

Repressive Action of the Communist Regime and its Consequences in Latvia

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The secret agreement of the Germany-USSR non-aggression pact of August 23, 1939 provided for the loss of Latvia's national independence. On June 17, 1940, the USSR, breaching international rights, occupied Latvia by the use of military force.

The mass repressions planned by the central authorities of power served as an essential tool to strengthen USSR policies in Latvia. These repressions included the deportations of inhabitants to Russia. As a result of two campaigns carried out in 1941 and in 1949, 58 557 persons were deported from Latvia without trial. In total, **during the communist occupation at least 189 931 persons were subject to repressions in Latvia for political reasons.**

Already while the USSR still existed (namely, in 1988), the deportations of 1941 and 1949 were declared illegal, and all individuals deported during these campaigns were rehabilitated in 1989.^{1,2}

Communist Terror in Latvia in 1940-1941

On May 16, 1941, the draft decision of CPSU Central Committee and the Government of the USSR "On Measures to be Taken in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian SSR to Eliminate Anti-Soviet, Criminal and Socially Dangerous Elements" prepared by the USSR NKGB was sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU. The "Plan of Measures Concerning Transportation, Placement and Provision of Employment of Special Contingent to be Deported from Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Moldavian SSR" signed by USSR Internal Affairs Commissioner L. Beria on June 14, 1941 followed – this was the main document on the basis of which deportation of inhabitants from Latvia began the very same day.

On June 14, 1941, with the support of the Red Army and the local Communist Party activists, the security/internal affairs institutions of the USSR and the Latvian SSR deported 15 424 persons or 0,79% of Latvia's population from Latvia. Out of this number, 10 161 persons were resettled, but 5263 were arrested. Only approximately one fifth of the arrested persons survived. 700 arrestees were shot dead and 3441 persons died in penal institutions because of torture, diseases and inhumane conditions.³ 43 persons died on the way to the destination of deportation.

Out of all persons deported on June 14, 1941, 6081 (over 39% of the total number of deportees) died. Out of persons deported, 46, 5% were females (13, 7% of them were housewives). 27, 9% were younger than 20, but 15% were children younger than 10.⁴

Apart from those deported on June 14, 1941, at least 7670 more persons were deported on various dates during 1940 – 1941.⁵ The majority of them were either shot dead after a short investigation or died during investigation.

Continuation of the Communist Regime Repressions during 1944 – 1985

After the end of Second World War, the USSR continued its ethnic cleansing policy in Latvia.

Based on the USSR Council of Ministers decision of January 29, 1949 providing for the deportation of kulaks and their families, bandits and nationalist families from Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian SSR, the security and internal affairs institutions of USSR and Latvian SSR, the USSR MGB troops supported by the local communist party and soviet activists deported 43 133 persons or more than 2% of Latvia's inhabitants during March 25-29, 1949.⁶

58, 1% of the deportees were women; 17, 8% were pre-school children and elderly residents, and 16, 3% were schoolchildren.⁷ During the deportations of 1949, 183 persons died on the way, 4941 (or 12% of all deportees) died in exile.⁸

In addition to the deportation of March 1949, the USSR communist regime in Latvia carried out several deportations of smaller scale:

Following an oral instruction of USSR Deputy Minister for State Security V. Merkulov, 675 Germans and stateless persons were deported from Riga.⁹

After the end of war in 1945, family members of 584 convicts (the so-called 'betrayers of motherland') were deported from Latvia.

In 1951, 40 persons were deported from Latvia for participating in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Following the deportation of March 1949, additional 448 persons were deported until 1952 after serving their sentence in punishment and filtration camps.¹⁰

Therefore, in addition to the deportation of March 1949, 1732 Latvian residents were deported from 1945 to 1952.

After World War II, 91 034 Latvian residents were serving terms of up to 5 years in Soviet filtration camps outside Latvia.¹¹

The security/internal affairs institutions of USSR and Latvian SSR physically destroyed 2407 participants of the national resistance movement – the partisans – and 13 supporters.¹²

From 1945 to 1953, the security institutions of the Latvian SSR arrested 26 500 persons for anti-soviet action and action during the Nazi occupation regime.¹³

For political reasons, 2451 persons were arrested and punished from 1954 to 1985.¹⁴

During 1940s and 1950s, the repressive institutions of the USSR and the Latvian SSR executed the orders of the CPSU/Latvian communist party by carrying out mass repressions and terror. Apart from direct repressions such as apprehension, arrest, or judicature, indirect repressions such as limiting the career of individuals undesirable for the regime, expulsion from study institutions, prohibitions to travel abroad, limiting the rights of person's relatives, etc. were also carried out in the occupied Latvia for as long as the end of 1980s. The cooperation of Communist party and KGB structures was very close. The Communist party usually had the leading role in this cooperation, and it initiated repressions by issuing orders.

The Consequences of the Communist Regime Repressions

As a result of World War II, the population of Latvia shrank by 70% - i.e. from 2 million in 1939 to 1, 4 million in fall of 1945.¹⁵ Because of the consequences of repressions and World War II, there was also a rapid decline of the relative birth-rate among the Latvian population in 1944 and 1945 – i.e. from 75% to 40-45%. The rate remained unchanged until the restoration of Latvia's independence.¹⁶

Starting from post-war years until as long as 1990, workforce from other republics of the USSR was settled in Latvia. As a result, the proportion of the Latvian population in 1979 had shrunk to 53, 7%, whereas the proportion of Russian population had reached 32, 8%, the proportion of Belarussian population – 4, 5%, and the proportion of Ukrainian population – 2, 7%.¹⁷

The Character of the Crimes

Article 6, paragraph c of the Statues of the Nuremberg International War Tribunal formed in accordance with the London Agreement of August 8, 1945 between the allies – the United States and Great Britain, as well as USSR provides for recognition of the following crimes as crimes against humanity: murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed before or during the war; or persecutions on political, racial and religious grounds.¹⁸ The mass repressions carried out by the USSR against the residents of Latvia are considered crimes against humanity.

As of 2006, the losses incurred by the regime of the USSR, including the losses incurred as a result of repressions, are calculated by the Commission that determines the number of victims of the USSR totalitarian communist regime, locates mass graves, compiles information on repressions and mass deportations, as well as calculates the losses inflicted to the State of Latvia and its residents. The activities of the Commission are subject to the May 30, 2006 regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia.

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- ¹ - Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR "On the Unlawful Administrative Deportation from the Latvian SSR in 1949", 02.11.1988
- ² - Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR „On the Rehabilitation of Persons Deported from Latvia in 1940s and 1950s” 02.11.1989
- ³ - Riekstiņš J. 1941. gada 14.jūnija deportācija Latvijā//1941.gada 14.jūnija deportācija- noziegums pret cilvēci. Starptautiskās konferences materiāli 2001.gada 12.-13.jūnijs, Rīga/Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti, 6.sējums.-21.-25.lpp.(Riekstins J. „The Deportation of June 14, 1941 in Latvia” // „The Deportation of June 14, 1941 – Crime Against Humanity. Materials of the International Conference, June 12-13, 2001, Riga // Writings of the Commission of Historians of Latvia, Vol. 6; pp 21-25)
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