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Background Information USSR

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AVERAGE WAGES - ENOUGH TO EAT (VII)

Two years ago it was possible to calculate the planned 1958 wages of the 27.8 million workers and employees "in the national economy of the RSFSR," the largest Republic in the Soviet Union; the figure thus derived was 765 R/month,¹ only 20 R less than the average earnings of 785 R/month for the entire USSR in 1958 which can be obtained from the 990 R/month average wages -- a 26% increase over 1958 -- fixed as the goal for 1965 in the theses of the 7-year plan.² Since then no additional data have been released for any other republic, but a recent Tass transmission (15 Feb. 1960) again in English, gives the following comparison for the incomes of the highest category of workers in one of the smallest regional units in the country:

"The monthly wage of a skilled worker in Estonia in 1938-39, when the economy was on the upgrade, was about 72 Estonian crowns or 576 R in current prices. Now it is over 910 R/month."

How many of the 399,000 workers and employees in this Baltic republic³ fall into the skilled category is not known, although the percentage is not likely to be greater than the national average in view of Estonia's specialization on consumer goods industries. Nevertheless, even for those in Estonia whose monthly incomes in 1959/60 (910 R/month) already approached the 1965 goal for average wages throughout the country (990 R/month) feeding the family remains the most trying problem of daily life. Despite the fact that food supplies, in contrast to the first post-war decade, are now generally available in adequate quantities, food prices, although somewhat lower, are the major obstacle to both balanced diets and balanced budgets. According to a

¹ N. Baibakov, Pravda, 29 January 1958; see "Average Wages - Enough to Eat," Background Information, 17 Feb. 1958.

² Tass (English), 14 Nov. 1958; the 990 R/month goal did not appear in the Pravda text of the 7-year plan theses (14 Nov. 1958) nor has it been published subsequently in any source available here.

³ Narodnoye Khozyaistvo SSR v 1958 Godu, Moscow, 1958, p. 61.

recent report⁴ presenting an objective picture of improving conditions in the post-Stalin period in Estonia,

"in order to eat properly -- and that means a rather modest bill of fare in the Western sense -- one has to spend at least 500 R per person"...

Unless Khrushchev's recognized reforms and admitted achievements in agriculture are reflected in markedly lower food prices by 1965, average wages at the end of the 7-year plan will still suffice only for a breadwinner and a single dependent "to eat properly." By keeping expenditures for food below this level, the vast majority of Soviet wage earners are obviously able to clothe and to house their families. In increasing numbers, perhaps, but remaining a definite minority, some of these workers and employees may be able to take advantage of the latest price reductions which have lowered silver and black fox fur pieces from 2,000 R to 1,600 R, motor scooters from 3,890 R to 3,190 R, and Zorky cameras from 1,666 R to 1,166 R.⁵ For the masses, however, even the canteen menus -- "for five rubles one gets a good midday meal"⁶ -- must appear as an unattainable luxury which would require -- if taken regularly at work -- about 15% of average wages for the noon meal alone.⁷ To change this situation is not, as is the case of manufactured consumers goods, a matter of allocations of supplies and prices; it will require not only great quantitative increases in output, but a qualitative change in agricultural policy.

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4 "Recent Improvements in Estonia," RFE Item 769/60, 27 Feb. 1960; see below, p. 1.

5 Radio Odessa, 3 March 1960; the price for motor scooters is calculated on the basis of a 700 R saving as the result of the 18% cut announced on 1 March 1960; the camera prices are derived from 500 R savings after the 30% price decrease; the fur prices were given in the broadcast cited above. See also "Soviet Living Levels" (IV), Background Information, 2 March 1960.

6 L. Burnyashev, "Besuchen wir mal die Kantine," Die Sowjetunion heute, Press Dept., USSR Embassy, Mehlem, Germany (no date).

7 For a typical menu, see below, p. 3, ibid.

RECENT IMPROVEMENTS IN ESTONIA

RFE Evaluation & Analysis
Item 769/60
26 February 1960

Life in Estonia has improved since Stalin's death. The personal security of the population is a good deal greater now that people are no longer so frequently arrested for political offenses, that there have been no large-scale deportations since the death of the dictator and that some deportees have come back.

The situation started to improve about three years ago. The shocking food shortage of the years immediately after the war is now only a memory. Now the shops appear well-supplied to the population, although prices are high. However, now it is the price and not the shortage that keeps the staple goods out of the people's reach. For years sugar used to be in very short supply. Now it is freely available in the towns, there is no restriction on the quantity one can buy and one can even make jam if one can afford to pay for the sugar (11.60 rubles per kilo). Fish is now available again and so is meat.

In the past people used to storm a shop as soon as it had anything to sell. Now there are queues too, but they are not very long -- half an hour or at most an hour of standing in line does the trick. Five-six years ago one still lined up in the middle of the night for the more desirable items. If the shops lack some foodstuff, one can try the kolkhoz market for it, but there everything costs about 25 per cent more than at the shops.

All this does not mean that things are the same as elsewhere in the world. No housewife can decide in the morning what she is going to cook for dinner and then shop accordingly. No, she has to go shopping, see what she can get and then figure out what she can cook from her catch.

Nevertheless, if money is no object one can live quite well in Estonia where food is concerned. The trouble is that most people do not have the money. In order to eat properly -- and that means a rather modest bill of fare in the Western sense -- one has to spend at least 500 rubles per person and accordingly they had only one proper warm meal a day. In the morning they drank tea (coffee is too expensive and is bought only on great holidays) with a sandwich. None of the four members of the family ate any proper lunch. They took a sandwich with them to work or to school and snatched a cup of coffee (substitute) at a cafeteria. It was only in the evening that they had a proper meal.

No ordinary person in Estonia lives on his or her ordinary income; everybody has to have some extra work in the evenings.

These small incomes are the whole trouble. Although supplies are more plentiful now, life has not improved correspondingly, for incomes have stayed the same. For instance, woolen materials can now be bought in the shops, but material for a woolen dress costs 200 rubles the meter and source cannot afford this price. The people who can are army officers, high Russian officials, some industrial leaders, scientists whose work or inventions benefit the state, and high Party leaders. This economically privileged class is very small in relation to the entire population....

A special feature of post-war Estonia is the great number of young people studying at colleges. It might look as though they do this in order to have a better career in later life, but actually this is not so and in many cases college studies mean a sacrifice. After top Party officials and administrators, the military, top scientists and top artists and actors, a skilled physical worker or factory foreman has a better income than most college graduates. Doctors, teachers, civil servants, bankers, earn less than workers in such industries as mining, engineering, etc., if they are young, skillful and strong and manage to exceed their norms. But even the great mass of physical workers, whose wages are between 450 and 800 rubles earn more than most white-collar workers....

Sowjet Union heute
Press Department
USSR Embassy in Germany

Dining Room No. 5

(Elektroinstrument - Daugavpils, Estonia SSR)

MENU FOR TODAY

<u>Soups</u>	<u>Weight</u> g	<u>Price</u>
Vegetable soup with egg	500	1 ruble 75 kopeks
Beet soup	500	2 " 20 "
Milkrice soup	500	1 " 20 "
Beet soup (small)	250	1 " 10 "

Entrées

Chops	50	1 ruble	
Sausage with mashed potatoes	75/150/90	2 " 25 kopeks	
Mutton stew	250/50	2 " "	
Chop with mashed potatoes	50/150/50	1 " 75 "	
Liver with mashed potatoes	50/150/50	1 " 65 "	
Buckwheat groats with brown butter	250/10	1 " 10 "	
Pancakes with sour cream	150/20	0 " 90 "	
Pancakes with brown butter	150/10	0 " 95 "	
Cottage cheese pancakes with sour cream	150/15/10	1 " 15 "	
Sausage, no vegetables	75	1 " 50 "	
Liver, no vegetables	50	0 " 90 "	

Cold vegetables

Vegetable salad	100	1 ruble 35 kopeks
Green peas	100	0 " 60 "

Complete meals

No. 1
Vegetable soup
Mutton stew
Compote of stewed apricots
4 rubles 35 kopeks

No. 2
Milkrice soup
Cottage cheese pancakes with sour cream
Hot milk
2 rubles 75 kopeks

Desserts

Compote of stewed apricots	200	0 ruble 60 kopeks
Fruit custard	200	0 " 50 "
Café au lait	200	0 " 35 "
Milk chocolate	200	1 " 0.5 "
Hot milk	200	0 " 40 "
Tea with sugar	200	0 " 15 "
Sugar	10	0 " 10 "
Sour cream	50	0 " 70 "