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WH

The Growth of the Movement

1. The partisan movement in its wider sense started in the Latvian SSR in 1945 after the capitulation. Members of the Latvian Legion were faced with the choice of reporting to assembly points and becoming prisoners-of-war or taking to the forests and continuing to fight. In this manner, larger and smaller groups of partisans sprang up.
2. The groups consisted of former front-line soldiers, well acquainted with each other. They included officers, instructors, other ranks, police, home guards, and patriotically-minded members of the intelligentsia and of other walks of life. Some had a strong ideological spirit; others were unorganized outlaws.
3. In the beginning, nobody intended to return to legal life. Everyone thought that war against the Soviet Union was imminent. But the war did not start, nor could it be expected in the near future. The Soviets started to comb the forests for partisans, many of whom were killed resisting arrest, and many were captured. The Soviet authority increased in strength. Life in the forests, especially after the first winter, became more difficult. There were cases of ill-health among the partisans, especially among the older men. It was becoming clear that the latter would not be able to continue the struggle. Many lost their nerve when they heard of the heavy losses which were the result of dare-devil actions, lack of security precautions, and misplaced trust in other persons. Many of the partisans heeded the proclamation of Eglitis, the Minister of the Interior, inviting them to come out of the forests and surrender. Thus, a good many of the partisans gave themselves up, especially those who thought that they had not taken part in any compromising activities.

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4. Until 1949, these former partisans lived and worked unmolested, some obtaining quite good positions, and some finding the possibility of cooperating with the Communists. Many of these legally established persons who were suspected by the authorities of continuing to cooperate with the partisans in the forests and of providing the latter with information about the authorities' impending activities were deported in 1949, together with those who had failed to conceal their dissatisfaction with the Soviet regime.
5. All legalized ex-partisans were questioned about the whereabouts of other partisans, their identities, where they obtained food, their activities, what they were waiting for, and what they were preparing to do against the Soviet State. It was suggested to the legalized ex-partisans that they should go and meet their former friends and ask them to come out of the forests. It is only very rarely however, that someone from the groups does go to meet the partisans and then only if they are relatives. There have been a few instances when some of the legalized ex-partisans were forced to work for the MGB.
6. The number of partisans decreased, therefore, by reasons of illness (no possibility of getting surgical aid or treatment for wounds), suicide, death in action, or capture. The fate of those who failed to escape in the actions that were fought against the partisans, and who were trapped in the forests and taken alive, is not known, but it is presumed that they received sentences of 25 years' imprisonment. Leaders and supporters were also arrested, and the supporters usually received sentences of 5 years. There have been reports that, after serving a sentence, these individuals returned home.
7. As has been mentioned above, partisans were divided into two main classifications:
 - a. The ideological groups, whose aim was to preserve themselves for the liberation of Latvia, and to give moral support to other patriots.
 - b. The demoralized but otherwise good fighting groups, whose aim became banditry and all sorts of illegal acts, without taking into consideration the moral or patriotic views of their victims. These groups aroused general hatred, and this also cast a shadow over the ideological partisans. The attention of the authorities was attracted and frequent actions were fought against these groups, in the course of which many ideological groups became involved and also suffered. The ideological groups warned their supporters (i.e., the legally-living ex-partisans) not to make any contacts with other groups and to have nothing to do with other groups for security reasons. Friendly groups endeavored to keep in contact among themselves.
8. These conditions and the lack of central organization aroused concern among the legally established patriots who, already in 1946, had formed secret organizations for underground activities. While it is not possible to give an overall account of the process of reorganization which was then set up throughout the whole of the Resistance in Latvia, a general pattern may reasonably be drawn from that which actually took place in one regional grouping of quite considerable size, comprising a number of separate partisan groups. The representative of an organization of legally established patriots, a certain -----, undertook the task of establishing contacts with the ideological groups in the forests. Since the spring of 1948, with his collaboration, work has proceeded on the organization and consolidation of these partisans on an ideological basis, cutting away from this organization all partisan bodies which had no

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discipline and did harm to the good name of the partisans. Such ideological groups are now not numerous but their very existence is important to the morale of the population. In three and one-half years the difficult task of reforming the disorganized, undisciplined, and demoralized partisan forces into small but purely national-minded nuclei has been accomplished, not without success. It has proved possible to organize the partisans in an ideological struggle without being able to offer them any material support. Thus the ideological and the passive resistance movement has been organized and is being extended, slowly and carefully, to deal with definite and realistic tasks for the future.

9. The morale of the present day resistance movement is good, and its members are very much on the alert, though nothing of this can be shown outwardly. Overt activities were carried out by the partisans and the legally established supporters before the enforcement of collectivization, i.e., propaganda against collectivization and acts of sabotage against farms and farm machinery. The most active Communists were caught and beaten. Threatening letters were sent to Communists, and those who paid no attention to such letters were shot. Such activities, however, brought reprisals on the local population, as well as on the partisans themselves. Meanwhile, the terrorist groups, and especially the groups of bandits who acted on their own and without serious thought, shot many innocent, unimportant individuals, even shooting some persons who supported the partisans but were, at the same time, employed by the Soviet authorities. The resulting deportations and the strong actions against the partisans were such as could have been expected. It was then realized that, in the circumstances, it was better not to give evidence of any activity at all and, since 1949, the principle of the partisans has been to conserve their strength until help is nigh, and in the meantime to learn to be of use.

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11. After any clash between troops and partisans, or if partisans have been spotted and reported by someone to the authorities, a counteraction can always be expected. How soon this takes place depends upon the distance from the telephone and the state of readiness of the troops. These counteractions are usually dangerous because they start very early in the morning, but they generally cease at twilight.
12. Bigger actions against the partisans can be anticipated from the concentration of troops, but smaller actions which could not effect the surrounding of an area cannot be foreseen because they can be carried out by a few men at a time. As a rule, hidden sentries and traps are set up on various roads, at crossroads, on bridges and river crossings near settlements, and also in the vicinity of homes of persons suspected of being partisan supporters. To avoid the risk of capture, the partisans always have to arrange security signals beforehand.

Methods and Forces used against the Partisans.

13. In the early years, provocation was often carried out. Militiamen dressed in civilian clothes went to farms and asked for food, pretending to be partisans. The farmers who supplied them were afterwards arrested for supporting the partisans. This method was soon discovered by the farmers, and those who were partisan supporters henceforth admitted only partisans personally known to them. This also obliged the partisans to deal only with trusted supporters. A general distrust of strangers was thus created. To safeguard themselves from provocation and infiltration, the partisans did not admit into their ranks any person who could not be vouched for by members of the partisan group.
14. Units of MGB are stationed in every district center or raion town, and presumably work together with informants placed at various points. All the inhabitants are under orders to report any partisan movements, but only those who feel unfriendly toward the partisans actually do so. On seeing partisans, the informants report to the local MGB office, which in turn notifies the MGB troops. The troops use the informants and local guides to take them to the partisan camps. Dogs may also be used.
15. The Istrebiteli are scattered in villages and various places in the countryside. They are organized somewhat similarly to the former Latvian Home Guard (the Aizsargi); that is, a few men, not quartered in barracks, subordinate to a "senior". Their ages vary considerably. Their fighting ability is not as good as that of MGB troops. Among them are some who are friendly toward the partisans and even cooperate with them.
16. In actions against the partisans, the MGB and Istrebiteli employ military tactics, surrounding the partisans, placing concealed sentries, and also using mortars. The Istrebiteli assist the MGB when necessary and vice versa, if either cannot cope by themselves.
17. In the beginning, the Istrebiteli concentrated around the forests. They always fired a few shots in the evening before going to sleep. This was done to show that they were armed or to give themselves confidence. On occasion they were disarmed by the partisans or shot if they resisted. Eventually they were withdrawn from the forest areas and moved to larger centers, presumably because it was not considered worthwhile keeping them in such precarious positions.
18. The struggle between partisans and the security organs continues.

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