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COUNTRY USSR

SUBJECT Living Conditions at Fryazino

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Although his contacts with the Soviet people were subject to the usual restrictions reported by other returnees from the Soviet Union, there were enough of them to give a sound background to his observations. His account contains numerous citations of incidents and illustrative material. [REDACTED]

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As for his political attitude, he stated that he opposed all totalitarian systems and had personal reasons for hating the Soviet regime, since, so far as he knew, the Soviet authorities had killed his father after they had arrested him and taken him to the Soviet Union. The system of total distrust which he found in the Soviet Union confirmed his hatred of the regime there. On the other hand, the interrogator did not feel that the [REDACTED] hatred for the system had impaired his power of objective observation of how it worked and how it affected the Soviet people. /

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2. Then it happened. At 4 o'clock on the morning of 22 October 1946, the doorbell rang. A Soviet major asked to see my identification and plant pass. At the same time another Russian in civilian clothes entered the house. After seeing my papers, the major announced that all the Oberspreewerk personnel were being

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transferred to the Soviet Union and that we must pack and be ready to leave the house in just three hours' time. I said I did not believe it and asked to be allowed to consult with the plant director. The major then showed me a photostat of three of the plant personnel records concerning me and asked whether I still doubted that he had something to do with the plant. In the meantime, armed Soviet soldiers entered the house and took their places at every door and window. Also, workmen had already entered and started to pack and remove the furniture. They had packed only about half of it when the three hours were over. The officer said the rest would be packed and sent along afterward, but we never saw the remainder of the furniture. My father-in-law, who came over later in the day for a little visit, reported to us that there was no furniture left in the house. Whether it was removed by the Russians or was looted by Germans is not clear. As soon as we were taken out of the house and put in a car, we could see that the same thing was happening in practically all the houses along the whole street. Everywhere we looked there were trucks loaded with furniture and Soviet soldiers were on guard around every house.

3. We were put on a train at Hoppegarten station and assigned to a second-class compartment. The furniture was put in freight cars attached to the same train. The train was full of other Germans, some of them from the Oberspreewerk plant. Along the route to the Soviet Union we were fed warm food (noodles, soup, et cetera) every noon. Otherwise we lived on food given to us in a large box at the beginning of the journey, containing among other things old German army rations. We had a long stop in Posen, during which the station was continually filled with trains like ours taking Germans to the USSR; whenever one train left, another took its place. Our train went on by way of Grodno, Velikie Luki, and Moscow, where we spent one whole day. The following day the train stopped at a small station and we were told that we had arrived at our destination. From the railway station we were taken by trucks to the village of Fryazino, where we were assigned an apartment in one of the 12 new stone houses there.
4. In Fryazino we discovered that the Soviets had in fact removed to the Soviet plant there about 180 specialists and technicians from the Oberspreewerk - together with their families, about 500 people in all. This number included personnel all the way from the director, Dr Steimel, down to turners and glass-blowers. Even a few were taken along who had no particular skills whatever. Dr Steimel, however, had not been taken by train. He had been flown to Moscow with some special apparatus from the Oberspreewerk plant which he was told he was to demonstrate to Soviet experts. Upon arrival in Moscow he was told frankly that they were not interested in the apparatus, that the real reason for his trip was that all the key personnel of the Berlin plant were being transferred to the plant at Fryazino.

#### Fryazino

5. The town of Fryazino is located six kilometers from the rail center of Shchelkovo\*. It had evidently grown up around a silk plant built there by the French before the Revolution. In the early thirties RCA had built a radio-tube factory there, taking over and enlarging the old silk plant. Around the plant, which was located in the center of the town, there were

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old Russian wooden houses. There were 12 new stone houses, built since the war. [redacted] and only one section, which comprised our apartment, was completed. In 1946 the total population of the town was about 8,000 and by 1952 this number had grown to around 30,000, as houses of the newer apartment type were built. During the war the plant had been evacuated to Tashkent. There were at least five German tanks in the vicinity, indicating that fighting had taken place there during the German push toward Moscow in 1941. The machines in the plant had come from the plants of Fernseh AG and Telefunken in Germany and of Tungsram in Budapest. In 1946, there were 3,000 to 4,000 Russians employed in the plant. 25X1

6. We were given a two-room apartment with kitchen, bathroom, and toilet. Other Germans were given similar apartments in the new stone buildings. Some were given pre-fabricated Finnish wooden houses, which the Soviet Union received as reparations from Finland. Still others were housed in a sanatorium about four kilometers away, a house which had formerly belonged to Prince Golitsin. Our own furniture actually arrived and we were reasonably comfortable, although a little crowded in our apartment. In the winter it did get a bit cold in the house. The stucco on the outside and inside walls would peel off and let the cold air through, because there was really no mortar between the stones vertically, just horizontally. This was the result of the new speed-up methods of stone laying whereby the workers just put a layer of mortar on top of a row of stones and then slap a new row on top.
7. We were certainly much better off than the average Russians, who were officially entitled to only eight square meters of floor space and in actuality had much less. But the Russians did not complain about the overcrowding. I frequently, at the beginning, asked Russian workmen at the plant how they could get along with so little living space, and whether they did not want a little more privacy. They shrugged this off with the comment that all they needed was a place to hang their clothes on a nail at night and a bed to sleep on. I asked one of the girls what happened if she wanted to put a cupboard in the corner and another girl in the room objected. She answered, "Then the cupboard would not go into the corner". What impressed me about these Russians was their ability to get along with so little in the way of home comforts and otherwise. Certainly, under the crowded living conditions, life is not lived at home but outdoors. At night the town really came to life. Groups would wander up and down the streets singing in their terrible voices to an accordion from which the player was able to produce only three chords. This would go on until after midnight, and the next day various workers at the plant would say, "We really had a good prazdnik (festival) last night."
8. The more important employees in the plant, the nachalniki, or department bosses, had better housing accommodations. Many of them had two-room apartments also. Russians, for instance, occupied the other two sections [redacted] after they were finished. We Germans had, in general, the better housing; when part of the Germans were repatriated in 1950, the Russian nachalniki hastened to move into 25X1

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the apartments vacated. This brought Russians into the same section of [redacted]

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9. None of the wooden houses for Russians and not all of the new stone houses had running water or toilet facilities. People living in such houses had to walk several blocks to get water from a well with a draw-bucket. Toilet facilities were in the form of out-houses back of the dwellings.
  10. We could buy some farm produce from an old kolkhoz woman who brought us cabbage, cucumbers, eggs, and sometimes milk. Another Russian woman came about three evenings a week to clean the apartment for us and do other housework. She worked in the plant as a welder and lived alone in the town. Her husband had been arrested after the war and had disappeared. Her father had been a railway official under the Tsarist regime. Her work for us was without the permission of the authorities, who told her several times that she should not work for us. She kept coming, however; evidently she did not care what might happen to her if the authorities took stronger measures to prevent her from coming to our house to work. House servants were almost unknown in the Russian households. A few had nurses for their children; and only two families, insofar as I know, had full-time servants.
  11. It was the ambition of almost all the nachalniki to own a car, and 10 to 15 people owned their private Moskvich or Pobeda. The Moskvich sold for 7,000 rubles and the Pobeda for 12,000 to 15,000. Also some of the younger people bought second-hand cars from officers at a nearby flying field. These officers were well-paid and always had plenty of money. They would sell their used cars for 2,000 or 3,000 rubles and buy themselves new ones.
  12. The only public eating place we ever went into in the Fryazino vicinity was a little place at the railway station, where we stopped sometimes when we were on our way home from an outing. The place was filthy. The tables without any coverings were smeared with fish crumbs, bones, and heads which were left there by Russians eating their usual fare of fish, which they would bring along wrapped in a dirty piece of paper. It was a most unpleasant place even to sit and drink a beer.

#### Contact with Russians

13. Our contacts with Russians outside the plant were very limited. When we first arrived, several of the Russians were friendly, but they soon began to avoid any social contacts with us. For instance, in the first days in Fryazino the wife of one of the nachalniki by the name of Shakhov came to my wife to consult her about an illness and afterwards dropped in several times for a friendly visit. Then suddenly the visits stopped and when Mrs Shakhov met us on the street she would not speak to us. [redacted]

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14. After this experience, we found that none of the higher employees would have anything to do with us outside working hours. Only the minor employees seemed not to fear the consequences of such association. For instance, out of lack of other recreation, I took up playing football again. The Russians playing our German team were from the lower ranks of plant workers and with them we formed a very enjoyable comradeship. Frequently, after a football game, we sat around together and discussed all sorts of things over a couple of hundred grams of vodka.
15. Since there was absolutely nothing of cultural interest in Fryazino - the one motion picture house had such poor sound equipment that there was no pleasure in seeing the Soviet films - we did go a few times to Moscow. This, however, was not easy and we finally practically gave that up. In the first place, it was necessary to apply for permission to go, naming the exact theater or stores one expected to visit. After asking for permission, one then ordered theater tickets. If the tickets were received, then we had to make a new application to the plant office set up for that sort of thing to see if we could really go at the time requested. Then, if permission was granted, we always had to walk about five kilometers to the nearest station, and then the train schedules were such that we would get home about 3 o'clock in the morning. We did get to the theater a few times, but all the pleasure was taken out of an evening of concert or ballet when we had to sit up so late on an unheated train afterwards. We were told that it was possible to take trips to other places, but it never turned out to be possible in actuality. Any requests for permission to take such trips were always turned down for some reason or other, i.e., that there were no rail tickets available or some other very stupid excuse.

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17. I never saw the parades in Red Square, and there was nothing to be seen on those days in Fryazino. My daughter, however,

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saw one May Day parade, going to the city one morning with a Russian girl friend and returning home about 3 o'clock in the morning, tired and blissfully happy. They had gone right into Red Square by crawling between the legs of the militiamen surrounding it.

#### Russian Character and Attitudes

18. The thing that impressed me most about Russians was their Bedürfnislosigkeit; they are satisfied with so little. The crowded living conditions don't seem to bother them, since their life is spent more outside the home than inside it. The Russian usually has only the clothes he wears on his back; and, as noted above, if he has a nail on the wall where he can hang them when he goes to bed, he seems satisfied. Most of them are so used to the condition of having little that they cannot understand any other way of life. For instance, one of the girls in the laboratory told of the fun she had had rowing on the river in a boat she had rented. I told her I liked to row, too, but that it was more fun to have a boat of one's own so that one could row for several days at a time and stop whenever and as long as one liked on the way. She said the idea didn't attract her at all, that when she wanted to row she rented a boat and that was enough for her.
19. One of the plant workers had been in Germany as a major in the Soviet Army, and had seen how much better the Germans lived than the Russians. He said, however, that he wouldn't want to live in Germany. The Germans were queer people whom he would never understand. Why, the Germans have both a living room and a dining room; and, if unexpected guests drop in, they ask them into the living room and close the door to the dining room. If they wish to invite the guests to dinner, they ask them for Tuesday next week at 8 o'clock. The Russians can't understand this. When they have guests, they offer them food right away, whatever they may have. "Oh no," he said, "I wouldn't want to live in Germany!" This same Russian said, "If I want to build a veranda to my house and don't have enough wood and nails, I go over to neighbor Ivan and he will give me any wood and nails he has. A German would say, 'No, I have worked hard to get this wood and these nails and I need them for myself'. We don't understand that."
20. The Russians also don't suffer so much from the thing we feared most under the Soviet regime: the suddenness of misfortune, or of changes in general. The sudden disappearance of friends, the sudden falling through of plans through some whim of the authorities, were things we could never get used to. The Russian seemed not to care in the slightest what happened. One day when we were riding on an open truck to the railway station, we were held up by an accident on the road ahead of us. A Russian woman had been run over and killed by another truck. We Germans were very much horrified by the accident, but the Russians with us said indifferently, "Why are you carrying on so? Frau kaput; there are others to take her place".
21. This Russian attitude of indifference to the conditions under which they live can be explained perhaps by two things: They are not conscious of the fact that things could be different, and the Soviet propaganda system works so well.

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Soviet propaganda plays constantly and systematically upon the fears of the Soviet people of a new war. In their ignorance of outside conditions, they are ready to accept almost anything in the way of propaganda.

22. Last spring we had a lot of late snow and there were many cases of illness from a kind of virus influenza. Persons affected suffered from low body temperatures and from certain signs of paralysis, which makes me think there may have been some polio involved. At a mass meeting called by the trade union shops, where the main propaganda theme was American bacteriological warfare in Korea, one of the speakers blamed both the snow and the virus infections on the Americans. The people seemed to accept this as entirely true, however impossible and unreasonable it may seem to us westerners. Russians seem to believe that the Americans are technically capable of almost anything, even the unbelievable achievement of bringing heavy snows and virus influenza to Moscow Oblast, the well-protected center of the Soviet Union.
23. I would say that the people under 40 years of age are by no means definitely against the regime. There are some older people who say that things were better earlier, but the people who have not known Russian conditions before the Revolution give loyal support to their government. In case of war, the loyalty of the people will be unquestionable. We have Germany to thank for this situation. The experience the Soviet people had of oppression under the Germans has made them decide that, if they are to be oppressed, then it is better to be oppressed by Russians than by foreigners. Many things the regime has undertaken have the enthusiastic support of the population, such as the new power plants and the new canal projects. The people believe that, if war does not intervene, the future will bring an easier life.
24. Their fear of war is, however, constantly increasing. For the past year and a half this fear has been aroused almost to fever pitch, so that it is the constant preoccupation of the people. When it was finally sure that we were leaving for Germany, my football friends arranged a farewell party for me. Over the usual food and vodka they urged me when I returned home to say that they are good people who don't want war and said, "Please, never come back as a soldier!" This fear of war has been greatly increased and has entered a new phase with the possibility that German soldiers may again take part in a war against the Soviet Union.
25. In August 1951 it was rumored that we were soon to go home. One of the Russian nachalniki with whom I worked took me aside and said, "I feel sure that you will escape to West Germany, and that Germany will want to get her revenge for her defeat. But remember, even if Russia is beaten in another war, there will be absolutely nothing left of Germany!"

#### Soviet System of Education

26. Our two children went to a Russian school which was set up especially for the children of the German specialists at the plant. There were about 100 German children at first, this number being reduced to about half that many when the first group of German specialists were repatriated in 1950. The school was completely Russian, however, German being taught

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only as a foreign language two hours a week. The teachers had only the most elementary education. It would seem that almost anyone who can read or write is allowed to teach in the Soviet Union. This is, however, not such a severe handicap under their system of schooling. The children are not taught to reason out any problems but just made to learn things by heart from the textbook. Teachers even of such specialized subjects as mathematics and the sciences did not know any more about their subject than what they read in the textbooks. For instance, my daughter was studying botany. I know some botany and I used to teach her when we were walking in the woods. One day we found some hazel-nut trees in bloom and I showed my daughter the difference between the blossoms of the male and female trees. She decided that that would be something interesting to take along to botany class. She broke off some samples of the two kinds of blossoms and took them to class the next day. She was very disappointed when she found that the teacher did not take any interest and did not even know that there were two kinds of hazel-nut blossoms.

27. On the other hand, the children were kept quite busy and seldom had any free time in the afternoons or evenings. There were always lessons to be memorized. The whole process was purely mechanical, and no attempt was made to educate the children to think for themselves. The amount of material learned in this mechanical way was, however, tremendous and when the German children returned home, according to reports from the parents of children who returned home in 1950, they suffered no handicap in their studies in the German schools.
28. The Russian technicians we met in the Soviet Union were good illustrations of the result of such a system of instruction. They always knew a lot of facts and were better able to cite mathematical formulas or rules of physics than were the Germans. They had, however, no capacity for critical thinking and their rules and formulas were not supported by any experience in practice. None of the Russian technicians wanted anything to do with laboratory experiments. They just sat at a desk and figured things out on paper. Where some laboratory work was called for, the technicians turned it over to laboratory assistants to work out. They could not be bothered with such details.
29. Discipline in the school was terrible. The teacher seemed absolutely unable to control the pupils. Beating or striking a child is forbidden in the Soviet Union, and the teachers depend entirely upon the parents to control the children. My boy, for instance, when called upon to recite his lesson, might refuse outright to do so. The teacher would tell him to stand in the corner, which he willingly did. Since such measures did not have any effect, the teacher would call me and ask that I make the boy obey. I told her I could not understand why she was not able to control nine-year-old boys, but she was never able to remedy the situation. The children remained impudent in their attitude toward the teacher, and she maintained that the parents were responsible.
30. This situation prevailed not only in the school for German children but also in the Soviet schools and was, therefore, not due to the inability of the teacher to establish the

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