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Estonian communists in prisoner exchanges between the Republic of Estonia and Soviet Russia in 1921–1923

At the beginning of 1920s there was an interesting practice between the Republic of Estonia and Soviet Russia — within three years more than two hundred people were exchanged between the two countries. The exchanges were based more on mutual interest than on legislation: the Estonian communists had an opportunity to emigrate to Soviet Russia and Estonian citizens in Soviet Russia's prisons could come to Estonia.

The aim of the paper at hand is to provide an overview and an analysis of these prisoner exchanges concentrating firstly on the technical aspect of the topic — how this practice started in the first place and what was the wider context of the exchanges. To what extent were these exchanges motivated by political interest? Equally important is the biographical aspect, more specifically, the stories of Estonian communists — who were these people on the exchanges lists and what happened to them in Russia?

The area now forming the Republic of Estonia has been throughout its history a battleground for different European powers. From the end of the Great Northern War at the beginning of the 18th century it had been part of the Russian Empire. In 1917, after the February Revolution the Bolsheviks had become very popular in Estonia just within a few months as they stressed the workers' class solidarity (despite of opposing the aspirations of extended Estonian national autonomy). The number of party members rose from 200 to 10 000 and the number of supporters allegedly to 80 000 or even to 100 000[1]. It is not all that surprising given that during the war Tallinn had

[1] *Siilivask K.* Veebruarist oktoobrini 1917. Tallinn, 1972.

become the base for Russian Baltic fleet and location of several warship factories and by the beginning of 1917 provided shelter 50 000 foot soldiers and sailors in addition to approximately 30 000 industrial workers. The Bolsheviks began to organise workers' councils in towns and for the Russian troops located in different parts of Estonia.

After the *coup d'état* in Russia in October 1917 the Bolsheviks also seized power in Estonia for the duration of three months. In February 24, 1918, the independent Republic of Estonia was declared by the nationalist politicians. The next day, an Estonian Provisional Government was formed in Tallinn, only a few hours before the invading Imperial German Army units arrived in town. Most Estonian Bolshevik leaders managed to flee from advancing German troops to Soviet Russia[2] only to come back when Germany had to withdraw its troops from Estonia in November 1918 after the defeat of the Central Powers in World War I. The Estonian War of Independence began as the Red Army stormed Narva on the 28th of November 1918 and Estonian Communist Red Riflemen troops (formed inside the Red Army) fought against Estonian People's Army (*Eesti Rahvavägi*) in this war.

The activity of the Bolshevik organisations was prohibited in Estonia by degree of the head of domestic security in December 1918 and therefore, during the Estonian War of Independence, communist activities in the Estonia focused on the agitation work among workers and soldiers as well as on the intelligence work which was coordinated by Registration Directorate (*Registrupravlenie*, RU, later GRU) from Soviet Russia[3].

Tartu Peace Treaty, signed on February 2, 1920 in Tartu, ended the war between Estonia and Russian SFSR, establishing the border between Estonia and Russia, and setting up diplomatic relations between the two countries. The articles 9 and 10 of the peace treaty also regulated the exchange of prisoners of both sides, concerning prisoners of war and internees, who were confined before the ratification of the treaty[4]. However, there remained still a number of people who did not fit under those agreements, but whose release the other side was still interested in. One of the most problematic categories among them was Estonian communists.

Notably, the question of exchanging Estonian communists was one of the issues that began to influence the mutual relations between Estonia and Soviet Russia for the next three years.

I

Sending communists to Soviet Russia was not actually a new phenomenon in itself and Estonian authorities had practised it at least twice before 1921. First time it happened during the Estonian War of Independence, in august 1919, when after expressing its support to the Third International, the first congress of the Estonian

[2] *Laaman E., Ernits J.* Enamlus Eestis. I. Tallinn, 1930.

[3] Ibid. L. 171, 176–177; *Tamming M., Rosenthal R.* Sõda pärast rahu. Tallinn, 2010. L. 59–60, 64.

[4] *Mattisen E.* Tartu rahu. Tallinn, 1988. L. 456–457.

Trade Unions was disbanded by Estonian authorities and 102 of more than 400 delegates were arrested and sent across the front lines toward Red Army positions. This event is also known in Estonian historiography as the Irboska bloodbath, because 25 of the arrested delegates were shot near the border by the fighters of the Armoured Train Division. In august 1920, 61 union and labour movement activists were sent to Soviet Russia for proclaiming a general strike in Tallinn. Both of these were unilateral actions initiated by the Republic of Estonia.

In November 1919, just before the peace negotiations between Estonia and Soviet Russia began, an agreement that regulated hostages exchange was signed in Tartu by Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ants Piip on the one side and member of the college of Soviet Russia's People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs Maksim Litvinov on the other[5]. Under this agreement 24 people were handed over to Soviet side and they included mainly family members of more «prominent» Estonian communists[6]. Among 31 people who were able to return to Estonia were State Elder Konstantin Päts' brother's family members[7] who had been kept in concentration camp on Soviet side.

In February 1921, Maksim Litvinov, who had meanwhile became an ambassador of Soviet Russia in the Estonian Republic, contacted the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs again, and in his letter expressed Soviet Russia's interest to explore the possibilities of exchanging three Estonian communists who were convicted and sentenced to death for «espionage during the war, which continued in time of peace» only a few days earlier[8].

Litvinov's application put Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs into a difficult position, because all three persons were citizens of Estonia and the lawsuits related to them were an internal affair of the Republic of Estonia. Minister's reserved position was also caused by Litvinov's announcement that the Soviet government was interested in the fate of these people particularly because they were communists. As a result minister Ants Piip declined to discuss this topic any further and expressed the hope that this kind of intervention into the internal affairs of Estonia does not recur[9].

A secret correspondence between Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Military Prosecutor's Office began at the same time and it shows much deeper concern regarding to Litvinov's letter than can be read out from the official answer to the Soviet ambassador[10]. Besides expressing the opinion that such an exchange could en-

[5] *Mihkelson M.* Eesti Töörahva Kommuuni koonduslaager nr 1. // Tundmatu Eesti Vabariik. Tallinn, 1993. L. 21–22.

[6] For example wife of Estonian communist military officer Harald Tummeltau and daughters of Estonian communist writer and politician Hans Pöögelmann (*Klassivõitlus* 1920. Taavi Minnik. Terror ja repressioonid Vabadussõjas. Master's Thesis. Tallinn University, 2010).

[7] *Mihkelson M.* ETK koondluslaager. L. 21–22.

[8] Estonian National Archives (ERA). F. 957. N. 11. S. 740. L. 11.

[9] ERA 957–11–740, 12–13.

[10] ERA 957–11–740, ll. 12, 13, 15–15-p.

courage the communist underground activities and would, therefore, only threaten state security, Military prosecutor also warned minister Ants Piip about instructions that were recently found from arrested communist agitators, in which all measures of support and assistance were promised from local Soviet Russia's representatives in case of agitators' capture. The heightened interest in sentenced Estonian communists from the Soviet Embassy seemed to imply that the above-mentioned instructions were not empty promises.

After all, Estonian concern was fully justified, due to the fact that communist movement, which was led by the underground Estonian Communist Party (ECP), was the main threat to internal security in Estonia in the early 1920s.

In the Estonian War of Independence (1918–1920), Estonian Bolsheviks' party organization had been a part of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party. The independent Estonian Communist Party (ECP) was formed in November 1920, representing a formal break with the Russian organization. This did not result in actual independence, however, as the source of instructions and funds continued to lay beyond the Estonian borders, in the hands of the ECP central committee members in Russia, known as ECP's Russian office, which kept the contact with Comintern. Although Bolsheviks had lost many supporters in Estonia from 1917, they still had noteworthy support mostly among the industrial workers, but also among the landless peasants, the unemployed and the students. Especially in the early 1920s, Estonian Bolsheviks had strong positions in the trade union movement. As they were prohibited since 1918 and had a clearly expressed goal to violently overthrow the so-called bourgeois government, the ECP saw no reason to legalise its activities and its members stayed underground. Nevertheless, using several «false fronts» communists took part in the elections to the Parliament in 1920 and in 1923, and got five, later ten seats in 100-member Estonian Parliament. The membership of the underground Estonian Communist Party increased to 2000. Communists' popularity decreased only after their failed coup attempt on December 1, 1924 when party lost its support and membership fell to around 70 to 200 people. It remained low until 1940.

After Estonian Foreign Ministry's reply to Litvinov's letter, correspondence between Minstry and Russian Embassy temporarily stopped. However, in the spring of 1921 another tendency showed signs of growth — telegramms from Estonian Embassy in Moscow reporting arrests of Estonian citizens and month after month the number of messages containing similar news increased. For example, the Estonian consul in the Crimea Jaan Timse and his four co-workers were arrested in February 1921, all accused of espionage. In May, former member of Russia's State Duma and now Estonian offical Karl Hellat[11] and Hellat's wife were arrested in Odessa facing the same charges as consul.

[11] ERA 957–11–754, l. 36-p, The Analytical Bibliography of Estonian Press — «Karl Hellat»: http://www2.kirmus.ee/biblioserver/index2.php?kid=410780&index_from=6 (date of access 10.12.2015).

An additional topic that is closely linked with the present one and began to influence the exchange question both politically and socially was the question of *opting*. By the year 1920 there were approximately 320 Estonian settlements in Russia with about 190 000 Estonians living in them and according to Tartu peace treaty of 1920, all these ethnic Estonians residing in Russia had the option of opting for Estonian citizenship and returning to the Republic of Estonia. In 1920–1923 approximately 38 000 ethnic Estonians arrived to Estonia in this way. People, who opted, were called 'optants'[12]. For Soviet side this category of people gave an additional opportunity to «negotiations» with the Estonian Republic, namely hindering people from leaving by using various means of influence and by distracting the work of opting committees. One way of obstructing the opting committees was to hold people by force and accuse them of various crimes. For example, one person was accused of «inciting people to opt», i.e. inciting people to choose Estonian citizenship[13]. It is not difficult to see that these actions were politically calculated.

Although there are few records and it is not exactly clear when and how the Estonian side seriously began to consider the option of exchanging the communists for Estonians but it may be assumed that it was due to the developments that took place during the spring 1921 — the imprisonment of Estonian citizens and officials who were organizing the work of the opting committees — that led to the closer consideration of the exchanging question whatsoever.

It can be assumed, that the negotiations over this issue continued in some form throughout the spring in the narrower circle in Moscow between the Estonian ambassador and the representative of Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. By April Estonian Ambassador in Moscow Tõnis Vares had drawn up lists of some kind, in which the approximate number of Estonians were mentioned[14]. In June Soviet government's representative gave, in turn, to Estonian ambassador new list of people the Soviet side was interested in. This time the list consisted already of 12 people, all of them were in one or another way related to the underground communist movement and were members of a greater Soviet intelligence network, caught a year before in the South-Estonia. All of these people faced serious accusations and expected to go on the so-called trial of the 50 (communists), scheduled to start within the next few months[15].

Although the Minister of Justice as well as the representative of the Police Main Directorate emphasized that the possible exchange would be unreasonable, among other difficulties indicating the lack of any legal base concerning the communists' exchange issue, but also considering the nature of allegations which were raised against the 12 — mainly espionage and participation in activities of the communist organization[16]. Nevertheless, the negotiations in narrow circle continued.

[12] *Optandid* in Estonian.

[13] ERA 957–11–754 ll. 38, 79–107.

[14] ERA 957–11–754, l. 2.

[15] ERA 957–11–754, l. 19.

[16] ERA 957–11–754, ll. 24, 34.

Estonian Ambassador in Moscow Tõnis Vares had a more positive attitude towards the exchange question in general and while giving to Ministry of Foreign Affairs an overview of the issue, pointed out that although exchanges as a general measure was not advisable, it could be conceivable, however, as an exception, because the exchange would be the only way to save «several honest Estonian public figures» from Russian prisons. At the same time he presented a series of conditions that should be taken into account when the negotiations should really begin: for example no more than a half of the members of each larger communist group should be exchanged, only the people who are already convicted should be allowed to be included the exchange lists, etc. Exchange list, which was put together by Estonian Ambassador in Moscow, consisted of 40 names with abovementioned Karl Hellat, his wife and the staff of Estonian Consulate in Crimea in the first order[17].

These instructions were motivated by Estonian internal political situation which was influenced in many ways by an active communist underground activity. The Estonian government institutions, especially the Estonian Security Police, which was established in 1920, tried to restrain the communist activities and therefore several legal proceedings were held. There were three large proceedings against those accused of communist activities between 1920 and 1922, which are related to the present paper: in June 1920, the so-called trial of the 35 was held, where mainly the members of the underground communist Tallinn city committee, which coordinated communist agitation work in Tallinn, and their co-workers, were on trial. In September 1921 the trial of the 50 (the number in the name referring to the number of the accused) was held against the members of another communist network in South-Estonia which also was linked to Soviet intelligence network. In April 1921, a courier for the underground movement was arrested and this exposed the communist MPs' and the communist members' of the Tallinn City Council covert ties to the ECP central committee and their seditious activity. This was followed by trials and convictions in the so-called *trial of the 115* in May 1922.

Precisely these people on trials were at the centre of the interest of Soviet Russia and it will be shown that these people also took more than a half of the places in the future exchange lists. It is not surprising that the Estonian ambassador was cautious and naturally Estonian authorities had no desire to worry about the possible future activities of the people once convicted of the actions against the state. Yet this would have been the possible outcome if all the sentenced had been exchanged together or at least this possibility seems to have been the main concern of Estonian authorities.

Rumours about possible exchanges between Estonia and Soviet Russia spread fast among Estonians in Russia and Estonian Embassy in Moscow received number of petitions from Estonians who were being held captive in Soviet Russia and were not in the exchange list[18].

[17] ERA 957–11–754, l. 36.

[18] ERA 957–11–754, ll. 60–61-p.

Until September 1921 there were only 12 communists in the potential exchange list and 40 Estonian citizens in Estonian list. Soviet Russia's interest towards the fate of Estonian communists seemed to rise significantly in relation to the so-called trial of the 50 which was held in Tartu in September, where 38 people were convicted, and a new and so far the biggest court case, the so-called trial of the 115 began to take shape.

In the light of such developments the necessity from Estonian side to make some kind of decision concerning the exchange became more and more evident[19]. Whilst Estonian side still delayed with the decision, Soviet People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs came up with a new proposal at the beginning of October, wishing the same exchange to be carried out extraordinarily on a much larger scale and resolve the matter once and for all: this new proposal envisaged the releasing a total of 166 prisoners in Estonia, whom the Soviet side was interested in. Russian side expressed, in return, its willingness to release all Estonian citizens (i.e. officials, people who wanted to optate and others), who were at the time in Soviet Russia's prisons and who could not be released based on the corresponding paragraphs of the Tartu peace treaty. There were a total of 274 Estonians who were in Russia under these circumstances and who now appeared in the list drawn by the Estonian Embassy. They faced allegations from espionage to illegal border crossing and smuggling alcohol[20].

In the beginning of October the exchange agreement and the lists were finally ready for signing, only thing still lacking was the approval from Estonian government[21]. A special committee composed of the Minister of War, Minister of Justice, and ministers of Internal Affairs and of Foreign Affairs was formed in Estonia only in late autumn 1921 and made the decision in favour of the prisoners exchange on November 3, 1921, after the Soviet side had threatened to begin to shoot the Estonian prisoners[22]. Especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that if it should reach to exchange, then it is not originally an exchange therefore it can't create a precedent, but an extraordinary release agreement[23]. When we look at the behaviour of the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs there prevails the fear for the growth of the communist activities. The Special Committee argued that it was necessary for Estonian communists in exchange to obtain the citizenship of Soviet Russia before the exchanges would take place. The punishment had to be modified for the people with the newly acquired Russian citizenship into sending them to their «home country» and not giving a pardon to them. It meant that their sentences remained applicable in the territory of the Estonian Republic, if they should come back to Estonia. Special Committee's decision was confirmed the next day by the State Elder Konstantin Päts[24].

[19] ERA 957–11–754, l. 66

[20] ERA 957–11–754, ll. 79–107.

[21] ERA 957–11–754, l. 127.

[22] ERA 957–11–754, l. 137–138.

[23] ERA 957–11–753; 21.02.1921–31.12.1921, Kirj.vahetus Eesti esindusega Nõukogude Venemaal, l. 26, ERA 957–11–754, ll. 137–138.

[24] ERA 957–11–754, ll. 148–149, 151.

Finally, from December 1921 to September 1923 six exchanges between the Republic of Estonia and Soviet Russia took place where in six echelons 127 Estonian communists were sent to Soviet Russia, one of them even twice, because he had managed to come back meanwhile and was caught again. From Soviet Russia 130 Estonian citizens arrived to Estonia. The number of people exchanged was somewhat smaller than the number of people in the original lists as many were released before the realization of the exchanges, and some died before.

The first prisoner exchange took place on December 8, in 1921 between Narva and Jamburg on Estonian eastern border. Originally it was planned to finish the exchanges by February 1922, but the prisoner exchanges, however, did not proceed as smoothly as could have been expected. This time it was the Russian side that began to stretch the determined exchange dates, referring to the difficulties connected with collecting Estonian citizens together from different parts of Russia. So at the request of the Estonian ambassador the deadline was extended and several people who were arrested after the agreement of October 5, 1921, were included to the exchange lists, replacing the ones released or died.

One last major influencing factor of the prisoner exchanges was the capturing of ECP's leader Viktor Kingissepp in May 1922 by the Estonian Security Police. Kingissepp had been leading the underground communist activities in Estonian of the past three years and now he was found guilty of crimes against the state. A hastily organised hearing sentenced him to death and he was shot just barely 24 hours after his arrest. The cause of such haste was probably the possibility and assumption that Russian side would want to start the negotiations for exchanging Kingissepp for Estonian officials in Russia. In response, a number of arrests of Estonian citizens took place in Russia, which culminated in two major proceedings in summer 1922: so-called *trial of the Vildenau* (named after Estonian official Nikolai Vildenau) with 35 people on trial in Moscow and 60 people in Petrograd. Estonian ambassador Ado Birk stated openly to Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs when informing him about the proceedings, that it was not so much about the fact if anyone was guilty of anything or not but they were exemplary proceedings which served the goal of criticizing the foreign policy of Estonia.

The last exchange took place on September 4, 1923 when six communists were sent to Soviet Russia and seven Estonian citizens were handed over to the Estonian authorities. Although Estonian Ministery of Foreign Affairs began lobbying the government for organizing one more exchange that could have given the opportunity to release some more Estonian officials convicted in the great trial of Petrograd one summer before, the members of the government were resolute about refusing to confirm the ministery's request for another exchange and made the decision to terminate the prisoner exchanges with Soviet Russia permanantly instead[25].

[25] ERA 957–12–51, l. 2 (11).

II

This part of the paper concentrates more thoroughly on the biographical aspect of the exchanged communists: what was their background, what were the circumstances of their arrest and what is known about their life in Soviet Russia.

An invaluable source for collection of the biographical data analysed here are three voluminous archive funds which were originally formed as a result of the actions of Estonian communist organizations in Soviet Russia — Russian Office of the Estonian Communist Party's Central Committee, Estonian Section of Comintern in Leningrad and Estonian Section of Comintern in Moscow, and consisting of CVs, petitions to different offices, questionnaires etc.[26]

It should be mentioned, however, that this material is far from being sufficient to examine the life of the communist emigrants in Soviet Russia (later Soviet Union) and not all people who were exchanged can be found in the materials of the funds described above. There are data of any form on roughly 2/3 of people who were exchanged. There can also find some printed memories and secondary data that helped to fill some of the gaps.

As mentioned earlier, a total of six exchanges took place between the years 1921–1923: the first echelon with 42 communists was sent to Soviet Russia in December 1921. It was followed by the second echelon with 18 communists in January and the third with 5 more communists in March 1922. The fourth echelon with 46 people started their journey in August and the fifth with 10 people in November 1922. The last exchange took place almost 10 months later in September 1923 when six communists were sent to Russia. Among 126 Estonian communists exchanged, there were 89 men and 26 women, and one person unknown.

Among 42 people exchanged in the first echelon in December 1921 were primarily many local communist party organizers as well as other more important Estonian communist activists. For example the majority of the members of the underground communist city committee of Tallinn, whose actions became evident in spring 1920, were all exchanged in December 1921.

Communists with heavier sentences were predominately placed in the higher ranks on the exchange lists and were among the first arrivals to Russia. One such example is the chairman of the underground communist Tallinn city committee, former sapper officer and Russian Civil War veteran Georg Kreuks who was sentenced to death for «subversive activities against the Republic of Estonia».

There were comparatively fewer couriers in the first echelon, many of them can be found in later exchanges. One of the three communists Litvinov had written to Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs about, asking about the possibilities of the exchange — Slata Kušnerova — was sent to Russia in the second echelon. The two others had been executed by then.

[26] Nowadays they can be found in the Estonian National Archives.

Almost 60 % of the people exchanged were convicted in the previously mentioned three large proceedings. The *trial of the 35* (1920), *trial of the 50* (1921) and *trial of the 115* (1922) stand out precisely in the sense that majority of the convicted people were exchanged: for example in the trial of the 35, 14 persons were convicted and 13 of them were exchanged. In the trial of the 50 the numbers are respectively 38 and 28 (people exchanged). The rest of the people in the exchange lists were also on trial for espionage and/or communist activities, but they were prosecuted in much smaller groups.

Sentences assigned to the people who were about to be exchanged, also varied greatly ranging from two years in prison to the death penalty.

The original list of 166 communists also included the names of people who were by October 1921, when the lists were handed over to Estonian side, already been executed, released or had never been arrested, such as the communist MPs, who were also included into the original list[27]. It may be that communists were afraid of the MPs' arrest concerned to the incident with the courier in spring 1921 and communist MP's may have been taken to the list as a precaution.

In most cases, people who were exchanged were also the members of the communist party. For example all party members who were convicted in the trial of the 50 were exchanged[28]. However, party membership was not a precondition for gaining entry to the exchange lists although it played an important role. Numerous reports can be found from people who were exchanged and joined the communist party later in Soviet Russia or did not join the party at all.

In this context the example of a student named Paul Schütz is interesting. Schütz was arrested in July 1921 as a contact person of intelligence network, but he does not appear to be a member of the communist party. It is very possible that part of Schütz's «fortune» for being included to the exchange list came instead from his father's position as a revolutionary martyr among Estonian communists.

Three different groups or categories can be brought out inside the party members and activists:

1. People who had been active since 1905 or at least before the World War I in Tallinn Committe of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.
2. People who joined Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks), RSDLP (b), in 1917.
3. People who joined Estonian Communist Party in 1920 or later.

People in the first and second echelons had joined party mainly in 1917, some even earlier, but in the subsequent echelons more people who joined party later can be found, especially in 1920 and onwards. It shows quite well that communists' popularity in Estonia was not limited up to the year 1917 and it continued in the Republic of Estonia as well.

[27] ERA 957–754, l. 167.

[28] *Tammela M.-L.* Poliitilised suurprotsessid Eestis 1920–1925: katse portreteerida Eesti kommunisti / Master's Thesis, 2010, University of Tartu, advised by Ago Pajur. L. 84.

Not all people, who were given the chance to be exchanged, used it. Several refused to go for personal reasons — their family remained in Estonia. Another story was, of course, if the family already lived in Russia.

For example, Peeter Lindau was also in the exchange list, but he withdrew his name. He described the details of his action later in 1935 in his CV in the Soviet Union. Namely, he says that when the communists had already given the requests to the Estonian government, a regulation from Party (probably central committee) arrived instructing that all persons, who were members of some representative body (i.e. parliament, municipality etc.), had to take back their requests and stay in Estonia[29]. It seems likely that this guideline was given with the forthcoming *trial of the 115* in mind, where the accusations were quite vague (common charge was «participation in a pan-Estonian secret communist organisation») and as times showed, many people were acquitted and were able to continue their former activities.

It also seems, that the determining factor of deciding whom to exchange, was the question of trust. Artur Kamp was the only one convicted in *the trial of the 35* who was not included in the exchange list, although he had been an activist, though probably not a party member. Kamp was found guilty in keeping the underground correstondence bureau. His wife Alma Kamp left Estonia with the first echelon in 1921 and turned to ECP Central Committee's Russian Office with the petition to include his husband in the list, but her request was denied. It appeared that meanwhile one of the underground communist leaders in Estonia, Jaan Kreuks, elder brother of Georg Kreuks, had made a complaint against Kamp, accusing him of not warning him in time against police raid[30].

The majority of people exchanged represented the true «working class». Industrial workers such as tinkers, locksmiths, machinists and weavers accounted for at least two third people in exchanges. This also represents in its own way the social and economic history of Tallinn. Also smaller municipality officials could be found among communists, in addition teachers, students, but also a hairdresser, a land surveyor and a midwife were represented. It is also interesting that many shoemakers can be found among the group in question. It is likely that shoemakers' small workshops with many people coming and going were good channels of communication.

The average age of exchanged communist was between 25 and 30 years. The youngest person exchanged was a 17-year-old school student Erna Saarens, who was accused of working as a courier of one of the ECP central committee members. The oldest was a 58-year-old paper mill worker Tõnu Vainlo, who was arrested as a member of communist group in Tallinn City Council.

When it comes to nationality it may be said that at least about 90% of the exchanged were ethnic Estonians, then came Russians and there were a few Latvians.

[29] ERAF 24–2–978, l. 3.

[30] ERAF 24–2–236, ll. 1–2-p.

These emigrants, of whom it was possible to find material, in most cases found work in factories in Leningrad but also in *kolkhozes* or cooperatives, ran by emigrants themselves. August Sarap, one of the accused in the *trial of the 50*, ended his membership in the party during years of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and started a private business. Some success stories, although only very few, can be found in the workers' category. For example, Rudolf Lees (later Lessov), who had been convicted of being a member of underground communist town committee of Tallinn, arrived to Soviet Russia with the first echelon in December 1921. He continued his career as blacksmith in Kanonersky Ship Repair Yard in Leningrad became «*Stakhanovetz*» and a motor ship — «*Кузнец Лесов*» — was named after him[31].

Voldemar Teppich, one of the exchanged, distinguished in his memories the so-called elite and all the rest. From his memories it seems that the most of the emigrants belonged to the last category without any prospects for a career inside the party[32].

However, some people managed succeed inside the party. For example, Aleksander Mäe, who started his career as a spinner in Kreenholm Manufacture in Narva, was found guilty of espionage in the *trial of the 50*, and had several smaller posts in the party in Russia after the exchange, came back to Estonia after the Second World War and became the minister of agriculture of the Estonian SSR.

Konstantin Männikson, former tailor, arrived to Soviet Russia in 1922, graduated from the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West in 1929 and became a headmaster of the Incomplete High school in Kalinin *oblast*. He was one of those exchanged communists who returned to Estonia in the summer 1940, after Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union and worked as one of Estonian Communist (Bolshevik) Party County Committee secretaries in 1941. He was killed when fighting in the destruction battalions against German army in summer of 1941.

In a way, the story of Richard Mirring's story can also be considered as a success story — at least to a certain point. Richard Mirring was a bookkeeper, a trade union activist and a courier between Viktor Kingissepp and the members of communist group in the Parliament. After his exchange, he worked in Soviet Russia as a secretary of Central Committee of ECP and in 1930s worked in Comintern Executive Committee until 1937[33], when he was arrested and shot for having «involvement in the counterrevolutionary organization».

In much frequent cases, communist emigrants found difficulties in their new home country. In spite of coming from former Russian empire and having more or less the same social and political background, Russia was still different and unfamiliar cultural environment for many emigrants from Estonia. One significant difficulty that they experienced was poor language skills, and this was particularly experienced by women. It may be explained by overall low level of education of the group surveyed

[31] ERAF 25–2–1012: Leesov (Lees) Rudolf Jakobi p, ll. 17–18; Кузнец Лесов: его имя носит теплоход. [Рихард Меринг, Макс Поляновский, Рудольф Лесов]. М.: Профиздат, 1933.

[32] *Teppich-Kasemets V.* Põrandaaluste juhi paljastusi // Päevaleht. 1933. 19.02.

[33] Akadeemia. 2002. N 3. Ll. 665–666.

here. The majority of people observed had barely completed primary education, and 2–3 winters of village school education was not enough to provide sufficient language proficiency. As a result, political emigrants remained in closer contact to each other, establishing their own cooperatives etc.

The pattern described above does not apply to communists with secondary education. They had the opportunity to continue their studies for example in the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West, and several did it. One of the exchanged people, Richard Anslaud-Majak became even lecturer at the same university.

One important factor that influenced emigrants in Soviet Union more and more especially from the second half of 1920s was the growing conflicts within the Estonian communists' community. Alienations dated back to 1918 when one group of Estonian communists supported the idea of establishing independent Estonian Communist Party while others considered functioning as the Estonian section of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party sufficient enough. Confrontations between Estonian communists became more apparent and deepened after the failed *coup d'état* attempt in Tallinn in 1924. Some main *coup* organisers who managed to escape to Soviet Union and their supporters justified the attempt, while others called the event «dancing on workers' corpses». So it was essentially a power struggle between two groups and many emigrants also found them in the struggle, often on the «wrong», i.e. opposing side.

As part of this power struggle, tale bearing as well as digging up old disputes and arguments culminated in the most extreme cases in accusing each other of Trotskyism. In this context, the re-examination of the circumstances of each emigrant's arrival to Soviet Russia took place. Good opportunity for such actions was given with the documentation that was collected by interviewing persons arriving. Interviews did not cover only the actions of the interviewee but were also meant to collect information about activities of other communists the person had had contacts with. All details were gathered to every person's personal file and this documentation often became the main source for later accusations and could lead to repressions of the ones accused.

For example, a courier Anna Leeto was exchanged to Soviet Russia with the first echelon in December 1921 and had worked in Estonian cooperative of political emigrants in Leningrad since then. When she submitted her request for personal pensions in 1935 to Estonian Section of the Comintern in Leningrad, her previous actions during her Tallinn period were taken under closer scrutiny, which led to accusations of betraying one of her fellow accused during the *trial of the 35* in 1920 and Anne Leeto was thrown out from party[34].

In addition to conflicts among Estonian communists' own organisations, wider political developments in the Soviet Union began to affect the fate of the people ex-

[34] ERAF 25–2–708, ll. 6, 8, 24.

changed. The entire central office of ECP and many other higher party officials were repressed during the Great Purge. More detailed information can be found about 1/10 of the people exchanged[35], but the data are not conclusive.

The prisoner exchanges, which took place between the Estonian Republic and the Soviet Russian in 1921–1923, during which a total of 126 Estonian communists arrived to Russia, were undoubtedly a serious test to the relations between the two countries, each trying to maintain good diplomatic relations at the same time. For most of the emigrants going to Soviet Russia was hardly an act to follow their revolutionary dream of any kind, but rather the opportunity to live their lives outside prison which in this case meant outside Estonia. There were also these Estonian communists, who could have a career in Russia inside the party or somewhere else, but their percentage remained modest and the majority of them were killed during the Great Burge.

In summary, the present topic reveals new interesting perspectives in the mutual relations between Estonia and Soviet Russia in early 1920, but also in the social history of communist movement in Estonia and the history of Estonian communists in Soviet Russia.

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