

Travel

A Journey to the East

by Ben Best

Diogenes went looking for an honest man. Ben Best went looking for libertarians in Europe's ex-collectivist back streets.

From mid-June until late July of 1992 I traveled through Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and the northeast corner of the former Soviet Union. The pretext for the trip was two computer conferences being held in or near St. Petersburg, Russia in the first half of July, but my actual goal was to meet and confer with as many libertarians as I could. So I spent several months preparing for this trip, mostly identifying and writing to libertarian contacts in this part of the world.

When I landed in Stockholm I was met at the airport by Henrik Bejke, the Swedish representative of the International Society for Individual Liberty (ISIL). We went by bus to a night club that is a major locus of libertarian activity in Stockholm. This club is owned and operated by libertarians as a profit-making political protest. Other Stockholm nightclubs have liquor licenses and must close at 1:00 a.m.; this club has no liquor license and operates all night.

Occasionally, the police raid the club, arrest its workers and shut the club down. The workers are released a few hours later and the club is back in business soon after. So far, the authorities have refrained from taking measures that would destroy the enterprise.

This peculiar stand-off between the police and the operators of the nightclub is indicative of both Swedish tolerance and of the high political profile libertarianism has achieved in Sweden since 1980. Sweden's backlash against the Welfare State, although less dra-

matic than Eastern Europe's revolt against communism, is a national force powerful enough to have placed a conservative government in office and to have made libertarianism a household word and a force in mainstream student politics.

Just inside the nightclub's entrance is a large sign containing a quotation from Frederic Bastiat: *where law and morality stand in conflict, morality must prevail*. Similar signs around the stage and dance-floor contain quotations from Milton Friedman and other libertarians.

Henrik handles much of the accounting and administrative work of the club. He showed me the office and his computer. He had an ambition to start a Swedish libertarian E-mail system, but had no idea how to go about doing so. Also in the club's office is a libertarian library and bookstore. Among other titles, it offered a Swedish translation of *Atlas Shrugged*, in a three-volume boxed set.

Arrangements were made for me to have lunch with Einar Du Rietz, the head of the Free Moderate Students Association, the largest conservative

student organization in Sweden. Einar is a libertarian, and we talked politics and philosophy. Einar mentioned that *Atlas Shrugged* is a frequent catalyst for students to change their views from conservative to libertarian. This led to a discussion of Rand's attempt to derive ethics from metaphysics — an issue that is frequently on the minds of Randian libertarians in Europe, as elsewhere.

In his office, Einar allowed me to phone the Assistant Director of Student Affairs at the Institute for Humane Studies in Paris. She agreed with me that traveling can be made much more pleasant by meeting like-minded people in foreign countries. She faxed me a list of names, addresses and phone numbers of free market minded people in Eastern Europe. I was especially eager to make contacts in Lithuania and Latvia, partly because all my previous efforts to do so had failed. Einar showed me a letter he had received from a fellow who is active in Lithuanian libertarian student politics. I wrote the fellow a post card, telling him the arrival time of my flight to Vilnius from Warsaw.

I spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around Stockholm. Immigration is a big issue in Sweden, insofar as eight million Swedes have allowed one million foreigners to enter the country. Sweden has the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, I was told. The bountiful shipments of food to Africa from Sweden have contributed to attracting many immigrants from that continent. One Swede complained to me that Swedish laws are so tolerant that AIDS-testing of immigrants is prohibited, out of concern that this would be discriminatory. A segment of Swedish society is in reaction to this influx. On that day the newspaper headlines proclaimed the capture of "Laser Man," a person who had been taking potshots at dark-skinned people through his scoped rifle, yet had been eluding the police.

I met Henrik, my ISIL host, for dinner — and more political discussions. Public opinion polls typically show Scandinavians scoring the highest for irreligion in the Western World. Nominally, Swedes belong to the State Church, and 1% of their income is taxed to finance the Church. Any Swede can avoid the 1% deduction simply by making a formal request to the government, but most don't bother. Henrik said that the government will probably privatize the Church within the next five years, but there are evidently people who are concerned that a private church might become aggressive and obnoxious.

I had made arrangements to catch a train to Oslo at about 2:30 a.m., and someone had agreed to drive me to the train station. My driver engaged me in a discussion about the function Michael Milkin served in the marketplace, and about how the state can be eliminated without violence.

I had planned my arrival in Oslo to coincide with a conference that I was told would be the largest gathering of libertarians ever seen in Norway. This turned out to be not true, for reasons that were never made clear to me. The conference was sponsored by the Progress Party, an alliance of conservatives and libertarians that is not always congenial (the Progress Party is officially anti-immigration, to the chagrin of many libertarians). Because the conference had speakers from many countries, it was held in English. The topic was

the EC and the Maastricht Treaty. Predictably, nearly everyone opposed the political centralization represented by Maastricht. Most still favored the Treaty of Rome as a method of reducing trade barriers, although one speaker vehemently opposed the EC for being an instrument of European protectionism that was thwarting the free world trade which could be achieved through GATT (the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs).

One Norwegian libertarian, although he was ideologically committed to a pro-immigration position, ex-

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pressed his concern about the impact of immigration upon Norway. He felt that far too many of the immigrants were attracted to Norway by the very generous system of social welfare. These people, he said, were coming to Norway with no intention of working for a living or becoming productive citizens. The immigration policy is so generous that it guarantees the children of immigrants an education in their native language. This can be both costly and difficult in the case of some of the more obscure African languages.

One of the speakers was a member of Parliament in Denmark, and he was among my lunch companions. I have had little experience with having friendly, casual relations with elected political figures in North America, let alone with ones who are libertarian. The election of libertarians is much more possible on the Continent than in America or Britain because Europe's electoral systems generally have proportional representation, as opposed to the "winner takes all" system in the English-speaking world: small parties with a small fraction of public support get a

small political representation in Parliaments.

Libertarianism is influential in Norwegian student politics, although less influential than in Sweden. I dropped into the libertarian students' union in Oslo and chatted with a number of the students. The ones I spoke to did not seem very well read or knowledgeable of libertarian philosophy or economics.

I took the train to Germany, where cryonicist Klaus Reinhard was my host. Although Germany has an ISIL representative, libertarianism is practically unheard of in that country — except for the non-capitalist varieties. Considering the role that Austrian Economics has played in libertarian philosophy, this puzzles me. The Scandinavian libertarians could give me no persuasive explanation. Someone translated *Atlas Shrugged* into German many years ago, but it was long out-of-print, and practically unobtainable. I gave Klaus an English-language version of the novel.

I took a night-train from Hamburg to Prague. The train itself gave me a sense of foreboding that I was entering the former Eastern Bloc. The railcar bound for Czechoslovakia was dark, old and dirty-looking — in contrast to the other railcars in the train (and European railcars in general). It looked as if it had been built to transport troops during World War II.

Prague escaped the devastation of World War II and is full of historical monuments. I would rate it as one of the best cities for touring in Europe — and yet the big influx of Western tourists is a very new phenomenon there. Prague almost seemed to be in a state of on-going celebration, or carnival.

My guidebook said that the National Museum on Wenceslas Square wasn't worth wasting time in, but I personally found the taxidermy superior to any I had ever seen — partly because the stuffed animals were on floor level and weren't sequestered in glass cages. I had never before stood so close to a stuffed rhinoceros.

The most peculiar tourist attraction I saw was the city sewer, an engineering masterpiece, the advertisements said. I bought a ticket and walked down some stairs to a "gallery" on top of the flowing sewer-water. I could see the confluence of three pipes of sewage. It smelled

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like an outhouse, but the sewer water looked fairly clean (and greenish.)

In an attempt to get another viewpoint on Prague, I rode the subway to the end of the line, to the Prague suburbs. What I saw is typical throughout cities of Eastern Europe (and even more so in the former Soviet Union): forests of huge and identical-looking apartment buildings. The only houses in or near cities are those that pre-date communist rule. In this sense, life in the communist countries of Eastern Europe was collectivized and quite uniform. Makeshift kiosks near the subway stations selling food and household items symbolized the new spirit of enterprise.

Had I met libertarians, I might have gotten more insight into Czech politics and culture. Some Canadians who had lived there for several months told me that hatred is a standard emotion. The Czechs hate the Germans, the Russians, the Jews and the Slovaks. The Slovaks have almost the same list of hates, save for substituting Czechs in the place of Slovaks. People feel that it is inevitable that Czechoslovakia will split in two.

I took an overnight train from Prague to Warsaw. Warsaw is not the tourist attraction that Prague is. Hitler was determined to reduce Warsaw to rubble, and he did a pretty good job of it. Even the "old town" is a reconstruction, and there weren't many tourists.

Warsaw is dominated by the Palace of Culture and Science, a 30-story concrete building that was a gift from Stalin to the Polish people (built by Poles, as one Pole wryly pointed out to me). Surrounding this building is the heart of the "new Warsaw" — a collection of huge quonset huts that serves as a shopping center. The newness of a market economy to Poland seems reflected by the ramshackle buildings out of which many businesses are conducted. Nonetheless, on the ground floor of the Palace of Culture and Science itself I found a rather new clothing boutique.

I arranged a meeting with a "libertarian" student completing a Ph.D. in economics at the University of Warsaw, and also with the publisher of *Stanczyk*, reputedly "the oldest Polish journal edited by Polish defenders of laissez-faire capitalism." I was a little surprised at how eager these men were to meet with me — and adjust their schedules.

The publisher of *Stanczyk*, Krzysztof Bakowski, told me he was very self-conscious about his poor English. On the phone he told me that trying to have a conversation with an English-speaking person made him "feel like nigger talking to white person." Many times in Eastern Europe I encountered this shame people had of their poor English — while no acknowledgement was made of my ignorance of their language.

We ended up in Krzysztof's apartment, with the Ph.D. student acting as a translator. From the student I got the impression that his economics department is more like a western business department. I also found this to be the case in the Baltic countries. With the passing of Marxism, practical business has become far more important than macroeconomic theorizing.

I had seen advertisements for *Stanczyk* in *Freedom Network News*. Krzysztof said the ad had not been successful in generating interest or help from Westerners. He said, "libertarians don't help each other." Primarily, he was looking for financial support in the thousands of dollars. Since this was unlikely to be forthcoming, it seemed inevitable that he would be forced to cease publication. This is particularly ironic in

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light of the fact that for most of *Stanczyk's* publication history, the journal was outlawed and had to be distributed through clandestine networks.

Krzysztof said that the philosophy expressed in *Stanczyk* is both economic and political — the two being equally important. In economics, he favors complete laissez-faire capitalism — even to the point of money and banking being kept totally out of the hands of the state. In politics, however, he is fiercely anti-democratic. His view is that the masses will always vote for socialism and welfare, and that a free economy can only be achieved through dictatorship. Chile was his best model. I was a bit too stunned by his position to argue

with him, but I did ask by what means a stable free-market dictatorship could be guaranteed. I didn't get a very satisfactory answer.

The train from Warsaw to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, passes through Byelorussia. My Russian visa (still a visa for the "USSR," despite the political changes) was good only for the month of July, so I was forced to fly from Warsaw to Vilnius.

I was very worried about my trip through the Baltics. I had written letters to the "Free Market Institutes" of Lithuania and Latvia, but got no response. Credit cards and traveler's checks are not accepted in the Baltics and it is impossible to wire money into those countries even in an emergency. This meant I had to take ample amounts of "hard currency" (i.e., currency for which there is an exchange market, like Deutschmarks or dollars). Given the stories I had heard about the desperation of the people and the prevalence of robbery (especially on trains), I did not feel comfortable. I had also heard that the trains did not run on time — frequently with delays of two days or more. I expected that almost no one would speak English, and I was not confident I could get by on my poor Russian.

Except for a one hour delay in Latvia, my fears proved unfounded. I was met at the Vilnius airport by a man named Wasyl Kapkan. The postcard I had mailed in Stockholm had been received and passed on to Wasyl, who agreed to be my guide and to let me sleep on the couch in his apartment. We rode buses to his apartment block, and he apologized for his humble living conditions as we walked up the dirty, narrow stone stairway. His apartment was indeed small. Everything, in fact, seemed greatly miniaturized: the kitchen, the refrigerator, the toilet, the bath, etc. (Toilets are usually in separate rooms from the bathtub or sink in apartments of the former Soviet Union — presumably to allow others to wash or bathe independent of toilet use.)

Almost immediately I found myself invited to two lunches. My first host was Algirdas Degutis, President of the Libertas Institute and a very well-known man in Lithuania. He was one of the founders of the Liberal Party and was influential during the break from

the Soviet Union. Degutis translated *The Road To Serfdom* into Lithuanian, and apparently this book was widely read. He also publishes a libertarian magazine in Lithuanian called *The Speculator* (the issue he gave me contained essays by himself, Frederic Bastiat, John Williams and Tibor Machan, along with

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one-page excerpts from Ludwig von Mises, Murray Rothbard and Herbert Spencer). He is a former philosophy professor, but he evidently knows a wealthy libertarian who subsidizes his libertarian pursuits — largely translation of libertarian economics books into Lithuanian. His personal library is impressive. As his views have gotten increasingly radical, Degutis has come to be disparaged by those in government. His most recent interests were David Friedman's *The Machinery of Freedom* and Ayn Rand.

By Lithuanian standards, Degutis seemed to be a fairly rich man. He had a new-looking (if small) car, and he could afford to chain-smoke packaged cigarettes. He picked me up in his car and drove me to his apartment, where I had lunch with his family.

I was quite surprised when Degutis told me he was a firm Roman Catholic. I asked him how he could reconcile the atheism of Rand's Objectivism with Roman Catholicism. He answered that he thought Objectivism and Roman Catholicism were not incompatible. It turned out that all the libertarians I met in Lithuania were Roman Catholic. Lithuania's Roman Catholicism comes from the country's historic close relationship with Poland. In this respect, Lithuania is quite different from Latvia (which is more Germanic) and Estonia (which is more Scandinavian).

The host of my second lunch was an enterprising libertarian engineer who had started a business dealing with sound systems and acoustics. He was also active in the libertarian faction of

the Liberal Party.

After lunch, he and Wasyl gave me a tour of the points of historical interest in Vilnius, beginning with the TV station offices (across from the engineer's apartment block) where the Lithuanians had confronted Russian soldiers. I could see pockmarks from bullets on the walls of the building. We ran into a fellow on the street with whom my companions exchanged a few friendly words. This man had been in charge of Lithuanian counterintelligence against the KGB just after Lithuania achieved independence. The sense of closeness to central government in a small country is almost eerie.

Vilnius has a few noteworthy cathedrals and monuments, as well as an "Old Town," but I barely saw anyone I would call a tourist. Nor did I see much in the way of tourist amenities, like fast-food vendors or souvenir sellers.

I returned to an evening meal at the apartment of the engineer's family. This meal was exactly like my lunches — bread, leaf lettuce, small unripe strawberries, greasy sausage slices, bits of cheese and some wine. Wasyl phoned Latvia to arrange for someone to meet me in Riga, and the engineer's wife packed me a lunch for the next day. These people are so poor by western standards, and yet they kept trying to give me things and help me in any way that they could — and it was difficult to give them anything in return. The extremity of their hospitality was embarrassing.

At the train station in the morning, I finally met Andrius Buldygerovas, the student libertarian to whom I had sent my postcard. He had been on a camping party with 40 or so libertarian ("neo-liberal," they say) students. We got into a conversation about cryonics and the attraction it has for so many people who have admired Ayn Rand. I said it was probably because Rand is so pro-survival, pro-technology, life-affirming, pro-reason, and anti-mystical. Wasyl was evidently impressed, because he mentioned that he was nearly finished translating *The Road To Serfdom* into Ukrainian, and he asked me to write an introduction for his edition. I protested that Degutis should write the introduction, but Wasyl kept pressuring me until I agreed — warning him that it might take months.

I took the train to Riga in a "first class" (by Soviet standards) railcar, at a cost of about \$1.20. I shared my compartment with three other people. One fellow owned a cheap-looking pocket calculator, but one might have thought it was a video game, judging by his fascination and the way he kept doing calculations. (He really seemed to be playing; I didn't see him taking figures from anywhere or writing down results.)

I was met at the Riga train station in the late afternoon by a middle-aged

I got a very strong message, during my stay in Russia, that the great majority of people hate communism and crave a market economy. Equally strong, however, was my impression that hardly anyone has the least idea of what a market economy is.

woman who did volunteer work for the Latvian Liberal Party. Professionally, she was a teacher of geological engineering at a Riga Technical School. She gave me her business card. (Every "libertarian" I had met in Poland and Lithuania had given me business cards — including Wasyl, whose card was hand-printed). Her English was not very good and she seemed almost non-ideological, aside from her desire to see the Russians leave Latvia.

She did give me an excellent tour of Riga. I noted that anti-tank barricades remained standing around government buildings — as compelling a sign as any that Latvians will not rest easy while Russian soldiers are still in their country.

I rode the overnight train to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, where I was met the next morning at the train station by a 17-year-old boy named Juri, with whom I had corresponded for six months. He is both a libertarian (although his knowledge is limited) and a Mensan (one of the three Mensans in the whole of Estonia). He is fluent in Russian, English and Estonian. Since his

school year had just ended, he was happy to be able to be my full-time companion for two days.

Upon arriving in a new country, one of the first problems that must be dealt with is obtaining the local currency. This proved to be more difficult than usual because: (1) I had arrived two hours before the currency exchange office opened and (2) the Estonian government had converted from Roubles to Kroons on the previous week, and the availability of Kroons was still a problem. In front of the train station's closed currency-exchange office there were quite a few currency traders (most of whom were from Russia or the Caucasus). Naturally, they charged an exchange rate that was more costly than the office. I asked Juri to talk to several traders in order to get the best rate. All the traders quoted the same rate except one, who undercut the others by a slight margin. Before a transaction could be performed, however, another trader started yelling, and informed a "boss" who came over and chewed out the deviant trader. The deviant's rate immediately came in line with the standard one. I traded currency with a dealer who had not been involved in this commotion (at the standard rate, of course). When I later teased Juri that he should go into the currency business, he replied that he would get beat up if he did.

Juri located a hotel for me that was decent, yet cost only \$8 per night. He then proceeded to show me around Tallinn. Tallinn is swarming with tourists, in contrast to Lithuania and Latvia. Estonian language is very close to Finnish and, with Helsinki just a short boat-ride across the Gulf of Finland, there is a constant influx of Finns seeking inexpensive entertainment. The Estonians are also influenced by Finnish television. Although Estonia is still a very poor country by Western standards, it is noticeably richer than Lithuania, and there is much more commercial activity on the streets.

Estonia is larger than Switzerland, yet its population is only 1.6 million, less than half Lithuania's. Nearly a third of the residents of Estonia are Russian, contrasted with only 20% in Lithuania. Juri told me he could speak Russian from the time he was seven years old, and his fluency was evident from his conversations with Russian

speakers. Juri denied claims by the Russian government that Russians are a persecuted minority in Estonia. He thinks that any Russian who truly wants to be an Estonian citizen should be willing to fulfill the new requirement of fluency in Estonian. He says that most Russians simply refuse to learn the language.

While we were in an Estonian natural history museum, I asked Juri about the two large Estonian islands between the Gulf of Riga and the Baltic Sea. Juri said that even he would be unable to visit those islands without a personal invitation from a resident. Concerning the low population density of Estonia, he told me that any Estonian citizen can have a piece of farmland simply by making a request to the Estonian Government. Most Estonians living in Tallinn just aren't interested.

I struggled to make contact with libertarians in Tallinn, but had a very hard time. One Estonian student libertarian was doing graduate work in Sweden. He did not think that Estonia was ready for libertarian ideas because the country is so concerned with constitutional issues and relations with other nations (particularly Russia).

I phoned Roger Wessman (the ISIL representative for Finland) with the hope of finding English speaking liber-

The publisher of "Stanczyk" told me that trying to have a conversation with an English-speaking person made him "feel like nigger talking to white person."

tarian contacts in St. Petersburg and Tallinn. Roger is planning to organize an ISIL conference in Estonia, but he had no contacts in Russia and could only give me the names of a couple of Estonians. One of those Estonians was a young banker who was helping Roger organize the conference. I arranged for the banker to have dinner with Juri and me.

Even the restaurants in Tallinn are still owned by the government. Surprisingly, the one we selected had

fine food. The banker was an enterprising young man who works 16-hour days to help establish an Estonian commercial bank. I asked him about the International Monetary Fund (IMF) involvement with the new Estonian currency. Evidently there was no direct involvement at the beginning — the Kroon was being backed entirely by Estonian government reserves of "hard currencies" (especially Deutschmarks and dollars). The IMF nonetheless was planning future involvement, and was demanding that the Estonian government raise taxes — something vigorously opposed by a coalition of the Liberal and Conservative parties.

I paid about \$5, tip included, for the excellent dinner for the three of us. Considering that the food was so good, I found it curious that the restaurant looked so empty. The banker told me the front door is usually closed, and that it was only an accident that it was open when we arrived. Perhaps employees of state-run restaurants aren't so eager for business.

The banker invited us to go to his office so that he could try to find libertarian contacts for me in Russia. From his office, the banker got a phone call through to a journalist in St. Petersburg who he hoped could help me locate libertarians in that city. The journalist couldn't understand why anyone would want to meet such people, but provided the address and phone number of the Free Democratic Party of Russia.

I took a night train to St. Petersburg. The total cost of my train fares from Vilnius to Riga to Tallinn to St. Petersburg amounted to less than \$5, including the 25¢ I had to pay for bedding. Predictably, I was awakened in the night when we crossed the border into Russia. Unpredictably, the inspectors were only interested in my passport and visa — they didn't even look at my suitcase or backpack. I later learned that Russian customs officers at the St. Petersburg airport are as diligent as ever.

When I arrived in St. Petersburg, I took a taxi directly to the center where my APL computer-language conference was being held. This conference was sponsored by the Association of Computing Machinery, with headquarters in New York City. It was the first

conference the ACM had sponsored in the former Soviet Union.

I had arrived early so that I could explore St. Petersburg before the conference started. The conference coordinator asked me if I wanted the services of a translator at the cost of \$20 for 8 hours, plus \$5 to the agency. I accepted this offer, and was introduced to a fel-

It would be nice to think that with the decline of the Soviet state, freedom and enterprise would prevail. But a host of extortionists and protection rackets emerged, exercising control over anyone who ventures to engage in any kind of business.

low named Ivan, who was fluent in Russian, English, French and Spanish. Ivan was also a historian, with particular expertise in the history of St. Petersburg — as was obvious by the way he could rattle off dates and expound at length about almost every monument, cathedral or mansion we passed. The \$20 fee was a bargain as far as I was concerned, but by Russian standards — the average monthly pay is about \$20 — Ivan was being richly paid.

For over 30 years following World War II, there was almost no inflation in Russia. During that period, a ride on the Moscow or Leningrad subway cost 5 kopeks. Most workers had maintained the same salary for 30 years. Then a few years ago, the economy began to crack. Prices have moved more towards reality, but only in a very qualified way. With almost everything still owned by the state, it is difficult for prices to reach a "true market level" (as Ludwig von Mises so trenchantly demonstrated in his famous essay "Economic Calculation in a Socialist Commonwealth"). Oblivious to the rampant inflation, the Russian State Banks continue to pay 5% interest on deposits, as they have for decades. As far as I can tell, there was no incentive to save money except to make a big pur-

chase. In cradle-to-grave socialism, there is no point in saving money for retirement.

I bought \$125 worth of roubles at a rate of 105 roubles to the U.S. dollar (although I later heard I could have gotten 125 on the street). This was more than enough to last me for 3 weeks. Thinking of a rouble as being worth less than a penny helped me to evaluate costs.

A subway ride in St. Petersburg cost one rouble, and a telephone call cost 15 kopeks. But making a telephone call was not easy: I couldn't find anything that cost less than a rouble, and no one had change. Ivan had a source for change that he wouldn't tell me about, although he did sell me coins for the pay phones.

Although there is still negligible privatization of large enterprises, on the individual level there is enterprising almost everywhere in St. Petersburg. Outside every subway stop are rows and rows of kiosks, and people are selling things on the pavement, on tables, etc. On Nevsky Prospekt (the main drag) near the Big Department Store, the sidewalk merchandising reaches a fever pitch. Against both sides of the sidewalks, people stand side by side offering the most ridiculous items for sale: high-heel shoes, kittens, blood pressure kits, etc. Bananas are sold from boxes piled on the sidewalk — a very popular item. Bananas cost more here than in the government stores, but government stores are usually out of them.

A serious problem for tourists in St. Petersburg is the fact that the drinking water is infected with the *Giardia lamblia* parasitic amoeba — which can cause serious illness and diarrhea. The residents know to boil water before they consume it — and tea-drinking is common. Since I do not like drinking sugary soft-drinks or alcoholic beverages, my search for mineral water took on an almost desperate quality. I tried tonic water, but I am not keen on quinine. Ivan and I finally did find some mineral water. Despite its murky brownish color, I bought six bottles and poured them into a large plastic bottle I carried in my backpack.

Peter the Great had an interest in science which is rarely seen in those with political power. I visited the Antropology Museum that he commissioned in 1718 to house his collection

of "curiosities." I saw a skeleton of a calf with two heads and one hip and numerous skeletons of Siamese twins. The jars of deformed fetuses were remarkable not only for their oddities — cyclops eye, face fused into a single orifice, etc. — but for the degree of preservation. (Peter once presented his wife with the preserved head of one of her lovers.)

I wanted to get some materials which could help me learn Russian, so Ivan took me to the largest bookstore in St. Petersburg, located in a building built by the Singer Sewing Machine Company at the turn of the century. Bookselling is a very popular private merchandising activity, tables loaded with used books are seen on sidewalks, outside subway stations and around the railway stations.

We also went to the largest distributor of cassette tapes and video recordings. I had Ivan select recordings of popular Russian music for me. It was possible to obtain Russian-dubbed videos of almost any popular American movie. I selected *Bladerunner*, *Star Trek*, among many others. I had to wait a week for my order to be filled. I was slow to realize that these films were all being copied illegally (ignoring the FBI warning!) by a business run by the Russian government.

I made my way to the office of the Free Democratic Party of Russia. Only one person (a guy named William) spoke English, so I talked with him. I asked William what books his views were based upon, and he said there were no books. I asked him if he knew of libertarians in St. Petersburg who spoke English, and he said he knew of no others. He affirmed his support for a free market, and said that privatization had not even really begun in Russia. William said that his Party was in contact with ISIL and the Republican Party in the United States. He said that his Party currently had 2,500 members (mostly in St. Petersburg), and 3 seats in the Russian Parliament (out of about 1,000).

William gave me some pamphlets (written in Russian) on his party's principles. He wrote his name, address and phone number on the front cover. I gave him copies of several of my essays, a copy of the latest issue of *Liberty*, and a copy of *Atlas Shrugged*. I mentioned

that Ayn Rand was born in St. Petersburg, and had influenced contemporary libertarianism more than any other person.

Once the APL computer conference began, I could almost have forgotten what country I was in. Russian participation in the conference was less than I had expected. Many of the Russian APLers spoke no English, even though all of the sessions were held in English. I came to appreciate that virtually all Russian software is pirated, probably as the result of U.S. efforts to prevent exports of computer technology to the USSR, and the inability of the Russians to pay for it.

Most of the conference involved computer ideas. Nonetheless, there were a couple of plenary sessions that were of general interest. One was by an expert in economic planning, who was now using his APL libraries to construct models. He thought a market economy was simply a different kind of planned economy — with supply and demand curves. He cautioned against the danger that was posed by instability in Russia. During the question period I asked him if he was talking about political instability or, if not, what criteria does he use for determining that economic instability exists. He didn't give me a straight answer.

I got a very strong message, during my stay in Russia, that the great majority of people hate communism and crave a market economy. Equally strong, however, was my impression that hardly anyone has the least idea of what a market economy is.

Another plenary speaker had been working for the KGB for many years in the field of cryptography and cryptanalysis. He emphasized that the KGB was not simply a team of spies and torturers, and that he was glad he could now speak openly about his scientific work. He said that "the enemy" had been richer, and used expensive equipment, whereas the Soviets had been forced to use their minds. During the question period someone asked if cryptanalysis could be used to decipher how the brain works. The speaker liked the idea and asked the questioner if he was interested in co-operating with the KGB.

On the second evening of the conference, there was a hovercraft cruise in

the Gulf of Finland which ended with a reception on the Kronstadt Naval Base. Only a year earlier the base had been off-limits to non-military people. The conference delegates traveled to and from the hovercraft and directly back from Kronstadt, aboard a convoy of buses that were led and followed by police cars with flashing lights and screaming sirens. One delegate commented that the Russians seemed less concerned about photography on Kronstadt than the American military would be at an American naval base. A few of the delegates were led to a carefully locked room containing PCs which had evidently never been used — and took delight in installing APL software.

I went directly from the APL conference to a conference on computer education held on a cruise ship. During this conference, the boat went up the Neva River to Lake Ladoga (the largest lake in Europe) and Lake Onega. As with education about education everywhere, much of the conference was a bore, and I took the opportunity to catch up on some rest. Most of the Russians were from the Moscow Institute of New Technologies, and quite a few of those were writing software packages for use in education, which I did find interesting.

At one stop I had the opportunity to explore a small Russian village. Another stop was on Kizhi Island, with its famous wooden architecture. In particular, the Church of the Transfiguration, constructed entirely of wood, is both spectacular and humble. Its onion-shaped cupolas, constructed from aspen, have a striking silvery appearance. The Russians are experimenting with methods of preserving these wooden masterpieces by chemical means. I was disappointed to hear my computer colleagues disparage "artificial chemicals" in favor of "natural methods."

We were given the opportunity to view Kizhi in an old-looking Russian Army helicopter. I took a chance. Ten of us paid U.S.\$5 each for a 20-minute helicopter tour of the island. After the trip, the pilot tried to sell us his watch.

The Valaam Islands were also of interest for their historic monasteries (used as hospitals after World War II). The buildings were being given back to

the church, but the number of TV antennas still greatly exceeded the number of crosses. Women entering the cathedral were supposed to cover their hair with scarfs and wear long skirts, but our irreverent group wore baseball caps and jackets with the arms tied around their waists. Someone suggested that, if challenged, the women could claim to be men and defy the monks to check. The cathedral inspired as much reverence as a construction zone — there was lumber and scaffolding everywhere.

In the ship's bar-and-party room, I was approached by a Russian who had written software that allowed high school students graphically to construct and manipulate chemical models. He said that I was the only person who had ever shown him errors in his software, and he asked whether I was a chemist. After answering his question, I took the opportunity to ask him if he believes in God. He said that he did, but not in the God of any organized religion. When I asked him what percentage of Russians believe in God, he estimated only 10%. But to his surprise, when he started polling his Russian computer compatriots, they almost invariably gave the same answer he had given.

I had made arrangements for Ivan, my translator, to find me an inexpensive place to stay in St. Petersburg after my return from the boat cruise. This turned out to be a flat belonging to the daughter of a woman living in Ivan's apartment building. The daughter was away, and I had to promise I would respect her possessions and make no international phone calls. The flat had all the amenities: bed, TV, telephone, toilet, bath, kitchen and refrigerator. For this I paid \$10 for two days. Considering that Ivan paid \$2 per month for rent, I could see that the transaction was mutually advantageous. (A hotel room in St. Petersburg is typically at least \$60 per night — for foreigners.) As with my room in the conference center on the other side of town, warm water was sometimes available, sometimes not — for no apparent reason. You could always tell the warm water from the cold water — the warm water was brown.

The doors to my apartment provided another insight into St. Petersburg life: there was an outside door and an inside door — both heavy and locked.

Police service is terrible in this erstwhile police state. When an apartment is broken into, the police merely record the matter in their books. Ivan said that apartments only tend to get broken into by people who have reason to believe that there is something valuable inside.

With the police so weak, a powerful Mafia has arisen. It would be nice to

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think that with the decline of the Soviet state, freedom and enterprise would prevail. But a host of extortionists and protection rackets has emerged, exercising control over anyone who ventures to engage in any kind of business. I went with Ivan to some Kolkhoz markets — which have more fruits and vegetables than can be found elsewhere. Ivan told me these markets are controlled by a Mafia of Georgians, and others from the Caucasus. When I asked him why the Caucasians have such power, he replied it is because they are more ruthless and uncivilized.

Ivan told me that there are many "Mafias" in Russia, and these have no direct connection with the Sicilian Mafia. A woman from Moscow, on the other hand, told me that the KGB had a long history of paying the American and Sicilian Mafia for dirty work — and that the old KGB-Mafia alliance has central power over much of Russia's Mafia.

The museum situation is in a state of flux — there had been many communist museums in the city, yet I was unable to find one. The Lenin Museum had been located in the Marble Palace, but this building was being given to the Russian Museum to display Russian paintings. St. Isaac's Cathedral had been returned to the Church, which promptly removed the Foucault pendulum that had been swinging from the inner dome to

the floor for the last several decades.

The Museum of Religion and Atheism had also been given back to the Church, and is now (as it was before the Revolution) the Kazan Cathedral. There were still Christian works of art on display, but many sections were roped off. The glass cases containing torture implements of the Inquisition were empty, and the artifacts of other religions and superstitions were likewise gone.

Nonetheless, the Chesma Church was still a Museum of Naval Warfare, and the St. Nicholas Church still contained the Museum of the Arctic and Antarctic. The loss of this last museum would be a particular tragedy, because it is unique.

The Museum of the October Revolution had been converted into a wax museum of terrorists, revolutionists and reformists. As with practically all museums we visited, there was one entrance rate for Russians and another for tourists. I paid 15 roubles for Ivan and 100 roubles for myself. Lenin was portrayed as one among many terrorists, although the bitterness that was expressed towards him in particular was very great. The museum guide also had unkind words for the wax figure of Brezhnev, saying that he had not earned many of the military decorations he loved to wear.

I had a strong urge to visit Piskarov Memorial Cemetery, where nearly half a million people were buried during the 900-day siege of Leningrad in World War II. Ivan persisted in his attempts to talk me out of going, saying there is nothing to see there. But I would not be stopped. It was somewhat difficult to reach by bus, but I noticed that people in St. Petersburg frequently stand on the curb and extend their arms as an invitation for anyone driving by to become an impromptu taxi-driver. I encouraged Ivan to do this, and we soon got a ride. I let Ivan do the talking, because otherwise it might have cost me a lot more than 25 cents.

The cemetery consists of rows and rows of mounds, which cover vast pits into which bodies were thrown. The mounds are only designated by number and year. A granite wall bears the inscription: "No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten."

For Ivan, being in the cemetery was depressing. He blamed Stalin for

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trusting Hitler to honor their pact and for letting them be so vulnerable to Hitler's attack. Ivan had not been to this cemetery for a long time, and he found it bitterly ironic to see the Russian flag flying. In this one case he would have preferred a Soviet flag — to keep the responsibility for this colossal tragedy where it belongs.

Not long after my return from the boat cruise, I phoned Valentin Yemelin, a networking expert whose number I had been given. Valentin had spent many years as a research scientist, until the current economic crisis drove him out of that work. To take advantage of his fluent English, his computer skills and his networking ability, he started a travel agency. Tourists traveling to Russia no longer need to be under the wing of the state Intourist agency. Valentin can arrange for invitations and provide complete custom-made itineraries in Russia (including food, accommodations, travel and a translator-

companion) for U.S.\$50 per day.

Valentin said that Russians are undergoing a grave spiritual crisis. After years of economic security guaranteed by the government, people are facing economic insecurity.

Valentin was very pained by the troubles his scientific colleagues were suffering. Many fine scientists are unable to find work. Valentin has a database of scientists who would gladly work for \$100 per month in their own laboratories (supplemented by Western equipment, if necessary). He was most eager to market the services of computer scientists.

I left Russia by the same railroad station where Lenin made his famous entry — Finland Station. Many of Lenin's statues have fallen, but the one in front of Finland Station still stands. The Finnish railway cars were by far the most beautiful and modern-looking I have ever seen. I almost think they were purposely luxurious, to emphasize the contrast to the dirty, pover-

ty of the Russians' railcars. The Finnish customs inspector went through all my baggage with very great care.

In Helsinki, walking into an air-conditioned Western self-serve supermarket again was ecstasy — I could hardly restrain myself from buying much more than I needed. I hadn't seen a fresh orange in weeks, and all the fruit and vegetables looked wonderful.

Coming from Russia (where things are ridiculously cheap) to Finland (where things are ridiculously expensive) was a shock. I bought two paperback books (marked on the back to total eleven British pounds) for \$50. Roger Wessman, the ISIL representative for Finland, told me that Helsinki is the place to find the fine Russian restaurants that would have existed in St. Petersburg had there been no Revolution. I treated Roger to a meal in a "moderately" priced Russian restaurant, only to discover it cost me \$150.

I flew from Helsinki back to Toronto, via Zurich. □

Scott Reid, *continued from page 58*

in the lead. But this time, the implications of the national split may be too much for the federal government to paper over.

But even a Yes vote from coast to coast probably wouldn't result in Canada adopting a new constitution. The package on which Canadians are voting is so far from being a legal document, and the various negotiators are

so far from being able to agree on a real text that can actually be voted on by provincial legislatures and by Parliament, that the negotiations over a final text would almost certainly end in confusion, discord and another "humiliation" to Quebec, driving it at last to declare itself independent.

All signs indicate that Canada's secession crisis has begun and the only thing still holding the country together

is the fact that most Canadians don't yet know it — largely because they've been completely confused by the surreal debate over amending the constitution.

For what it's worth, I'm advising my friends not to go out and buy that National Geographic atlas of the world just yet, since I expect the maps of Canada to be out of date within five years. □

David Kelley, *continued from page 63*

choose among them? By considering a wide range of facts about myself and my circumstances. The choices I make will be objective insofar as they are based on facts, but not universal, because the relevant facts pertain to my unique constellation of talents, interests, and opportunities.

There is much more to be said about the process of applying the Objectivist ethics to one's own life. But this is not a matter of adding "more substantive content" to the ethics itself. If there were, a principle of flourishing would be of no help, since it is just as abstract as the principles of reason, purpose, and self-esteem. And it certainly won't

help to adopt "justificatory fuzziness" — whatever that means — as a standard of cognition.

Finally, in regard to the derivation of rights: The fact that human beings need to act on the basis of reason does not, as Johnson implies, immediately entail that I must act to satisfy that need in others by respecting their freedom. Human beings also need food, shelter, love, and many other things, but I have no unchosen obligation to meet these needs of others. A crucial aspect of the case for rights is that the benefits of peaceful, voluntary exchange vastly outweigh any short-run advantage one might seem to derive from plunder, and that these benefits

are available to me only if I act in accordance with a principle of rights.

It's true that at a fundamental level, my need for freedom and my need to respect the freedom of others have the same foundation. It is only in the condition of freedom that humans can create the values which make peaceful exchange a positive-sum game. But the fact that exchange is a positive sum game, the fact that interests do not conflict at any fundamental level, must be made explicit. Were it not the case (as it is not the case in emergency situations), then no principle of rights could be established. At some point, *any* egoist ethics must be prepared to answer the question "What's in it for me?" □