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TWO 1905 CONGRESSES IN LATVIA: A RECONSIDERATION

Andrejs Plakans

Two Congresses in November 1905 – the Schoolteachers Congress and the Rural Delegates Congress – have played an important role in the narratives of the events of the year 1905 in the Latvian territories of the Russian Baltic provinces. When narrative descriptions of the two are contrasted with the information available about them in the most frequently used contemporary sources – newspaper accounts – the statements that can be made about the two Congresses turn out to be anchored in evidence that ranges from the certain, the plausible, and the uncertain. The nature of the evidence requires a reassessment of how the Congresses should be fitted in the larger narrative of the revolutionary year and how much importance can be attached to them in light of what is currently known.

Keywords: Latvia; 1905 Revolution; Riga; social democracy; rural reform; rural schools

The world is everything that is the case (Proposition 1)
Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent (Proposition 7)
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922)

Wittgenstein's attractively clearheaded propositions remind one again of the need for circumspection in writing history. There is always the need to know what was 'the case', and there is also the need to make clear how much about 'the case' can be spoken of with confidence. To do both is a difficult assignment for historians because evidence about 'the case' in the past eventually disappears from living

human memory. Take the revolutionary year 1905, for example. In Latvia the anniversary of that year was indeed celebrated in 2005, but the commemorative events seem to have been more important to historically minded intellectuals than to the general public. Abrams Kleckins of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia observed somewhat ruefully:

It is now entirely clear that in spite of official pronouncements and planning efforts, a century later the year 1905 is no longer perceived as a meaningful and revered event by contemporary individuals and society at large. This, in spite of the fact that 1905 involved, more or less actively, the majority of the Latvian people, and that for several decades afterwards novels and plays and poetry were written about that year, operas and ballets were composed, and films made concerning it; and notwithstanding the fact that almost every *pagasts* shortly afterwards had erected monuments and plaques for its victims and heroes. [In 2005] commemorative publications about those times elicited virtually no significant discussion and found almost no resonance in general society. (Kleckins 2006, p. 43)

This article does not propose to answer the questions of why 1905 has faded from the Latvian public's collective memory, and whether one should regret that fact. No doubt the answers would have to involve explorations of the evolving nature of collective memory as such, especially in a society in which the meaning and importance of most twentieth-century historical events remain contested. Certainly the year 1905 has always had a different meaning for those close to the history of Latvian socialism than for those close to Latvian nationalism, and an even more different meaning to those close to the history of the Baltic Germans in the Russian Baltic provinces. And to those interested in the place of 1905 in *Russian* history, the Baltic events have been something of a sideshow, important for its unusual characteristics but still not occupying center stage. It is nonetheless true that historically minded Latvians have continued to write about 1905, assuming all the while that they knew what 'the case' was and how to talk about every aspect of it. The main bibliography of works dealing with the 1905–1907 events, covering the years from 1905 to 1997, lists 3,832 items (books, articles, newspaper stories) (Pūce 1997), which suggests that in spite of the general public's amnesia, at least the intelligentsia were never willing to be silent.

The present article will re-examine several of the narratives that have sought to keep the memory of 1905 alive. I focus on two Congresses of that year, namely the Teachers Congress (*Tautskolatāju kongress*) which met 10–14 November/23–27 November,¹ and the *Pagastu delegātu kongress* or, as it has been termed in English, the Congress of Rural Delegates (Longworth 1959), which met a few days later on 19 and 20 November/2 and 3 December. At issue is the question of whether currently available knowledge about these Congresses entitles them to be entered into the existing narratives in the manner they have been, and what of their aspects we must be careful, if not silent, about. If Kleckins' observations are true, the assignment is particularly serious, because, public memory of and interest in 1905 having disappeared, everything written a century later will be in some sense a *new* history of that year.

Problematizing Familiar Narratives

My reason for focusing on these two Congresses and for isolating them from an almost endless stream of meetings large and small during 1905 in Latvia is to add some thoughts to the re-evaluations of the year now going on among Latvian historians. Since 1905 itself has now been problematized, does it make sense to problematize the Congresses as well? The following observations do not intend to be a new history of the Congresses; for that, continuous work in the Latvian archives would be necessary. However, I do see it as useful and perhaps helpful for future research to review some past and current portrayals of the Congresses, to examine the main features of the meetings, and to assess how far reinterpretations have to reach to arrive at a better understanding of what was ‘the case’.²

As observed, the year 1905 has received considerable attention in Latvian-language historical scholarship for many decades, and information about the year continues to enter wider reaching narratives of general Latvian history. I have chosen to examine five of these narratives and to juxtapose them with some of the primary sources available on the two Congresses. Closest to the events is a work by Spricis Paegle entitled *Kā Latvijas valsts tapa* [How the Latvian State was Created], which was first published in 1923 and republished in 1985 (Paegle 1985). Paegle, a political activist born in 1876, was himself a participant in the 1905 events and writes, as he says, as an ‘eyewitness’. It is not clear from his text, however, whether he participated in either of the two Congresses, but in his narrative of the 1905 events he offers a succinct one-paragraph description of them as illustrations of the continuing ‘revolutionary’ activities of the ‘Federative Committee’ – the organizing committee formed in 1905 by the Latvian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (*Latviešu sociāldemokrātiska strādnieku partija*; henceforth LSDSP) and the Bund – to create events and to direct their flow (Paegle 1985, p. 26). His description refers to ‘democratic’ election procedures in the choice of delegates to the Congresses and in the creation of *pagasts*-level executive committees (a consequence of the Rural Delegates Congress), but on the whole his description is sparse and somewhat muddled. Arveds Švābe’s *Latvijas vēsture 1800–1914* [History of Latvia 1800–1914] (Švābe 1958), published in Sweden after the author fled Latvia in 1944, was for many decades the most important single-volume source on nineteenth and early twentieth century Latvian history produced outside the Latvian SSR. In 1905 Švābe was still a teenager (b. 1888). In his general survey, the year 1905 occupies a total of 60 pages and the Congresses about five pages. Švābe portrays all the events of 1905, including the Congresses, as a turning point in Latvian history: ‘If until 1905 our *tauta* [Volk] was only the object of political-historical development, in 1905 it became – though only formally – its subject . . . (Švābe 1958, p. 655). Bruno Kalniņš’ *Latvijas sociāldemokrātijas 50. gadi (1905–1955)* [Fifty Years of Latvian Social Democracy (1905–1955)] was published in 1993 in Sweden, but was actually written in 1956. Kalniņš, born in 1899, was for a long time a luminary of the Latvian Social Democratic Party in exile, and for him the two Congresses, especially the Congress of Rural Delegates, were unquestionably triumphs of the organizing skill and leadership abilities of the LSDSP. ‘In the days of freedom in November and December, at the urging of and under the leadership of the LSDSP there took place two large Congresses,

whose delegates for the first time in the history of Latvia were freely elected from all of the districts of our country' (Kalniņš 1993, p. 76). Jānis Krastiņš' *1905. gada revolūcija Latvijā* [The 1905 Revolution in Latvia] was published in its third edition in 1975 in the Latvian SSR, and bears all the hallmarks of a narrative guided by the ideology of the Latvian Communist Party. For both Congresses, Krastiņš uses identical descriptive terminology – they had 'a large political meaning' (Krastiņš 1975, pp. 189, 191); moreover, the Congress of Rural Delegates had an especially large role in 'revolutionizing' the flow of events (Krastiņš 1975, p. 193). A recent post-Soviet work *gadsimta Latvijas vēsture 20* (Vol. 1) [History of Latvia in the Twentieth Century], published in 2000 by the Latvian Institute of History under the general editorship of the historian Valdis Bērziņš, aimed to provide the first comprehensive post-Soviet history of Latvia for the period 1900–1918. The chapter on 1905 in this volume was written by Jānis Bērziņš (Bērziņš 2000a) whose earlier works, starting in the late Soviet period, included publications on the workers' movement in the late nineteenth century as well as various studies of the events of 1905. Jānis Bērziņš notes that 'in the final analysis this [1905] revolution, having been a political school for the *tauta*, to an extent prepared the way for an independent Latvia' (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 401). But he is also very circumspect about how final a new history of 1905, including of the Congresses, can be at this stage: 'not even close to all that can be said about the 1905 revolution in Latvia, has been said. There is also no dearth of questions that have to be re-evaluated and rendered more precise' (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 385).

One additional work also needs to be mentioned, although it will not play the same role here as the others. In May 1959, J. George Longworth submitted an MA thesis in the Political Science Department of the University of Mississippi dealing with one of the Congresses: *The Latvian Congress of Rural Delegates in 1905* (Longworth 1959). To my knowledge this study is the only work in English to examine closely either of the Congresses, and it has been used widely as a secondary source. Based on considerable primary source research and more analytical than narrative history, this 138-page work devotes only 45 pages to the meeting of the Congress itself ('The Congress in Session', pp. 60–106), with the pages preceding and following this section being devoted to the events leading up to and following the Congress. Longworth portrays the Rural Delegates Congress as a 'convenient stage' on which 'the political strife emerging between the several Latvian political organizations, [increasing] without respite or compromise, finally flared into violent debate...' (Longworth 1959, pp. 4–5). For him, therefore, the Congress itself was epiphenomenal: the real story was the ongoing battle between the Latvian political groupings that, having started before 1905, had become progressively more contentious during the year and finally added the Congress to the many venues in which it manifested itself.

In the remainder of this article I will be juxtaposing these narratives with some of the currently available primary source evidence, the latter of which will be examined under three headings: the certain, the plausible, and the uncertain. Also, I will concentrate on the two meetings themselves ('the Congresses in session', to use Longworth's terminology). The narratives (Longworth excepted), of course, have much more inclusive goals. They mention that the two Congresses took place, cursorily describe their genesis, equally cursorily describe some of the debates and the

resolutions passed, and then attribute various meanings to the Congresses in the flow of Latvian history. This is the way narrative history has to be written: it cannot stop to analyze in detail every 'event' that it seeks to link in a chronologically based chain. This is especially true for the year 1905, when almost every day and certainly every week brought forth materials for the narrative historian to organize. The main chain of events – the meta-narrative – was laid out at the Imperial level, a sub-chain in the Baltic provinces and in the Latvian territories, and lesser chains throughout the year came into being at regional and local levels. In this hierarchy, two meetings – one lasting five days, the other two days – belong close to the bottom in terms of significance, unless they can be demonstrated to have been more important. The perspective of 'micro-history' may be helpful here. Launched in Italian historiography during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the microhistorical method invites historians to look closely at specific historical individuals and specific historical micro-events (such as meetings) in order to see whether through them it is possible to uncover meanings not accessible via 'the larger picture' (Muir 1998, pp. 615–17). To have the potential for being revelatory, the micro-event has to be well documented, but that characteristic of it cannot be assumed *a priori* and can arise only from a close look at the available sources. The analyst must be prepared for false starts, because many micro-events – although they can be said 'to have been the case' – will yield only ambiguous meanings, the desired detailed accounts of them having disappeared with the deaths of the participants.

The Two Congresses: The Certain

A reconsideration might as well start with the fundamental question of whether the two Congresses in fact took place. This question is not as ridiculous as might appear at first glance. The Congresses are no longer a part of anyone's living memory. There are no well-known photographs or paintings memorializing them, and if monuments or plaques exist in Riga, they are nearly invisible. First-person accounts are scarce or not readily available;³ if minutes were taken, they have not survived (Longworth 1959, p. 74, fn. 36); and the two meetings did not produce the kind of material *Nachlass* (flags, banners, pins, printed programs) that, by contrast, exist in plenitude for such well-documented events as the Latvian Song Festivals of earlier decades. So it seems that in late November of 1905, a large number of people came together, for five days in the one case and for two in the other, debated and argued, passed resolutions, and then disbanded, leaving no traces. What there is to mark the events are newspaper accounts and a few general memoirs – the starting point of all the historians' accounts. The two meetings were reported in such major Riga dailies as *Rīgas Avīze*, *Baltijas Vēstnesis* and *Dienas Lapa*, as well as in publications that appeared less regularly, some outside of Riga, such as *Apskats*, *Balss*, *Latvietis*, *Mājas Viesis*, *Spēks* and *Tēvija* (see the Appendix for a description of the newspaper sources). But in none of the newspapers are the Congresses in any sense 'headline' stories; in fact, in the reportage these meetings have to contend for the readers' attention with stories about all sorts of other meetings and important events in the Empire and abroad. In some of the papers, especially the weeklies, the stories about the Congresses appeared after considerable

delays of a week or more. Even in the large Riga dailies the coverage is not always continuous, the stories being scattered over a longer period of time than the meeting days themselves and reported under the heading of 'local news'. It is difficult to imagine that a reader of even the most complete coverage – such as in *Rīgas Avīze*, *Balss*, *Dienas Lapa* and *Baltijas Vēstnesis* – could come away with the impression that the stories were describing momentous events. The newspaper accounts themselves contained no by-lines, and it is impossible to tell which of the papers had reporters at the meetings, and, if they did, for how long each day. Several of the provincial papers – *Latvietis*, *Spēks*, *Tēvija* – offered derivative reports, since their materials are identified as coming from stories in the large Riga dailies. And it hardly needs saying that the newspaper accounts differ from each other in tone, and in attitudes toward the two Congresses. Factual reportage even in the Riga dailies is intermixed with considerable editorializing (for the differing accounts of the Teachers Congress, see Lapiņa 2006). Several of the papers – *Balss* (2 December) and *Baltijas Vēstnesis* (3 December) (these and all subsequent dates are for the year 1905) – offered evaluative retrospective accounts in the manner of 'what did it all mean?' several weeks after the Congresses, by which time these interpretations had to be filtered through the proclamation of martial law in Vidzeme (22 November/5 December), a general strike in Riga (25 November/8 December), considerable burning and looting in the countryside, and the start of the 'punitive expeditions' against the revolutionaries. The only feature of the Congresses that remains approximately the same in the various accounts is the Congress resolutions. These, evidently, existed in printed or written form and were made available to reporters. Even then, in some stories the resolutions were reprinted verbatim (e.g. *Mājas Viesis*, 30 November), and in others summarized (e.g. *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 15 November).

Thus, in reconsidering the path that information about the Congresses had to take in order to be absorbed into the narratives of later historians, the conclusion is inescapable that the latter are also reconstructions rather than more or less straightforward transcriptions of more or less straightforward contemporary accounts. This is, of course, not surprising, the introduction of order and sequencing being a normal part of the writing of historical narratives. Yet this feature of the narratives underlines the simple fact that, at base, even contemporary descriptions of the two Congresses do not rest on as solid an evidentiary base as the nicely flowing narratives imply. Or, to put it another way, there is still considerable doubt about what 'the case' was. At the very least, the newspaper accounts do assure us that we are not dealing with pseudo-events, that two meetings did take place, that they had a time-based structure, and that they had a newsworthy quality. It remains true, however, that no single newspaper source reports on either Congress with such thoroughness that from its account alone one can extract the story as it appears in the narratives.

In reconstructing the course of these meetings, historians have had to draw inferences, make educated guesses and fill in blank spaces. What, then, could be listed under the rubric of 'certainties' about the Congresses? We can be certain that the two Congresses took place, that the attendance of them was fairly large, and that they both involved people whom the newspaper accounts describe as 'delegates'. We also know by name, and by reports of vote totals, that at the start of each meeting presiding officers were chosen by the participants and that they conducted the meetings from

this point onward. We also know that both meetings unfolded according to agendas accepted by the participants on the first day, and that the agendas were presented to the participants rather than being suggested from the floor. We can also be certain that at both meetings a certain number of prominent speakers held forth, because some are identified in the newspaper accounts by name and their speeches are summarized (e.g. the literary ‘stars’ Rainis and Aspāzija at the Teachers Congress). The opening speeches of the presiding officers of both Congresses evidence, at least among the officers, a consciousness of the importance of the meetings. We can be certain as well that from both meetings a series of resolutions emerged, dealing primarily with, in the case of the Teachers Congress, the imperfections of rural primary and secondary schools, and, in the case of the Rural Delegates Congress, with the inadequacies of local (*pagasts*) governance but also with larger issues. We can also be certain about the content of the resolutions emerging from the Congresses. The Teachers Congress resolved, among other things, to demand a six-year Latvian public school, the separation of the Church from public education, and the placement of school management into the hand of the local governments (*pašvaldības*) (see, for example, *Dienas Lapa*, 12, 14 and 15 November). The Rural Delegates Congress, in turn, demanded, among other things, the reorganization of rural local governments, the democratization of the rights of farmers, the transformation of economic relationships in the countryside, the speedy resolution of certain political questions such as the calling of a constitutional convention for all of Russia, and the boycott of the Riga Latvian Association until it changed its leadership (see, for example, *Mājas Viesis*, 30 November). We also know, in the case of both Congresses that ‘central bureaus’ were to be created to handle the complicated issues arising from the proposed school reforms (see, for example, *Dienas Lapa*, 16 November; see also Longworth 1959, p. 103). We can also be certain that the LSDSP played some kind of a role in organizing both meetings and in conducting them, and that the two meetings had an ideological connection with each other insofar as the Rural Delegates Congress (the second of the two sequentially) passed a resolution to express solidarity with the goals of the Teachers Congress (e.g. *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 21 November).

It will be noted immediately that the language in which these ‘certainties’ are described literally begs for more detail and precision. How much more ‘hard’ evidence is available then becomes the crux of the matter. We are still a considerable distance from being able to say unambiguously what ‘the case’ was in either of the two Congresses.

The Two Congresses: The Plausible

By the realm of the plausible, I mean the features of the two Congresses which have the semblance of ‘facts’, but which strike me as needing further proof to be believable. In this domain, we must put aside for the moment the near certainty that there will never be any additional evidence, and forge ahead anyway. Some of the newspapers (*Balsis*, 2 December; *Rīgas Avīze*, 14 November, 22 November) complain, for example, that in organizing delegates in the countryside for the two Congresses, and during the Congresses themselves, the organizers used various kinds of coercive

tactics to ensure the arrival of 'sufficiently revolutionary' delegates. Reference is made to threats, cajoling, the scheduling of pre-Congress meetings at times when less fervent delegate candidates would not be around, and the *appointment* of delegates by local power holders rather than their *election*. No direct evidence is supplied for any of this. Yet some of these tactics strike us as at least plausible, not so much because the organizers were by nature coercive but because such tactics (excepting physical coercion) follow naturally from the greater concern of the LSDSP for results than for process. Since the LSDSP was the best organized political grouping among Latvians, and, as such, engendered much of the public opposition to the status quo in 1905 (strikes, meetings, etc.), the use of tactics bordering on the non-democratic would not be surprising.

In any event, according to Bērziņš (2000a, p. 362) the *archival* information on delegate selection to the Rural Delegates Congress (he says nothing about the Teachers Congress) is very scanty. Most *pagasti* elected two representatives, but several elected as many as four. In those *pagasti* where new methods of selecting leaders were already in place – such changes having begun in some places in the summer months – it was the new leaders who were chosen as delegates. In other places, the delegates consisted of the leaders who were in place; in many cases the same people who had led *pagasts* affairs for a long time. As best anyone can tell, delegate selection varied widely. In some places, apparently, there were pre-Congress meetings between the elected delegates and the *pagasts* population to discuss stands on particular issues. The evidence certainly allows for hard tactics in delegate choice, but does not document them.

Similar criticism is made in some of the newspapers of the way in which the resolutions were created and shepherded to successful adoption. It is said that these meetings were not truly democratic in that resolutions 'from the floor' were shunted aside or ignored in favor of resolutions prepared beforehand by the LSDSP and various unnamed individuals of revolutionary bent (*Mājas Viesis*, 30 November; *Rīgas Avīze*, 15 November; *Balss*, 2 December). None of the newspaper accounts or the sparse participant memoirs actually describe precisely how any particular resolution came into being, except that it was 'put forward' at a certain time and eventually voted on. Nor is there any evidence about whether some of the Congress resolutions may or may not have resembled other 'resolutions' brought to the meetings by the 'delegates' themselves. This, again, is not surprising. The LSDSP activists understood that controlling the agenda meant controlling the outcome, and acted accordingly. But, as with delegate choice, critics of these tactics appear to be using a model of democracy that that seems naïve in the extreme; at worst, the criticism is being made in order to discredit the two Congresses as such, a scenario that is entirely believable in the case of such conservative newspapers as *Rīgas Avīze*, which was predisposed to question anything the LSDSP did and even declared the Rural Delegates Congress to be 'illegal' (*Rīgas Avīze*, 22 November).

Similarly, some of the newspapers claim that in both Congresses those in attendance were not all 'delegates' in the formal sense of that term, but included a very large number, perhaps a majority, of non-delegates recruited by the LSDSP in order to 'tilt' these meetings in favor of 'revolutionary outcomes' (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 19 November, 3 December; *Rīgas Avīze*, 14 November; *Dienas Lapa*, 14 November).

More will be said about this in the discussion of the uncertain, but here we must observe that something like this scenario was at least plausible – namely that most of the day-to-day attendees of the Teachers Congress were not schoolteachers, and most of those at the Rural Delegates meeting were not rural or delegates. The inattention to parliamentary procedure especially in the Teachers Congress, as noted in all the main newspaper accounts, makes it entirely plausible that the resolutions were ‘passed’ by a voice vote that included a large number of people who had no right to vote on them. The charge is particularly credible if, as the newspaper sources describe, attendees on the first days of the meetings began to ‘go home’ because they had become convinced that their voices would not be heard.

Admittedly, plausibility is an ambiguous term, but it is a necessary one because of the nature of the primary sources. It is clear that the newspaper stories, which are very detailed in some cases, appear in publications that throughout are partisan and do not draw a strict line between fact and interpretation. At issue here is not deliberate falsification but guesswork about what went on ‘behind the scenes’, about the motives of the Congress organizers, and about the willingness of the newspapers and later interpreters to integrate the events of the Congresses with the ongoing larger events of the ‘Revolution’. Longworth, for example, builds a very strong and credible case that the Rural Delegates Congress was under the control of the LSDSP throughout, and fits the Congress neatly into his larger 1905 narrative. But his case is an *argument*, based largely on the same newspaper sources we have been citing. His interpretation, as with so many of the other narratives, involves as much the organizing imagination of the historian as it does direct evidence of the sources. By contrast, Bērziņš’ admittedly shorter account (eight pages) mentions the LSDSP by name only once (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 359), leaving the impression that this *party* – as distinct from individual activists who were social democrats but not party members – was not the behind-the-scenes manipulator of events that Longworth portrays and that *Rīgas Avīze*, for one, certainly believed. Both interpretations have a degree of plausibility, but neither can be sustained wholly on the evidence currently available.

The Two Congresses: The Uncertain

Finally we come to a class of statements about the two Congresses which, in my view, must remain in the realm of the uncertain. This consists of a collection of characterizations for which evidence is at best weak or at worst nonexistent. A fundamental one has to do with the size of the two Congresses. There were no lists of attendees kept, but the newspaper sources often report for both that ‘around 1000’ individuals were present (e.g. *Balss*, 15 November; *Dienas Lapa*, 11 November), and this imprecise number has been the one most often repeated in the narrative descriptions (Bērziņš 2000a, pp. 359–60). Yet another newspaper source reports that ‘1000 and another 500 workers’ were at the Teachers Congress (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 11 November); another, that at the Rural Delegates Congress there were ‘2000 persons’ in attendance (*Spēks*, 22 November); and still another that there were ‘1500 rural delegates’ (*Tēvija*, 16 November). Švābe puts the number of attendees at the Rural Delegates Congress at 900 (Švābe 1958, p. 615). Longworth estimates, on the basis of

the size of the meeting hall, that the Rural Delegates Congress had 'around 600' attendees (Longworth 1959, p. 67, n. 16). This variance suggests that the actual number of attendees at both meetings was being guessed at by the reporters on the spot; or that they may have been estimating the number by the size of the meeting hall, as did Longworth. The hall was always said to be 'filled' and in some cases as 'not having enough seats'. There appears to be no information available for greater precision, so the actual number remains uncertain. The meetings were not small, but nor did they have the nature of 'mass meetings'. This uncertainty, of course, is connected with the questions of how many 'delegates' (strictly speaking) there were, what one should understand by claims that votes were 'by acclamation' or 'by one voice', and related matters. Since some of the papers do report specific vote counts for those who were elected to lead the Congresses at the beginning, there must have been some form of control, but specific vote counts are not reported for any of the resolutions in any sources. In view of this uncertainty, it is impossible to interpret to what extent the later days of the Teachers Congress may have been affected by the early departure of 'delegates', something which a number of the newspaper sources claim as fact (e.g. *Dienas Lapa*, 14 November).

There is continuing uncertainty about who initiated the Congresses. Švābe says that the meeting was called by a bureau of the Riga district, the bureau having been elected by the district's *pagasts* elders and secretaries (Švābe 1958, p. 614). This seems to place the initiative in the hands of the Latvian rural leaders. For Kalniņš, of course, both Congresses were the brainchild of the LSDSP (Kalniņš 1993, p. 76), whereas Bērziņš suggests that the Rural Delegates Congress may have started as a reaction to efforts by Vidzeme governor Zvegintsov to call a similar meeting (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 360). The newspaper sources have nothing unambiguous to say on this question. What is clear from these accounts, however, is that in talking of the Congresses we are not dealing with a spontaneous upwelling of public opinion but rather a sequenced series of decisions by a number of actors who at this juncture remain unidentified.

A number of the longer newspaper accounts open their reportage of the Congresses with descriptions of the 'expectations' that the 'delegates' brought with them (e.g. *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 11 November), but it is impossible to discern on what this claim is based. No one-on-one interviews are cited, and some of the descriptions sound very much like inferences by the reporters as to what the delegates *should have been expecting* from the meetings. Some reports claim that the rural delegates came to Riga wanting the Congress to be about practical questions of farming (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 3 December); others claim that the teachers arrived there hoping to hear of practical solutions to accumulated problems in the school system, but instead heard discussions of ideology (*Rīgas Avīze*, 15 November). If indeed there was confusion about the purposes of the two Congresses in the minds of the delegates, it meant pre-meeting discussions may have taken place in only a few *pagasti*, and also that the 'resolutions' passed by the Congresses were not circulated beforehand. Only Bērziņš notes such pre-Congress activity, and only in a few places (Bērziņš 2000a, pp. 362–3). The strong impression one gets from the newspaper accounts is that those who called for the meetings were uncertain about how to make use of them, and may have acted opportunistically, developing strategies for specific outcomes after the delegates had arrived and the meetings had started.

Much uncertainty also surrounds the various resolutions themselves. We know, of course, what these were because they were reprinted verbatim in most of the newspaper accounts. But it is not clear from any of the accounts what the so-called ‘debates’ surrounding these resolutions were, if indeed there were ‘debates’ in any meaningful sense of the term; or whether there were any significant dissenting voices or suggestions of alternative wordings – in other words, whether the resolutions were ‘forced through’ by their preparers and therefore whether their representation as expressions of the ‘will’ of the ‘delegates’ is in fact warranted. *Rīgas Avīze* typically maintained (15 November) that at the Teachers Congress there was a serious curtailment of what it terms ‘free speech’, and accuses the Congress leaders of practising ‘terrorism’ (*Balss*, 2 December); it is also implied that resolutions were passed ‘at the point of the gun’. Other newspapers account for this lack of opportunity for all to have their say by describing the Congress as being ‘poorly led’. One way or another, it does remain uncertain how much of a voice the ‘delegates’, let alone ‘the *tauta*’, had in formulating the resolutions.

Yet another uncertainty has to do with what some newspaper accounts describe as the bemusement of the ‘delegates’ and the ideologized content of the proposals put forward by the conference leaders and organizers (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 3 December). Put simply, it is not at all certain that all of those who ‘voted’ on and passed the resolutions understood them or their ramifications. This problem is framed in different ways by the various sources. A number of accounts (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 2 November) refer to a rural/urban division among the attendees, the implication being that the rural delegates were outmaneuvered by the urbanites. In the Teachers Congress there was a drawn-out discussion between those who insisted that instruction in schools should be aimed at raising ‘class consciousness’ and others who argued that instruction should concern itself with practical subjects (*Spēks*, 17 November). Another version of this revolved around the question of whether the Congresses should align themselves with ‘revolutionary activity’ or use the time to discuss the specifics of correcting practical shortcomings. *Dienas Lapa* (11 November) uses the Latvian word *nenoskaidrojušies* to describe the state of mind of the rural teachers, meaning that they were befuddled, confused, and unable to articulate their wishes in the same eloquent way as the social democrats were doing. Švābe (1958, p. 613) characterizes most of the non-socialist delegates as ‘unprepared rural schoolteachers’ (*nesagatavoti lauku skolotāji*), and asserts that because members of the Congress leadership were veterans of such meetings they were able to ‘impose’ (*uzspiest*) their views upon the rest of the delegates. The portrait drawn by the various versions of this theme depicts somewhat naïve rural people being captured and manipulated by urban ideologues, for whom practical questions were less important than the alignment of these meetings with the general goals of the ‘revolution’ being pursued in other venues and by other means.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is uncertainty about the extent to which these two Congresses can be said to have ‘represented’ the views of Latvians, whether schoolteachers, rural political leaders, or the *tauta* at large. This question remains open, despite the frequent references by Congress speakers and organizers, and a good many of the newspaper accounts (including the accounts in foreign newspapers cited by Longworth [1959, pp. 107–8]) to ‘the people’, ‘the *tauta*’,

'the Latvians', and similar collective entities. We shall deal later with the question of how subsequent historians attributed importance to these meetings; the question at hand, however, is whether the participants in the meetings can be said to have been speaking on behalf of anyone but themselves. At least a few of them did, of course, because they had actually been 'elected', or chosen in some other way, to represent local constituencies. Yet it is also very likely that large numbers of those in the meetings had not been elected at all, but simply took it for granted that activism in the name of the ongoing 'revolution' was self-validating. The portrayal of the Congress results as desired by the *tauta* is also problematic because, as is clear from at least the tone of *Rīgas Avīze* in describing the meetings, some part of the *tauta* viewed the events that transpired very differently. As the description suggests, it is still not certain who spoke for whom, and which segment of public opinion the resolutions encapsulated.

This uncertainty is underlined by the ambiguous descriptions of which subpopulations were actually represented at the meetings. In the absence of a master list of delegates, the narratives use some unsubstantiated guesswork and occasionally contradict each other. Švābe, for example, says categorically that 'among the delegates [at the Rural Delegates Congress] there were represented the three most important rural groups – farmstead heads, farmhands, and the rural intelligentsia [*saimnieki, kalpi, un inteleģenti*]' (Švābe 1958, p. 615). Bērziņš, by contrast, opines about the same meeting that '[it] did not have represented in it all the social layers of society' (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 365). Similarly, Švābe observes about the Rural Delegates that 'just as with the Schoolteachers Congress, the Congress had no Latgalian, because the organizers were Balts [i.e. Latvians from the Baltic provinces proper – A. P.]' (Švābe 1958, p. 615). Bērziņš, on the other hand, in describing the efforts of the Vidzeme governor to split the meeting by inviting some delegates to visit him observes that 'at that point the leader of the meetings announced that the governor has invited to the castle all the delegates from Vidzeme, but not those from Kurzeme or Latgale' (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 364). We search in vain for some help from the newspaper sources, but, predictably, they offer little hard information on these points. Longworth, citing a short description in *Apskats* (22 November), decided that Latgalian were present (Longworth 1959, 71, n. 28) but played little part in the Congress. Uncertainty on this point is troublesome, because Latgale – the western districts of Vitebsk province – contained about 25% of all Latvians (1897 census).

There is one more area of uncertainty that, strictly speaking, falls outside the strict framework of our discussion – i.e. the meetings themselves – but needs to be mentioned nonetheless. The Rural Delegates Congress passed a resolution urging *pagasti* to form new local governmental bodies in the form of 'executive committees', and, by definition, these activities took place after the Congress was over, in late November and early December. As in the case of the numbers of people attending the Congresses, the numbers of 'executive committees' formed as the direct result of this resolution remains imprecise at this juncture. Švābe mentions 346 (1958, p. 617) and Bērziņš 470 (2000a, p. 366). The more interesting question is whether these 'executive committees' came into being as a result of decisions made at the Congress. Švābe's narrative implies that that was so, but Bērziņš in his much fuller account notes that local evidence about the 'executive committees' suggests that something like 175 were already in existence before the Congress, whereas 295 were created afterwards

(2000a, p. 366). Equally interesting is Bērziņš' description of the work of these committees: this section of his narrative is entitled 'the power of the *tauta* in the *pagasti*' and comprises over a third of his narrative. Švābe, by contrast, has virtually nothing to say about the functioning of the 'executive committees': indeed, he seems to be minimizing their importance by saying that these particular reforms were 'purely administrative', of short duration, and in any event involved only transfers of power among Latvians (Švābe 1958, p. 618). Moreover, he depicts the leaders of the *pagasts* reforms as being guided by a 'romantic mentality', citing as evidence the fact that even after the proclamation of martial law on 22 November/5 December in Vidzeme, various local executive committees were still issuing calls and instruction to the *tauta* as if the Imperial government were in full agreement with these local reforms. What to make of these 'executive committees', whatever their number, remains an uncertainty at this juncture.

The Two Congresses: What, Then, was 'The Case'?

It is abundantly clear from my grouping of the primary source evidence in the newspapers that less of it lies in the realm of the certain than in the other two categories, the plausible and the uncertain. Yet the certain evidence is, as observed, unsatisfactorily general. In light of this fact, what can we say about the narratives of the two Congresses currently at our disposal?

Looking at the narratives from this viewpoint, it also becomes clear that the certain evidence fits in well with the imperatives of narrative presentation, which preferably has to run smoothly and not be laden with analytical stopping points. It has to be carried along by the pace of events, which in 1905 was very fast, having the characteristics of time speeded up. Judged by this criterion, the most workmanlike *narratives* are those of Kalniņš, the historian of Latvian social democracy (Kalniņš 1993) and Krastiņš (1975), the Soviet-period historian. I would describe these narratives as 'triumphalist', meaning that the descriptions of the two Congresses are not fundamentally concerned with determining what 'the case' was in each meeting, but with emphasizing the fact that the meetings led to a chain of events, and an outcome that the authors celebrate. In Kalniņš' book, the overall narrative has the following model behind it: class conflict in the Latvian countryside → the work of the LSDSP → 1905 events, including the two Congresses → parliamentary democracy in Latvia after 1918 → the LSDSP as a leading political force in Latvia after 1918. For him, the party had become 'the only force leading the fight for freedom' (Kalniņš 1993, p. 76). In Krastiņš' work, the model is somewhat different: class conflict in Latvian society → work of revolutionary wing of the LSDSP → 1905 events, including the two Congresses → demonstration of the latent power of the proletarian masses → the triumph of the proletariat in 1917 (1919 in Latvia, also in 1940). For him

the revolutionary struggle, which the bourgeoisie together with opportunists sought to divert into waiting for peaceful reforms, widened in the fall [of 1905] and reached its highest point at the end of November. The masses had begun to

move – there began the burning of baronial estates and armed uprisings began. (Krastiņš 1975, p. 193)

These two models do not require mere incidents – such as meetings – in the grand flow of events to be analyzed deeply, if at all. The evidence about which there is certainty allows them to be fitted into the longer chain; the evidence that is plausible and uncertain is relatively unimportant and can be laid aside. For Kalniņš it is the continuity of party history that is significant; for Krastiņš, it is the ultimate triumph of the ‘proletarian masses’. Both these narratives subordinate the plausible and uncertain evidence to the telling of the story; yet the confidence with which the story is told most certainly is a spurious one, unjustified by the nature of the full array of primary evidence.

By contrast, the narratives of both Paegle (1985) and Švābe (1958) have moved away from evidentiary certainty to permit the inclusion of the other categories, Švābe more so than Paegle. Their books are mostly interested in portraying the chain of events that led to – as the title of Paegle’s book suggests – the founding of the Latvian state in 1918. Thus the model behind Paegle’s narrative is: oppression of Latvians by Baltic German hegemony and Tsarist autocracy → resistance to that oppression, including the events of 1905 → the founding of the Latvian state in 1918. In fact, for Paegle the 1905 events, including the two Congresses, are somewhat peripheral to the main story: ‘The revolutionary movement in 1905 in Latvia cannot be described as a real revolution of the Latvian *tauta* because it did not take place under the aegis of national slogans: it was more of an international event’ (Paegle 1985, p. 31). Švābe, following the same model, takes the opposite view about the ultimate meaning of the 1905 events, including the Congresses: they ‘enlarged the self-confidence and self-consciousness of the *tauta*, which proved to be a great source of strength for future struggles’ (Švābe 1958, pp. 655–6). Švābe, in fact, as we have seen above, brings a sarcastic tone to his interpretation of the two Congresses, with his references to ‘unprepared rural schoolteachers’ and ‘utopian visionaries’. Even though Švābe’s narrative is much more full-bodied than Paegle’s and reflects his historian’s bent, neither stops his recounting of the chain of events to suggest the differential quality of the evidence about the two meetings.

The only one of the reviewed narratives that reveals what seems to me to be the necessary amount of hesitancy in describing the two Congresses is that of Bērziņš (2000a). The overall model is the same as that used by Švābe and Paegle, that is, the post-Soviet narrative is also forward looking: ‘In the final analysis, this [the 1905] revolution, having been a major political school for the *tauta*, to an extent prepared the way for an independent Latvia’ (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 401). In spite of this, the Bērziņš’ narrative concerning the two Congresses is relatively constrained, and almost laconic in the case of the Teachers Congress.

Bērziņš touches on a number of the evidentiary problems identified above, especially with respect to the composition of the Rural Delegates Congress: ‘Information on the election of the delegates [to the Rural Delegates Congress], and therefore of the composition of the Congress itself, is sparse’ (Bērziņš 2000a, p. 362). Nor does his narrative magnify the role of the LSDSP at the Congresses; if anything, its activism is de-emphasized (he mentions the LSDSP by name only once in eight

pages) in favor of a contextualizing approach in which the Congress resolutions are linked not to the LSDSP agenda (as Longworth would have it throughout his account) but to what was going on in the Latvian countryside before and after the Congress (though Bērziņš warns the reader that the evidence is scarce about these extra-Congress events as well). He appears to be aware of the fact that the ‘softness’ of the evidence would reduce the descriptions of the Congresses to a minimum, and therefore stops frequently to analyze pre- and post-Congress matters. This judicious rendition of events – no longer purely the narrative form, but shading into the analytical – shares the general skeptical mood in which the current post-Soviet re-evaluation of 1905 is transpiring. In the re-evaluation, Latvian historians are seeking a more balanced picture by, for example, giving more room in the 1905 story to the destructiveness of some the ‘revolutionary’ activities, thus requiring consideration of motives that, certainly in the Soviet-era narratives, received little attention but are inevitably a part of all revolutions. Envy, resentment, payback, public shaming, murderousness, opportunism, self-defeating violence – all these and others are present in 1905. As Bērziņš notes: ‘Of course, as in all revolutions, in the 1905 events in Latvia one can see the shadow side. Side by side with revolutionary self-sacrifice there was cowardice and betrayal, side by side with the fight for ideals – selfishness’ (Bērziņš 2000a, pp. 400–1). With respect to the two Congresses, Bērziņš’ narrative is the opposite of those we have described as triumphalist. The quality of evidence is noted and the account of the Congresses aims at establishing ‘what was the case’.

In light of the uneven evidence, what standing can be assigned to the two Congresses in the flow of events? Among the narratives, only Bērziņš and Kalniņš highlight the two meetings with separate section headings, Kalniņš going so far as to use the heading ‘the great Congresses’ (Kalniņš 1993, p. 76). Krastiņš (1975, p. 186) includes his description with other materials in a section entitled ‘The Revolutionary Movement in November’, thus putting the Congresses in their – to him – proper place. The contemporary newspaper accounts, as observed, treated the two meetings as news items among many others in those turbulent weeks, and many participants of the Teachers Congress felt uninspired enough to leave the meetings prematurely after the first one or two days. On the other hand, Longworth thought the Rural Delegates Congress to be important enough to dedicate an entire monograph to it. And, as observed, by 2005 the collective memory of Latvians had relegated the entire year of 1905 almost to the status of a non-event. It may be that final characterizations of the two Congresses – as ‘great’, as ‘turning points’ or as something else – will have to await the results of the re-assessment of the entire revolutionary year. It may turn out that large *deliberative* gatherings, such as the Congresses undoubtedly were, had less long-term impact on collective attitudes than the *violence* meted out by the ‘revolutionaries’ or against them throughout the year (cf. Raun 2006); the two types of event, as always, compete with each other for memorability. Reinterpretations will have to cope somehow with the impoverished documentation for the two Congresses, but, one hopes, not by mere stylistic repression of it. A slightly revised reading of Wittgenstein’s Proposition 7 would require that historians be silent about that of which they cannot speak with certainty. This is clearly too much to ask of a profession which has as its core the telling of stories. But circumspection can

be urged, and in my reconsideration I have shown why it is highly desirable in the case of the two 1905 Congresses.

Notes

- 1 All dates that identify specific days in the text will be given according to both the Julian calendar, which was still in use in the Russian Empire at this time (and until 1918), and the Gregorian calendar prevalent in nearly all of Europe. The Julian calendar was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar in the twentieth century. All dates used in the citations will be according to the Julian calendar.
- 2 A welcome start in many new directions is the published (and enhanced) proceedings of the 11–12 January 2005 conference, in Riga, one of the few conferences of that year to mark the 100th anniversary: *1905.gads Latvijā* (Riga, Latvijas karte, 2006).
- 3 One possible exception to this statement is the three volumes of the memoirs of Fēlikss Cielēns, *Laikmetu maiņā: Atmiņas un atziņas* (Lidingo, Sweden: Memento, 1961–64). Cielēns (1888–1964) was a prominent member of the Latvian Social Democratic Party in the interwar years of Latvian history, as well as in Swedish exile after 1944. The two Congresses, in which Cielēns participated as a 17-year-old observer (the Teachers Congress) and, to use his own words, as a ‘keeper of order and an armed guard’ (Rural Delegates Congress), are covered in Volume I of the memoirs on pages 186–200. His account, though not a narrative, does not essentially differ from the ‘triumphalist’ narrative of his party colleague Kalniņš (1993).

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Appendix: Newspaper Sources

Rīgas Avīze appeared from 1902 to 1915 in Riga. The paper grew increasingly more conservative over the years, and in 1905 opposed all ‘revolutionary’ activity.

Baltijas Vēstnesis, published from 1868 to 1906, was understood to be the moderate voice of the Riga Latvian Association.

Dienas Lapa appeared from 1886 to 1905 in Riga, and was associated with the ‘New Current’ in Latvian political history; it generally supported social democratic causes.

Apskats was a weekly newspaper in Riga which appeared for a brief time from 1905 to 1906 and shied away from identifiable political positions.

Balss appeared from 1878 to 1907 in Riga and was moderately conservative, although held a ‘nationalist’ line.

Latvietis was a weekly newspaper that appeared in Liepāja from 1882 to 1905, and toward the end of its run came to support most social-democratic causes.

Mājas Viesis was another weekly of a literary bent that appeared in Riga from 1856 to 1910, and although it published many of the ‘New Current’ participants, it generally kept to a moderate line politically.

Spēks appeared in Jelgava three times a week between 1904 and 1906.

Tēvija was a weekly newspaper that was published from 1884 to 1914 in Jelgava, and generally replicated the moderate editorial stance of *Balss* and *Baltijas Vēstnesis*.

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