture; spoke of his friends in America and in England; expressed his appreciation for the moral and material help both countries had given Finland in times of stress.

The interview marked our first lesson in Finnish frankness. Unhesitatingly, he answered all our questions. His statement, quoted at the beginning of this article, was a quick reply to the pointed

query, "In view of the threat to the East, do you think it is possible for Finland to maintain its independence?"

His affirmation that Finland had "no intention of dying" was followed by an expression of hope that there would be more and more visitors from America and England who could help to interpret his country's position and her efforts to maintain it. "We appreciate understanding. We do not ask help," he said. When he was asked about the strike, he said that the latest indications were that it would subside, and when asked whether it had been caused by the Communists, he said the source had not been determined. "But the difficulties will be worked out. They must be. We Finns must work together; our survival depends on it." He added, in effect, that the hope of Finnish security depends more strongly on that than on anything else—even the understanding of other countries. "We have struggled for independence many years," he added. "Our problems are our own. We are still alive . . . and we have no intention of dying."

The majority of the Finns feel that their problems in the near future can be solved effectively if President Paasiviki will stand for re-election next year. If he agrees to do so, he will have no opposition. He is a member of the conservative party, but he had the high regard of the four other political parties. But he is almost eighty, and has guided his country through a perilous

time. His intimates say that he will accept the Presidency again only if he can be persuaded that no other acceptable candidate can win the coalition vote.

In the weeks that we have traveled throughout the country, we have heard and seen innumerable indications that the valiant little country bordering on the Soviet Union is fiercely determined to keep her independence and that she is convinced that her salvation rests strongly on her own energy, foresight and a wisdom inherited from her forerunners who struggled against the domination of the Swedes, and then the Russians, for many decades.

All Americans know that Finland pays its debts. Finland also has freedom of speech and freedom of the press. But the Finns keep their word. The "friendship and mutual aid treaty" which their nation signed with the Soviet Union in 1948 left Finland much freer than the Soviet satellites from Poland to Albania; however, it did stipulate in effect that the Finns were not to criticize their neighbor to the East. Openly, therefore, they refrain from discussing the Russian Government. But the Communist Party of Finland, which has a membership of about 50,000, gets its share of blasts all over the country.

Most of the Finns with whom I talked seemed confident that the Communists were dwindling in influence and effect. Last year, the Communists dropped from forty-nine to thirty-eight seats in the Parliament, which has two hundred elected members. The Communist-inspired strikes, which threatened to cripple industry a month ago, have subsided considerably in the past two weeks; and Hertta Kuusinen, leader of the Communist Party in the Diet, admitted that "efforts to improve the living conditions of many of our industrial workers have failed. "But," she warned, "we will try again."

Under the peace treaty, Finland lost twelve per cent of its area to Russia. This represented thirteen per cent of its national wealth and brought the problem of resettling and indemnifying approximately 400,000 refugees from Karelia,



American press women arriving in Finland as guests of the Women's Press Club of Helsinki. Left to right, Mary Lea Page, Ladies Home Journal; Martha Strayer, Washington Daily News; Vera Clay, Newsweek Magazine; Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Bureau; Hope Ridings Miller, The Argonaut; Esther Van Wagoner Tufty, Tufty News Bureau, Washington.