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INTERROGATION REGARDING CONDITIONS IN OCCUPIED LATVIA

Date of Interrogation: 22 February 1961.

Information on the interrogated person: Ilze RICHTERS, born 23 May 1887, in Kuldiga, Latvia. Her last place of residence in Latvia was: Riga, Vecpils iela 8. Present address: 32 Berkeley Place, Bloomfield, New Jersey, Tel. PI 8-1367. She lives with her son, Janis Richters.

She left Riga on 6 March 1960 and arrived in New York on 22 March 1960.

Procedures for obtaining travel documents and trip to the US

It took Mrs. R. about 5 years to arrange for her departure, and her exit permit was denied 3 times. In August 1959 she went to the Visa Section in Riga, Raina bulvaris 1, to inquire why her applications had been turned down and why she had not been permitted to join her relatives in the US. She was received by one of the higher officials, a Russian by nationality. He talked to her courteously, checked her departure documents (her "file") and admitted that all her documents were in order, but he added that it was not his fault if she was not given permission to leave, as everything was being delayed in Moscow. The same Russian official also persuaded her to show him the letters written by her son (from the US), as well as the photographs she had in her purse (sent from the US); he read the letters (therefore he understood Latvian, and Mrs. R. made a comment to him about it). He asked questions about her children's living conditions in the US, and then he returned everything to her.

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On 9 December 1959 she received a summons to present herself immediately at the above mentioned office, where she was informed that her exit permit had been granted. After that her case was handled by the secretary of the Visa Section, presumably a Latvian, about 40 years old (she speaks Latvian fluently), and everything proceeded normally from there on. The secretary arranged for her trip to Moscow and later to the US, together with another Latvian woman, whose final destination was Seattle, Washington.

Mrs. Richters traveled to Moscow by plane in March, after having settled her personal affairs (disposed of her personal belongings, etc.). The plane fare was 180 rubles. In Moscow she stayed for 14 days, as the matter of obtaining visas progressed very slowly. She stayed at one of the better Moscow hotels, Hotel "Leningrad", where the daily rate was 105 rubles. The daily rate at tourist lodgings was 10 rubles, but all of them are usually crowded. She was treated courteously in the Russian offices. Only after she had received her passport and had been leave in a friendly manner from a young Russian woman employee, a Russian "Cheka" official who was in the same room completely ignored Mrs. R.'s farewell words and even turned away from the departing "burzhuyka" [bourgeois woman]. At the Vnukovo airport, the customs formalities were strict and all of her belongings were carefully inspected. She was not allowed to take with her the wedding ring of her husband (who died in 1953), a gold bracelet, and wrist watch. She sent those items back to her friends in Latvia.

She left Moscow on 21 March and flew to New York via Helsinki and London. The plane ticket cost about 2,000 rubles.

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Mrs. R. remarked that one always has to give tips in the Soviet Union, i. e. to the Russians. For example, when one buys a ticket for a trip which costs 180 rubles, the cashier is usually given 200 rubles. If a letter is mailed at the post office and the postage is 2 rubles 80 kopeks, one usually pays 3 rubles (!)

Living Conditions in Riga and Mrs. R.'s Livelihood

Mrs. R. lived in her own home, which had not been nationalized. In addition to herself, there were three tenants in the house (in 2-room apartments), each of whom paid her a monthly rent of 25 rubles. Mrs. R. also had to pay the water tax; the tenants had to pay the costs of heating and lighting. Mrs. R. had a little vegetable garden at her disposal next to her house; this was a good source of income. After her husband's death, i. e. since 1953, Mrs. Richters received his pension (she was never employed herself) in the amount of 198 rubles per month (actually only 195 rubles, as she had to give 3 rubles each month to the mailman who brought the money). To be able to eat more or less decently, a person has to spend about 200 rubles a month for food. She had to pay a state tax on her house in the amount of 600 rubles per year, in addition, of course, to paying for all repair and cleaning work, and other necessary expenses. Somehow she was able to make ends meet; however, if it hadn't been for the support by her children (in the form of packages sent to her) from the US, it would have been very hard to live. Old people, who are no longer able to work and whose pensions are small (100 rubles or even less), are able to subsist by selling furniture and clothing.

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However, the best way to make money is to rent so-called "sleeping quarters" to students or single employees; because of the housing shortage in Riga, they pay 100 rubles or even more per month for a "place to sleep."

Information about Riga and General Living Conditions in Riga

Riga is crowded with Russians. Mrs. R. believes that at least one half of Riga's inhabitants are Russians. The latter behave like the true masters, they look down on the Latvians and cannot stand them. On the other hand, the Latvian residents are daily in hopeless disagreement with the Russians. To avoid open clashes in dealing with the Russians -- in stores, on the street, and at places of employment -- the Latvians are even forced to speak Russian among themselves.

All war-time debris were removed a long time ago; during the first postwar years all residents had to go out on Sundays (or any days off from work) to help in removing the debris.

There is a great deal of construction in Riga; new apartments are usually assigned to Russian officials or newly arrived Russian workers. The Latvians have to wait for many years for new apartments, and it happens only rarely that they are able to get them. Riga has been expanded in area; for example, in Pardaugava (on the Zengale side of the Daugava River) the new residential districts extend in the direction of Jelgava. On the former sandy expanses of Ziepniekkalns and Bisumuiza there are now multistoried apartment houses and asphalted streets. Altonovas iela has been extended as far as Bierinmuiza and Marupe. In place of the former single bus line to this area, 4 bus lines are now in operation. Bus No 25 goes as far as the Marupe Kolkhoz, and Bus No 5

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goes to the Marupe peat bogs along Vienibas gatve (Jelgavas Chaussee). Two streetcar lines (No 5 and 10) also service this area, instead of the former single streetcar line. The Riga suburbs on the Vidzeme side are also being expanded; however Mrs. R. did not know this area so well. In the city of Riga itself there are many new buildings, including public buildings such as schools, libraries, etc.

Riga is very clean, much cleaner than Moscow. There are many parks and areas planted with flowers. In Russia, Riga is called "the city of flowers".

The re-naming of streets has caused many anecdotes. For example, the re-naming of Marijas iela into Suworova iela was explained by the people as "Suworov has married Marija." In general, the Latvian people still use the old street names from <sup>the</sup> Latvian independence period, and they ignore the new names introduced by the Communists. They rarely use the words "citizen" and "comrade", and Latvians among themselves still address one another as "Mr." and "Mrs."

In addition to bribery, another vice introduced by the Russians, i. e. stealing, is widespread. Everybody steals, beginning with the workers and ending with the directors. Black market operations also continue to exist on a large scale. This applies especially to the trade in building materials: it is permitted to build private homes (on a living area of not more than 220 square meters), and the state even grants loans for this type of construction, but building materials cannot be purchased anywhere in the open market and have to be obtained through the black market for exorbitant prices; the persons selling the materials have usually stolen them from various places. The same

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applies to private transport; all this is done "in the dark." Therefore, the construction of private homes usually takes years and almost no one has been able to move into his home before a 3-year period of efforts; even at that time the houses are not yet finished, they have no baths, faucets, and other details.

New Construction Projects in Pardaugava of Economic or Military Significance

Near the Riga bridges on the Zemgale side, the Radio Factory imeni Popov was rebuilt during the postwar years. This factory openly produces radio sets. The factory is said to employ several thousand workers.

The former Arsenal of the Latvian Army has been greatly enlarged and it is believed that it continues to serve military needs. The number of workers in this establishment is said to be several thousands.

The new bridge across the Daugava is very modern; it has two-way streetcar traffic, in addition to two-way motor vehicle traffic. The bridge has modern lighting and wide sidewalks for pedestrians on both sides.

Only one of the former iron bridges has been restored, i. e., the railroad bridge. The wooden bridge at the end of Gorkija iela (former Valdemara iela), built after the war, is said to be unsafe for traffic; it was planned to have it torn down and replaced by the former pontoon bridge.

In addition, several new schools and other public buildings were built in Pardaugava. No barracks were built in Pardaugava, and no occupation forces are stationed there.

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### Military Matters in Riga

The old main post-office building is still occupied by the Russian Naval School ( they all wear Navy uniforms). Near the city canal, in the vicinity of the radio towers, some underground shelter has been built. The people say that it was built and arranged as an air-raid shelter for some military or security agency officials.

### Cultural Life in Riga

Mrs. R. attended the Riga Opera and theaters several times. She only went to the performances of classical works. Most of the Latvians do the same, they do not attend the Communist propaganda performances. The stage scenery is said to be very good, and the Riga Opera has a very good ballet. The Russian movies are usually seen by Russians only. They all have a propaganda line, therefore the Latvians do not care for them.

### Fares in Riga

Bus -- 90 kopecks; trolley-bus -- 40 kopecks; and streetcar -- 30 kopecks.

### Correspondence with Foreign Countries and Receipt of Foreign Packages

Mrs. R. is convinced that all letters going abroad and received from abroad are censored. The contents of packages received (from the West) are also inspected. Letters are delivered at home, and outgoing

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letters can be dropped in any mailbox. Only registered letters have to be delivered personally at the post office.

When someone receives a package from abroad, he must pick it up at the main post office, at the corner of the former Brivibas and Maršala iela (former Feitelberg store). A notice is sent to the person's home stating that a package has arrived and it has to be picked up personally. Formerly packages could also be received at the local post offices.

### Jelgava

Mrs. R. has also been in Jelgava. The area along the road from Riga to Jelgava is more densely populated than it was during the independence period (Riga and Jelgava are being expanded toward each other). A wide, modern bridge has been built across the Lielupe near Jelgava. The Jelgava Castle is being restored and enlarged. The old castle has a new tin roof. In the fall, large quantities of sugarbeets are piled up in open spaces covering several hectares near the Jelgava Sugar Factory. The sugarbeets are now apparently shipped to Jelgava from other regions of Russia.

A modern bus terminal has been built on the former Pasta iela (Mrs. R. could not exactly identify the spot, but according to her description it should be there). Buses leave from there to many centers of Latvia.

The Latvian Agricultural Academy has returned to the Jelgava Castle. There are also several new buildings in the park of the Jelgava Castle, probably some harbor offices or other government buildings.

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There are many new buildings in Jelgava and the city is being restored (during the war it was burned down completely).

#### Rural Areas

Mrs. R. did not live in the country and knows little about life in the rural areas, only on the basis of hearsay. During the first postwar years she had some contact only with the Marupe Kolkhoz and other kolkhozes nearby, where people used to go to "beg" for milk or other farm products, since there was a serious food shortage in Riga at that time.

The cattle-raising kolkhozes or farms are better off than the others, as it is easier there to steal fodder for one's own cattle, and it is also possible to "organize" something for one's own needs from dairy or meat products.

The so-called dealers have the best living conditions in the country; their task is to sell kolkhoz products on the city markets. These dealers, especially during the first postwar years, were always able to speculate and to put some part of the goods to be sold in their own pocket. In general life in the country is harder than in the cities; therefore everyone is leaving the farms. Now there is a labor shortage and everything is going to ruin. Riga is still the greatest center of attraction.

#### Trade

The stores in Riga, and to a lesser extent those in other cities, have an ample supply of goods. One can buy anything; however, the

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people do not have the money to buy even all the necessities. If people sometimes stand in front of the stores, it is not because of a shortage of goods, but because of an irregular distribution of supply; it also happens that lines form at the end of a working day when the people hurry to make their purchases, mainly of groceries.

All the old store buildings in Riga have now been put into use, and new shopping districts are being built. The largest Riga department store (Univerzag, former AEV) is being enlarged. The more expensive goods are bought only by higher Communist Party officials, mainly Russians. They still consider Latvia as the best place to live in the entire Soviet Union.

#### Sending People to Work Outside Latvia

Mass deportations, such as took place in 1949, have not occurred any more. However, Latvians are now sometimes sent to work in Russia. Those who graduated from higher educational institutions are usually placed in jobs by the appropriate commission. Most of them do want to stay in Latvia, mainly in Riga, but they are occasionally assigned to jobs in other republics. Mrs. R. doubts whether this is some kind of a special placement policy for Latvians. Quite a few go to work in other republics voluntarily, particularly to the Ukraine and other places.

Deportees (deported between 1941 and 1949) are now said to be allowed to return home (that is supposed to be Khrushchev's merit); however, many are said to remain voluntarily in Siberia and other places of deportation, where they have settled down during those years. In Latvia, on the other hand, those who returned from

deportation have difficulties in finding work and living quarters, and therefore they prefer to remain outside of their homeland. There have been cases where several deportees, who had returned to Latvia, went back to their deportation places.

### Religious Matters

The churches are attended both by old and young people. They also go to Holy Communion, and get married, confirmed and have their children baptized in Church. Even Communist Party members often do that. The parishes or churches (including the pastor) have to be maintained by the parishioners with the help of regular annual dues and contributions.

The new ceremonies introduced by the Communists to replace church ceremonies, such as the "coming-of-age" celebration, and "name-giving" celebration, are not popular with the people and therefore most of them continue to support the Church.

### Terrorism

Communist terrorist methods continue to reign in Latvia with the same intensity. People are under daily surveillance. Mrs. R. also was questioned several times about her neighbors by Cheka officials: i. e. where they work, how they live, whom they meet, etc.

Arrests and "disappearances of people" continue to occur. If anyone is arrested in the daytime, the Cheka officials arrive in a car bearing Red Cross identification signs (similar to ambulances) and therefore they do not attract the neighbors' attention.

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People have learned to speak and think without attracting attention. Usually no one gets into a conversation with a stranger and if any questions are answered, it is done in such a way as to praise the Soviet regime. People there want to live and they have to learn how to do it.

#### Young People

Mrs. R. believes that the young Latvians are "all right." It is true that many of them join the Komsomol, but that happens mainly in Riga. In provincial areas there are fewer Komsomols; even in Pardaugava there are not so many. The way through the Komsomol affords wider possibilities of education, as well as better employment prospects. Hard-working young people may also make their way without the Komsomol. Komsomol members also receive free clothing and have other advantages (for example, in the way of entertainment in the Riga Pioneer Castle, the former residence of the Latvian State President); however, that does not impress the young Latvians very much. Mrs. R. had heard that many "frivolous" young people join the Komsomol; they sometimes sell the clothes which are given out to them and waste the money by buying ice-cream, or spend it for other purposes. Even the young people learn to be silent and know how to say only what the Party allows and what pleases the Party.

#### Resistance to Communism

Latvians may not show any open resistance. However, there are none who have become reconciled with the regime, with the exception of the Latvian Communists. The general opinion of the Latvians is:

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a change must come. And everyone is waiting for it.

#### Other Information

Few Russian soldiers are seen on the streets of Riga. It is believed that they remain mostly in the barracks. Mrs. R. could not make any estimate as to the number of military personnel in Riga. There are many parades.

People frequently listen to foreign broadcasts. Audibility is better in rural areas than in Riga where there is much interference (one can hear better at certain hours and sometimes only parts of broadcasts). It is not officially prohibited to listen, but it is dangerous to discuss in public what has been heard. This can be done only among very good friends.

Mrs. R. mentioned with sincere appreciation the great courtesy and consideration shown to her by the employees of the US Consulate and personally by the Consul in Moscow, in the handling of her immigration matter.

#### Comments

It was very difficult to establish any contact in the conversation with Mrs. R. Her son said that if the visit had occurred immediately after her arrival in this country, Mrs. R. would have been even less talkative. People who arrive from countries behind the Iron Curtain have their system of answering questions: they never confirm that they have seen anything personally, but usually say, for example, "I was told about it, I heard, etc." Mrs. R. never mentioned the name of any person, that is another method of "not causing trouble" for one's fellowmen. Thus, for example, I could not find out what relatives or friends

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of hers (and where) had remained in Latvia. I also failed to find out the name of the lady with whom she traveled from Riga to Moscow, and then to the US. All I could find out was that the unnamed lady was accompanied to Moscow by her daughter (who then returned to Riga with the things which the Russian customs officials would not permit them to take out of the country), and that she parted from this lady in London since the latter was taking a different plane to Tacoma, airport of Seattle. This is an agreeable method of concealing things and not getting other persons involved in anything.

Mrs. R. also visited her married daughter last year in the State of Washington. She is contented to be in this country, since she is with her children and grandchildren, but she speaks with great feeling about her country and its longing for freedom.

Mrs. R. is sufficiently intelligent, even though she is not talkative and prefers to answer questions rather than talk herself. She likes to check questions with counter-questions.

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