

**In From Recognition to Restoration: Latvia's History as a Nation-State**  
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**'Forgotten Voices: Reflections on Latvia during World War Two'**

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The occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Latvia's declaration of independence seemed a suitable occasion to reflect on this author's decade long commitment to studying the history of Latvia during the Second World War. In 2003 Routledge published *Between Stalin and Hitler: Class War and Race War on the Dvina, 1940-46*, a detailed case study of Latgale under Soviet and Nazi rule. Since then, two articles have appeared on the National Partisans: "Divided We Fall: Divisions within the National Partisans of Vidzeme and Latgale, Fall 1945", *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38/2 2007 and "Latvia's Democratic Resistance: a Forgotten Episode from the Second World War", *European History Quarterly* 39/2 2009. Prior to that, in January 2004, there was also a short paper to the XIII Scientific Readings of the Humanities Faculty, Daugavpils University, on the subject "From Source to Person: the Case of Jānis Niedre", published in *Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Readings of the Faculty of Humanities. History VII* (Saule, Daugavpils 2004). These studies all focus on the power of the great ideologies of the twentieth century and the way those ideologies could justify the abandonment of accepted morality. Yet they also say something else about ideology: the years of Soviet and now post-Soviet historiography have drowned out the voices of those who did not quite fit in with the dominant ideologies of the time.

The aim of this short paper, therefore, is to restore to the historical record the voices of some of those who have been marginalised or forgotten. Three examples are taken: the case of Jānis Niedre; the demands of Latvia's former Red Partisans; and the decisions taken by many, possibly a majority of Latvia's national partisans.

The Niedre Case

The Niedre Case took place not on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Latvia's declaration of independence, but an altogether less celebratory occasion, as preparations began to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the declaration of independence in 1943; it concerned events surrounding an article written by the Latvian communist and folklorist Jānis Niedre to mark that anniversary. Niedre's name re-surfaced in September 2008. In that year the *Journal of Baltic Studies* published an article by Kevin Karnes on "Soviet Musicology and the 'Nationalities Question': the Case of Latvia". Karnes commented on the moves made by the Latvian musical and cultural establishment during the Soviet era to discover folksongs outlining the long-standing friendship between the Latvian and Russian peoples, and one essay he chose to consider was written by Jānis Niedre for the collection *Karogs* published in 1942. In this essay Niedre referred to the words of the following folk song:

I gave my sister to a Russian, and myself took a Lithuanian bride, among the Russians, among the Lithuanians, everywhere I find friends and relatives.<sup>1</sup>

However genuine or not the folksong, Niedre's choice of subject matter seemed particularly appropriate for a communist apparatchik, an unthinking pro-Soviet lackey. And may be that is what Niedre was in 1942, but a year later he had become an extremely unreliable communist. On 15 December 1943 Niedre was expelled from the Latvian Communist Party for a nationalist deviation. His expulsion was the result of an article he had written for Moscow Radio's Latvian service to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Latvian independence.<sup>2</sup>

Niedre was born on 24 May 1909 not far from Krustpils, and then went on to study at the primary school in Līvāni, before moving to a secondary school in Jēkabpils. As an adult, he then became a Social Democrat, joining the party in 1929. A student of both history and economics, in 1932 he joined the writer's and journalists' union and became involved in publishing left-wing papers. He stayed a member of the Social Democrats until President Ulmanis rounded up Left-wing activists in the aftermath of his coup on 15 May

1934. In prison he at once joined the Communist Party and when, like many others arrested at that time, he was released in 1937, he formally left the Social Democrats in 1938 and devoted himself to communist politics. In June 1940, after Soviet troops took control of the country, Niedre was elected a deputy to the Supreme Soviet and a junior member of the government working on press and publications, and a founder member of the Union of Writers. When the Nazi invasion began a year later, Niedre was one of those Soviet officials important enough to be evacuated from Latvia, and in exile he was given the job of Secretary of the Presidium of the Latvian Supreme Soviet. It was in this capacity that he was also required to provide material for Moscow Radio's Latvian broadcasts. He worked in this post until his dismissal in November 1943 and his expulsion from the Party the following month. The affair did not completely blight Niedre's career. After the war he continued his work as a Soviet deputy, and pursued his interest in folklore, becoming deputy director of the Institute of Folklore of the Latvian Academy of Sciences.<sup>3</sup>

The "crime" which led to Niedre's expulsion was this: he had written for broadcast, and forwarded to the relevant broadcasting authorities, the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinfo) and the Radio Committee, two articles which he had claimed had been endorsed by the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party, but which in reality had never received its endorsement. Leaving aside the question of how perfunctory the Central Committee's procedures were or were not for vetting such broadcast articles, this was not a simple question of procedure; it was the content of what Niedre had written that was the problem. One of the two articles concerned the Education Minister under Ulmanis and writer on national matters Atis Ķeniņš, who was, it was felt, portrayed in far too positive a light, given the fact that Ķeniņš had been arrested and exiled as a counter-revolutionary. The other article was the more topical, and concerned the significance of the date 18 November 1918 on its approaching 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

What precisely did Niedre say about the date in 1918 on which Latvia's independence was declared? Well, first of all it should be borne in mind that this was an important anniversary to mark because, unlike in 1942, the German occupation authorities had

agreed that lavish celebrations could take place throughout Latvia, culminating in a march past by the Latvian Legion in Riga and a special performance by the Riga Opera.<sup>4</sup> Niedre clearly felt that Soviet Radio had to take cognisance of this and address head-on what the significance of the date was for a majority of Latvians. So he described the regime which owed its origins to the declaration of 18 November 1918 as a democratic republic “proclaimed by many groups of the Latvian people”. He then looked at its most positive features, drawing an unfavourable comparison with the Ulmanis dictatorship by stressing that the inter-war parliamentary republic had given wide representation to the country’s ethnic minorities.

However, the most controversial part of the planned broadcast came when he then went on to suggest that the events of summer 1940 had simply been about restoring to Latvians the democratic rights that had been lost under Ulmanis, explaining that the People’s Government of 1940 “embodied the ideals of 1918”. The short-lived Latvian Soviet Republic of 1919 was scarcely mentioned, nor was the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in autumn 1940. The clear implication of what Niedre wrote was that, as the future of Latvia came back on to the international agenda after the success of the Red Army at Stalingrad, the re-incorporation into the Soviet Union was not the only option.<sup>5</sup>

What made Niedre act in the way that he did? To the leader of the Latvian Communist Party Jānis Kalnberziņš there was little to explain. As he informed N. N. Shatalin, then the Deputy Head of Cadres in the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) but in autumn 1944 to become the head of the Chairman of the Bureau for Latvia (Latburo), the Niedre case proved that all former Social Democrats were quite simply unreliable.<sup>6</sup> However, another explanation seems more plausible: both Niedre and Kalnberziņš were caught out by an important shift in the ideological agenda between Stalin’s speech on 6 November 1943 when he looked forward to the reincorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, and the “Anti-Fascist Meeting of the Latvian People” held in Moscow on 12 December 1943 when he acted as if this were a *fair accompli* when he allowed the President of Soviet Latvia Augusts Kirhenšteins to state that it would not be long before “the Red Army frees our beautiful Latvia”.<sup>7</sup>

## Red Partisans as National Communists

There are other signs that Niedre was not a lone former Social Democrat communist dissident, but in fact the voice of a vanished communist orthodoxy. Niedre had dropped reference to things “Soviet”, and had stressed the popular front nature of the People’s Government established in June 1940, and similar views were well established by 1943 among Latvia’s Soviet partisans. When in 1942 the first attempts had been made to establish a Red Partisan movement in Latvia, Party propaganda had constantly used the word “Soviet”; leaflets had ended “Long live free Soviet Latvia!” or “Long live Stalin!”. In 1943 the propaganda used by the Red Partisans had dropped all this. In fact, in many ways it was similar to that of any other communist party operating in occupied Europe: the communists stressed national themes; leaflets were circulated signed by Orthodox Church bishops, calling for the defence of Christian civilisation, the words “brothers and sisters” replaced “comrades” and all appeals to join the Red Partisans ended “Long live the freedom loving Latvian people and its gallant patriots”.<sup>8</sup>

This line was established when a Latvian Communist Party Central Committee delegation to the Red Partisans arrived at their Belarus base on 21 January 1943, led by Kārlis Ozoliņš and Milda Birkenfelde. In a report to Soviet Partisan HQ on 25 April 1943 Ozoliņš stressed that “there are only a few Hitlerites”, that most “bourgeois” nationalists looked to England and Sweden; the message from the Central Committee was “to make contact with Latvian associations of patriots and influence them to struggle more actively against the Germans, in the direction we wish”.<sup>9</sup> Fulfilling these instructions, the most successful of the Red Partisans leaders deliberately sought out representatives of the national partisans and tried to open talks with them. Wilhelms Laiviņš, who had commanded the “For a Soviet Latvia” regiment when it tried to march from Soviet territory back into Latvia in July 1942, was one of those keen to open talks with the nationalists towards the end of 1943; he recalled, however, in an interview recorded in December 1944 that the only place where formal talks actually took place was near Valka.

We held talks with the nationalists. We met them and held talks. It took place in Valka District. In other districts we just could not make contact. At that time the nationalists were split, breaking up into separate groups. There the Valka HQ had a secretary and we held talks. We met with them and tried to persuade them to fight.<sup>10</sup>

Otomar Oškalsns, who had been the commissar for Laiviņš in summer 1942, was only slightly more successful: on 10 November 1943 he held talks with national partisans near Birzgale. The group he met was linked to the *Latvija* underground resistance newspaper. He recalled rather bashfully that the meeting had begun by singing the “bourgeois” Latvian national anthem. Although disappointed that the talks seemed to get nowhere – the national partisans were determined to co-ordinate their activity with their leadership in Sweden and the possible intervention of the Western Allies – Oškalsns decided to keep in touch; later in spring 1944 he even co-operated with an armed nationalist group in resisting a German attack. As he told his interviewer: “I would have given anything to make contact with them, but was unable to do so”.<sup>11</sup>

These flirtations with a popular front approach to politics, and the implied suggestion that what would be restored in Latvia at the end of the war was a People’s Government rather than a Soviet Government, were brought to an end in December 1943. It was an open secret that the future of the Baltic States was discussed at the meeting of the three Allied Foreign Ministers held in Moscow on 19-30 October 1943. Stalin then used his October Revolution anniversary speech on 6 November to lay claim to the Baltic State once more, and at the Tehran Conference of the Big Three from 28 November to 1 December 1943 Stalin was indeed promised by Roosevelt that the Baltic States would be his.<sup>12</sup> There was no more need for any talk of developing a popular front strategy for Latvia.

How seriously should we take the declarations of Niedre, Laiviņš and Oškalsns? Was it an early outburst of national communism within the Latvian Communist Party? Niedre in particular, and Laiviņš and Oškalsns as things evolved, were caught out by the changed Party line between November and December 1943 when the question of the re-

incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union changed from being an open to a closed question. It would be possible to argue that there is nothing more at stake here than the dictates of Party discipline: communists followed a popular front style strategy when told to, and dropped it when told to. This must inevitably have been the case for some, but there seems to be more in it than that because those associated with the Red Partisan movement would become troublesome comrades in the immediate post-war years. Birkenfelde, who travelled in early 1943 with Ozoliņš to represent the Central Committee among the Latvian Red Partisans, proved after the war to be a real member of the awkward squad.

Milda Birkenfelde (née Dzervite) was born in 1903 near Vecate into the family of an agricultural worker. She joined the Latvian Communist Party in 1921 in nearby Mazsalaca, and after two years activity emigrated to the Soviet Union, where in 1928 she graduated from KUNMZ and returned to Latvia as *Komsomol* organiser in Riga. Arrested the following year, she spent ten years in prison, moving on her release to organise the communist underground in Sēlpils near Jēkabpils and heading the party's Daugava regional organisation. Active in welcoming the Red Army in June 1940 and organising popular demonstrations to demand the removal of Ulmanis and friendly relations with the Soviet Union, she was an obvious choice for rapid promotion and by August she had been elected First Secretary of the Jēkabpils District LCP Committee. Her Second Secretary was Otomar Oškalsns, the future Red Partisan leader, and together with him she formed an *ad hoc* military brigade which fought its way to Soviet territory when trapped by the speed of the German advance. After her three months with the Latvian partisans in 1943, it was logical that in July 1944 she should return with the Red Army and take up once again the post of Secretary of the Jēkabpils District Secretary.<sup>13</sup> Her dramatic life story meant that she had no qualms about calling a spade a spade. At the V Plenum of the LCP Central Committee on 25-6 August 1944, she immediately went on to the attack, criticising the behaviour of the security forces.

Birkenfelde argued that the “first duty” of the NKVD and NKGB should be to help restore links with the local population, the clear implication of her remarks being that this

was not yet happening and the security services were in fact undermining the tenuous links the communists had with the local population.<sup>14</sup> Later in the discussion she was even clearer about the need to work with, rather than against the local population. She stated:

There are very many people who waited for us, who fought the Germans in some way or another, and they must be found, trusted and included in constructing Soviet power. We must work with them. If we rely only on the *aktiv* which has come from the Soviet Union, we will achieve nothing.<sup>15</sup>

Birkenfelde was not alone in her concern at the way Soviet power was being re-established. At the VI Plenum on 15-16 November 1944 the Valka District Secretary Fricis Bergs, another former partisan, complained about the behaviour of the Red Army, much to the fury of Party leader Kalnbērziņš who commented: “Comrade Bergs carried out heroic deeds working among the partisan detachments in the rear of the enemy. And now he is embarrassed by Soviet power. It is shameful for a district secretary to say such things.”<sup>16</sup>

Birkenfelde continued to voice her concerns at the way Soviet power was being implemented in Latvia. Almost two years later, at the XII Plenum on 18-19 July 1946, she had another clash with the leadership when she stated:

It has to be said, that the greater part of our leading workers, both the Russians and those Latvians from the old republics, do not have a feel for the class struggle which is taking place with us. For them, all Latvians are as grey as cats, they cannot distinguish the difference in thought of a middle peasant or a kulak and put everything down to the national question. Their position is incorrect.<sup>17</sup>

Such views did not go down well with the Latburo, the Party institution established by Moscow to oversee the work of the Latvian Communist Party. As early as a meeting

between district party secretaries and representatives of the security organs held on 2 April 1945 the then Latburo leader Shatalin commented:

Even among party activists there are manifestations of local nationalism, manifestations of bourgeois nationalism, when comrades misunderstand our mutual relations and the current help we are giving. Our help is not always accepted as it should be, sometimes it is accepted with ill-grace and here and there you hear such things as: why have they come, and sometimes much ruder things.<sup>18</sup>

The re-surfacing of such views fifteen months later was not welcome, particularly since it coincided with other signs of nationalism among leading party members. By autumn 1946 the Latburo was increasingly concerned about the Third Secretary of the Central Committee J. Jurgens. Addressing a republican conference of local soviet chairmen, he made a series of statements that, while self-evidently true, were at variance with Soviet propaganda and which suggested to the LCP's Moscow minders a common stance with bourgeois nationalism. The starting point Jurgens took for discussing the current tasks faced by soviet chairmen was the fact that the situation faced in 1946 was far harder than that faced in 1940 because the country "had been emptied". Things were made worse because "our people is no longer the people of 1905, 1917 or 1919; the revolutionary mood there was then no longer exists". He conceded that some peasants had lived well under Ulmanis, and saw it as understandable that they did not approve the Soviet land reform, since no one liked having their property taken away. It was his view that "we must win the personal respect of all peasants" and drew no distinction between kulaks and peasants.<sup>19</sup>

Even though Birkenfelde and her Jēkabpils district colleagues were pioneers of collective farm construction in Latvia, the Latburo felt that she was tainted with nationalism because she tended to see the Latvian peasantry as suffering in common rather than being sharply differentiated between the rich kulak and the rest. When the Latburo held its only formal meeting on 21 October 1946 to assess the state of the harvest in light of the growing threat of famine in the USSR, it reminded the LCP Central Committee that

failure to meet harvest targets in the current situation would be considered a state crime and that any failure to deliver the harvest was a direct result of sabotage by kulaks. In this situation, an incorrect attitude to the kulak danger was impermissible. Birkenfelde was among those district party secretaries criticised. The new Latburo chief V F Ryazanov demanded that at least one district party secretary be sacked as a warning to others and reminded those present of rumours that Birkenfelde's husband was effectively a kulak who, through relatives, controlled at least three farms. The implication was clear, Birkenfelde was soft on kulaks because of personal circumstances. In the end it was Jurgens who was sacked, because he had also been associated with a group of veteran party members who remained loyal to Kalnberziņš's predecessor as party leader.<sup>20</sup> Birkenfelde's punishment was to be issued with a party penalty for her anti-party attitude to the kulaks.<sup>21</sup> It would appear that after receiving this warning, Birkenfelde was demoted to *raion* level work, but later appointed District Party Secretary for Jelgava. She retired in 1954.<sup>22</sup>

#### National Partisans and Surrender

The most controversial comment made by Jurgens at that conference of local soviet chairmen did not in fact relate to the kulaks, but the national partisans, or "bandits" as they were always referred to in Soviet documents. Jurgens told the local soviet chairmen: "we could put the army into every forest to destroy every last bandit, but we think, however sad the fact, that they are our Latvians too". It seems certain that it was this apparent sympathy for the national partisans that was the ultimate cause of his dismissal. However, he concluded those remarks with the comment: "may be they will understand and leave the forest; those who do not, we will have to destroy". It was always part of Soviet strategy to encourage national partisans to surrender their weapons and leave the forests. Why so many did so is not something that has really been explored by historians. Since 1991 it has seemed more important to extend the time-scale of national partisan activity into the mid 1950s, rather than to consider why, after such a dramatic beginning, the national partisan movement dwindled to become little more than an irritant to Soviet power. The key to understanding the success of the Soviet calls for national partisans to

leave the forests is to remember that these calls were not issued by the Soviet authorities alone.

When Oškalsns held his talks with national partisans in Birzgale in 1943, he felt the national partisans had no real leadership, no real centre. That was not the case. The national partisans to whom he talked owed allegiance to the Latvian Central Council and it had simply taken a policy decision not to talk to the communists. The story of the Latvian Central Council is well known. Formed in August 1943, it brought together the leaders of Latvia's pre-Ulmanis democratic republic, uniting democrats, Christian democrats and socialists, but excluding the communists as a point of principle. Its strategy was simple: it would make contact with Latvia's diplomats abroad and on the basis of such contacts, prepare for a national uprising to begin after the Red Army had crossed into Latvia; supported by the Swedes and British, the uprising would begin in Kurzeme and as it got under way a new national government for Latvia would be declared; for safety's sake, most of the members of that planned government would already have been smuggled to security in Sweden before the uprising began.

Often held to ridicule because of its reliance on British and Swedish support, which was not in the event forthcoming, and the fact that before the insurrection could begin, its leader General Jānis Kurelis was arrested by the Nazis in November 1944, it should be remembered that the Latvian Central Council always had a reserve strategy, and that reserve strategy began to be successfully implemented early in 1945. The reserve strategy was to prepare an army of national partisan forces throughout Latvia, which would stand ready to act when the western Allies entered the Baltic Sea. This event was anticipated as taking place in March 1945 when the Germans began to withdraw from Norway and the Allies began to make moves to open up a northern front for the final assault on Berlin, from bases to be established in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. When none of these developments materialised either, the national partisan forces had to consider whether or not to continue their operations or stand down.<sup>23</sup>

Over the summer of 1945 the national partisans loyal to the Latvian Central Council leadership in Sweden came close to representing the nation. In the 1960s and afterwards it suited Soviet analysts to build up the links that existed between some Latvian national partisans and the Germans; but it is beyond question that from autumn 1944 to autumn 1945 the dominant groups among the national partisans were those linked to Sweden and the Latvian Central Council; as the certainty of German defeat became clearer, so those who had initially fought with German support looked to Sweden and the Allies too. The biggest national partisan group the Latvian Fatherland Guards (partisans) Union (LTSpA) saw itself as an umbrella linking all regions of Latvia, with a common democratic programme, linked to Christian ideals, thus echoing the participation of Bishop Jāzeps Rancāns in the Latvian Central Council. The LTSpA brought together the traditions of Latgale Christian democracy and *aizsarg* nationalism, just as the Latvian Central Council had brought back Ulmanis's Peasant Union back into the political fold; it united those who had resisted both the Nazis and the Soviets, with those who had resisted only the Soviets. The LTSpA was a political as well as a military organisation. Although it is questionable whether much was ever done in this regard, the LTSpA saw it as essential to operate a "Self Help" organisation, to give support to the families of those suffering under Soviet oppression. Thus over summer 1945 it stressed the need for political work to be undertaken among the peasantry in order to organise a boycott of deliveries to the Soviet state. The LTSpA was strong enough to circulate 2,000 copies of its newsletter, and in this it identified its support base as "democratically inclined Latvians". It always stressed the word "democratic", and was keen to associate itself with the work of Latvia's last ambassador to Britain, Kārlis Zariņš.<sup>24</sup>

Latvia's national partisans were buoyed up by developments at the Potsdam Conference of the Big Three on July-August 1945. They interpreted the fact that Stalin had been forced at the conference to include members of the Polish Government-in-Exile in the new Polish Coalition Government as a clear sign that Britain was taking a firm stand against Stalin. Rumours at once began to circulate that British military intervention was imminent. What destroyed the LTSpA was the failure of that British military intervention to materialise. The zenith of LTSpA activity came at the end of September, when British

troops were reported to have landed on Latvian soil; moves to appoint a new provisional government began at once. It seems clear in the case of Antons Juhnēvičs, the leader of the LTSpA, that the failure of any British forces to materialise persuaded him not only to leave the LTSpA himself, but to issue an appeal for his followers to surrender as well. He was not alone. Arvids Puids, adjutant to the LTSpA Second Division, surrendered once he became convinced that no real contacts existed between the LTSpA and Sweden and Britain. The Ilūkste commander Stanislaw Urbans and his Chief of Staff both surrendered at about the same time. All those who surrendered expressed concern that a level of violence which was acceptable in the context of foreign military intervention, could not be justified if the national partisans faced the Red Army alone; reprisals would lead to the shedding of too much innocent blood, forcing the national partisans to turn to robbery to survive. To paraphrase the words of Juhnēvičs: good friends were dying in pursuit of a wrong tactic, based on violence and theft.<sup>25</sup>

However, by October 1945 the call to leave the forests was not only emanating from the official Soviet statements about possible amnesties, for a full understanding of the decision of so many national partisans to leave the forests, it is essential to keep in mind that the advice to lay down arms did not only come from the Soviet side. The message that the Latvian Central Council was sending from Sweden at this time was very clear: the international situation meant that an uprising in Latvia could not be sustained; therefore, military units should be preserved but stood down and instead of military action a broad underground network needed to be established to keep the national idea alive until the international climate improved. This was the agreed position of the Latvian Central Council in July 1945 as it tried to restore contact with Latvia from its Swedish base. Its leaders concurred: “in the near future, disagreements are hardly likely to arise between the Allies [so] ... we must prepare for the future; armed struggle by the Latvian people against Soviet power would only be harmful and lead to nothing”. When the Latvian Central Council emissary arrived in Riga in October, his message was quickly passed on to national partisans meeting in Vidzeme, and from them to the national partisans in Latgale. The message stated:

To the command staff of the national partisans of Latvia. I order you not to engage in heavy fighting with the Red Terror. Preserve your strength... demand from you subordinates the strictest discipline allowing no theft, arson or similar actions which will bring harm to our people... Until the moment when foreign states intervene to restore the independence of the Baltic States by force of arms, be passive in your attitude to the Soviet authorities, preserve your lives and organisation and wait for instructions from abroad to begin active operations".<sup>26</sup>

Of course, the national partisans did continue to fight after autumn 1945, but increasingly those still in the forests distanced themselves from the democratic programme of the Latvian Central Council. In May 1946, national partisans belonging to the Latvian National Partisan Union (LNPA), which by then had supplanted the LTSpA as the dominant national partisan force, issued a statement to commemorate thirteen years since the Ulmanis coup. It was a peon of praise: on this "unforgettable day", it stated "class government" was replaced by "national government", a dream that had been achieved "without bloodshed"; by his action Ulmanis had unfurled "the banner of Latvia's new democratic republic".<sup>27</sup> Such statement played into the hands of Soviet propagandists determined to stress the *aizsarg* nature of the national partisans, and helped silence the democratic voice of the first wave of the movement's first wave.

## Conclusion

What conclusion can be drawn from these loosely connected events - Niedre, the party dogmatist who rejected Latvia's sovietisation; Red Partisans who acted like national communists before their time; national partisans who left the forests on the advice of Latvia's democratic politicians rather than surrendering to the Soviet administration? Such events suggest that at the end of the Second World War there were, on both sides of the ideological divide, what might be termed "moderate" elements, people who wanted to prevent civil war between Latvians more than anything else. That, surely, was the message behind the controversial statement Jurgens made about "bandits": "we could put the army into every forest to destroy every last bandit, but we think, however sad the fact,

that they are our Latvians too". This concern for the fate of fellow Latvians was reminiscent of the policy adopted during the war by the Red Partisan leader Oškālns: it was his policy never to open fire first on patrols of the Latvian Legion.<sup>28</sup>

In a different context, Andrew Ezergailis has written about the "missing centre" in Latvia, and that was the impact of the Cold War as well; political views which might be quite close one to another in a democratic society, were pulled to the extremes of Left and Right. As the Cold War developed, there was no chance of the "national partisans" from the Soviet partisan movement establishing contact let alone a common cause with the "Swedish" element of the national partisans, even though in a different context their views, a mixture of Left and democratic politics, would have seemed rather close. Voices such as these simply disappeared, and Cold War historiography became set in stone. An important milestone in the dismantling that Cold War historiography was taken by Ezergailis when he wrote his *Nazi/Soviet Disinformation about the Holocaust in Latvia: Daugavas vanagi, who are they revisited* (Riga, Occupation Museum of Latvia, 2005). This study goes a long way to demolishing the Soviet propaganda myth that there was a direct connection between those involved in murdering Jews in Latvia, those who led the national partisans in the immediate post-war years and those who headed the Latvian anti-Soviet emigration in the 1960s.

However, there are other Cold War myths which need addressing. In Latvia's post-independence popular writing, and in some academic writing too, communists are considered nothing more than Soviet agents, that the Latvian Communist Party had any roots within Latvia itself is simply denied. Such an approach means not only that the voices of the Red Partisans who were national communists before their time are not being heard, but also that the voice of any Latvian idealist, who mistakenly saw in the model of the Soviet Union a solution to their own country's problems of social and national inequality, is also not going to be heard. Even Augusts Kirhenšteins, the man the Soviet Union made President of Latvia in July 1940 and thereafter Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, could fall into this category. In 1946 a report from the Latburo to the Soviet Politburo revealed:

He chatters a lot about how they have put the Latvian people in prison, have pursued a policy of destruction in Latvia, and other bourgeois nationalist nonsense. Kirhenšteins often supports people with anti-Soviet views and is particularly close to the reactionary section of the intelligentsia attached to the university, the academy of sciences, and the institute of medicine.<sup>29</sup>

It is not time, 90 years after the declaration of Latvia's independence, to rehabilitate Kirhenšteins, but it is time to recognise that even Kirhenšteins was a product of his time, a time when the ideological struggle between fascism and communism attracted many idealists to the communist cause, only to discover that the communist cause and the machinations of the Soviet system were by no means one and the same thing. Yet some of those idealists learned how to survive within the Soviet machine and live to fight another day when Khrushchev began his experiment with reform communism. Now, 90 years after the declaration of Latvian independence, it is important to hear the voices of all those who created its history.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Karnes 'Soviet Musicology and the "Nationalities Question": the Case of Latvia' *Journal of Baltic Studies* vol. 39, no. 3, 2008, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> Latvian State Archives (LVA) 101.3.2 p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> LVA 101.5.1 p. 14. For his cultural activities, see *My, nash, my novyi mir postroim: sotsialisticheskaya revolyutsiya I sotsialisticheskoe stroitelstvo v Latvii v 1940-41 godakh. Sbornik vospominanii* (Liesma, Riga, 1975), p. 283. I have been unable to resolve the contradiction between these sources on his place of birth: *My nash* gives his place of birth as Tikhvin, Novgorod Province.

<sup>4</sup> These events are discussed at more length in G Swain *Between Stalin and Hitler: Class War and Race War on the Dvina* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> LVA 101.3.2 p. 51

<sup>6</sup> LVA 101.5.1 p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Pravda* 14.12.43

<sup>8</sup> Latvian State Historical Archives R-69.1a.18 p. 173; R-69.1a.26pp. 25, 150, 152

<sup>9</sup> LVA 101.5.6 pp. 151, 156.

<sup>10</sup> LVA 301.1.29 p. 23

<sup>11</sup> LVA 301.1.29 p. 46

<sup>12</sup> These events are discussed at more length in Swain *Between Stalin and Hitler*, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Compiled from L. N. Terent'eva *Kolkhoznoe krestyanstvo Latvii* (Moscow 1960), pp. 195- 201; and *My nash*, p. 281.

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- <sup>14</sup> LVA 101.3.5 p. 35
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid p. 97
- <sup>16</sup> LVA 101.3.7 p. 115
- <sup>17</sup> LVA 101.9.6 p. 233
- <sup>18</sup> LVA 101.7.44 pp. 18-19
- <sup>19</sup> Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) 600.1.11 p. 121
- <sup>20</sup> RGASPI 600.1.23 p. 19
- <sup>21</sup> RGASPI 600.1.11 p.27; 600.1.23 p. 2
- <sup>22</sup> See *My nash* p. 281 and Terent'eva *Kolkhoznoe krestyanstvo*, n.22 p. 340.
- <sup>23</sup> For a full discussion of the Latvian Central Council, see G. Swain 'Latvia's Democratic Resistance: a Forgotten Episode from the Second World War' *European History Quarterly* vol. 39, no. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> G Swain 'Divided We Fall: Divisions within the National Partisans of Vidzeme and Latgale, Fall 1945', *Journal of Baltic Studies* vol. 38, no. 2, p. 210.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid pp. 201-02.
- <sup>26</sup> Swain 'Latvia's Democratic Resistance', p. 257-8.
- <sup>27</sup> H Strods, *Latvijas Nacionālo Partizānu Karš III, Dokumenti, Apcerējumi un Atmiņas 1944-1956* (Riga, Preses Nams, 2003) p. 119.
- <sup>28</sup> *Na pravyi boi, na smertnyi boi: sbornik vospominanii i dokumentov* (Riga, 1968), Vol. 1, p. 422.
- <sup>29</sup> RGASPI 600.1.23 p. 18. I referred to this first in my ' "Cleaning up Soviet Latvia": the Bureau for Latvia (Latburo), 1944-47' in O Mertelsmann (ed.) *The Sovietization of the Baltic States, 1940-1956* (Tartu: Kleio, 2003). The same document is commented on by Elena Zubkova in her *Pribaltika i Kreml'* (ROSSPEN: Moscow, 2008) p. 277.