

SOVIET TURMOIL: In a Splintered Union, Ethnic Russians Fear Future; In Lithuania, Power Workers Cling to the Pleasant Life

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Correction Appended

It is thrilling to be a Lithuanian these days, but not so comfortable to be one of Lithuania's more than 300,000 Russians.

For years, Russians here enjoyed a feeling of absolute freedom, and at times even a sense that they were bosses. Lithuania was under the Kremlin's thumb, the Russian language was required in all schools, and many people believed it would ever be so.

But suddenly all that has changed. Lithuania is racing toward independence, and many Russians fear that the good life they have enjoyed here for years may be threatened.

Russians in the other Baltic republics share the same concern. In Latvia and Estonia, they form about a third of the population. Russians Build a Town

Russians make up nearly 10 percent of Lithuania's population of 3.6 million, and their concentration is greatest in Snieckus, 120 miles northeast of Vilnius, where the Soviet authorities decided in the 1970's to build a giant nuclear power plant. They sent more than 10,000 Russians here as construction workers, engineers and technicians.

The area chosen for the plant is one of the most scenic and pristine in the Baltic region. Forests stretch for miles in every direction, and deep blue lakes are filled with fish.

There was no town here, though, and the Russians' first task was to build one. They did a good job.

Snieckus is a town of handsome apartment buildings separated from one another by large groves of trees. There are movie theaters, restaurants, schools and other amenities. Life here is far more pleasant than in many parts of

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the Soviet Union.

The power plant itself is a couple of miles outside town. Only two of its projected five reactors are complete, but the plant already supplies energy not only to Lithuania, but also to Latvia, Estonia, Byelorussia, and even the region around Leningrad.

Few Russians who live here want to return to Russia. They believe they will be treated well by the Lithuanian Government, but cannot escape a sense of unease. Better Life Was the Lure

"I came here because I was offered a good job, better than I could have had back in Leningrad, and because I had the chance to have my own apartment," said a worker who was strolling through an outdoor market with his wife today. "I feel at home here. What the future holds, I can't say.

rity in Russia, will not be discriminated against in any way.

Most Snieckus residents who voted last year on the question of Lithuanian independence cast their ballots in favor. So did most Poles, who constitute Lithuania's second-largest minority. But the Poles, who make up about 7 percent of the population, face fewer problems than Russians in the new Lithuania. They share with Lithuanians not only the Roman Catholic religion, but also deep anti-Communist sentiments. No Flag Is Raised

The Russian minority's uncertainty here is reflected in myriad ways. In Snieckus, as in the rest of Lithuania, today was the first day of the school year. At a welcoming ceremony at the largest of this town's four schools, the school authorities, not certain whether to raise the Soviet flag, the Lithuanian flag, the Russian flag or some combination, discreetly decided to raise none at all.

"Most people who live in Snieckus have been here for 10 or 12 years," said the school's principal, Olga Lachotskoyo. "It's a town of young families, with lots of children. Life is very comfortable.

"Some people can't change their attitudes and accept Lithuania as an independent state, but most of us are calm. I think relations will remain normal. Maybe they will even improve."

Some Russians here say that when they travel to other parts of Lithuania, they are now afraid to speak Russian in public. Others say they have been insulted on the street with taunts of "Occupier!" or worse. But most agree that the average Lithuanian is tolerant, and free of true anti-Russian prejudice. Changes Are Predicted

Outside the power plant, several workers sitting in the sun said they were now trying to learn a bit of the Lithuanian language.

"We're not worried about losing our jobs, because there aren't many Lithuanians trained to do this kind of work," one said. "But the situation here is going to change. Exactly how, we don't know."

Another change may be increased pressure from environmentalists. The power plant here was built to the same specifications as the one in Chernobyl, and although some improvements were made after the disastrous accident at Chernobyl, some say it is still unsafe.

"I'm not afraid that the Lithuanians will throw us out," one worker said. "But if the Green movement manages to close the plant, then we'll all be in trouble."