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Intelligence Memorandum

Soviet Concern over Falling Birth Rate

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviet Concern over Falling Birth Rate

Summary

At a time when most of the world is worried about the population explosion, Soviet demographers increasingly are expressing concern over the declining birth rate in the USSR. After changing relatively little in the 1950's, the birth rate in the USSR fell sharply from 24.9 per thousand persons in 1960 to 17.4 per thousand in 1967. In 1960 the Soviet birth rate exceeded that of the United States and was substantially higher than the average for 25 European countries.* By 1966, however, both the Soviet and US birth rates had fallen substantially, and the Soviet rate was below the US level and only slightly above the European average.

The decline in birth rate in the USSR was caused both by the decrease in the number of women in the prime child-bearing ages (20 to 34 years) and by the decrease in the average number of children per family. These trends are likely to continue, so that no reversal in the declining birth rate is likely in the near future. In the United States, however, the number of women in the prime child-bearing ages will rise sharply during the coming decade, tending to increase the birth rate. The downward trend in the Soviet Union is reinforced by a number of interrelated factors such as urbanization, the high participation rate of women in the

* Including 19 Western European countries and 6 Eastern European countries (including Yugoslavia) but excluding the USSR.

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labor force, the housing shortage, and more generally the shortage of consumer goods. The government's population policy, moreover, although it advocates population growth, freely permits abortions at state clinics, and a divorce is now quite easy to obtain.

The downward trend in the birth rate provides the Soviet Union with some short-term economic gains but portends long-run difficulties if it continues. A declining proportion of children in the population means less strain on child-care and educational facilities and less pressure on the notoriously inadequate housing facilities. After 1976, however, the number of persons reaching working age will tend to decrease each year. Moreover, entries into the manpower supply will be increasingly offset by persons reaching retirement age, causing a marked slowdown after 1980 in the annual net increases in the number of persons of working age. Thus an increasing share of the population will be outside the working ages, raising the prospect of a potential manpower pinch.

However, the USSR had an even more serious manpower problem in the early 1960's, when there was an absolute reduction in the number of persons of working age. At that time the Soviet Union augmented the supply of persons available for work by reducing the size of the armed forces, reducing the number of work-age youths attending full-time schools, and inducing housewives to take jobs. Although the Soviet Union might find it difficult to use these means in the future, there are still opportunities to transfer part of the large pool of rural manpower to nonagricultural jobs by expanding investments in labor-saving devices on the farm. If the decline in the birth rate continues, a comprehensive review of policies affecting marriage, birth control, and the employment of women may ensue.

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Trend in the Birth Rate

1. At a time when most of the world is worried about the population explosion, Soviet demographers increasingly are expressing concern over the declining birth rate of the USSR. The Soviet birth rate fell by almost one-third during 1961-67. This sharp decline, combined with a small increase in the death rate, led to the lowest rate of natural increase of the total population recorded in the post-World War II period (see Table 1). After remaining more or less stable during the 1950's, the birth rate fell sharply from 24.9 per thousand persons in 1960 to 17.4 per thousand in 1967. In the mid-1960's the Soviet birth rate was slightly lower than the rate in the United States and slightly higher than the average rate for 25 European countries, but was falling faster than the rates in either the United States or Europe (see the chart).

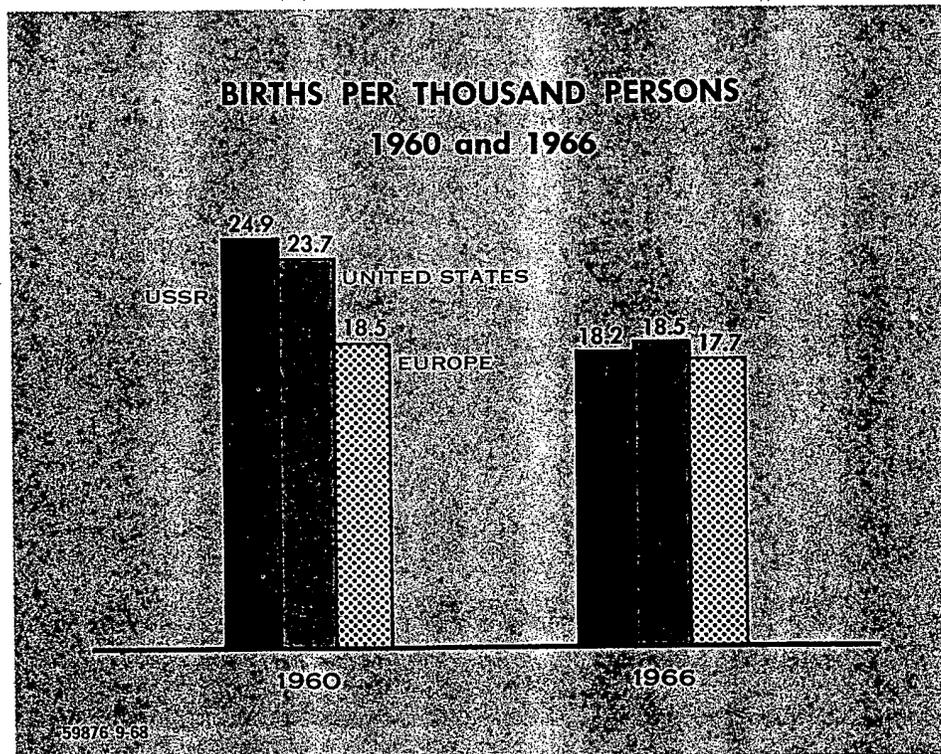


Table 1

USSR: Indicators of Population Growth
1950 and 1960-67

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>
	Per Thousand Persons								
Birth rate	26.7	24.9	23.8	22.4	21.2	19.6	18.4	18.2	17.4
Death rate	9.7	7.1	7.2	7.5	7.2	6.9	7.3	7.3	7.6
Rate of natural increase	17.0	17.8	16.6	14.9	14.0	12.7	11.1	10.9	9.8
	Daughters Born per 100 Women in the Reproductive Ages <u>a/</u>								
Maternal gross reproduction rate	139	135	131	127	124	118	116	N.A.	N.A.
	Million Persons <u>b/</u>								
Women 20 to 34 years of age	25.1	30.2	30.0	29.3	28.3	27.2	26.4	26.0	25.9

a. Ages 15 to 49 years.
b. Midyear estimates.

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2. The sharp drop in the Soviet birth rate since 1960 is due in part to an absolute decline in the number of women in the prime child-bearing ages (20 to 34 years) as a result of the low birth rates during World War II. The number of women in this group declined from 30.2 million in 1960 to 25.9 million in 1967. The most important factor, however, in explaining the decline in the birth rate is the pronounced trend toward fewer children per family. As a consequence, between 1960 and 1965 the number of daughters born per hundred women in the reproductive ages declined from 135 to 116* -- that is, at current rates, each woman has on the average 1.16 daughters when child bearing is completed. This trend is attributable to several inter-related factors, including urbanization, greater employment among women, shortage of social amenities (particularly housing and child-care facilities), and a permissive attitude by society and government toward birth control. Since 1960 the urban population has grown by one-quarter, while the rural population has declined slightly. Urban birth rates are about 80 percent of rural rates, reflecting the influence of the chronic shortage of housing in the cities and the greater participation of urban women in the labor force.

3. The Soviet Union has always relied heavily on the use of women in the labor force. In recent years, moreover, efforts to facilitate female employment have been intensified, and the proportion of women who work has been rising. Wages in the service sector, where women workers predominate, have been raised substantially, part-time jobs for women have been authorized, and child-care facilities have been expanded. As a result, during 1957-67 the share of women in the labor force rose from 45 to 50 percent. In urban areas, moreover, about 90 percent of women of working age (16 to 54 years) currently are either employed or attending full-time school. This contrasts with about 50 percent in the United States. The trend toward greater

* *This measure, called the maternal gross reproduction rate, indicates the replacement potential of the population in the reproductive ages. In the United States the rate is 139, or about 20 percent higher than the rate in the USSR.*

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employment of women in the USSR has tended to depress the birth rate. Soviet sources estimate that the birth rate is approximately 14 percent lower for working women than for nonworkers and that the abortion rate for working women is more than twice that of nonworking women.

4. Rapid urbanization and low rates of investment in new housing have combined to create a chronic housing shortage and, thereby, to depress the birth rate. At the end of 1967, per capita living space in the USSR was about 7 square meters (about 75 square feet) -- far less than the officially designated minimum norm of 9 square meters and less than half the available space per capita in Austria or West Germany. Soviet couples often share one or two room apartments with their children and relatives and frequently must use communal kitchens and bathrooms. In the late 1950's a survey conducted among Soviet women requesting abortion revealed that 14 percent of the respondents living in urban areas listed inadequate housing as the reason for requesting the abortion.

5. The preference of many couples for small families is supported by Soviet abortion and divorce policies. Even though the government advocates population growth and provides free medical service, child-care facilities, paid maternity leave, and family allowance payments, its policy with respect to abortion is liberal, and a divorce is relatively easy to obtain. Any woman may have an abortion performed at a state clinic for a nominal charge. Western sources estimate that the number of abortions in the USSR may even exceed the number of live births. Soviet divorce law was liberalized in December 1965. Provisions of the old law required petitioners for divorce to publish their intentions, appear before a people's court, undergo a "cooling off" period, pay three separate fees, and finally appear before a higher court for adjudication. The procedure was not only lengthy but also costly and hampered by bureaucratic delays. The 1965 amendment vested power in the lower courts to dissolve marriages at their own discretion, fees were reduced, and the time involved in proceedings was cut to a few weeks. The effect of the new law was a sharp increase in the divorce rate -- from 1.6 per thousand persons in 1965 to 2.8 per thousand in 1966.

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6. No reversal in the downward trend of the Soviet birth rate is expected in the near future. Until the mid-1970's the number of women in the prime child-bearing ages will remain at about the current level but will become a smaller share of the total population. Thus a reversal of the trend in the birth rate would require a sharp increase in fertility. Yet the influences that have caused fertility to decline -- urbanization, a desire for a higher standard of living, a housing shortage, and a high rate of employment among women -- are likely to continue and perhaps even to intensify in the near future. For example, Soviet economists currently believe that a nationwide labor shortage exists and that a further expansion in the use of women in the labor force will be required.

7. In contrast, the United States should experience a reversal in the downward trend of the birth rate in the near future. In the United States the number of women in the prime child-bearing ages will increase by almost 40 percent by the mid-1970's and will become an increasing share of total population. Even if fertility declines, the very rapid growth in the number of young women is likely to cause the birth rate to increase.

Expressions of Concern

8. The first recent expression of public concern over the falling birth rate came in 1966 when V. Perevedentsev, a leading Soviet demographer, stated that the birth rate was below optimum and called for a program of demographic research. Since then a number of other demographers have indicated concern about the impact of the decline in birth rate on the future supply of manpower and about the decrease in the Soviet Union's share in world population.

9. As yet, however, publicly expressed concern over the sharp decline in the birth rate has been confined to professionals. Indeed, other writers have recently reemphasized the regime's policy of permitting easy means of restricting family size. For example, in an article opposing Pope Paul's encyclical on birth control, a Soviet journalist stated that "to deprive the present-day family of

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the right to determine its size means encroaching on the most important prerogatives." Moreover, the Soviet Union has begun clinical testing of birth-control pills of Soviet manufacture, suggesting that the regime will continue to make means of birth control available.

10. The failure to pay attention to the demographers is the latest example of the low opinion of demography held by the Soviet government. The problem, according to Perevedentsev, is that officials regard questions of population as "simpler than a stewed turnip." Demography fell into disfavor in the Soviet Union in the late 1930's and, following the unpublished population census of 1937, most demographic institutes were closed. All formal research and training of demographers was halted in 1953 with the abolition of the last of the demographic institutes. The 1959 population census represents the only effort since 1939 to gather nationwide demographic data. Moreover, officials refused to include in the 1959 census the questions related to fertility that had been requested by demographers in order to improve their population forecasts.

11. Subsequently, official overestimation of population growth dramatized the need for better demographic data, and a small effort has been made to improve the data base. In 1960 the Central Statistical Administration estimated that the Soviet population would be 250 million in 1970 and 280 million in 1980, whereas the population actually will be about 8 million below the estimate for 1970 and perhaps 15 million below that for 1980. Although the Central Statistical Administration later reduced the 1980 estimate by 8 million, Perevedentsev considers this to be only "current repairs, to be followed by a major overhaul." To that end, the Central Statistical Administration has recently conducted "fertility surveys" to collect information concerning child bearing (such as age of mother at birth of each child), employment, income, and housing. One such survey covered 250,000 urban families in September 1967, and another covered 26,000 farm families in March 1968. One Soviet demographer, however, claims that a survey among two and one-half to three million women is required to get adequate

data on fertility. Nevertheless, these steps may indicate the beginning of official concern over the birth rate and portend a more respected position for demography in the USSR.

Economic Implications

12. The decline in the birth rate provides the Soviet Union with some short-term gains but also suggests long-run problems. To the degree that children constitute a smaller share of the total population, demands on the nation's resources for child-care facilities, schools, and some consumer goods are lessened. In 1965, persons under 16 years of age made up 33 percent of the population. By 1970 the share of youths will fall to 30 percent, and even if the current level of fertility is maintained, the share will decline to 25 percent by 1980. Fewer children also mean less strain on the supply of housing and facilitate the regime's efforts to get women into the labor force.

13. In the long run, however, the declining birth rate means that fewer persons will be coming of age for work and for military service. Until 1976, when those born in 1960 reach the legal minimum working age of 16, the number of persons reaching working age will increase somewhat each year. After 1976, however, the number will drop until at least 1985, causing a marked slowdown after 1980 in the annual net increase in the number of persons of working age (see Table 2). If the present fertility rate (116) continues, the decline eventually will be replaced by a slow upward trend.

14. Thus the declining birth rates of recent years may portend some difficulties in meeting civilian and military requirements for manpower. In particular, the Soviet Union will likely find it more difficult to carry out its current program of rapidly expanding the consumer services sector (retail trade, public dining, repair centers, and the like), which are labor-intensive operations with few opportunities for labor saving innovations. However, the USSR had a much worse manpower problem in the late 1950's and early 1960's when the smaller numbers of persons born during World War II were reaching working age. At that time the Soviet Union

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Table 2
Comparison of Soviet and US Labor Supply a/
Selected Years, 1960-85

	Million Persons					
	<u>1960</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1985</u>
New entrants <u>b/</u>						
USSR	1.9	4.1	4.7	4.9	4.5	3.9
United States	2.8	3.5	3.9	4.2	4.1	3.9
Total population of working age						
USSR <u>c/</u>	119.4	124.3	133.8	146.3	157.5	161.0
United States <u>d/</u>	105.2	113.1	122.1	132.5	142.3	151.3
Average annual change during preceding 5- year period						
USSR	..	1.0	1.9	2.5	2.2	0.7
United States	..	1.6	1.8	2.1	2.0	1.8

- a. Midyear estimates.
b. Persons 16 years of age.
c. Males 16 to 59 years of age, females 16 to 54.
d. Persons 16 to 65 years of age.

augmented the supply of persons available for work by reducing the size of the armed forces through a series of demobilizations that freed military personnel for work in the civilian sector of the economy and reduced the military draft of youths; the USSR also decreased the number of work-age youths attending full-time schools and, via enforcement of "anti-parasite" laws, induced more housewives to take jobs. Today, with a smaller army, increased emphasis on education, and a higher proportion of women already employed, the Soviet Union would find it more costly to mobilize supplementary sources of manpower for the labor force. However, the supply of agricultural population, traditionally a ready source of manpower for industry and other urban needs, is still great -- and it could be tapped in the future if investment in labor saving devices on the farm is stepped up.