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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SUBJECT Living Conditions for the Aged, and for Kolkhoz Peasants Actitudes and Morale/Partisan Groups/Foreign Radio/Black Markets, etc.

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Living Conditions for the Aged

1. "All 'Former' Latvians still in Latvia and too old to find work, live by selling clothes, furniture and valuables on the black market, (and, in some cases, by receiving parcels from abroad). Those still of working age, and not obvious suspects of the MVD, take small jobs in order to avoid compromising themselves by collaborating with the regime - for they still hope for liberation. When the old have nothing left to sell, they go to the poorhouse or the 'invalids' homes', where they live in barrack-like rooms and have little food; they are fed enough to keep them from dying outright, but not enough to keep them alive for more than two years. Naturally, the aged are anxious to sell their last belongings to avoid this extremity.

Living Conditions for the Kolkhoz Peasants

2. "These people live miserably on potatoes and other vegetables which they manage to grow in their garden plots. If they have eggs, or milk from their single cow (somehow kept), they sell these in town where they buy bread, unavailable in the country. They rarely receive the grain due them for their work days, and their position is made the worse by the fact that they cannot leave the kolkhoz without permission from the authorities, a permission granted only to those going to work in the mines in the USSR or Siberia. No Latvians want to do this, no matter how grievous their lot: they would find themselves alone, with a strange language and strange customs. The only ones to escape this life are gifted children who are sent to school in the towns. Most of the old Latvian farmers have been deported. The mass deportation of 1949 left whole communities empty, save for dogs. Deportees were placed, for the most part, not in slave labor camps, but in isolated parts of Siberia, given a few implements, and told to organize a kolkhoz. They were not allowed to leave the locality, but were permitted to correspond with their friends, and to receive parcels. Some of the farmers managed to escape deportation by moving to Riga in time.

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There, they received good jobs from the Latvian Communists, most of whom were disgusted with the regime and with the USSR. None who still retain their jobs are ideological Communists, but all are opportunistic and sadly disillusioned, resolved that it is too late to remedy the situation.

Attitudes, etc.

3. "Latvian-Soviet relations are very poor; there is no mixing or fraternization: even in public parks, Latvians and Soviets sit apart. The Soviets do not seem to desire any other relationship, and the authorities encourage this attitude. One reason for it, of course, is the Soviets' superior economic position: they have better jobs, plenty of money, and many of them even have cars (Riga is full of Moskviches and Pobiedas). There are many Jews in Riga, and they too have good jobs, especially in the economic field. They are over-bearing, so the Latvians have become anti-Semitic, a thing which did not apply before World War II. The attitude of the general populace is dejection and apathy; even those who once tried to adapt by becoming Stakhanovites, etc., have now grown tired. In the most vague way, a change is still awaited, but hope would be greater if world events justified it. When Eisenhower took office, there was a burst of hope that he would help the oppressed. When this hope was defeated, the people became more depressed. The new generation is untamed; unthinking of the future, youths drink heavily. Children neglected by their parents are subjected to Communist control through Communist organizations which they must join. [redacted] one case in which a boy reported his own father. [redacted] the father has said, 'Stalin' sticks in my throat', and the next day was arrested; the only people to hear him had been his wife and his son. The young hate and fear military service; they all want to be drafted into the infantry, and to avoid technical arms of the service, the terms of which are considerably longer than infantry terms - sometimes as long as six years. Many Latvians left at home wish that they had made greater efforts to escape. They expect great things from the Latvian refugees. 25X1 25X1

Foreign Radio Programs

4. "The people are generally well informed about world events, through listening to foreign radio. Nevertheless, rumors of dates when, places where, and reasons why war might quickly break out, are continually spread. Any harsh word from Moscow on foreign radio causes rumor of war. Radio listening is not forbidden by law, and [redacted] no one has ever been arrested for it. It is dangerous to spread news, though, so everyone is silent. 'Rias' (Berlin) and BBC are listened to the most. VOA programs come in badly in Riga, but better in the country. At first people listened avidly to VOA Latvian programs in the belief that the US was taking up Latvia's cause; now there is less interest, and many have given up listening altogether. 25X1

Partisan Groups

5. "There are still relatively inactive partisan groups in Latvia. Many of the Latvian troops captured in Courland at the moment of Germany's capitulation headed for the forests of Rauna /[illegible]/. The partisans battled; some were killed, some captured, and some probably escaped. (The local pharmicist took his life with poison after the discovery; he had been the partisans' contact man.)

Black Markets

6. "The black market in Riga flourishes as it does in all towns. There are various types of black market. For instance, shoemakers and tailors employed by State enterprises also ply their trade, after hours, independently: they charge exhorbitant prices. Textiles are available for purchase, but tailoring or dress-making is very hard to come by, and tailors and dressmakers need almost to be bribed to do this work, in spite of the

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compensation they receive. They live well, and some even have cars. Electr technicians and dental technicians are also well off for they have opportunities to steal materials, and they sell them dearly. Much of the material on the black market is stolen from factories and enterprises. One such article is knitting wool, which never appears in shops, but can be found on the black market.

Clothing/Fashions

7. Thanks to the tailors and dress-makers from former days, who still remain in Latvia, Riga manages to be the fashion center of the Soviet Union; here women are better dressed than anywhere else in the USSR. No Latvian factory-made clothing remains in Latvia; it is all exported to the USSR. The clothing coming in from the USSR is almost unwearable: cotton dresses for women are exceedingly ugly in design, and not colorfast. (Soviet women coming to Latvia always have an overcoat - 'Palto' - made before they come. Dress-making, of course, is very expensive.)

Food Shortages

8. In Latvia there is a shortage of practically everything except bread, which is, however, unobtainable in the country. In 1953, there was a sufficiency of meat, but this was due to the extraordinary price of meat which rendered it prohibitive to most people Milk and eggs are only occasionally available, at the kolkhoz market. (Vodka is always plentiful, and is sold not only in shops, but in street corner kiosks.)"

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