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## Aspects of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia: Looking through the Library and Archival Collections of Stanford University

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### ABSTRACT



This paper offers a look at some facets of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia, at the time part of the Russian Empire, and their interpretation in historiography from 1905 to 2015. Using resources in the Stanford University Libraries and the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, the paper provides an overview of the causes and the character of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia while also discussing various debates among historians of 1905. The main focus is on collective violence and political activism. The article is written from the point of view of a librarian and historian. It has two parallel goals: to tell the history of the Baltic collections at Stanford and to acquaint the reader with current scholarship on the subject of 1905 in Latvia. Even though some papers have been written that examine Baltic collections in American libraries, few, if any, of these have concentrated on individual historical topics.

### KEYWORDS

archival collections; historiography; library collections; Russian empire; scholarship; Stanford University; the 1905 revolution in Latvia

### Introduction

During work on a paper, *Exploring the Library of Latvian Socialists in San Francisco, California: Activities of the Early Latvian Political Emigration, 1905–1917*, the author of this article encountered several questions relating to the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. This encounter came from an unusual angle, namely looking at the activities of the members of early Latvian Socialist groups in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> This research led to an awareness that these Latvian socialists were political refugees escaping the Russian government's mass repression of the revolutionary movement of 1905. The San Francisco Latvians were a part of a political exodus from Latvia. Fearing all kinds of severe punishment, about 5,000–6,000 Latvian political refugees were forced to emigrate to the United States and European countries. In Latvia itself, more than 2,000 revolutionaries, including a large number of schoolteachers, were shot or publicly hanged without trial, while another 400 death sentences were imposed after trials. A further 8,000 individuals were imprisoned. While Latvians constituted

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only 1.5 percent of the total population in the Russian Empire, the percentage of the exiled revolutionaries who were Latvian was 12 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Working backward from the repression and its consequences, I became interested in what determined the development of such an extreme political and social conflict in Latvia. In doing so, it seemed more important to seek the causes of the 1905 Revolution rather than to see it in terms of a linear sequence of events. When concentrating on general trends, problems, and causation, it is possible to answer the question why such a social eruption happened.

Another motive for looking into the topic of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia was the present state of scholarship on the subject. There has been a marked decline of interest in 1905 among historians. This in itself is not surprising, considering that the 1905 Revolution was followed by other extraordinary, violent events, including the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917; the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union in 1940; the German invasion and the Holocaust; and the reannexation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. The reimposition of Soviet rule in the Baltic States resulted in mass deportations and political persecutions. These dramatic events have displaced 1905 in terms of research interests.

The Revolution of 1905 has also not been a preferred topic in present-day research because of the politicization of history during the long decades of Soviet power in the Baltic States. For ideological reasons, the 1905 Revolution became covered with falsified narratives, omissions, and questionable interpretations. The purpose of the interpretations of official Soviet history was clear—they were meant to show the Bolsheviks and later Communists as the only true liberators of oppressed nations and workers in all historical events of the 20th century, including the 1905 Revolution. Due to this, right now quite an opposite reaction is prevalent in historical research in Latvia, as well as in Latvian public opinion. It can be described either as an unwillingness to talk about 1905 at all, or a feeling of shame regarding the intensity of events involving violence, or even a complete condemnation of the 1905 Revolution.

The political, social, and economic aspects of the Revolution have been studied in the West, but the historiography mostly has been Russo-centric. Although ethnic Russians constituted less than half of the tsarist Empire's population around 1905, the Baltic events have been something of a side-show, interesting for their unusual characteristics, but not their substance.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that the multi-national dimension of the 1905 Revolution is an aspect that is difficult for historians to investigate, since the original source materials are in different languages. If somebody would like to devote himself or herself to doing research on 1905 in Latvia, a knowledge of Latvian, Russian, German, and English is a definite must. Adding to the difficulty is the fact that Latvian publications at the beginning of the 20th century were in Gothic script. Gothic orthography remained in use in Latvia until 1922 when a modernized writing system, a modified Latin alphabet, was adopted. These

topics and questions led me to look into holdings on the 1905 Revolution in Latvia in the Stanford University Libraries (SUL), as well as in the Hoover Institution Library and Archives (HILA). This meant checking the amount and variety of resources in one of the major university research libraries in order to find out to what extent research on this subject is possible.

### **History of Latvian Collections at Stanford, Main Repositories and Access to Materials**

For purposes of historical research, there are two libraries and two archives located on the Stanford University campus: HILA and SUL with its special collections. Both repositories operate independently. HILA was the first to start collecting materials on Eastern Europe, including Latvia, in 1920. SUL followed in the 1960s.

Frank A. Golder (1877–1929), the curator of the Hoover archives, visited Riga, capital of independent Latvia, three times: in 1920, 1922, and 1925.<sup>4</sup> Golder brought back literature and archival materials about the period when Latvia was a part of the Russian Empire, including publications from the beginning of the 20th century, especially in German. The work of Golder was continued by Harold Henry Fisher (1890–1975), a specialist in Russian history. In a search for new materials, Fisher visited Riga in 1922 and 1929. The materials he acquired still can be found in HILA, although some have been moved to SUL.

According to the Stanford Library catalog, about 30 publications in German and 20 in Russian on Latvian history and economics, published between 1905–1918, are available. Some of them are the only copies in the United States.

A new impetus for collecting materials on Latvia at HILA occurred in the 1970s, and was due to the activities of a historian, American Latvian professor Edgar Anderson (1920–1989). He was employed both in San Jose State College (now San Jose State University) and at the Hoover Institution. The History Department of San Jose State College offered students a course on the history of Northern Europe, including the Baltic Region. The course was taught by Professor Edgar Anderson and Bruce E. Gelsinger.<sup>5</sup> Edgar Anderson facilitated the acquisition of Baltic archival collections, as well as published materials, by HILA.

At SUL, the position of Slavic curator was established in the 1960s. Peter Kudrik worked for several years, and his work was continued by Richard Lewanski in 1970, who soon left for Europe.<sup>6</sup> Slavic collection development intensified at Stanford at the beginning of the 1970s.

During the 1970s and 1980s, collecting in non-Slavic languages, including Latvian, proceeded at a moderate pace. The emphasis was on academic series, but acquisitions from other publishers were few. Nevertheless, thanks to the diligent efforts of curator Dr. Wojciech Zalewski (1972–1999), SUL now

contains a rich collection of monographs, secondary sources, and memoirs on the broad range of issues on the 1905 Revolution in Latvia.<sup>7</sup> The collecting policy further broadened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, after more than 40 years of Soviet occupation, became independent again. SUL started to accumulate the best available publications on the Baltic States, regardless of language. This active collection policy successfully continued during the curatorship of Dr. Karen Rondestvedt (2001–2015).

In general, the Latvian and Baltic collections in SUL formed a small part of its large Slavic and East European collection. The situation changed recently due to an endowment received from Kistler-Ritso Foundation, an organization founded by Dr. Olga Kistler-Ritso. In 2013, assistant curator Liisi Esse was hired to curate and enlarge the collections of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Now, SUL's Baltic collection is 30,000 titles strong, with the Latvian collection being the largest.

According to the bibliographic index from 1997, 3,832 items (books, articles, etc.) were published during the period from 1905 to 1997 about the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. It can safely be concluded that 80 percent of these works are available through SUL's access services.<sup>8</sup>

These works not only include the physical items shelved in Stanford's main Green Library and in several facilities off campus, but also online articles. Since the late 1990s, journal publishers have begun to provide online access to full-text versions of scholarly articles with the help of e-journals. At this point, about 86 percent of the titles in the humanities and social sciences are available as e-journals. For the present research such titles of e-journals as *Slavic Review*, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, *Social Sciences*, *Latvijas Arhīvi*, *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* and many others were available.

In the same way as it would be possible from any point in the world with Internet access, there is an option to access journals directly from SUL and to also use materials in the Latvian language provided online by the National Library of Latvia.<sup>9</sup> At present, the Latvian National Digital Library *Letonica*, which was formed in 2006, holds digitized copies of both early and recent monographs.<sup>10</sup> To give an example, after entering the keyword *1905 revolūcija* [*Revolution of 1905*] in a search box, a large number of results appear, including not only titles with the above mentioned keyword, but every page in every book where the combination can be found.

The Latvian National Library also provides a collection of digitized historical periodicals in Latvian with the possibility to read full texts and search page by page. Materials are available also in German, English, and Russian.<sup>11</sup> In addition, a certain number of early publications in German, English, and Russian have been made available in digitized format by Google. If SUL owns a book, there is a direct online link in Stanford Library's Catalog Search Works.

In the process of preparing the paper, documents from four archival collections were used, including 3 collections from the Hoover Institution Archives: the collection of the *San Francisco branch of the Socialist Party Lettish Section* (cataloged under the title: Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church collection, 1876–1976); the files about Latvian (Lettish) revolutionaries—political émigrés in Western Europe and intelligence reports from agents in the field and the Paris office were used from Okhrana records, 1883–1917; the Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection, 1801–1982, containing materials regarding Latvian political emigres abroad, as well as writings by Latvian revolutionaries; and the Rev. Richards A. Zariņš papers, 1883–2008, from Stanford University Special Collections mainly contains materials about the Lutheran Church and its attitudes to the 1905 Revolution in Latvia.

### **The Historical Background of the 1905 Revolution**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the political power in Latvia as well as in Estonia was held and wielded by two forces: the tsarist government and the Baltic German landed gentry. Russia had conquered Latvia in the 18th century, but the German invaders who arrived in the 13th century had managed to maintain local political and economic power through the centuries. As a result, Latvians faced a situation of double oppression from the Baltic German aristocracy and Russian administration.

Descendants of German knights continued to rule as they had for 700 years. In the 20th century, the Baltic Germans still referred to themselves as *Ritterschaft*, or a corporation of nobles. Under the laws of the Russian Empire, the Baltic province was one of the regions with a special status. As distinct from the nobility of Central Russia, the Baltic German nobles enjoyed a much broader form of self-administration.<sup>12</sup>

While industrial development was very advanced in Riga and other cities, semi-feudal relationships still existed in rural Latvia. A small number of German landlords possessed large territories of land with manor houses. Landed gentry owned 86 percent of private land in Vidzeme and 92 percent in Kurzeme.

The Lutheran Church in Latvia was also under German domination. Although by 1900 the Latvians had access to the theological faculty in Tartu (Dorpat), Latvian candidates were seldom considered as candidates for pastoral office. The Lutheran Church identified itself with the German nobility. Not only were church services in German; German pastors owned large private manors. Small parcels of land were rented by the pastors to local peasants. The pastors had actually turned into businessmen. Conflicts arose when peasants felt that they were not treated fairly. Quite naturally, the peasants resented this situation.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the Catholic and

Orthodox Churches, which were prevalent in the Eastern parts of Latvia, were considerably more respected.

The Russian peasant commune (*mir*), where agricultural activities had to be coordinated among all villagers, did not exist in Latvia. The majority of rural Latvians were landless peasants employed as wage labor. As a consequence, many of these country laborers migrated to the cities, where they constituted the greatest segment of the urban industrial workforce. A distinctive feature that characterized these urban workers was that they kept strong relations with their families and friends in the Latvian countryside.

At the end of 19th century, Latvian peasants were granted the legal rights to buy land from the rural gentry. Many of these new landowners successfully managed farms, modernized households, and established cooperatives. But even these more wealthy peasants were hindered by many obstacles. Latvians did not have their own banks, for example. They paid higher taxes to the Russian government than the Baltic German gentry. Latvians had to take care of local improvements while bearing the main burden of indirect taxes.<sup>14</sup>

The tsarist government in Latvia and Estonia opposed any form of autonomy and was extending its policy of Russification. Russian was the language of administration, justice, and even elementary education. The use of the Latvian language was circumscribed in the public sphere. Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, and other minorities in the Baltic provinces were subject to the same restrictions. The process of Russification alienated national minorities of the Russian Empire from the government and ensured that national groups would be well represented in the revolutionary movement.<sup>15</sup> In Latvia, as in all Russia, strict censorship and a lack of political freedoms existed. As it can be seen from the Okhrana materials in Hoover Archives, the political activities of the population were closely monitored by the secret police.

Thanks to the period of Swedish rule in the Baltic provinces during the 18th century, educational institutions were established that predated Russian rule. In addition, due to the Moravian religious movement, Latvia had a well-developed tradition of education. Educated Latvian workers knew three local languages and were able to read German socialist literature in the original. Teachers, half of whom were writers and poets, were highly respected in society and many of them became leaders in the 1905 Revolution. Latvia had its own national intelligentsia, and there were hundreds of libraries, educational and agricultural associations, and unions in Latvia.<sup>16</sup>

One of the few Western historians who studied the 1905 Revolution in depth observed that "Latvia's peasantry, deprived of land but possessed of a Western-oriented and urban sophistication, had acquired an understanding of socialist ideas far beyond anything that could possibly have stirred in the mind of the Russian peasant."<sup>17</sup>

The period around 1905 is considered a golden age of Latvian art, theater and literature. The present writer agrees that a rich literary and art movement contributed to the spreading of ideas of individual and national freedom, as well as nationally oriented creativity.<sup>18</sup> A powerful example of this involved the events concerning Latvian poet Aspazija (real name Elza Rozenberga, 1865–1943) and her play *The Silver Veil*. The premiere took place on 27 January 1905, just 2 weeks after the 13th of January, considered the “Bloody Sunday” of Riga, Latvia, when 70 demonstrators were killed by the tsarist police. In her play, Aspazija used symbolic language while talking about power, liberation, and women’s rights. The audiences rightly caught the revolutionary message underlying the performance. The play left a deep impact on people and the enthusiasm of the participants in the revolution grew. It was one of those rare historical moments in the history of Latvia when historical conditions, the uniqueness of literary creation, and a very talented poet and speaker merged. A powerful inspiration for the Latvian people was born.<sup>19</sup> Those who experienced the atmosphere during the Singing Revolution in 1989, before the Soviet Union fell apart, may remember this emotional and intellectual spirit.

### **Resources on the Causes and the Character of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia**

Stanford University Libraries have acquired about 30 of the earliest monographs or popular surveys published just after the events of 1905. They reflect the ideological controversies and different actors of the 1905 era: Social Democrats; the Social Democratic Union; Baltic Germans; and representatives of Russian imperial government. These publications have value as primary source materials. Most of these publications try to reveal the causes of the 1905 Revolution, but they mainly express their particular perspective on events.

The Latvian Social Democratic Party was founded in 1904. It was inspired by Marxist ideas from the social democratic movement in Germany. The Latvian Social Democratic Party, with its 2,000 members, was the leading force in the 1905 Revolution.

The collection of the library of Latvian socialists in San Francisco, which is kept in the Hoover Institution Archives, provides an opportunity to study the possible influences on the members of the Latvian Social Democratic Party. Some rare publications, written by the leaders of Latvian Social Democrats are also available through the online access to the National Library of Latvia.<sup>20</sup> In the course of 6 months, after the October manifesto of 1905, the Latvian Social Democratic Party had printed 130 pamphlets, 500,000 copies of which were distributed. The revolutionary movement of 1905 benefited from a relative freedom from censorship.



According to the views expressed in these publications, the main cause of the 1905 Revolution was social contradictions. The goal of the Latvian Social Democratic Party was autonomy of Latvia within a united, free Russia. Only a few books representing the opinions of the Latvian Social Democratic Party were published at the time in English. The most important one was written by Ernest O. Ames and was published in London by the Independent Labor Party.<sup>21</sup> The author, one of the leaders of Latvian Social Democratic Party, used a pseudonym. He had escaped to London, where he started a clandestine printing press. The publication is viewed as one of the principal English language sources on the 1905 Revolution in Latvia.

The Boris I. Nicolaevsky collection in the Hoover Institution Archives has the typescript of a publication and a copy of the PhD thesis by Jānis Ozols, a member of the Central Committee of Latvian Social Democratic Party in the 1905 Revolution. After the defeat of the revolution, he was able to emigrate to the United States. Ozols studied at Harvard University, and in 1914 published his thesis.<sup>22</sup> Another important work found in the same collection was handwritten by David Beika.<sup>23</sup> He was a schoolteacher, who took part in the burning of a manor house in Dobeles, but later was a leader of a local partisan movement. He emigrated to the USA in 1907.

The second party of social democratic origins was the Latvian Social Democratic Union, founded by exiled Latvian radical intellectuals in 1903. The main party leaders were Miķelis Valters and Ernests Rolavs, and most of the members were Latvian poets, writers, and teachers.<sup>24</sup> Their writings on the revolution advanced the idea that the national inequality between native Latvians and the ruling classes was the most powerful cause of the revolutionary movement. The party was nationally oriented, and their goal was to attain full rights of self-determination and the formation of an independent Latvian state.<sup>25</sup> The members of the Latvian Social Democratic Union took an active part in the 1905 Revolution. One of its leaders, Ernests Rolavs, was “shot while trying to escape.” As the revolution progressed with so many victims on the revolutionaries’ side, the party more and more supported using means of individual terror against the tsarist state and the Baltic German gentry. The Latvian Social Democratic Union became the Socialist Revolutionary Party or Latvian *eseri*. Its best known combatant was Alberts Traubergs, killed in 1908.<sup>26</sup>

Stanford Libraries hold the first works of Baltic German historiography, some published during the years of Revolution. The best known authors, Astaf Alexander Georg von Transehe-Roseneck and Theodor Schiemann, were German ultranationalists whose position could be described as being on the far right.<sup>27</sup>

These writers saw the mental illness of the masses as well as the instincts of a part of the Latvian peasantry as the main causes of the revolution. Both authors disapproved of the policy of Russian officials who advised the German barons to improve the conditions of rural laborers. Additionally,

both authors approved of the repressive measures of the Russian government. Jānis Jansons-Brauns, one of the leaders of the Latvian Social Democratic Party, referring to Transehe-Roseneck's comment about the madness of the Latvian nation, observed: "It is pretty clear that such a thought can be expressed only by people standing on a melting piece of ice being taken away in the ocean by the stream of history."<sup>28</sup>

The few books published in the Russian language at the time about the revolution generally represent the opinions of the Russian government. An author who wrote under the pseudonym "Vega" had spent 10 months in Latvia, although it is not known in what capacity. He approved of the Russian government's policy in general, including mass retaliation. He blamed the Baltic Germans for not being able to see the necessity of reforms. He seemingly was even able to understand the point of view of the Latvian peasants. Even liberally inclined Russian scholars, who felt sympathy towards the Latvian peasants, were able to see oppressive policies as being the work of the Baltic Germans rather than the Russian state.<sup>29</sup>

SUL and HILA hold a number of works in Russian that discuss the land tenure and agrarian question, and they give the impression that the Russian government must have been more than aware of economic and social problems in the countryside.<sup>30</sup> However, Russian society in general had little knowledge about the Baltic provinces with Latvians and Estonians often considered "German tribes."<sup>31</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the years of independent Latvia, a Latvian national historiographic tradition developed, mostly due to the efforts of social democratic historians. Memoirs, along with accounts of the revolutionary events in the most radical localities of Tukums, Talsi, Aizpute, Dobele, Aluksne, and Smiltene were published during this period. All these rare publications are available online through the National Library of Latvia.<sup>32</sup>

Many of those who participated in 1905 became politically active in the independent Latvia, representing different parties, but most belonging to the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party. The Social Democrats celebrated the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the 1905 Revolution. In 1925, 25 articles were published on the subject.<sup>33</sup> In the *Saeima* (Latvian parliament) the Social Democrats proposed a pension bill that favored the participants of 1905.<sup>34</sup> The society "The Year 1905 in Latvia" interviewed participants of the revolution, while the Society of Latvian Historical Research turned to the Latvian populace with a request to collect and send in documents and materials about 1905.<sup>35</sup>

Soviet historiography about 1905 in the Baltic provinces started in the 1920s in the USSR, and continued its development in the 1950s–1980s in Soviet Latvia. While looking for the causes of the Revolution, it had only one answer: the intensification of class contradictions and the exploitation of industrial workers. Although Latvian workers and peasants felt both, total

social misery and extreme poverty did not exist. Instead, there was a deep, nationwide dissatisfaction and resentment that affected the entire nation. Latvians made up a nation with a rich culture, but without any political power, they faced substantial barriers to economic development. As a French observer concluded earlier, Latvia was the most advanced nation in Russia intellectually and in some respects economically, but it was the most backward politically.<sup>36</sup>

SUL has acquired a number of publications from 1950s–1960s, mainly monographs. The main authority of this period, Soviet academician Janis Krastins, published his first work in 1950. During the next decade, it was reprinted five times, both in Latvian and in Russian. The emphasis was on the social nature of 1905; the leading role of the revolutionary proletariat; and the armed struggle.<sup>37</sup> In the 1970s and '80s, Soviet publications continued in the same ideological direction. What was new was the publication of collections of primary sources and conferences materials.<sup>38</sup> Attention also turned to one of the innovations of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia: the rural committees which represented a form of revolutionary power in the countryside.

These important publications were preceded by a monograph about the rural committees, which came out in the West in 1959. It was one of the first works on the subject based on an MA thesis by George J. Longworth at the University of Mississippi.<sup>39</sup> The author considered the Latvian Congress of 1,000 rural delegates, which took place in November of 1905, to be the most significant single event during the revolution. 400 rural committees were elected all over Latvia after the congress. Other democratic transformations followed. Rural committees introduced Latvian as a language of instruction in schools and voted to eliminate the privileges of the Baltic German nobles, to organize a people's militia, and to abolish land rent. Over the ensuing 50 years, some researchers have returned to the subject of the congress. There is an opinion among them that the congress should be considered the first Latvian parliament.<sup>40</sup>

Unsurpassed to this day is a monograph by exile agrarian historian professor Arveds Švābe, himself a revolutionary in 1905. He emphasized that, even if the aim and character of the revolution in Russia was different, in the Baltic the revolution definitely had an agrarian character. Arveds Švābe, who had an encyclopedic knowledge of Baltic history, pointed out that 1905 was the biggest and most impressive of a series of peasant risings, of which Baltic history is so full.<sup>41</sup> Another monograph, written by the Social Democrat Dr. Bruno Kalniņš, was also based on a wide range of sources.<sup>42</sup>

More research was done in the West. Professor Stanley W. Page from City College of City University of New York wrote on several topics, including the formation of the independent Baltic States and Lenin and world revolution. His article on the 1905 Revolution in the Latvian countryside still attracts the interest of historians.<sup>43</sup>

As can be seen from SUL's collection, the 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of several high-quality Baltic German works.<sup>44</sup> Professor Gert fon Pistohlkors, a representative of the second generation of Baltic German historians, was the first who openly confronted Transehe-Roseneck's ultra-nationalist ideology. Pistohlkors' point of view is that Transehe-Roseneck defamed the entire Latvian nation.<sup>45</sup> Another novelty of the research into 1905 in the 1970s and 1980s was cooperation between Baltic German historians and Soviet Latvian historians.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1960s–1980s, a new generation of Western researchers of Latvian and Estonian origin started to publish in scholarly journals, including Toivo Raun and Andrejs Plakans. Both authors have continued to work on the problems of the 1905 Revolution for 40 years. The approach was based on detailed studies of resources, especially archival materials.<sup>47</sup>

In Latvia, the years since the 1990s have brought to the research field the impact of the freedom of speech that came with the renewed independence of the Baltic States. Controversial questions were discussed not only among historians, but also journalists and intellectuals. However, this also brought along a danger of generalizing and simplifying certain historical issues. Documents representing different sides of the “barricades” during the Revolution were published in Latvian research journals (for instance, in the *Journal of the Institute of Latvian History*, which includes English synopses). Most often, these were memoirs of revolutionaries. One example are those of a member of the Latvian Social Democratic Union and later a diplomat in independent Latvia, Eduards Bīriņš (1905–1909).<sup>48</sup>

One new development has been the publication of police documents, court proceedings, and investigative reports of the government.<sup>49</sup> Documents have also been published about the opinions and attitudes of Baltic Germans.<sup>50</sup>

Only a few professional historians are working on the whole range of questions of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. Professor Ilga Apine was the only historian to publish a monograph at the time of the 100th anniversary of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia.<sup>51</sup>

Work with primary sources seems to be the most important task for historians in present-day Latvia. The largest number of research articles and publications of archival materials with commentaries have been published by Dr. Līga Lapa.<sup>52</sup>

It may take years or even decades of work for new monographs to appear. At present, the results of current research can be found in journals and in collections of articles. In 2005 and 2006, two collections of articles were published, both based on materials from international conferences. The most encouraging development was that a new generation of historians was widely represented at the conferences.<sup>53</sup>

Some progress in research has been reflected in the latest publications in the West. For instance, Dr. James D. White, Professor Emeritus at Glasgow

University, one of the few in the West who has studied the 1905 Revolution in the Baltic Provinces, has emphasized that events there did not meet Lenin's definition of 1905 as a "dress rehearsal" for the October Revolution of 1917. For that very reason, White argues that the revolution in the Baltic provinces had unique features worthy of study.<sup>54</sup>

In 2013, a collection of research papers was published by Indiana University in Bloomington, which is home to one of the oldest Baltic and Finnish Studies programs in the United States. Two research papers contribute to an understanding of the multi-national dimension of Latvia.<sup>55</sup> The latest book on the subject, published just a few months ago, offers a concise analysis of the work of historians exiled from the Baltic States, including Baltic Germans.<sup>56</sup>

### **Debate on Violence**

All researchers of the 1905 Revolution, regardless of ideological leanings, seem to agree on one common viewpoint: that in comparison with the other regions of the Russian Empire, in 1905, Latvia witnessed a high level of political activism, including violence. This question appears to be almost the only one which still attracts attention in Latvian society, as it is often discussed in the mass media.

There were several forms of armed struggle during the 1905 Revolution: the people's militia in countryside; the units of combatants, both in cities and in smaller locales; partisans or so-called forest brothers; and anarchists and individual terrorists. These divisions cannot be strictly applied since they tend to overlap both in place and time. The one that has attracted the most attention, both in research papers and in the mass media, is the escalation of militant activities in the countryside: specifically the burning of the manor houses of German landlords.

The armed struggle in the countryside, rather than in the cities, was the most specific feature of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. By late autumn 1905, the situation resembled a civil war. The prevailing view among historians is that the manor burning resulted from the previous long history of conflict between landlords and peasants. The burning of manor houses amounted to historical revenge for the centuries-long oppression and humiliation the Latvian peasantry endured. 72 manor houses were burned in Livland and 42 in Courland.<sup>57</sup> Such historical revenge was also perpetrated during the agrarian reform of 1920 in independent Latvia.

In analyzing the 1905 Revolution in Latvia, the comparative method has turned out to be the most revealing. The Estonian historian Toivo Raun, who has studied both Latvia and Estonia, believes that the higher level of violence in Courland and Southern Livland was related to the larger German presence there: the German proportion of the total population in the Latvian areas was

close to three times larger than that in the Estonian ones (9.3 percent versus 3.5 percent). He adds that although it may well not be possible to document this in any definitive way, it seems likely that the historical relationship between Latvians and Germans was more troubled: a deeper level of ethnic antagonism existed.<sup>58</sup> For instance, the opposition to the patronage rights of the Baltic German nobility to name the Lutheran pastors in their locality was especially strong in the Latvian areas. It turns out that Baltic Germans in Estonia learned and used Estonian, while those in Latvia were much less likely to use Latvian.

Western researcher Dr. Ellen Wiegandt has compared the Baltic provinces to Wales and Ireland, emphasizing that “In communities so heavily dependent on a single economic activity and where small group of landowners virtually monopolized the chief source of wealth, and where that group, too, often culturally alien, had such an exclusive residue of power, there was a great potential for animosities and conflict that would in all likelihood be expressed in ethnic terms.”<sup>59</sup> Curiously enough, already at the beginning of 1906, British journalist Henry W. Nevinson, while traveling through Latvia, referred to Latvians (Letts) as the Irish of Russia.<sup>60</sup>

In order to understand the motives of Latvian peasants, analyzing ethno-psychological factors is of utmost importance. Ernests Rolavs, a member of the Latvian Social Democratic Union, wrote, “The Manor and its autocratic dweller lay as a burden on the whole area. It was a den and the center of fear, distress, shame and harassment. Almost each Latvian peasant family had a story of drudgery, flogging, and hand kissing.”<sup>61</sup> In another vein, Baltic German writer Siegfried von Vegesack has used in his work the image of a ‘glassy wall’ to characterize German-Latvian rural relations around 1905, thus referring to the existence of a psychological barrier as well as to transparency in their mutual view of one another.<sup>62</sup>

There is a very specific source which should be added to the historical records of Latvia when ethno-psychological aspects of the 1905 Revolution are considered. Since the peasants did not leave their own written records, their opinions may be found in Latvian folk songs or *dainas*, historical sources which have been preserved orally and were written down in the 19th century. There are about 1,300 *dainas* which tell stories about the relationship between Latvians and Germans. They basically document the harsh life on the German estates. Thus the *dainas* can be considered as “vehicles of memory” for the shared experiences of the peasant society.<sup>63</sup>

There are several challenging questions to be answered about the violent activism in countryside. When did the burning of the manor houses start? Which ones were attacked? Who took part in those actions? The answers are complicated, and may not ever be understood or clarified completely. Most of the researchers agree that peasants started to burn the manor houses only

at the end of 1905. The burnings occurred only when martial law was announced (in Courland in August, in Livland in November) and the German landowners brought in Cossacks from the North Caucasus region, units of the Russian Imperial Army. The German nobles privately had organized their own armed police force, so called self-protection squads (*Selbstschutz*). When punitive expeditions arrived and burned farmhouses and shot the peasants, the most common answer by the peasants was to burn down manor houses, which housed the punitive expeditions. The terror of landlords facilitated revolutionary terror.

Historian Peter Holquist has described the punitive expeditions of 1905–1906 as an entirely extraordinary innovation, especially active in the non-Russian periphery. “Over the past century, not one European government resorted to punitive expeditions against internal revolutionary and oppositionist movements within the boundaries of civilized states .... The exception was the Paris Commune of 1871, but once open armed conflict had ceased, military campaigns against the population of certain regions or against whole categories of civilians were never practiced.”<sup>64</sup>

Professor Emeritus Arno J. Mayer has offered a perspective on the general behavior of what he calls “old regimes”: “old regimes depend on force to maintain themselves, as indeed all societies do, and revolutionaries should not be blamed for resorting to the same means to change things.”<sup>65</sup> In his view, “there is no revolution without violence, but this violence stems from the inevitable and unexceptional resistance of the forces and ideas opposed to it, rather than, as many historians have claimed, from ideological obsessions of the revolutionaries”.<sup>66</sup>

The phenomenon of revolutionary violence in Latvia can be understood only by putting together all available knowledge and opinions. Professor Andrew Ezergailis has emphasized that the damage that the Latvians committed was basically against property, while the damage to Latvians in the Revolution of 1905 was mostly against people.<sup>67</sup> The first targets most often were the manor houses of the most hated landowners. 82 German property owners and 4 German pastors were killed during the Revolution of 1905.<sup>68</sup>

The question about the role of the Latvian Social Democratic Party in the violent events in the countryside seems to be the most politicized and confusing question in the historiography on the subject. The authority on 1905 in Latvia, Professor Ilga Apine, has stressed that the Latvian Social Democratic Party did not urge violence. On the contrary, Social Democrats appealed to the Latvian people to refrain from burning German properties in the countryside.<sup>69</sup> Her research shows that organization and the patrolling of streets prevented provocations and anti-Jewish pogroms, which never happened during the 1905 Revolution in Latvia.

Others believe that the burning of manor houses was systematic, involved mindless looting, and that the Latvian Social Democratic Party was

responsible.<sup>70</sup> The same opinion dominates in the works of cultural historians and intellectuals whose concern always has been the damage done by brute force to material values such as architectural heritage, books, and libraries.<sup>71</sup>

The most reasonable conclusion about revolutionary violence seems to be the statement by German historian Pistohlkors that, although it is true urban agitators and workers went into the countryside to stir up unrest, it cannot be concluded that the disturbances in the rural districts occurred mainly because of them. On the contrary, a great deal of unrest in rural areas stemmed from socio-economic injustice and dire local conditions, especially of landless laborers.<sup>72</sup>

In July of 1906, the more radical part of the Latvian Social Democratic Party united with the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. It is quite possible that this could have brought some changes in the attitudes of combatants toward violent conflict. In fact, the most radically inclined Social Democrats left the party and chose to become anarchists. It would not be surprising that the horrific experiences of 1905, including repression, torture, and executions without trial, could have contributed to the fearlessness and fierceness of Latvian anarchists.<sup>73</sup>

John Keep discusses the basis and context of violence in Latvia in the 1905 Revolution. He invites us to look at historical actors in their contemporary context, not that of a century later.<sup>74</sup> According to Keep, the participants of the revolution did not distinguish between violent and peaceful methods as a matter of principle. Moral considerations were dismissed as irrelevant.<sup>75</sup>

Another perspective is offered by political scientist Roger Dale Peterson. He has analyzed the events of 1905 in Latvia while concentrating on the subject of ethnic violence in general. After identifying the motivations of individual perpetrators of ethnic violence in different regions in Europe, Peterson has developed four models: Fear, Hatred, Resentment, and Rage. His main conclusion is that the “resentment narrative,” centered on a sense of unjust group status, provides the best fit for the case of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. He agrees with most of the Latvian historians that national identity conjoined with class identity in the 1905 Revolution.<sup>76</sup> Although the Tsarist Russian administration held decisive political power, Baltic German landlords were a logical target for both economic and political reasons.

During the Revolution, the most obvious form of anti-German violence was against German pastors. German theologian and historian Ernst Benz made this argument years before. During 1905, pastors often were allowed to speak until they began blessing the Kaiser and the German nobility, at which point shouts and turmoil broke out.<sup>77</sup>

Landed gentry had a privilege, so called patronage rights, to appoint a Lutheran pastor, almost always German. Lutheran pastors in the meantime were landowners, too. That makes it easier to understand why Lutheran pastors unanimously welcomed punitive expeditions. The most interesting



addition to the discussion regarding the role of Lutheran pastors in the 1905 Revolution can be found in a very rare publication of sources: the reports of German pastors collected in 1906 but published 20 years later. The German pastors were satisfied with the results of the brutal acts of the punitive expeditions and welcomed the capital punishment that was inflicted on the revolutionaries. The reports reveal that the Baltic German pastors essentially were complete strangers to Latvia and its people.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

Stanford University and Hoover Institution Libraries offer extraordinarily rich and diverse material on the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. Although the last monograph on the subject in Latvia came out in 2005, few collections of papers have been published, and research journals keep publishing both articles and source materials. The archival documents which this paper has benefited from have served as additional elements to bring a deeper understanding to the subject.

In Latvia, the causes of the Revolution of 1905 differed from those elsewhere in the Russian Empire. If in Russia great social inequality, the despotic government of Tsar Nicholas II, and the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War were the main reasons, research shows that in Latvia the most powerful cause was the inequality between native Latvians and the ruling Baltic Germans. During the course of the revolution, two ruling forces, Russian and German, were united in their violent retaliatory measures. In Latvia, more than anything, the 1905 Revolution was a wakeup call, the beginning of national and social liberation. Latvia reached its independence in 1918, only 13 years after the 1905 Revolution.

The forms of struggle in Latvia in 1905 were defined by historical conditions, the distribution of social and political forces, and the brutality of the ruling powers. The scholarly debate has lasted more than a century. This debate has not been over the fact of violence, but over its interpretation. An enduring question for researchers is how to explain that in November and December, during the culmination of the 1905 Revolution in Latvia, when the clashes between government and revolutionary forces grew and hundreds of the Baltic German properties were burned, in the same localities the countryside witnessed an extraordinary creation of people's power. About 400 rural committees were elected and began to work, if only for a short period. This phenomenon was unique to Latvia and the Baltic and was not seen elsewhere in Russia.

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