



Rebellion and resistance / edited by Henrik Jensen - Pisa : Plus-Pisa university press, 2009. - (Thematic work group. 2, Power and culture ; 4)

303.6 (21.)

1. Conflitto sociale I. Jensen, Henrik



CIP a cura del Sistema bibliotecario dell'Università di Pisa

This volume is published thanks to the support of the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission, by the Sixth Framework Network of Excellence CLIOHRES.net under the contract CIT3-CT-2005-006164.

The volume is solely the responsibility of the Network and the authors; the European Community cannot be held responsible for its contents or for any use which may be made of it.

Cover: Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Smolin (1929-), Petr Aleksandrovich Smolin (1930-2001), *The Strike, 1905* (1964), oil on canvas, Moscow, The State Tretyakov Gallery.

© FotoScala Florence

© 2009 by CLIOHRES.net

The materials published as part of the CLIOHRES Project are the property of the CLIOHRES.net Consortium.

They are available for study and use, provided that the source is clearly acknowledged.

cliohres@cliohres.net - www.clioehres.net

Published by Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press

Lungarno Pacinotti, 43

56126 Pisa

Tel. 050 2212056 – Fax 050 2212945

info.plus@adm.unipi.it

www.edizioniplus.it - Section "Biblioteca"

Member of



Association of American
University Presses

ISBN: 978-88-8492-649-4

Informatic editing

Răzvan Adrian Marinescu

Editorial assistance

Viktoriya Kolp

Latvian Society and the Soviet Regime in 1919: from Support to Resistance

JĀNIS ŠILIŅŠ
University of Latvia

ABSTRACT

The present chapter investigates the relationship between the Soviet regime and Latvian society, looking for an answer to the question, why society turned away from the initially popular communistic ideas and in the course of a few months changed into opposition against Bolshevik regime. Particular attention is paid to the Latvian communist ideology and the implementation of terror in the context of increasing resistance against the Soviet regime, which resulted in its final breakdown. This issue is significant as Soviet Latvia was one of the most successful communist totalitarian statehoods in post World War I Europe.

1918.gada nogalē pēc I.Pasaules kara beigām un Brest-Litovskas miera līguma atcelšanas Padomju Krievija uzsāka militāru un politisku ekspansiju rietumu virzienā. Nacionālo padomju valstiskumu izveidošana bijušās Krievijas impērijas rietumu apgabalos un revolucionārie notikumi Vācijā un Ungārijā iezīmēja pirmo lielniecisma vilni (1918.-1920. g.) Eiropā.

1918.gada 17.decembrī proklamētā Padomju Latvija, balstoties uz sākotnējām iedzīvotāju simpātijām, izrādījās par vienu no veiksmīgākajiem komunistisko valstiskumu projektiem. Tomēr dažu mēnešu laikā situācija radikāli mainījās. Februāra beigās un marta sākumā Latvijas austrumu un centrālajos rajonos izvērsās zemnieku nemieri un plaša partizānu kustība. Vienlaikus kritās brīvprātīgo skaits un disciplīna Padomju Latvijas armijā. Sabiedrība arvien negatīvāk izturējās pret padomju varu un komunistiem, kas sevišķi izpaudās laikā, kad iedzīvotāju atbalsts bija visnepieciešamākais. Pēc tam, kad 1919.gada 22.maijā pretlielnieciskie spēki ieņēma Rīgu, divu nedēļu laikā lielinieku režīms sabruka, karavīriem, padomju darbiniekiem un lielai daļai komunistu dezertējot vai pārejot nacionālās valdības pusē.

Izmaiņas sabiedrības attieksmē noteica vairāki faktori (radikālā agrārā reforma, terors, mobilizācijas u.c.), kuriem bija kopīgs cēlonis – latviešu komunistu radikālie ideoloģiskie uzskati, kuru realizācijai tika izvēlēti vardarbīgi līdzekļi. Visaptverošā terora politika

bija nevis sabiedrības pretestības sekas, bet gan cēlonis. Vēršanās pret inteliģenci, cenšoties pakļaut kultūras telpu, kā arī terors pret plašām sabiedrības grupām radikālo ideoloģisko mērķu vārdā, dažu mēnešu laikā radīja ievērojamu pretestību sabiedrībā. Latvijas iedzīvotājiem bija vajadzīgi tikai daži mēneši, lai apjaustu to pārvērtību mērogu, kuras bija skārušas lielniekus Krievijā vācu 1918.gada okupācijas laikā. 1917.gadā solītā miera, zemes un demokrātisko padomju vietā 1919.gadā komunisti nesa nežēlīgu pilsoņu karu un šķiru cīņu, zemes nacionalizāciju un proletariāta diktatūru. Lielākajai sabiedrības daļai tas nebija pieņemams.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Latvia was substantially influenced by World War I (1914-1918) as it was a part of the Russian Empire. The western part of Latvia was captured by the German army in the spring of 1915, and during the next two years intense armed combats took place in the Rīga area and around the river Daugava. Approximately half of the Latvian population was mobilized during the war, evacuated or fleeing the country as refugees in Russia¹. In August 1917, Rīga was captured by the German army, and in February 1918 so was the rest of Latvia. Along with other western provinces of the Russian Empire, after the Brest Litovsk peace agreement Latvia fell under German occupation.

The revolution in Germany at the end of the World War I, November 1918, shattered the political situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Soviet Russia revoked the Brest Litovsk peace agreement hoping to recover occupied territories in the West. Besides, it was a great opportunity to export the revolution, hoping to accelerate revolutionary developments in Europe and initiate the beginning of the World Revolution. The first wave of Bolshevism in Europe (1918-1920) manifested itself as the foundation of short-lived communistic states in a wide area to the east from the Rhine: from the Munich Commune to Soviet Hungary and further on to Soviet Estonia².

The first Bolshevik states were founded in November and December 1918 in the territories liberated from German occupation by the Red Army. There were created one after another a string of Soviet republics in the Western part of the former Russian Empire: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belorussia, and Ukraine. It was on Moscow's initiative, based on political calculations as an answer to formation of the independent national pro-western states in the region.

The same motivation was behind the foundation of Soviet Latvia in 17 December 1918. Initially, Latvian communists similarly to their Lithuanian and Estonian comrades resisted the idea of forming an independent Soviet republic, but they were forced by Stalin and other party leaders to 'simulate' the foundation of a sovereign state³.

At the time of the proclamation of Soviet Latvia, there were three major competitive political forces in the territory of Latvia: the Soviet government lead by Pēteris Stučka;

the Latvian Provisional government of Kārlis Ulmanis which represented the independent Republic of Latvia, proclaimed in 18 November 1918; and the local German minority which advocated the foundation of a larger Baltic state and organized their own military formations (Baltische Landeswehr)⁴. The government of Kārlis Ulmanis represented democratic and national values, orientated towards the Western democracies, in opposition to Pēteris Stučka whose government propagated communistic ideals and was strongly connected with Soviet Russia. The local German minority was politically oriented towards Germany and intended to Germanize Latvian territory retaining its historical privileges and political domination. The subsequent struggle for power in Latvia until late 1919 was fought between these three major political forces and ended with the victory of democratic government of Kārlis Ulmanis.

Originally Bolsheviks achieved indisputable success, capturing by the end of December 1918 the Eastern and Central parts of Latvia, and the city of Rīga by 3 January 1919. The success of the communists forced all the anti-Bolshevik forces (the government of Kārlis Ulmanis, the local Germans and Russian monarchists) to consolidate for their common cause. However, this did not lead to the expected success, and by the end of January, almost all of the territory of Latvia had been captured by Bolsheviks. Only with significant support from Germany and the Western Allies was the Red army stopped in the far south western corner of Latvia near Liepāja harbour.

In Latvia, Bolsheviks achieved the greatest success in the whole Baltic region. Their advance in Estonia and Lithuania was not so significant⁵, and the Army of Soviet Latvia (ASL) had to be used to defend Soviet power in the neighbouring territories as well. Despite the initial military failures in February and March, the Soviet regime in Latvia remained externally stable. Although the government of Stučka had to face many interior problems, the collapse of the Soviet regime, in late May 1919, was unexpectedly fast. On 22 May, anti-Bolshevik forces suddenly captured Riga, and after two weeks of retreat the communists only kept control over the Eastern part of Latvia. Left with no effective military power (the main part of the ASL had deserted), the Soviet government moved to Russia and the Bolsheviks withdrew from the struggle for power in Latvia⁶.

INITIAL PUBLIC SUPPORT OF THE SOVIET REGIME

Although historians, with few exceptions⁷, recognize a general public support for the Bolsheviks by late 1918, it is difficult precisely to detect the changes in public sentiments, the scale of support and the reaction to the specific political decisions of Soviet regime. During their rule, the Bolsheviks avoided democratic elections and polls, which might have reflected the public mood. Therefore it is possible to make only an approximate calculation of the scale of support.

The only figures historians can adhere to are the results of the local elections at different levels in the central and eastern part of Latvia in second half of 1917⁸. The Bolsheviks

gained a decisive victory in competition with other political forces acquiring more than 50% of votes in almost all districts. The Bolsheviks received the highest support in the rural areas. In August 1917, they gained 48% of votes in Rīga⁹ city, compared to 80% in the northern Latvian rural district Rūjiena, and an average of 71-76% in un-occupied Latvian territory¹⁰. Despite the fact that these elections were poorly attended (the number of participants hardly exceeding 30%)¹¹, these figures show that the active part of Latvian society was supporting radical ideas. This was not surprising, taking into account the traditionally strong position of leftist views in the population, and psychological motives, connected with Bolshevik promises of peace, which must have been popular in a Latvia devastated by war¹². As a result, a year later when the communists returned, they could count on a continuation of the public sympathy that had manifested itself in 1917, in January 1918 resulting in a convincing victory in the elections for the Constitutional assembly.

Additionally, two other circumstances should be mentioned, which by late 1918 were to the favour of the Bolsheviks. Firstly, the Bolsheviks offered an immediate rescue from German occupation. They were seen as the only true alternative at the time and as a real power which could force Germans to retreat, thereby providing long desired peace and prosperity for the Latvian people. Secondly, the communists were accompanied by Red Latvian Riflemen regiments. These consisted of Latvians who had been fighting for the Russian Empire in national formations during World War I, later to retreat to Soviet Russia and participate in the struggle on the Bolshevik side. At their return home to Latvia, they were greeted as heroes and hardly delayed by any fighting. Short engagements in Inčukalns, Iecava and Lielauce against local German and Latvian national units throughout January could not stop the Red Riflemen's advance. In numerous towns their regiments were reinforced with volunteers, their total number thereby exceeding 5,000¹³.

Shortly before the Bolsheviks arrived, there were armed uprisings in many places, most notably in the cities of Rīga, Jelgava and Bauska. These were organized by the communist underground and supported by the local population. Units of Red militia, later to be included in the ASL, had been formed extensively. It should be noted that it is difficult to find cases of civil disobedience in the first two months of Soviet rule, whereas there were many indications of active popular support for the Bolsheviks.

These public inclinations put the pro-Western government of Kārlis Ulmanis into a corner. Facing Bolshevik invasion, it had no choice but to ally itself with the Germans, thus pooling military resources. Unlike in Estonia, because of popular dissent it was impossible for the nationalists to carry out mobilizations. The agreement with the Germans on 29 December resulted, in the evening of the very same day, in the uprising of one of the companies in the Rīga garrison. When the national government left Rīga in the early days of January, there were only 400 soldiers left of the original 1,400 under its command, the rest had dispersed or joined Bolshevik forces¹⁴. Comparing these figures

with the more than 5,000 volunteers in the Red Army, we get a notion of the scale of public sympathy for the two sides in late 1918.

The importance of the public attitude may be recognized when the situation in Latvia is compared to that in the two other Baltic states. The incursion of the Red Army did not succeed in Estonia and Lithuania. In Estonia, the initial advance of the Bolsheviks was stopped and crushed by national forces as early as January 1919. Estonian society was more in favour of balanced social democrats than of communists, and supported the national statehood proclaimed in 1918. In Lithuania, the situation was even worse for the Bolsheviks than in Estonia. The great authority of the Catholic Church eliminated any cooperation between the population and the communists. As a result, the government of Soviet Lithuania could count only on Russian forces¹⁵.

THE EMERGENCE OF RESISTANCE AGAINST SOVIET POWER

From the Bolshevik seizure of power in the greatest part of Latvia to the final breakdown, barely five months were to pass. It was a surprising turn, considering the initial public sympathy, as well as the economic and military assistance provided by Soviet Russia¹⁶. However, growing discontent in the population has to be taken into account.

The first cases of armed resistance against the Bolsheviks occurred in the eastern part of Latvia in February 1919. This particular part of the country had been under communist rule for more than two months. In late February, a peasant uprising took place near the town of Balvi and in its rural districts. On 10 March, partisans attacked the Balvi railroad station¹⁷. In Southern Latvia near the town of Līvāni, a guerrilla unit was organized, consisting of 63 people at the time. However, the most active resistance developed in the central provinces of Latvia, which earlier had been considered pro-communist. Here, near the town of Ērgļi, the "Green army" was in operation, consisting of 400 combatants¹⁸.

In the spring, peasant rebellions, uprisings and guerrilla warfare affected substantial areas: Tīrzas, Lubānas, Kraukļu, Druvienas and other districts of Maliena County, as well as Jumurdas, Kosas and Ērgļu districts of Cēsis County, and others. Bolsheviks had to involve units of ASL in order to suppress armed opposition¹⁹.

Beside the armed struggle, an increasing number of cases of civil disobedience may be identified. Reports from the province to the Commissariat of Interior Affairs confirmed a shift in the public mood. Soviet political and military authorities recorded progressive scepticism in the population about a "communism suitable for real life"²⁰. Bolshevik leaders noted a growing frequency of sabotage as well as apathy and indifference among the workers.

A decrease of public support was very noticeable in the military development. At first, it expressed itself as a decrease in the number of volunteers for the army. In March, for the first time the Soviet government was forced to order mobilizations to reinforce its

armed forces. The population shunned recruitment, despite the strong measures against deserters introduced by the Bolsheviks²¹. As discipline was failing in the army units, the first cases of mutiny occurred. Reports from the frontline disclosed an increasing hostility towards communists among the soldiers²².

The biggest armed uprising took place in the city of Cēsis in the night between 13 and 14 May, a week before the collapse of Soviet regime. A partisan detachment attacked Cēsis, an important administrative and military centre. A part of the city's garrison and local militia joined the insurgents, and the rest of them maintained neutrality. The rebels captured most of the public offices in the city, as well as their main target, the prison, from which they released more than 210 persons. The Soviet government had to summon regular units of the ASL, in order to expel the insurgents from the city. Most of the fugitive prisoners were captured, and 18 mutineers were executed on the spot (among them soldiers and militiamen)²³.

However, the population's true attitude toward the Bolsheviks manifested itself in most critical moment for the Soviet power. The military and political catastrophe of 22 May began with the inactivity of the Red Latvian Riflemen regiments, failing to resist the attack of the anti-Bolshevik forces, and subsequently retreating chaotically from Rīga. A major part of the ASL personnel deserted, and the workers of Rīga showed no will to participate in the city's defence, remaining deaf to the Bolshevik call for final battle.

The Bolshevik evacuation to eastern Latvia in late May was characterized by mass desertion and a general hostility of both army personnel and local population toward communists and Soviet officials. Assaults against Soviet representatives by their own soldiers, deserters and partisans were reflected by later reports to Commissariat of Interior Affairs on the course of evacuation²⁴. During two weeks of retreat nearly 70% of ASL personnel deserted – its strength falling from 105,000 to 35,000²⁵.

A similar proportion of communist party members deserted as well. Only around 4000 communists and approximately 1,500 soviet officials were evacuated to eastern Latvia²⁶. Taking in account that in March the number of members of Latvian Communist Party had increased to 8,000 and in May reached around 10,000 it can be seen as a considerable loss²⁷. These figures show a disinterest for the struggle for the communist cause, not only on the part of the population but among the most loyal followers. The changes in the public attitude over just five months were so dramatic that it is hard to explain the reasons only by referring to the economical and social failures of the Soviet regime. The causes appear to be hidden much deeper in the very nature of the Bolshevik regime.

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE LATVIAN BOLSHEVIKS

The first practical change introduced by Bolsheviks which affected the population was the reorganization of the local political administration. Shortly before the invasion of the Red Army, there had been elected councils in almost every rural district, copying

the democratic institutions of 1917. The first task of the communists returning from Soviet Russia was to pursue a 'bolshevization' of these institutions of self-government. Groups of instructors sent by the Soviet government, in many cases even ahead of the regular army, dissolved the elected councils or arrested those officials who were considered wealthy farmers or members of the intelligentsia. Later these councils (in some regions up to 85%) were re-elected among the landless peasants, according to the dogmatism of proletariat dictatorship²⁸. This was the first contact of the population with Bolshevik power, demonstrating ideological transformations following the communist retreat to Soviet Russia in early 1918²⁹.

The most notable aspect of Latvian Bolshevik ideology was its radicalism. Latvian communists were dedicated internationalists who looked upon Latvia as a step on its way towards World Revolution. The head of the Soviet government, Pēteris Stučka, stressed this:

There should be a hammer in one hand and the rifle in the other hand – only in this way will a devastated Latvia be rebuilt. And our red flag will rise over the castle of Rīga [...] to be seen from afar with the guarding password of the Paris Commune: 'We stand here in guard for all of mankind!'³⁰

The ambition and the mission of Latvian communists were founded on the belief that the Latvian proletariat was more advanced than the Russian, and therefore had an exclusive role to play in the history of mankind. We see it in the words of Pēteris Stučka:

Small Latvia is starting an historical age [...]. It is clear to everybody who is watching, the spectacular history of the Latvian proletariat applies to several special tasks: it can only stand in the first line. And the Latvian working Commune [...] has to struggle to be the leading Commune.

The Latvian Bolsheviks attacked this task with great enthusiasm despite all obstacles "notwithstanding hunger and frustration"³¹.

The Latvian Bolsheviks attacked this task with great enthusiasm. The plan was to establish a true dictatorship of the proletariat, mercilessly to start a class war and form a new kind of society. To accomplish this, however, the primary objective of the communists was to conquer the public consciousness. Pēteris Stučka stressed:

[...] we are opening a general agitation [...] to battle for life or death against the mental dependence in which the masses and not only the masses are choking, against all spiritual life of the bourgeoisie³².

Actually it had to be struggle 'for life or death' not only against those ideas and values but also against people who were advocating them.

These general formulations to a great extent determined the attitude towards culture of the Soviet regime. First the very meaning of the term 'culture' was changed. The only culture that was considered as such by Bolsheviks was what was helpful in serving the regime's political interests and accomplishing their ideological goals. Usually, in the Bolshevik discourse, there was no distinction between 'culture' and political propaganda and

agitation³³. For example, in December 1918 the War Revolutionary Committee of the city of Daugavpils formed a Cultural organizational branch, assigned to the agitation and organization of Soviet power in the province, and equipped with 15 machineguns³⁴.

Executives of the culture department, armed with rifles and machineguns, represented the attitude of the new regime towards the cultural space³⁵. Similarly to the geographical space, it had to be conquered and subordinated to proletarian dictatorship. This goal was achieved through iron censorship, enforcement of new symbols and submission of the intelligentsia.

The first cultural metamorphosis to be noticed was the appearance of new symbols, widely used in the celebrations and funerals organized by Bolsheviks. Red flags, stars, sculptures and banners with motives from the class struggle were used, despite the fact that they were alien to Latvian culture and neither their form nor their message were understandable for the public. However it is important to notice how the symbols reflected the Bolshevik ideas. The State Emblem of Soviet Latvia can be mentioned as an example. In contrast to the state symbol of the hammer and sickle, used in Soviet Russia, the Latvian communists used a scythe, recognized as a more advanced tool, in order to stress the more progressive nature of the Latvian proletariat³⁶. At the same time, a fierce struggle against non-communist symbols was launched. The usage of 'wrong' symbols was punished severely³⁷.

The fate of the so-called 'intelligentsia' – the most educated part of society, which traditionally had high social authority – is significant. The Soviet regime recognized it as a dangerous, or at least an unnecessary part of the society. The food rations for the intelligentsia was set so low that without collaborating with the Bolsheviks they would be exposed to starvation³⁸. Even those members of the intelligentsia who were in Soviet service were looked upon with suspicion. The Bolshevik press stressed that they were not fully obedient to the Soviet regime, but camouflaging their true beliefs³⁹. As a result, the intelligentsia turned out to become one of the most terrorized groups of society.

Even the teachers, traditionally considered one of the most revolutionary social groups, were heavily repressed. One of the reasons was the Soviet government's ambitious project of transforming the traditional school into a 'Labour School'⁴⁰. This project was based on the idea, expressed in the Communist Manifesto, that education should be combined with material production. A new perfect generation of the proletariat should be produced in Labour Schools. The radical education reforms were never accepted by a majority of the teachers, resulting in deep suspicion from Bolsheviks, who called them the 'darkest and most irrelevant bootlickers'⁴¹.

THE SYSTEM OF BOLSHEVIST TERROR

The radicalism of the Soviet regime determined the use of brutal measures in order to achieve its ideological goals⁴². Not persuasion, but intimidation and the use of force

were selected as unavoidable instruments for building communism in the shortest possible time. Under the conditions of class war, there was no room left for mercy and the importance of terror became clear from the very first days of Soviet rule. Retaliations cannot be explained as a necessity in order to protect the new regime against violent opposition, because there was none in December 1918 and January 1919.

That there were ideological, not rational causes for the implementation of the terror may be indicated through a mapping of the centres of repression. This shows a correlation of the pro-Bolshevik attitudes of the population, and the scale of terror. The characteristic example is the Vecgulbene area, which was traditionally recognized as one of the Latvian communist strongholds. Here the first revolutionary tribunal was organized the very day after the proclamation of Soviet power in Latvia 18 December 1918. Until April 1919 the tribunal condemned no fewer than 113 people to capital punishment, which is second highest number in Soviet Latvia, next only to the Rīga tribunal with 175-192 death penalties⁴³. It should be mentioned that highest number of death sentences (40) were given in January – shortly before the first peasant uprisings and guerrilla activities when no active opposition yet could be identified⁴⁴.

The conviction that of the the Latvian communists were predestined to have an exclusive historical role expressed itself in the introduction of an innovative system of terror in comparison to Soviet Russia. The Bolsheviks had all the competences to manage that – many of them had previously worked in repressive institutions in Soviet Russia and some of them even participated in the theoretical discussions on the necessity of Red terror. For example, the head of Soviet government, Pēteris Stučka, was the first Commissar of Justice in Soviet Russia, together with others signing the decree of Red terror in September 1918⁴⁵.

Unlike what happened in Russia, the Latvian Bolsheviks avoided establishing 'extraordinary commissions' (*cheka* in Russian), replacing them with political branches, controlled by the local administration. It is important to take into consideration that the government of Soviet Latvia did not permit the organization of *cheka* sections, but obtained absolute control over the local repressive system. It was the intention of the Latvian communists to have their own secret police, independent of the Russian, despite all difficulties in gaining their far-reaching goals.

The second step after the introduction of political branches was the reorganization of revolutionary tribunals to increase their efficiency. The staff of each tribunal was diminished from seven to three members. Later such a model for the revolutionary courts (popularly named *troykas*) was adopted by Soviet Russia. It became the main institution of the revolutionary judiciary, hearing political and criminal cases. In a few months a net of these tribunals covered almost all of Latvian territory. By April, around 700 people had been condemned to death⁴⁶, totalling in more than 1,000 in the whole period of the Soviet rule in 1919⁴⁷.

The third achievement of the Latvian Bolsheviks was the construction of concentration camps exclusively for political prisoners. In contradiction to Soviet Russia where no clear instructions on the issue were given at the time, the government of Soviet Latvia issued special regulations⁴⁸. It was based on a proposal made by the Council of Revolutionary Struggle on 13 February. The concentration camps were created for “reactionaries who were seriously suspected of being counterrevolutionaries but whose crimes could not be documented and brought to trial”⁴⁹.

The resolution of the council to a great extent indicates the nature of Bolshevik system of terror, which became an instrument of public administration. At the beginning, the number of outspoken political enemies in the Soviet controlled territory was insignificant, and most of the people picked out for retaliation by Red terror in reality were innocent. It was sufficient to look potentially dangerous or guilty of so-called objective crimes to become victims of social or ethnic genocide. The practice of the repressive system to arrest as many as possible and search for the evidence afterwards – in many cases deciding according to ‘revolutionary consciousness’ whether to release, hold as hostage or to kill the accused – was a shocking experience for Latvian society.

The escalation of violence became in several cases the object of criticism even by party members. For example, the shooting in late March 1919 of 98 persons by a special army commission in the city of Daugavpils was criticized by the local communist organization. A letter describing the outrage of the military authorities was sent to Lenin. One of the Latvian military and political leaders, Kārlis Daniševskis, justified the mass killing as a revenge for similar actions by the anti-Bolshevik forces against communists in their controlled part of Latvia⁵⁰. However, complaints about the scale of terror by the communists themselves were not common practice⁵¹.

By the year 1919, the system of terror had become an important part of State administration that directly affected thousands of people, and indirectly the whole society. The scale and nature of terror shook the Latvian society, which previously had only experienced chaotic terror against a number of bourgeois and aristocrats by the Bolsheviks in early 1918.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that brutal Bolshevik terror was not the consequence, but the cause of the resistance. It is possible to identify chronologically the shift in public attitude in response to Soviet repressive politics. There were no significant cases of resistance in January and February. However, the prisons were getting more and more packed, the number of death penalties stayed high and the Soviet government started to establish the concentration camps.

It is hard to link the mass murders and the taking of hostages that occurred in March with endeavours to suppress public resistance because there were no cases of rebel-

lion. Guerrilla activities and early cases of civil disobedience cannot be identified until March and April. There occurred a turn in the public consciousness, which manifested itself in an increasing intolerance toward the communists. Significantly, the uprising in the city of Cēsis and the general collapse of Bolshevik regime occurred in May 1919, a month that started with a tremendous celebration of 1 May and saw a peak of communist propaganda.

It cannot be ignored that terror reflected the deeper intentions of the regime. Bolshevik ideological goals were alien to the greatest part of society. An actual turning point in public attitude was the recognition of a dramatic difference between Bolshevik politics in 1917 and 1919. Instead of peace, the communists offered civil war and a policy of war communism; democratic institutions of self-governance were replaced by party dictatorship; instead of prosperity, the population faced hunger; hopes for land were ruined by nationalizations and the introduction of collective farms. These were the reasons why the Soviet regime despite initial public sympathy, failed to obtain continuous support, and instead of mass enthusiasm gained public hostility.

The consequences of discontinuity in time become even more considerable when the Latvian communist movement is examined. There can be identified clashes, not only between Bolsheviks and the society, but among the communists themselves. The reason was the German occupation, which had isolated the local underground communists from those who moved to Soviet Russia, losing ideological connection. The Latvian society and local communists lacked information about the political and ideological changes in Soviet Russia, represented by Latvian communists returning home in late 1918⁵². The possibility of mutual understanding, overcoming the lack of continuity, was diminished by the unwillingness of the Bolshevik leaders to limit themselves to the achievements reached in Soviet Russia. They wanted to go further, transforming Latvia into a polygon of social experiments where mistakes made in Russia were avoided, leading to a 'purer' version of communism. The result was the total clash with the Soviet regime – where not only the biggest part of society, but also the members of the Latvian Communist party in great numbers sought to escape the army and the Soviet institutions.

NOTES

¹ According to estimates made in Soviet times the Latvian population decreased from 2.5 million inhabitants in 1913 to 1.3 million in 1919. Around 700,000 Latvian refugees lived in Russia at the time. See *Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas vēstures apcerējumi (1893-1919)* [Historical Studies of Communist Party of Latvia (1893-1919)], vol. 1, Riga 1961, pp. 373, 394.

² A full list of these would consist of: the Soviet Republic of Ukraine, the Estonian Working Commune, the Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic, the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic, the Socialist Soviet Republic of Belorussia, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Munich Commune (also known as the Bavarian Soviet Republic and the Munich Soviet Republic), the Slovak Soviet Republic and the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee. The results were not inspiring, see R. Pipes, *Communism: A History*, New York 2003, pp. 50, 51.

- ³ Šalda V., *Latviešu strēlnieki par un pret lieliniekiem (1915-1920). Dokumenti un materiāli*, Daugavpils 2006, pp. 105, 106; see also *Образование Советской Социалистической Республики Белоруссии*, <http://www.belarus.by/ru/belarus/history/6/4/index.php>, accessed on December 2008.
- ⁴ E. Muhle, *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, New York 2003, p. 51.
- ⁵ The territory of Estonia was liberated from the Red Army on 24 February 1919. In Lithuania communists managed to capture half of its territory and it was liberated in June 1919.
- ⁶ However it had no actual political influence left although the government of Soviet Latvia formally continued to operate, resigning only on 13 January 1920.
- ⁷ A. Plensners, *Divdesmitā gadsimta pārvērtības*, New York 1978, p. 324; see also V. Bērziņš (ed.), *20.gadsimta Latvijas vēsture. Neatkarīgā valsts (1918-1940)*, vol. 2, Riga 2003, pp. 29-30.
- ⁸ These were elections for the Land Council of Vidzeme, the District Land Councils and the Constituent Assembly of Russia.
- ⁹ P. Stučka, *Rakstu izlase*, vol. 2, Riga 1978, p. 307.
- ¹⁰ V. Bērziņš (ed.), *20.gadsimta Latvijas vēsture. Neatkarīgā valsts (1918-1940)*, vol. 1, Riga 2000, p. 620; see also E. Andersons, *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1920*, Stockholm 1967, p. 245.
- ¹¹ Bērziņš, *20.gadsimta cit.*, vol. 1, p. 620.
- ¹² V. Blūzma, *Sarkanā terora sākums Latvijā*, in "Latvijas Zeme", 23 March 1993, p. 6. In elections for the Constituent Assembly of Russia the Bolsheviks received 72% support in Latvia compared to an average of 24% in Russia; see Andersons, *Latvijas cit.*, p. 251.
- ¹³ Bērziņš V. *Latviešu strēlnieki – drāma un traģēdija*, Riga 1995, p. 166.
- ¹⁴ Plensners, *Divdesmitā cit.*, p. 203; see also Bērziņš, *20.gadsimta cit.*, vol. 2, p. 26.
- ¹⁵ V.G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity & German Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge 2000, p. 229.
- ¹⁶ LVVA, P-8 f., 1.apr., 7.a l., 142.lp.
- ¹⁷ Bērziņš, *20.gadsimta cit.*, vol. 2, p. 57.
- ¹⁸ Ā. Šilde, *Pasaules revolūcijas vārdā*, Riga 1993, pp. 32-33; see also Bērziņš, *20.gadsimta cit.*, vol. 2, p. 56.
- ¹⁹ Bērziņš, *20.gadsimta cit.*, vol. 2, p. 57.
- ²⁰ LVVA, P-613 f., 1.apr., 82.l., 11.lp.
- ²¹ Bērziņš, *Latviešu cit.*, p. 175.
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.
- ²³ Ā. Puriņš, *Dumpis uz grimstoša kuēa*, in "Rīgas laiks", 1994, 5, pp. 21-23.
- ²⁴ LVVA, P-10 f., 1.apr., 51.l.
- ²⁵ Šalda, *Latviešu cit.*, p. 145; see also A. Štrauss, *2. Latvju strēlnieku pulks revolūcijas cīņās*, in P. Viksne, V. Straujš, P. Stučka (eds.), *Latvju strēlnieku vēsture. Strēlnieki Padomju Latvijā. Atmiņas un apraksti*, vol. 2, Moscow 1934, pp. 2, 265.
- ²⁶ There were registered 2,963 communists and 1,434 officials evacuated to Eastern Latvia. Also around 1,000 communists were mobilized during evacuation. See *Latvijas Komunistiskā partija 1918. un 1919. gadā. Dokumenti un materiāli*, Riga 1958, p. 453.
- ²⁷ *Latvijas Komunistiskās cit.*, pp. 414, 419.
- ²⁸ LVVA, P-10 f., 1.apr., 49.l.; see also LVA, PA-55 f., 2.apr., 3.l., 3.lp.
- ²⁹ S. Courtois, W. Nicolas, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, London 1999, p. 65.
- ³⁰ Stučka, *Rakstu cit.*, p. 311.

- ³¹ Šilde, *Pasaules* cit., p. 20.
- ³² Stučka, *Rakstu* cit., p. 318.
- ³³ R. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, New York 1989, p. 70.
- ³⁴ LVA, PA-45 f., 4.apr., 24.l., 89.lp.
- ³⁵ On subject about war on culture and symbols in Soviet Russia see Stites, *Revolutionary* cit., pp. 64-70.
- ³⁶ Stučka, *Rakstu* cit., p. 374.
- ³⁷ Šilde, *Pasaules* cit., p. 51.
- ³⁸ Food ration was set to 200 grams of bread per day for intelligentsia, see Stučka, *Raksti* cit., p. 422.
- ³⁹ Šilde, *Pasaules* cit., p. 64.
- ⁴⁰ M. Vecvagars, *Vienotās darba skolas izveidošanas iecere LSPR 1919.gadā*, in "Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis", 1991, 10, pp. 16-23.
- ⁴¹ Šilde, *Pasaules* cit., p. 64.
- ⁴² For theoretical discussion on relationship between revolution and terror see A.J. Mayer, *Furies: Violence & Terror in the French & Russian Revolutions*, Princeton 2000, p. 96.
- ⁴³ LVVA, P-21 f., 2.apr., 10.l., 128.lp.; P-12 f., 1.apr., 59.l., 1.-9.lp.
- ⁴⁴ LVVA, P-21 f., 2.apr., 10.l., 128.lp.
- ⁴⁵ V.N. Shostakovsky (ed.), *Гулаг (Главное управление лагерей) 1918-1960. Документы*, Moscow 2002, p. 14; see also on other Latvians in repressive system of Soviet Russia Courtois, Nicolas, *The Black* cit., p. 78; I. Simbircev, *ВЧК в Ленинской России (1917-1922)*, Moscow 2008, pp. 16, 20, 22, 27; Andersons, *Latvijas* cit., p. 300.
- ⁴⁶ LVVA, P-21 f., 2.apr., 10.l., 128.lp., P-12 f., 1.apr., 59.l., 1.-9.lp.
- ⁴⁷ Bērziņš, *Latviešu* cit., p. 168.
- ⁴⁸ Šilde, *Pasaules* cit., pp. 19, 20; see also M. Jakobson, M.B. Smirnov, *Система мест заключения в РСФСР и СССР. 1917-1930*, <http://www.memo.ru/history/NKVD/GULAG/articles/Chapter2.htm>, accessed on December 2008.
- ⁴⁹ LVVA, P-613 f., 1.apr. 83.l., 3.lp.
- ⁵⁰ LVVA, P-10 f., 1.apr., 3.a. l., 35.lp.op.
- ⁵¹ As another example we can mention the admonishment performed by the Commissariat of Justice with respect to arrests made in the city of Valmiera where people were accused of giving shelter to German soldiers in February 1918. The Commissariat indicated that such practice of "foolish arrests spreads indignation", see LVVA, P-12 f., 1.apr., 114.l., 142.lp.
- ⁵² Courtois, Nicolas, *The Black* cit., pp. 65, 78, 79.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

- Latvijas Valsts Arhīvs* [State Archives of Latvia] (LVA).
- Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs* [Latvian State Historical Archives] (LVVA).
- Latvijas Komunistiskā partija 1918. un 1919.gadā. Dokumenti un materiāli* [Communist Party of Latvia in 1918 and 1919. Documents and Materials], Riga 1958.
- Merts (Lapiņš) K., *No Latvijas sarkanā valdnieka līdz emigrantam* [From Latvian Red Ruler to Emigrant], Riga - Liepāja 1924.
- Šalda V., *Latviešu strēlnieki par un pret lieliniekiem (1915-1920). Dokumenti un materiāli* [Latvian Riflemen For and Against Bolsheviks (1915-1920). Documents and Materials], Daugavpils 2006.
- Shostakovsky V.N. (ed.), *Гулаг (Главное управление лагерей) 1918-1960. Документы* [Gulag (The Chief Administration of Camps) 1918-1960. Documents], Moscow 2002.
- Stučka P., *Rakstu izlase* [Selected Works], vol. 2, Riga 1978.

Secondary Works

- Andersons E., *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1920* [History of Latvia 1914-1920], Stockholm 1967.
- Bērziņš V., *Latviešu strēlnieki drāma un traģēdija* [Latvian Riflemen: Drama and Tragedy], Riga 1995.
- Id. (ed.), *20.gadsimta Latvijas vēsture. Neatkarīgā valsts (1918-1940)* [History of Latvia in the 20th Century. The Independent State (1918-1940)], vol. 1, 2, Riga 2000, 2003.
- Blūzma V., *Sarkanā terora sākums Latvijā* [Start of the Red Terror in Latvia], in "Latvijas Zeme", 23 March 1993.
- Courtois S., Nicolas W., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, London 1999.
- Jackobson M., Smirnov M.B., *Система мест заключения в РСФСР и СССР. 1917-1930* [The System of Prison Administration in RSFSR and USSR. 1917-1930], <http://www.memo.ru/history/NKVD/GU-LAG/articles/Chapter2.htm>, accessed on December 2008.
- Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas vēstures apcerējumi (1893-1919)* [Historical Studies of Communist Party of Latvia (1893-1919)], vol. 1, Riga 1961.
- Liulevicius V.G., *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity & German Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge 2000.
- Mayer A.J., *Furies: Violence & Terror in the French & Russian Revolutions*, Princeton 2000.
- Muhle E., *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, New York 2003.
- Peniķis M. (ed.), *Latvijas atbrīvošanas kara vēsture* [History of Latvian War of Liberation], vol. 1, Nebraska 1961.
- Pipes R., *Communism: A History*, New York 2003.
- Plensners A., *Divdesmitā gadsimta pārvērtības* [Metamorphosis of the 20th Century], New York 1978.
- Образование Социалистической Советской Республики Белоруссии* [The Foundation of Socialist Soviet Republic of Belorussia], <http://www.belarus.by/ru/belarus/history/6/4/index.php>, accessed on December 2008.
- Puriņš Ā., *Dumpis uz grimstoša kuģa* [Riot on the Sinking Ship], in "Rīgas laiks", 1994, 5.
- Šilde Ā., *Pasaules revolūcijas vārdā* [In the Name of World Revolution], Riga 1993.

Simbircev I., *ВЧК в Ленинской России (1917-1922)* [The VChK in Lenin's Russia (1917-1922)], Moscow 2008.

Stites R., *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, New York 1989.

Štrauss A., 2. *Latvju strēlnieku pulks revolūcijas cīņās* [2nd Latvian Riflemen Regiment in Revolutionary War], in Viksne P., Straujš V., Stučka P. (eds.), *Latvju strēlnieku vēsture. Strēlnieki Padomju Latvijā. Atmiņas un apraksti* [History of Latvian Riflemen. Riflemen in Soviet Latvia. Memories and essays], vol. 2, Moscow 1934, p. 2.

Vecvagars M., *Vienotās darba skolas izveidošanas iecere LSPR 1919.gadā* [Project of United Labour School Formation in LSSR in 1919], in "Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis", 1991, 10.

