COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP IN LATVIA: DECEMBER 1918 – JANUARY 1920. ETHNIC POLICY

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In 1918 the majority of Latvia's population, worn out by the long years of war and German occupation, welcomed the Communists led by Peteris Stučka – who in fact were carrying out the aggression of Soviet Russia – as liberators whom they expected miraculously and quickly to solve the problems, some of which had been swelling for centuries, the agrarian issue in the first instance. The fact that the ranks of the Stučka-led troops comprised not only the Latvian riflemen, who were expected home, but also Red Chinese units, was only the first surprise, but by no means the greatest nor the last one. The Communism that Stučka brought – a perfect Latvian-style Communism that did not even allow the distribution of land to peasants as private property and wished to demonstrate to Russia how a real, 'pure' type of Communism, 'more correct' than the one imposed in Russia's heartland could be built. Latvia must create, Stučka declared, 'a small exemplary cell to serve as a paragon for the rest of Russia...' This brought misery for the entire population of Latvia and terror, without which it could not survive a moment: as early as 18 December 1918 the first Revolutionary Tribunal was founded in Vecgulfene and it quickly grew into one of the most blood-thirsty among such bodies in entire Soviet Latvia – in the course of the first two weeks alone, i.e. by 6 January 1919 it had held three sessions, arrested 144 persons, imprisoned 98 and executed 14.¹ The tribunal's sessions took place in the local church, which had been turned into a Communist club! Luckily Jews were few in number in this district, called Maliena. By 9 May 1919 Maliena's tribunal had repressed only nine Jews altogether; Stučka himself admitted that Maliena's tribunal had been the most ruthless one in entire Soviet Latvia and almost a half of all executed

¹ Latvian State History Archive (hereafter – *LVVA*), f. 31, ser. 2, p. 13. fo. 8.

persons were to be placed on its account.² The foundation of this tribunal was followed by many others, covering the entire country and literally driving the population into Communism by rifle's butt, gallows and concentration camps (there were three main tools of terror: revolutionary tribunals, investigation commissions and political departments that functioned as a sort of a KGB of Stučka's regime). It was in Communist Latvia that a KGB officer of Latvian origin, Martins Lacis' aspirations were fulfilled in full extent; in newspaper *Izvesti'a* on 23 August 1918 he had for the first time come out with self-coined term *The Red Terror* (both words to be written with capital letters), which meant mass-scale terror and focusing on the person's social background instead of searching for proofs of his or her guilt: bourgeois and landed gentry were guilty by definition because they were not proletarians but bourgeois.

Stučka's regime was not specifically anti-Semitic nor was Stučka himself an anti-Semite, although anti-Semitism was spread in the lower layers of Latvian Communists; if there was an ethnic group that Stučka was hostile towards as an ethnic, not only a social unit, these were the local Germans. Yet the obsession of Stučka's regime with the imposing of Communism would touch Jews as well, and rather painfully at that: the trends of the social structure of Jewish petty bourgeois – particularly the large number of people employed in commerce – was completely opposed to Soviet Latvian Communism, which from the very first days of its existence prohibited keeping more than 1000 roubles at home and commanded the delivery of all the surplus money and gold to the state and went as far as imposing 'a bourgeois tax on clothing, underwear and footwear'. The Jews of Latvia did not play any, not even the slightest role in the power apparatus of Soviet Latvia and the implementation of the Communist policies. Significantly, there was not a single commissar – of Jewish-origin either from Latvia, or from Russia – involved even in the political work in the Soviet Latvian Army – which was the official name of the armed forces of the Communist regime –, although Jews were visibly represented in the political work in the other units of the Soviet Russia's troops. There was even a certain number of Poles and Germans serving in the Latvian Riflemen units, but not a single Jew; ethnic Latvian Communists themselves were so numerous and so loyal to Lenin

² P. Stuchka, *Za sovetskuiu vlast' v Latvii. 1918–1920. Sbornik statei* (Riga, 1964), pp. 493.

that there was no need to assign the political work to anybody else as there was probably no other more loyal group in entire Russia (also the administration of the special and political agencies within the army, such as the department of political control as well as the information and investigation department, was in the hands of ethnic Latvians exclusively: I. Beigrants, J. Krikmanis, O. Kazimirs, same as the intelligence service of the army: O. Lacis, F. Berzins³). There were no ‘Jews – chekists’, nor ‘Jews – commissars’.

Admittedly, in 1918–1919 several Jews from Latvia entered Cheka service in Russia’s heartland, but their influence and role at that time was not even close to that enjoyed by ethnic Latvian chekists. The first Jew from Latvia to be hired by the KGB and serve in a war tribunal was Davis Rapoport (1898–1962) who was born in Riga and served in Voronezh; he was followed by Jakovs Veinshtoks, born in Rezekne district in Latvia, whom his destiny had taken to North Russia, where he joined the KGB, was soon transferred to Ukraine and reached the highest point in his career in 1933–36 serving as the head of the OGPU academy, to be executed in 1939, of course. Boriss Gordons (1896–1937), born in Daugavpils, started his career in KGB structures in Yelts, continued in Orel, much later – in 1934–1937 raised to the status of one of the most prominent Soviet spies in Germany and was executed already in 1937. Tukums-born Veniamins Gordons (1891–1940) entered the ranks of the Cheka in 1919 and from 1920 to 1926 served as the secretary of the chairman of the Cheka (later GPU and OGPU) Feliks Dzerzhinsky himself; he was executed in 1940. In 1919 most likely only one of Latvia-born Jews Mendelis Deichs – who was mentioned earlier as a member of Bund in Daugavpils in 1905 – for a short while had risen to a position in Moscow that could be compared in influence to that of Latvians in the Cheka: in May 1919 he was appointed member of the operative troika of the State Extraordinary Commission together with Dzerzhinsky and his deputy Jekabs Peters; although it has not been established with complete certainty what kind of decisions troika exactly made, it can be assumed that it adopted quick and ruthless resolutions ‘to fight counter-revolution’. Later, until 1924 Deichs worked in Odessa division of the OGPU, and, of course, was executed in 1937. Daugavpils-born Solomons Mazo (1900–1937) was recruited for the Cheka in 1921 and in 1935 reached the peak of his career, becoming chairman of Kharkov NKVD authority and State

³ *Istoriia latyshskikh strelkov 1915–1920* (Riga, 1972), pp. 392–393; *Revoliutsionnye latyshskie strelki* (Riga, 1980), p. 170.

Security Commissar of third rank. He, however, was among those chekists, who had a presentiment of his own destiny: Mazo shot himself on 4 July 1937, leaving a suicide note: 'Comrades, come to your senses! Where does this chain or arrests lead to...' Arturs Hirshfelds from Jelgava, who in 1921–24 had served as the first resident of the combined Soviet civilian and military intelligence service in Germany, also met his death in 1937. Irrespective of their ethnic background, chekist officers committed unspeakable crimes during the Russian Civil War in 1918–1921 and the total number of their victims probably reached more than 200,000–300,000; frequently their victims were atrociously tortured before their death. Where does such atrocity come from? A classic work, dedicated to the history of Russia, claims that the source of atrocity, at least partially, was rooted in the beastly brutality that according to the author had been typical for Russian peasants since times immemorial.⁴ However, atrocities were committed in Soviet Latvia, too, in 1919, and the Latvian Cheka – or whatever it was called – did not have a single Russian peasant nor a Jew in its ranks, in ethnic terms the staff was exclusively Latvian. I do not have the answer.

Several specific aspects that affected the proportion of Latvians and Jews in the State Extraordinary Commission have to be mentioned. Firstly, the proportion of Bolsheviks (Communists) among Latvians was higher than among any other nation represented in the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party and this situation persisted for several years, for instance, in 1922 of all Latvians residing in Russia 7.8% per cent were Communists, Lithuanians ranking second, followed by Estonians, while Jews were in the sixth place; membership in the Party, certainly, was an advantage for admission into the ranks of the Cheka. The other peculiarity was the military experience that Latvians had accumulated through their service as riflemen, that at least in the early years of Communist rule was considered an advantage that Jews did not have. Latvians residing in Russia were primarily concentrated in Moscow, Petersburg and some other industrial centres and this, combined with other factors, dictated the very high proportion of Latvians in the central bodies of the Cheka, while Jews were much broader represented in their

⁴ O. Figes, *A Peoples Tragedy. The Russian Revolution. 1891–1924* (New York, 1996), pp. 646–647; concerning the number of the KGB victims, see N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York, 1999), p. 392; concerning the Latvian Jews in the KGB: V. Abramov, *Evrei v KGB* (Moscow, 2005); also: *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1935–1941* (Moscow, 1999).

traditional territories: in the former Pale of Settlement, especially in Ukraine, where there was no shortage of Latvians transferred there from Moscow either. In the early years of Cheka operations their fame of being loyal to Bolsheviks was a sufficient advantage for Latvians to make a career in the KGB, which aspect was combined with another factor: Latvians, being clearly aware of belonging to an ethnic minority in Russia, to a certain extent formed a closed circle where one Latvian chekist recommended another for admission to the Cheka, etc. Personal recommendations were one of the main staff selection principles in the early years of the Cheka and Poles, too, recommended other Poles, Jews recommended Jews, while among Latvians this sense of belonging to a community – ‘a clan’ was probably the strongest. Yet after the Civil War the Cheka (OGPU) started applying other employment criteria; there were at least two of them: education – and in this regard Jews surpassed any other ethnic group (see below) – and language skills, which were particularly important for spying abroad and in this respect, too, Jews were the best.⁵

Peteris Stučka, not being an anti-Semite – which he could not have been even if he wanted considering the role of the Jewish-origin Communists in Soviet Russia – certainly sanctioned the operation of Jewish Communist sections; there were three such sections: in Rezekne, Daugavpils and Riga. They were very small, tiny even; for instance the Riga section had only 15 members; the Soviet Latvia of 1919 indeed did not have the slightest reason for forming concepts about ‘Jewish Communists’. The number of Jewish members in the Young Communist League (the LCP’s Union of Working Youth) was even smaller in 1919; it seems that at that time there were almost no Jewish members among the Young Communists in Riga, Kurzeme and Vidzeme at all: during the first Congress of the Young Communist League in Riga on 28 February – 1 March the operation of 14 Young Communist units in Latvia was noted, of these 13 were ethnic Latvian groups while only one, stationed in Riga, consisted of non-Latvians and even this was that of Russians. The Congress elected the Central Committee of the Union of Working Youth consisting of nine members, all of them Latvians.⁶ It was only in Latgale region that a very small number of Jewish Young

⁵ *Evrei i russkaia revoliutsiia. Materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. O.V. Budnickii (Moscow, 1999), pp. 329–337.

⁶ *Latvijas Komjaunatnes Vēsture Dokumentos 1917–1970* (Riga, 1973), pp.16–26.

Communists would emerge (see below). Jewish Communists had their own press: a newspaper in Yiddish *Der Roiter Emeth* (The Red Pravda), which was first issued in Riga on 13 January and was published until the liberation of Riga from the Bolsheviks on 22 May; it was printed in the nationalized Elias Levins' printing house; altogether 56 issues of this newspaper were published, the number of printed copies has not been established but assumedly it was not large. The existence of a Jewish Communist newspaper was nothing extraordinary; the Soviet rule published press also in Russian, German, Lithuanian and Estonian languages (an interesting detail: the Communist newspaper in the Lithuanian language *Darbininkų Kova* employed then very young Justas Paleckis who in 1940 was appointed head of the marionette government of occupied Lithuania; his collaboration with Soviet Russia started very early indeed). The Jewish Communists in Daugavpils had a club of their own, named after Marx; Jewish Communist sections comprised small youth divisions.⁷ The same sort of activities were sanctioned all over Soviet Russia; and in Latvia this bizarre Jewish Communist section, which was a mortal enemy of the traditional Jewish culture, not to mention Zionism (the outstanding right-wing Zionist Vladimir Zhabotinsky described the Communist rule in Russia as having a Black Hundred and anti-Semitic character and the Jewish section as an ardent henchmen (*prisluga*) of the Bolshevik-Black Hundred), most likely did not have enough time to launch activities worth considering (for instance, in Kiev, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities with large Jewish communities Jewish sections went as far as organizing public burning of Jewish books: publications in Hebrew and religious works;⁸ nothing of the sort happened in Latvia). The first Jewish Communist section was founded in Daugavpils in December 1918, but it was very small (see below).

Although Stučka was no friend of the Bund, in Soviet Latvia, as in Soviet Russia in general, Bundists were given rather free hands to

⁷ L. Dribins, *Antisemitisms un tā izpausmes Latvijā*, p. 82; Š. (Bubi) Ceitlin, *Dokumentāl'nāia istoria evreev Rīgi* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 35; see also the carefully compiled list of Jewish press in Latvia (1918–1940): B. Volkovich, *Iz istorii evreiskoi kulturi v Latvii (1918–40)*, vol. 2. (Daugavpils, 2002), pp. 28–40; R. Treijs, *Darba tautas prese* (Riga, 1984), pp. 224–225; I. Apine, *Latvijas komunistiskās partijas nacionālā politika 1917–1920* (Riga, 1980), p. 161; I. Paletskis, *V dvukh mirakh* (Moscow, 1974), pp. 50–51.

⁸ *Sbornik statei po evreiskoi istorii i literature*, vol. 2, part 1, ed. M.S. Zhidovecky (Jerusalem, 1992), p. 11.

act;⁹ in their meeting in Riga on 15 February Bundists went as far as openly expressing support for the Soviet rule, yet they voiced also several demands traditional for the Bund: guaranteed equality of all languages and Jewish autonomy in the field of culture and education; Bundists even required Jews to be permitted to communicate with the state in Yiddish.¹⁰ Stučka's regime did not have any intention – at last not at that time – to meet this demand (and certainly not to the full extent), nor any other Latvian government – Communist or anti-Communist national government – should have been obliged to do this; the Bundists' demands in the field of language ('equality of languages') were excessive. Yet the Soviet rule laid no obstacles to education in Yiddish and operation of Jewish schools. The Jewish grammar school headed by J. Landau (with the Russian language of instruction) that had returned from evacuation in Dorpat was however nationalized, which under Stučka's regime of warring Communism was a logical development (all schools had to turn into a 'single school of work'), yet it continued to function as a Jewish school (although it was renamed as simply school No. 44, which was the Communist practice aimed and depriving schools of their identity); one Jewish school with the Jews' language of instruction (most likely Yiddish) was opened even in Valka, where the Jewish community was very small. Some Jews occupied public positions of secondary importance under the Communist regime (for example, medical doctor Boriss Polaks worked in the sphere of healthcare until Stučka was driven out of Riga on 22 May 1919; later the same year he became one of editors of the democratic newspaper *Segodnia* but then his political ill-wishers reminded him of his service to Communists), but on the whole in ethnic terms Stučka's national Communist government was the most Latvian of all powers in Latvia in 1919; not a single non-Latvian held any state or party position.

Stučka's national Communism caused two kinds of problems for many Russian-speaking Jews: firstly, the Communist regime – particularly in the early phase – consistently respected the rights of the Latvian language as the official language of record-keeping (the

⁹ The Bund in Riga '...is reported to have held some open meetings and published a weekly newspaper...'. *Strādnieku Avīze* (the Latvian Social Democrat Workers' Party's newspaper in Liepāja), 28 March 1919; Vladimir (Ziv) Zhabotinskii, 'Chornaia sotnia' *Vestnik evreiskoi kultury* (Riga, 1990), nos. 4, 12.

¹⁰ 'Ebreju tautas sapulce', *Cīņa*, 19 February 1919; Such meetings had indeed taken place, but the information about Bundist press under Stučka's regime was wrong: no such press existed.

teaching of the Latvian language was also broadly introduced in schools); it was a sort of Communist nationalism; secondly, Stučka, at least until the summer of 1919, was a consistent advocate of the idea of 'single and indivisible Soviet Latvia' which meant that Latgale was considered an irretrievable part of Soviet Latvia, that caused discontent among Jews residing in Latgale who were orientated to Vitebsk gubernia; initially Stučka ignored their position¹¹. He should not necessarily be reproached for it, yet the following has to be taken into account: Latgale Jews were far from being the only group that were nostalgic for the times when their territory belonged to Vitebsk; they certainly were not the most numerous carriers of such sentiment either. The radical Communist economic policy of Stučka's regime – especially in the agrarian sector concerning the most vital issue for the population of Latvia, on which the policy was nationalisation of land instead of distributing it to peasants and formation of Soviet farms – caused discontent on the broadest possible scale and in Latgale this discontent took the expression of a desire to join (return to) the Vitebsk gubernia, where the land of rural estates was distributed to peasants, which course the sterile Communist Stučka rejected; even a part of Communists in Latgale yielded to the longing for union with Vitebsk. While analysis of the attitude of Soviet Latvia towards Latgale is not part of the goal of the present paper, it has to be noted that after the disastrous losses of May 1919 the trend to associate Latgale, which was still in Communist hands, with Vitebsk, emerged even in the circles of the Soviet government, which hoped thus somehow to keep Latgale in Communist hands, even if these would no longer be exclusively Latvian Communists.

In February 1919 Stučka's regime launched red terror on the broadest possible scale and Jews fell victim to it, mostly for violation of the economic policies of the Communist regime (as 'profiteers'). The terror took various forms; while Juda Shehtelsoņs and Abrams Levins escaped with an only administrative penalty for illegal brewing of brandy wine, Efraims Falks, Efraims Abramsoņs, and Solomons Akselrods were not that lucky and for a similar perpetration on 10–11 February were put in Riga Central Prison but Johelis, Davids and Jakobs Barkans – imprisoned in Kaiserwald (Mežaparks) concentration camp¹² (Prison No. 2 – called Riga Citadel – was also

¹¹ Dribins, *Antisemitisms*, p. 83.

¹² LVVA, f. 5627, ser. 1, f. 3, fos. 14–35.

a horrible place of terror). Although the terror was not specifically anti-Semitic, even Riga Bundists, who had just welcomed the Soviet rule (which they most likely had done in order to adapt themselves to the situation, rather than as a matter of their principles), now had a reason to complain that militia, as they were evicting people from their apartments, confiscating foodstuffs, imposing forced labour on citizens and launching arrests and carrying out searches, behaved in a manner that made an impression that ‘<...> strong anti-Semitic trends were in the air everywhere...’.¹³ What was not typical for Stučka personally and other commissars (or what they did not show), was present in ‘the people’: in militia and other civil servants. Information about the hidden anti-Semitism had probably reached Moscow where Jewish-origin Communists played an extremely important role; on 8 March Stučka had to write a letter to the very influential Jakov Sverdlov (in terms of influence probably ranking second or third in Soviet Russia, right after Lenin or after Lenin and Trotsky), Chairman of All-Russia Central Executive Committee, a Jew by origin, who had personally visited Riga in January and had probably already then received some complaints from Jews (admittedly, who had complained to Sverdlov about what probably cannot be accurately established; while it is unlikely that a Jew from Kurzeme, let us say, from Jelgava, could have complained about insufficient application of Russian or Yiddish, complaints of such type could have come from Latgalean Jews who were orientated to Vitebsk). Stučka tried to justify himself in the mentioned letter: ‘There has never been and never will be any anti-Semitism here among us’.¹⁴ (One of a Jewish Communist’s complaint to Moscow was even funny: he wrote that Stučka’s government deliberately allocated worse quality and yellower paper to Jewish newspapers than that used by other publications; in fact all press issues were printed on yellowish paper of equally poor quality). Admittedly, it definitely was not terror against Jewish religion or the-so-called profiteers that really worried Sverdlov as one of the staunchest supporters of the dictatorship of the Communist Party. What Moscow most likely was unsatisfied with was nothing else but the fact that there was neither a single Jew nor a single Russian in Stučka’s government and that Stučka until then had probably rather consistently insisted on the status of the Latvian language as the official language of Soviet Latvia and in practice this consistency often took rather arrogant

¹³ F. Gordons, *Latvieši un žīdi starp Vāciju un Krieviju* (Riga, 2001), p. 26.

¹⁴ Apine, *Latvijas komunistiskās partijas nacionālā politika*, p. 162.

expressions. Although only about a year and a half ago in the article 'On Latvian Autonomy' Stučka himself as a matter of principle had declared that civil servants of Latvian origin in Riga should by all means be able to speak German and Russian, it had been in 1917 and not during his dictatorship in 1919. It seems that he had clearly changed his opinion to the worse for the German language, but the main aspect was that civil servants of Soviet Latvia, coming from poorly educated and Communist-chauvinist circles, gave free reins to their haughtiness. Stučka personally had already received relevant complaints from Riga, which he briefly summarized as follows: '... I received complaints to the effect that in a Commissariat everyone who speaks Russian or other language that is not Latvian, receives the answer that he cannot be understood and with that the communication ends...' Significant is the following confession: 'Jews, too, complained to me about our nationalism whose existence they deducted from the fact that we use the word 'Jew', which in Russian, as we know, has a chauvinist tinge to it. I explained to them though that this word did not have the same meaning here...' ¹⁵ No matter what kind of complaints Stučka received in Riga and no matter what he replied, it is very unlikely that such complaints alone could have changed anything in his policy, even if on the language issues alone throughout the year 1919 Stučka demonstrated extreme obduracy and failure to comprehend the domestic and external situation in Latvia and all changes came only as a result of pressure from Moscow. The same was true also regarding language matters.

On 8 March, at the very same time when Stučka had to justify himself to Sverdlov, a decree on the languages applicable in the official documents in Soviet Latvia was issued, regulating the choice of languages in three types of documents: first, three languages qualified for internal documentation of central and local authorities: the Latvian and Russian languages and the Latgalean dialect; second, the correspondence between the central institutions and local authorities had to be either in Latvian or Russian; third, applications could be submitted to authorities in the Latvian language, Latgalean dialect, the Russian, Jewish, Lithuanian, Estonian and even German languages and should the applicant have written in some other language (it may be assumed that one such other languages could be, for example, Polish in Latgale), the authorities

¹⁵ Stučka, *Nacionālais jautājums un latviešu proletariāts*, p. 240.

were obliged to file and translate it.¹⁶ As we see, several languages were granted very broad application opportunities – and there was no reason whatsoever for discontent from the part of Jews specifically, although it seems that the law of 8 March was a result of pressure from Moscow (Sverdlov himself, whose insistence had probably been the main cause of the above-mentioned law, suddenly died of Spanish flu on 16 March that in Riga nobody could, of course, have predicted). In spite of the mass terror against the Baltic Germans, in compliance with the language law applications could be submitted in the German language, too, and even some German schools were operating, yet the fate of the German language was the most threatened – the Baltic Germans themselves had to disappear from Soviet Latvia as intended in the 25 April resolution by the Soviet authorities commanding their extradition.

Terror against Jewish bourgeois continued with increasing force. ‘Crimes’ of not only economic character were punished with imprisonment. For Mordehajs Dubins, a prominent Jewish leader and orthodox chasid, the primary concern under any regime was the opportunities of Jews to practice their religion; he managed to get permission from the Communists to hand out flour to Jews for baking matzo, yet a little later his request was regarded as a counter-revolutionary step and imprisonment was absolutely inevitable; only grave illness – typhus – saved him from it; the Bolsheviks thought that Dubins was thus doomed to death anyway, however he recovered and meanwhile the Soviet rule had come to an end. But the others still had to try to survive to see that day: mass-scale arrests took place in Riga, on 14 March, on the very same day that the *Landeswehr* achieved considerable success in Kurzeme, capturing Talsi; Stučka’s regime became nervous; on 14–15 March approximately 60 persons were shot dead in Bikernieki forest; blood flowed in Riga prisons as well. It is difficult to establish the exact figure of the executed Jews, same as that of Latvian victims. Already in February Lija Hosiasona, Morics Bergers and Jefraims Abramsons had been sentenced to death ‘for profiteering’ and their property had been confiscated.¹⁷ One must agree with authors of academic papers who have admitted that due to the fact that very incomplete documentation had survived, it is impossible to establish a more or less accurate total number of the

¹⁶ Idem, *Piat’ mesiatsev sotsialisticheskoi Sovetskoi Latvii*, part 2 (Pskov, 1921), pp. 34–35.

¹⁷ Dribins, *Antisemitisms*, p. 82.

Bolsheviks' victims.¹⁸ It is clear that the number of victims was smaller than that mentioned in popular literature and that among Jews this figure was incomparably smaller than among the main target groups of terror: Baltic Germans and Latvians. Popular literature that is not based on reliable sources operates with very impressive figures: according to such works, 1,549 people were shot dead in Riga and 3,632 in countryside and the number of victims may have been even larger by a few thousand¹⁹. Documental sources do not provide a reliable proof for such figures.

The German *Landeswehr* also kept their registers. As soon as Kurzeme was liberated, a list of the murdered, arrested and deported (*Liste der von der Bolsheviki in Kurland ermordeten, verhafteten und von dort verschleppten*) was compiled; one clearly could not expect complete accuracy from it – the *Landeswehr* was preoccupied with its main task – the liberation of Riga – and may have run out of time to make an absolutely reliable list. The list contains a little more than 350 names and it confirms the well-known fact: the terror had deliberately tried to exterminate Baltic Germans, women including – which was the most horrible feature of Stučka's regime (for example, ...*Keyserling, Gräfin Helene, Mitau ermordet...*);²⁰ the number of Jews on this list is very small: a few arrested in Jelgava. After the capturing of Riga the *Landeswehr* established Administration and Assistance Commission (*Verwaltungs- und Hilfs- Kommission*), which compiled a list of the victims of repressions in Riga (it contained however, also a few names of the people repressed in Jelgava): it consisted of more than 520 persons (Stučka's personal confession: in Jelgava and Riga about 500 persons had been shot dead – adds reliability to this figure), the majority of them Germans, though the data on Latvians is also horrifying: for example, on 15 March Georgs Dukats was executed, leaving behind seven children; on the night of 15–16 March Pastor Pauls Treijs, a father of five, met a similar end; Janis Stuberovskis, a father of eight was also shot dead. The *Landeswehr* drew the conclusion that Jews had not taken any part whatsoever in the red terror while the number of repressed Jews on the above-mentioned list slightly exceeded 20, which is definitely an inaccurate figure.²¹ As late as the morning

¹⁸ 20. *gadsimta Latvijas vēsture. II sējums. Neatkarīgā valsts. 1918–1940* (Riga, 2003), p. 55.

¹⁹ Ā. Šilde, *Pasaules revolūcijas vārdā* (Riga, 1993), p. 45.

²⁰ LVVA, f. 5627, ser. 1, 3. l, fos. 1–3.

²¹ Ibid., p. 14–45; P. Stučka, *Za sovetskuiu vlast' v Latvii*, p. 490.

of 22 March Bolsheviks killed a couple dozen Latvians and Baltic Germans in the Central Prison, including nine German Baltic women (Maria Rozen, Maria Klodt, Helen Jordan and others).²² In Latgale the red terror raged much longer and it will be described below (approximately 200 persons were taken as hostages to Soviet Russia, the absolute majority of them were Germans and it seems that there were no Jews among them).

It was only in late 1919 when the way was opened to the last act of the freedom fights – the liberation of Latgale. Latgale had suffered longest under the Communist rule: in all parts of the region it had lasted at least one full year, while in the eastern-most outskirts – almost two years and two months. Daugavpils, once a flourishing centre of Jewish life, literally lay in ruins. From March 1919 the red terror had raged on a grand scale here; 76 well-known public and economic figures of the city were shot dead in Dubrovinski Park on 28 March; the mayor of the city of the German time J. Movshenzons and several other Jewish entrepreneurs were also killed.²³ Local Jews had been visibly involved in the work of the Soviet authorities – considering the larger proportion of Jews in the city's population and more proletarian social structure of the Jewish community here compared to Riga – yet it was not significant; there were two Jewish sections of the Latvian Communist Party – in Rēzekne and in Daugavpils. Only two Jews had held leading positions: Movsha Kabs had been a member of the LCP Daugavpils District Committee (one of seven) and Davids Vaisfelds – member of the LCP Daugavpils City Committee (also one of seven members).²⁴ The number of Jews in Daugavpils had dropped to a very small, almost unbelievably small figure: in the course of one year it had decreased more dramatically than that of any other ethnic group in any other location in Latvia and in the first half of 1919 constituted probably only around 9,000 persons (compared to 55,000 in 1913), while the Jewish Communist section was literally microscopically small: in April 1919 it consisted of only 17 members, 16 candidates and 16 supporters;²⁵ thus, altogether only 45 persons out of 9, 000!

²² *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 26 May 1919.

²³ Z. Jakub, *Gorod Daugavpils. Khronologičeskii obzor 1275–2001* (Daugavpils, 2002), p. 48; G. Barkovska, J. Šteimanis, *Daugavpils vēstures lappuses*, p. 37.

²⁴ *Latvijas Komunistiskā Partija 1918. un 1919. gadā. Dokumenti un materiāli* (Riga, 1958), pp. 253, 351, 379, 438.

²⁵ R. Treijs, *LKP 1919. gadā* (Riga, 1969), pp. 58–59; Apine, *Latvijas komunistiskās partijas. 1917–1920*, p. 161.

Even under the conditions of Soviet terror the Daugavpils Jewish community had remained loyal to their lifestyle and religion; those who were not religious – to their old-time protector, the anti-Communist Bund (although in Latgale in general the proportion of Jewish Communists had never exceeded the low 4 per cent, the figure was higher even among Poles – 6 per cent²⁶). The ethnic composition of the local LCP units of two large Jewish centres in Latgale – Rezekne and Ludza – clearly assert the negative attitude of Jews towards Communism: Jews practically did not hold any official position, not even the lowest one; even in Varaklani where a half of the population were Jews all Communists were local Latgalians or Latvians transferred there from Riga (for example the political department of Varaklani district – a counterpart of the Cheka in Soviet Latvia was headed by ethnic Latvian Karlis Minkis; the situation was the same in Vilani: there the respective authority was under the charge of Peteris Perkons who later gained prominence in the Soviet OGPU and rose to the rank of major of security service; another Latgalian, Dominic Esta was a head of the Cheka in all Rēzekne district²⁷). On 23–25 November 1919 a conference of the Young Communist League of Latgale took place in Rezekne that also proved the insignificant role of Jews among the Communist-orientated youth even in Latgale: only one Jew – Nosons Alperovics by name – was elected to the Central Committee (consisting altogether of nine members) of this organization and most likely only two other Jews – J. Vargaftiks and T. Segale – rose to some kind of prominence in Young Communist activities; Janis Kruze was elected head of the LUCY, which had only two more months left to exist legally.²⁸

Newspapers in Riga presented a very gloomy picture of the situation in Daugavpils: prisons crammed, torture and executions – a daily occurrence, by 1 June 2,000 people had been shot and even more had died of typhus. While the number of the executed persons in reality was not that high, the rest was true: almost 10 per cent of the population of Daugavpils perished under the Soviet rule in 1919; the proportion of birth and death rate among Jews was literally tragic: in 1919 only 178 babies were born while 1,255 persons died. As a result of the First World War (primarily) and Bolshevik rule in late

²⁶ Treijs, *LKP 1919. gadā*, p. 198.

²⁷ *Latvijas Komunistiskā partija 1918. un 1919. gadā*, p. 578; *Kto rukovodil NKVD. 1935–1941* (Moscow, 1999), p. 337.

²⁸ Treijs, *Devinpadsmitais gads Latvijā* (Riga, 1988), p. 132; *Očerki istorii Leninskogo Kommunisticheskogo Soiuza Molodezhi Latvii* (Riga, 1985), p. 45.

1919 the Daugavpils Jewish community had fallen to 9,000–10,000 persons at the most, which was five-times less than before the war.²⁹ The Latgale Jews were exposed to the increasingly hostile attitude of the Soviet rule towards Zionism, which trend was spread all over Russia: already in 1918 all Zionist press publications in Hebrew and Yiddish were banned; in July 1919 the last remaining newspaper (*Khronika evreiskoi zhizni*), which was published in Russian, also met its end; although officially Zionist organisations were not banned yet, following a proposal from Jewish Communists (*Tsentrālnoe Biuro Evseksii pri TsK RKP (B)*) – the Central Bureau of the Jewish Sections under the Central Committee of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party; this section had been established on Joseph Stalin's, Commissar for Ethnic Matters, initiative) the second conference of Jewish sections took place in Moscow on 2–6 June 1919, in which demand to ban Zionist activities was voiced. On 1 September 1919 the Central Committee of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party passed a secret resolution that envisaged further repressions against Zionists and the establishment of a special group under the Russian Extraordinary Commission (KGB) to combat Zionism and Jewish counter revolution; a few days later, on 30 August the teaching of Hebrew as 'a counter-revolutionary language' was prohibited (such prohibition had been demanded by Deputy People's Commissar for Education of Russia, the famous historian M. Pokrovsky; considering the fact that Palestine was under British protection, Zionists were regarded as agents of British imperialism).³⁰ In Soviet Latvia Stučka even went slightly ahead of the orders from 'the centre' – as was typical of him in several fields: although in Russia Zionists were already persecuted as 'British spies', the decision on prohibition of any Zionist activities had not been made yet, but in Soviet Latvia the operation of Zionist organizations was banned and several Zionists repressed already in August 1919.³¹

In May 1919 the Soviet rule in Latgale started arresting Jews who were suspect for collaboration with or sympathy for the White

²⁹ *Evrei v Daugavpilsē* (Daugavpils, 1993), pp. 99; *Evrei v Daugavpilsē*, vol. 3, part 1 (Daugavpils, 2001), p. 20; *Evrei v Daugavpilsē*, vol. 4 (Daugavpils, 2005), pp. 114., 279. LVVA, f. 31, ser. 2, p. 13. fo. 8.

³⁰ M. Beizer, *Evrei Leningrada 1917–1939* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 141–142; I. Maor, *Sionistkoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Vestnik Evreiskoi Kultury* (Riga, 1990), no. 4, p. 18; *Evreiskii vopros: poiski otveta. Dokumenty 1919–1926 gg.* (Vinnitsa, 2003), pp. 14–19.

³¹ Dribins, *Antisemitisms*, pp. 83.

Guards – not K. Ulmanis' government which the Latvian Communists also called the White Guards, but the real White Guards or other anti-Soviet forces in Russia, especially in the proximity of Latgale where Nikolay Yudenich' army started gathering. The first arrests took place in Rēzekne: in May Solomons Lurje was arrested for recruiting the residents of the city for the Northern Army of the White Russians; Lev Zaidin was arrested for similar perpetration; on 9 August Jakovs Ribins and on 10 August Zalamans Lufts were arrested, both were accused of supporting the White Guards; on 10 September the entire Pliners family of five – Gana, Grigorijs, Jeremijs, Raisa and Roza Pliners – were arrested as counter-revolutionaries. Terror was launched in Daugavpils, too, where in September an anti-Soviet organisation was disclosed and Riva Galperins, Ilja Gordins, Esfira Neimane, and later also Jakovs Himmelfarbs and others were arrested.³² It is very likely, of course, that a part of the accusations were fabricated, yet there is also no doubt that a large part of Jews in Russia were very hostile towards Soviet rule and supported both Yudenich as well as Denikin in the South, in spite of the spread of anti-Semitism among the White Russians: for example, many Jews were employed in Denikin's propaganda service, yet it was Denikin's commanded troops that committed the most horrible pogroms in Ukraine. It is very likely that the large-scale arrests in Rēzekne and Daugavpils in August and September were linked with the fact that in Petrograd at that time the KGB disclosed the anti-Bolshevik organisation 'The National Centre' headed by cadets. Their leader was a cadet engineer of Jewish origin V. Shteininger – he was arrested on 26 July and the materials that the Cheka obtained may have disclosed supporters of this organisation in Latgale, too; another Jew, Mihail Feldshtein by name was active in the Moscow branch of 'The Centre'; representative of the Cadet Party with Yudenich, with a cover-name Osetrov, also was a Jew. Jews had also supported another anti-Soviet organisation in Petrograd and Moscow: 'the Rebirth Union', which while being more leftist than 'The Centre', was also in favour of a democratic Russia, which was said to have had contacts in Latvia as well.³³ However, these intellectual circles

³² *No NKVD līdz KGB. Politiskās prāvas Latvijā. Noziegumos pret padomju valsti apsūdzēto Latvijas iedzīvotāju saraksti* (Riga, 1999), pp. 912–914, 922, 929 et passim.

³³ *Krasnaia kniga VTsK*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1989), p. 52; N.E. Kakurin, *Kak sražalas' revoliutsia 1919–1920*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1990), pp. 196–197.

in Petrograd, not to mention their ordinary supporters in Latgale, did not cause much trouble to those, who were fully in charge of the situation in Petrograd and saved it for the Bolsheviks: the first city's Extraordinary Commissar of city was Latvian Jekabs Peters, but in October Leo Trotsky himself joined him.

The year 1920 started with the joint offensive of the Latvian and Polish armies in Latgale to liberate it from the Soviet occupation; on 3 January Communists were driven out of Daugavpils. Journalists from Riga who came to the liberated city, were shocked: the once great, flourishing city as many remembered Daugavpils from the pre-war time, where the Jewish public and cultural life had literally seethed and where the great Sholom Aleiheim had been passionately welcomed in 1914, shortly before Russia fell in the abyss of the world war – now in the aftermath of the war and Bolshevik rule resembled a desert. 'Everything was grey, dirty, empty...'.³⁴ As the Polish front commander Stanisław Septicki arrived into the city, he saw almost no people in streets, the few by-passers regarded the Poles with 'total apathy and indifference', while the few welcomers, who called 'welcome, compatriots' were Jews³⁵. The city suffered from shortage of food, different currencies were in circulation and wild profiteering boomed. Until 15 January the city was practically under total Polish occupation: all authority was exclusively in the hands of the commanders of the Polish garrison and later the Polish commandant continued to exert great power. Although no Jewish pogroms took place in the full sense of the word, Polish soldiers did loot many Jewish shops. Jews complained to the People's Council in Riga, which sent three of its members to Daugavpils: L. Fishmans from the Jewish National Democrat Party, Social Democrat E. Skubikis and Edmunds Freivalds from the Farmers' Union of Latvia. As a result of their visit Latvian soldiers also started patrolling the city streets and commanders of the Polish garrison promised to put an end to the robbing of Jews. The situation indeed improved and Fishmans told the press that not a single Latvian soldier had committed any atrocity against Jews and representatives of the Jewish community expressed gratitude to the government of Latvia for its benevolent attitude towards them.

³⁴ *Segodnia*, 10 January 1920.

³⁵ Ē. Jēkabsons, 'Latvijas varas iestāžu darbs Daugavpilī, Daugavpils aprīņķī un Grīvā 1920. gadā', *Acta Latgalica*, 10 (Daugavpils, 1999), p. 85.

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KOMUNISTŲ DIKTATAS LATVIJOJE:
1918 M. GRUODIS – 1920 M. SAUSIS. ETNINĒ POLITIKA

Santrauka

AIVARS STRANGA

Latvijas Baltijos vokiečiai ir žydai, nors ir skirtingu mastu, labiausiai nukentėjo nuo Stučkos režimo.

1. Neapykanta Baltijos vokiečiams, ypač dvarininkams (jie sudarė daugumą visų Baltijos vokiečių 1919 m. Latvijoje), buvo didžiulė, arba – kalbant naujausiais terminais – netgi turėjo genocido apraiškų. Iš ryškiausių pavyzdžių galima paminėti Latvijos komunistinės vyriausybės 1919 m. balandžio 25 d. dekretą, kuriame buvo skelbiama, kad „Baltijos šalių dvarininkija yra reakcingiausia klasė pasaulyje.“ Dėl šios priežasties, pirma, visi žemvaldžiai ir jų šeimos privalėjo registruotis: per 7 dienas atvykti į vietos vykdomąjį komitetą, priešingu atveju mėginusiems išvengti registracijos grėsė Revoliucinis tribunolas. Antra, po registracijos jie buvo įkalinami koncentracijos stovyklose kaip įkaitai. Trečia, jie buvo ištremiami iš Latvijos visiems laikams. Visai nestebina, kad Baltijos vokiečių šauktinių kariuomenė (*Landeswehr*), kovodama prieš Stučkos režimą, siekė to, ko nesiekė jokia kita struktūra Latvijoje, – jie kovojo už savo etninės grupės išlikimą.

2. Stučka jokių būdu nebuvo antisemitas, tačiau jis buvo radikaliai dogmatiškas komunistas, o žydai nukentėjo ne tiek dėl etninių priežasčių, netgi ne dėl religinių įsitikinimų (nors Stučka buvo brutalus ateistas), kiek dėl savo socialinio statuso arba politinių pažiūrų: netrukus po valdžios paėmimo buvo paskelbta, kad komunistinė Latvija yra darbininkų, bežemių valstiečių ir šaulių Latvija. Žydai nepriklausė nei pirmajai ar antrajai, nei trečiajai kategorijai. Po to, kai didesnėje Latvijos dalyje komunistai patyrė pralaimėjimą ir pats Stučka pabėgo į Pskovą, jis 1919 m. vasarą parašė trumpą straipsnį, pavadintą „Apie mūsų „Antisemitizmą“ (žodį antisemitizmas jis parašė su kabutėmis). Tai labai retas atvejis, kai Stučka, be galo užsispyręs žmogus, buvo priverstas teisintis. Šis straipsnis niekada nebuvo įdėtas į jokių jo rinktinių raštus po Latvijos okupacijos 1940 m. Stučkos darbai – ir ne tik šis – apskritai neretai buvo draudžiami, ir netgi uoliau nei „buržuazinių nacionalistų“ tekstai. Straipsnyje Stučka pripažino keletą esminių dalykų: 1) jo valdžia buvo „grynai komunistinė“, tačiau tarp Rygos komunistų nebuvo nė vieno žydo! Taigi jis negalėjo įsileisti žydų į valdžios aparatą. Persiisi svarbi išvada: nors Latvijoje buvo keletas žydų komunistų, iš esmės jie jokių būdu nebuvo siejami su komunistine diktatūra; 2) Kuršo ir Rygos gyventojai žydai buvo „vokiškos orientacijos“. Vien tik šito fakto užteko, kad jie taptų komunistinio teroro aukomis; 3) masiniai žydų areštai Rygoje vyko dėl to, kad žydai priklausė buržuazijai. Pažymėtina, kad areštai vyko ne tik Rygoje.