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DIVIDED WE FALL: DIVISION WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARTISANS OF VIDZEME AND LATGALE, FALL 1945

Geoffrey Swain

Heinrihs Strods has shown that Latvia's national partisans were defeated primarily because of the overwhelming military odds they faced, but he added a secondary cause — the lack of unity in their ranks. This article explores the causes of such disunity and suggests that Björn Felder is right to see a blurring of ideological divisions as the Second World War came to an end; however, even at the height of summer 1945 there were some signs of tension, and as the likelihood of foreign intervention waned, fundamental tactical disagreements developed, disagreements which reflected different political pasts and differing visions of Latvia's future.

Keywords: Latvia; second world war; national partisans

Friends say come to the forest, the British and Americans are coming; but I say: you know, dear friends, real friends, if the German Army could not stand up to the Red Army, you with your rifles in the forests never will.

With these words a former member of the Latvian Legion explained why, in fall 1944 he agreed to be mobilized into the Red Army and did not follow his friends to join the national partisans. With hindsight his seems the commonsense view, but in summer 1945 the national partisans can be forgiven for thinking the future might be theirs. Rumors abounded that there would be war between the Soviet Union and its former Anglo-American allies; it was widely believed that 'the English will come'. In Daugavpils activity by national partisans 'increased sharply' in May 1945 to the extent that in June it was decided Daugavpils should have its own Anti-Banditry Detachment, composed of former Latvian Red Partisans. ³

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The unrest in nearby Ilūkste peaked in mid-July when one report spoke of a group '400 strong' and eight attacks on the railway system. The national partisans had succeeded in paralyzing normal life in some ten parishes: 15 milk-collection points had been destroyed, as had two horse-hiring stations; one butter-making factory had been destroyed and an assault launched on the large Bebrene butter plant; and two village soviets had been destroyed and a further five were refusing to meet because of threats from the national partisans. One incident took place only three kilometers from Ilūkste itself, when telephone lines to the town were cut. A report from Abrene dated 29 May 1945 stressed that 'banditism' was now so developed that 'a threatening situation' had been created in which 'no day passed' without some incident on country roads where 'bandit' patrols frequently checked documents; 'bandits' were clearly preparing for an uprising and had wide support. The unrest in Abrene district was largely the work of the Latvian National Partisan Union (LNPA); in Daugavpils and surrounding districts it was the Latvian Fatherland Guards (partisans) Union (LTSpA) which was responsible.

As Heinrihs Strods has shown in his definitive study, the national partisans faced overwhelming military odds and, deprived of the Anglo-American support they anticipated, were condemned to defeat. If, however, the lack of external support was for Strods the primary cause of this defeat, he listed as its second cause the lack of unity among the national partisans themselves (1996, p. 558). How important was such disunity? Was it simply a factor of the fragmented nature of the national partisan movement, or were there more principled disagreements?

In his study of the formation of the LNPA, Zigmārs Turčinskis has shown that tension developed within the leadership of that organization over the question of the brutality of the tactics that the national partisans used. In February 1945 LNPA leader Pēteris Supe clashed with Broņislavs Sluckis, the leader of its operations section, about the best tactics to be pursued. According to Sluckis, the tactics favored by Supe had to be changed to avoid accusations of butchery. When a meeting was called to discuss the matter, Supe threatened to resign unless he got his way, and the majority of his commanders were prepared to back him (Turčinskis 2004, p. 455). In an earlier study Turčinskis described a related disagreement (2002, p. 342). A meeting of key LNPA commanders took place on 15 May 1945 which saw a clash between those calling for active struggle and those calling for underground preparatory work in anticipation of an Anglo-American landing. Tactical issues about the intensity of the anti-Soviet struggle could mask underlying differences of strategy and ideology.

In her study of the civil war in Poland during 1942–48, Anita Prazmowska notes important differences of approach among the Polish anti-Soviet armed resistance in fall 1945. By then two distinct tendencies had evolved: Freedom and Independence (WiN), which had its origins in the Home Army, the London-based Government in Exile, and National Military Unity (NZN), which was essentially the armed wing of the pre-war extreme right National Alliance (SN), whose relations with the Government in Exile had been tense throughout the Second World War. Although relations between these two armed groups were cordial, they did not cooperate or evolve a common command structure. WiN did not accept that war between the Soviet Union and the West was inevitable, and established links, albeit clandestine,

with the legal Peasants' Party, looking to operate within a broader political framework. The NZN saw a third world war as inevitable and always acted as if it was; its units thus 'became particularly determined and reckless in their attacks', Prazmowska comments (2004, p. 152).

Could there be similar issues lying behind the divisions among the national partisans operating in Latgale and Vidzeme? That not all national partisan groups were the same was clear from the very start. The former Soviet partisan leader Oskars Oškalns told an interviewer not long after the Red Army retook Riga in October 1944 that at the end of 1943 and in early 1944 he had been in contact with two different groups of national partisans operating in the forests to the south west of Jēkabpils. The first he described as 'bourgeois': their line was to encourage desertion from the Latvian Legion but to avoid contact with the Germans, preserving their forces until help came from Britain and the United States. Another group, he went on, favored participation in the Latvian Legion, wanting to turn it into the nucleus of a Latvian Army. Yet, Oškalns recalled, in April 1944 even these 'aizsarg nationalists' had been prepared to fight alongside him. Later, in September 1945 when the appeal was issued by the Latvian Soviet Government to persuade national partisans to surrender, a similar distinction was recognized. The Soviet press dropped its usual rhetoric about 'Gestapo agents trying to restore bourgeois Latvia'. Instead, Latgal'skaia Pravda of 16 September 1945 talked of people mistakenly struggling for a 'democratic republic', while failing to recognize that Soviet Latvia was in reality a fully democratic state.

Building on the work of Strods, scholars such as Dzintars Ērglis have shown clearly that, far from the national partisans being 'Gestapo' agents, many of those involved in founding national partisan groups owed their ideological allegiance to the Latvian Central Council (LCC) and through it to the Western allies (Ērglis 2004). Björn Felder has gone further and shown how in Kurzeme the Latvian National Partisan Organization (LNPO), founded with the active support of SS Jagdverband Ost, gradually transformed itself into the armed wing of the LCC (Felder 2004). For Felder, ideological barriers were in flux and those like Teodors Jansons, who had once been influenced by the Pērkonkrusts when young, hurried to divert resources acquired through collaboration with the German security services into the arsenal of the LCC or a group like the Guards of Latvia (Latvijas Sargi) which brought together members from such diverse backgrounds as the Nazi-sponsored Pioneer (Līdumnieks) organization and the former Social Democrat fighting organization (Felder 2006). Was the situation the same in the east of Latvia, in Latgale and Vidzeme? Is there evidence, to use Oškalns's terminology, of differences continuing between 'bourgeois' and 'aizsarg' national partisans within the LTSpA and LNPA, or even within those organizations? Or, as Felder suggests, did such differences disappear over time?

This article will suggest that Felder was right to see a coming together of a variety of ideological strands in summer 1945 as preparations were made for a national uprising, supported from abroad. But it will also show that this *rassemblement populaire* was never without tension, and that, as the likelihood of foreign intervention waned, fundamental tactical disagreements developed, disagreements which reflected different political pasts and differing visions of Latvia's future. The divide was not as crude as that proposed by Oškalns, but where people stood did seem

to reflect whether they had resisted both fascism and communism, or just communism alone.

This article is not a comprehensive study of the national partisans. Far from it. It takes a snapshot of some developments in Latgale from July 1945 to February 1946, based on an analysis of published sources and some selected NKVD 'criminal files' relating to prominent members of the LTSpA and LNPA national partisans. It traces the tension which developed within the LTSpA leadership over the issue of 'passivity', a dispute which ultimately led the LTSpA president and other leading figures to surrender to the authorities; and it considers the state of relations between the LTSpA and the LNPA at the end of 1945, when the latter wanted to launch an offensive operation during the elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet scheduled for 10 February 1946.

Handling NKVD 'criminal' files is notoriously difficult. The revised interrogation procedures of 17 July 1947 made perfectly clear not only that inducements were regularly made to persuade those arrested to agree with their accusers, but that recourse to a 'hard regime' - including confinement in a punishment cell for three weeks - was routine; an official request to Moscow was needed before outright torture could be applied. Moreover, interrogations were always conducted in Russian, which often meant the accused was interviewed through a translator; this could make a nonsense of the requirement that each prisoner should initial every page of the interrogation report as an accurate record. Many of those whose files have been read for this study, because they emanate from Latgale, were happy to be questioned in Russian; but even then the historian does not read what the accused said, but the NKVD's summary of what was said. That summary is not only incomplete – some are timed at several hours, but contain only a few pages - but constantly overlaid with ideological assumptions; in the cases considered here the accused probably said 'restore Latvia as an independent democratic state' not 'restore bourgeois democratic Latvia'. In an article in Europe-Asia Studies in 2003 Hiroaki Kuromiya discussed some of the problems involved in interpreting these criminal files. His main concern in that article was that many of those arrested for anti-state activity were held for participation in conspiracies which simply did not exist. That is not a problem here; the struggles of these national partisans were very real, but some of the other issues Kuromiya raised, especially that of conflicting statements by the accused, are very relevant. Kuromiya is right to state that 'it is difficult to discern the true voice from the forced voice' (2003, p. 636) in these interrogations, but with careful reading across the grain it can be done.

The LTSpA and Passivity

In the summer and early fall of 1945, when the prospect of a British landing in Latvia was presumed to be assured, the LTSpA consciously strove to be a broad-based organization. Although the ideological and tactical divisions were there, they could be papered over when national liberation seemed so close. It was no accident, therefore, that the LTSpA looked for a respected figure in the local community as its leader. The titular president of the LTSpA was Antons Juhnēvičs, but he was not its founder.

He was deacon of the Roman Catholic church in the village of Vanagi, near Līvāni. Here, in his church work, he had taken seriously the concept of sanctuary. He had regularly given shelter to those who wanted to avoid conscription into the Latvian Legion, and, when the Red Army arrived, he did the same for those trying to escape Soviet mobilization orders, even constructing a 'bunker' where they could hide. In January 1945 the Soviet authorities arrived demanding to search the church premises, and Juhnēvičs fled. From then until the summer he lived in hiding. His main support came from the local Vanagi school teacher, whose family often fed him; however, preparations for the start of the school year brought too much interest in the school from the Soviet authorities and early in August Juhnēvičs moved further afield; it was then that he came into contact with the LTSpA, which had been founded more than a month earlier by Jānis Zelčans. Juhnēvičs already had an inkling of its existence. In mid-June he had been contacted by Antons Gravars, a parishioner whose marriage he had celebrated before the war and who was also in hiding. Gravars was already working with Zelčans in setting up the LTSpA, and reported that Zelčans was interested in talking to Juhnēvičs. Juhnēvičs did not respond at once, but in July picked up rumors that on the Ilūkste side of the River Daugava some sort of center had been established for the national partisan movement, complete with officer corps and a communication network. Hoping to make contact with such a national resistance army, Juhnēvičs decided to take up Gravars' invitation and asked for a meeting with Zelčans. The meeting took place on 24 August. 10

By then, on paper at least, the LTSpA looked an impressive organization, for, besides Latgale, it controlled most national partisan activity around Ilūkste. The dominant figure in this region was Stanislavs Urbāns, who knew the area well since he was a local man and had been part of a military unit fighting the Red Partisans of Oškalns in the very same forests. By May, Urbāns' group was in contact with an emissary of Boriss Jankavs, leader of the Kurzeme-based LNPO. In June he made his first contacts with Zelčans and by July his group was fully merged with the LTSpA (Aļķis 1997, p. 309). Contact with the LNPO and the Latvian emigration in Sweden, with its links to the British Secret Intelligence Service, have been confirmed by the fact that Jankavs possessed a copy of the first LTSpA statutes, issued in July 1945 (Strods 1996, p. 58).

Juhnēvičs was taken to the LTSpA headquarters, then based in a barn equipped with typewriters and several copies of the newspaper Fatherland Guard. Zelčans introduced Juhnēvičs to Kārlis Blūms, his close associate. Blūms introduced himself as a plenipotentiary from the Kurzeme national partisans who had arrived at the LTSpA headquarters about a week earlier. Juhnēvičs then asked to talk to Zelčans alone. He wanted to know if the reports of a national resistance army 'beyond the Daugava' were true. Zelčans explained that this was a myth; the only organization in operation was his own Latgale-based LTSpA; further afield, he added, in Kurzeme, the remnants of the Latvian Legion still operated, inaccurately adding that they were being led by General Bangerskis. 'In no time', he went on, 'England will go to war with the Soviet Union and Latvia will be freed from the Bolsheviks'. It was therefore essential, he said, to unite all those national partisan groups operating around Daugavpils, Jēkabpils, Indra and Rēzekne. In Zelčans' scheme of things, these units would provide

the core of his Second Division; a Third Division would be founded in Vidzeme; while the national partisans of Kurzeme would constitute the First Division.

Juhnēvičs seems to have hesitated for a moment before joining. He asked whether Zelčans had been responsible for producing leaflets which demanded that for each Latvian killed two or more Soviet activists should die. Zelčans agreed that his organization had issued such leaflets. Then Juhnēvičs 'very quickly' looked over the draft statutes of the organization, which had been agreed in July, thought for a moment and agreed to become involved. In the paraphrase of his words recorded during his NKVD interrogation, he took this decision because 'he wanted to see the overthrow of Soviet power and the establishment in Latvia of a bourgeois-democratic system'. That same day a series of other meetings were held with various commanders and it was agreed to formalize the establishment of the LTSpA, with Juhnēvičs being made president, Zelčans secretary and Kārlis Blūms vice president. The only leader not consulted about this was the military commander Juris Rudzats, but Juhnēvičs was assured that Rudzats would endorse the decision. Juhnēvičs then returned to the village where he was hiding, while the others remained at their barn headquarters. ¹¹

Despite the grand title of president, Juhnēvičs continued to be a rather peripheral figure in the LTSpA. His concern was the organization's statutes, and during late August and early September he set to work on redrafting them. Meanwhile, it was decided that Blūms should head off to Madona and Lubane to contact the national partisans there, forming a division or regiment depending on what turned out to be feasible. This trip was a success. Contact was established with Pēteris Supe, the leader of the LNPA, and Roberts Timmermanis, an LTSpA commander, agreed to establish a Third LTSpA Division in that region, while retaining contact with the LNPA and Supe. When Blūms returned on 15 September he found Juhnēvičs still working on the statutes. 12 The original statutes drafted in July, those reproduced by Strods (1999, p. 160), had 49 paragraphs, but in the final version there were 71 paragraphs. ¹³ According to Zelčans, Juhnēvičs really loved getting the legal formulations right; as an educated man he felt this to be important and the sort of useful contribution he could make. 14 On 20 September Juhnēvičs presented his revised statutes to the assembled leaders of the LTSpA. This, in the words of his Soviet interrogators, is what he told his new comrades:

I read the text of the draft statutes. After the reading there was much discussion, as a result of which Blūms moved an amendment; he was supported by Juris Rudzats. However in [illegible] time some amendments were accepted and the statutes were confirmed. On 21-22 September I dictated them to Jānis Vidzans at my home and they were written down in a big new book, after which all those mentioned above signed them. ¹⁵

Later in the interrogation he explained more precisely the content of his new clauses:

The statutes were discussed again on 20 September when I introduced some changes and additions, in particular I brought in a Christian spirit, in other words that a member of the organization had to govern his actions according to Christian morality and responsibility for his actions before God. ¹⁶

Clearly, the violence used by the national partisans continued to perturb Juhnēvičs.

It was not only the statutes which caused debate. On 29 September, at a meeting again held in the barn headquarters, there was much discussion of the LTSpA's recently issued Order No. 1 which called for the 'extermination of the people's traitor *chekist* militia' and actions to halt all harvest and other deliveries to the state (Strods 1999, p. 251). As Juhnēvičs explained in the words of his interrogators:

Zelčans and I each gave his own draft of this order and the appeal to the population. After repeated discussion Zelčans' version was accepted as the final version of both the order and the appeal.

Later, Juhnēvičs would have second thoughts about his decision to sign the Zelčans version, complete with its call for 'extermination'. However, at the time he overcame his hesitations because he accepted at face value the assertion that the British were expected at any moment. The LTSpA argued that the Western allies had stood up to Stalin at the Potsdam Conference, forcing him to establish a truly democratic government in Poland; after such a success, it was argued, the Western allies would now turn their attention to the Baltic states.¹⁷ The LTSpA was so convinced of imminent intervention that it even discussed contacting a Daugavpils teacher to help translate its Declaration into English, so that it could be distributed to the advancing Tommies. 18 On 24 or 25 September the LTSpA received a message that British troops had already landed on Latvian territory. ¹⁹ In such circumstances, his interrogators noted, Juhnēvičs felt 'it was essential before the start of this foreign intervention to weaken the forces of Soviet power and prepare the population in the event of war for an attack against the communists'. 20 On 27 September the LTSpA presidium began to select possible members of a new Latvian Provisional Government and identify possible local police chiefs and other administrators (Strods 1999, p. 276).

This was the high point of Juhnēvičs's work with the LTSpA. After 29 September he began to distance himself from the organization. In particular, he did not attend a crucial meeting held on 5 October 1945. Indeed, he was not invited to this meeting, which was called to discuss purely military plans in which he, as a religious man, had no interest; only military commanders took part.²¹ However, despite its formal agenda, the assembled commanders began to pick over the text of the statutes once again. Without consulting Juhnēvičs, they made two important changes to the statutes he had worked on with such care. First, the commanders decided to change paragraph 38, expanding the size of the presidium: bringing in the former teacher Valerija Mundere as vice president in charge of publications was uncontroversial, but the decision to include the military commanders themselves as presidium members significantly changed the nature of the organization. Second, the meeting of 5 October decided to remove all mention of Christianity from paragraph 2. Thus the organization was no longer to employ methods of struggle 'allowed by God, the law and Christian morality' in order to establish a government 'guided by God and a Christian conscience'. 22

Juhnēvičs only found out about these changes to the statutes after the event. At a meeting held between himself and Zelčans on 11 October, things went relatively smoothly. He took note of the decisions taken on 5 October and agreed to sign an

appeal to Catholic clergy about helping in the process of selecting local administrators in the immediate post-Soviet period. However, two days later, when he met with both Zelčans and Blūms on 13 October the atmosphere was very different. Blūms and Zelčans were again convinced that British action was imminent and the British could be in Daugavpils in two or three days' time; it was therefore essential to make progress in the question of forming a new Provisional Government. They wanted Juhnēvičs to persuade the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy to use its good offices in publicizing the names of Latvia's new rulers and contacting the Western powers. ²³

The 13 October meeting, which began in a tense atmosphere, soon degenerated into a full-blown row. Blūms accused Juhnēvičs of doing nothing, of being a mere figurehead and of letting Zelčans do all the work. Juhnēvičs replied that he refused to listen to such nonsense. Blūms then became very angry and reminded Juhnēvičs how much he, Blūms, had suffered in the cause of the people. Eventually Juhnēvičs also lost his temper and accused Zelčans and Blūms of failing to carry out the tasks they had been allocated. As the row developed, the issue of 'passivity' came to the fore. Juhnēvičs seemed happy to make contact with the Roman Catholic hierarchy, but was keen to distance himself as much as possible from military activity. Blūms and Zelčans were equally determined he should play an active military role and ordered him to form a partisan regiment for Rēzekne, something he categorically refused to do. 24

This was not the first occasion on which the question of the 'passivity' of some members of the LTSpA had been raised. At the presidium meeting which had endorsed Juhnēvičs's changes to the statutes on 20 September, Antons Gravars was criticized for his 'passivity', and on that occasion Juhnēvičs had gone along with the criticism. At the meeting of commanders held on 5 October Gravars was again accused of 'passivity', when he refused to organize a raid on the post office in Vārkava, forcing Zelčans to undertake the raid himself. Gravars was formally dismissed as Daugavpils commander of the LTSpA on 11 November after he had effectively gone absent without leave (Strods 1999, p. 278). According to the NKVD interrogation of Zelčans, the LTSpA secretary confirmed that the differences between himself and Juhnēvičs had centered on whether the organization should follow a program of propaganda without terror or armed struggle. For his own reasons, Zelčans tried to suggest to the NKVD that it was Juhnēvičs and Gravars, not he and Blūms, who favored terror; Juhnēvičs supposedly wanting to avenge his arrested mother.

Exactly when Juhnēvičs decided to leave the LTSpA is not clear. According to his interrogation record he had already reached this decision by the time of the 13 October meeting, and it is established that some time in October he buried his diary, which was full of LTSpA contact details, since he no longer needed it. ²⁷ The explanation Juhnēvičs gave the NKVD would seem to fit the facts: good friends were dying in pursuit of a wrong tactic, based on violence and theft. On top of that, his personal relations with Blūms, in particular, had completely broken down. He was stung by Blūms' charge of 'vanity' (samolyubie), but things probably ran deeper than that. At their first meeting on 24 August Juhnēvičs noticed that Blūms was wearing the remains of an aizsarg uniform. ²⁸ This seems to have worried him, and in a chance remark to his interrogators he recalled that the Roman Catholic Church had moved him to his job in Vanagi because of his 'unsociability (neuzhivnost') with aizsargs'. ²⁹ Juhnēvičs was clearly interested in establishing Latvia as a Christian Democracy; was

this then a clash between visions of Latvia's future, with Blūms representing something more akin to the authoritarian tradition of Ulmanis and the *aizsargs*? Blūms had been happy to portray the Kurzeme national partisans as fighting under the leadership of General Bangeris, as some indeed had briefly declared they were willing to do, whereas the Roman Catholic Church had been a prominent supporter of the LCC, which had denounced Bangeris. Tension amongst the émigré community in Sweden between those who had followed Bangeris and those loyal to the LCC was a significant feature of summer 1945.³⁰

The debate about 'passivity' affected not only Juhnēvičs and Gravars but also Arvids Puids, who served as adjutant to the LTSpA Second Division. Shortly after Juhnēvičs decided to distance himself from the LTSpA, so too did Puids. Since the end of July the Second Division had been aware of efforts by the Soviet Latvian Riflemen Division units in the region to persuade national partisans to surrender, efforts that the Second Division were at first determined to resist by appealing to their fellow kinsmen to desert from their Soviet units (Strods 1996, p. 199). However, around the start of November a sergeant from the counterintelligence section of the Soviet Latvian Riflemen Division was able, through local contacts, to start talks with a group of LTSpA national partisans, which included Puids. Puids and his group were persuaded to legalize and so, on 7 November 1945, the counter-intelligence sergeant accompanied Puids and 13 others out of the forest. This surrender then became a cause célèbre. The men sheltered at the farm of one of their number, close to the village of Turki near Līvāni. There, on 8 November, they were arrested by the local NKVD, who, unaware of the counter-intelligence operation of the Soviet Latvian Riflemen Division, had responded to a report that national partisans had arrived in Turki. It was only a year later that the case of Puids and his comrades was finally resolved and it was accepted that they had not been captured but had willingly surrendered.³¹

Puids had volunteered to fight alongside the German army and, with the arrival of the Red Army, he had tried to disappear, returning to his native Daugavpils early in summer 1945. In June 1945 an old aizsarg friend warned him that the police were after him, so he moved to Līvāni. There, on 25 June, he made his first attempt to establish contact with the LTSpA. A few days later he succeeded and was introduced to Zelčans and Rudzats, the LTSpA military commander. Rudzats explained that he was a former aizsarg, and, according to Puids, he often appeared wearing aizsarg uniform. A month after joining, Puids was promoted and at first he seemed impressed with the ability of the organization to produce 2,000 copies of its newspaper. He also took at face value talk of the contacts Rudzats had with Riga, and accepted that 'in England (the former Latvian ambassador) Zariņš had assembled a Latvian Government which would soon be sent to Riga'. However, when someone he knew to be a local Līvāni farmer claimed to have visited Sweden and then England, before returning to Latgale by plane and parachute, Puids began to have doubts. These were reinforced when a series of predicted dates for the overthrow of the Soviet government passed without incident.

Puids began to wonder whether the LTSpA was anything more than an exercise in smoke and mirrors. There were orders and other documents signed in the name of

divisional and regimental staff, but what of substance stood behind such documents? It appeared not to be real. Puids' interrogators recorded his words thus:

The point is that the leadership of the division and the regiments always came back to the same two personalities, Zelčans and Rudzats, who, as necessary, fabricated and distributed the orders and documents issued in the names of the division and regiments. On more than one occasion I witnessed how orders and documents, issued supposedly in the name of a divisional or regimental staff, were signed by Zelčans and Rudzats using pseudonyms.

The whole thing was 'a comedy' got up to 'create the impression of a serious, terrifying military organization'. 33

In these circumstances Puids felt that the policy being pursued by Rudzats was reckless. What really turned Puids against Rudzats was the issue of passivity. By mid-August Puids was worried that, with so many Soviet troops in the area, a policy of successive offensive actions by the national partisans was not really the best way forward. When challenged on this, Rudzats dodged the issue. He replied that there was nothing to worry about: the national partisans had established excellent links with Soviet Latvian military units, to the extent that, at the crucial moment, the Soviet units would refuse to fight against the national partisans, their fellow compatriots. As proof of this, Rudzats produced a telegram addressed to his sister. Puids was furious at this rather offhand dismissal of his legitimate strategic concerns. The surrender of Puids was rapidly followed by that of Stanislaw Urbāns (Alkis 1997, p. 283), the Ilūkste commander, and of Jānis Baltmanis (Strods 2003, p. 218), his chief of staff, as well as about 100 of their men who left the forest between 14 December and 31 December 1945.

Like Juhnēvičs, both Urbāns and Baltmanis made it clear to the Soviet authorities that they had not only opposed the return of the Red Army but had actively resisted the Nazi occupation regime. Behind their alleged 'passivity' and willingness to surrender could have lain a different vision of the national uprising which the Soviet authorities recognized was in preparation. Bloody assaults on representatives of Soviet power were of less value than broadening the movement to include the Catholic Church and identifying key local figures for a new administration. Blūms did not share this vision, Juhnēvičs clearly did, and the resulting tension left the LTSpA seriously divided and ultimately fatally weakened.

The LTSpA and the LNPA

By November 1945 it was perfectly clear that there was to be no British landing, and this realization brought very different responses from the LTSpA and its near neighbor the LNPA. The former looked to broaden its political base, while the latter proposed raising the military struggle to a new level. These policy differences were complicated by declarations in favor of joint activity and the receipt of instructions from the Latvian emigration in Sweden.

The raid on the Vārkava post office, which had highlighted the issue of 'passivity' within the LTSpA leadership, had not been launched as part of a broad-scale offensive

operation but was undertaken to raise essential funds for propaganda work and establishing links between the LTSpA and sympathetic political parties. Despite the break with Juhnēvičs, the LTSpA consistently strove to coordinate its actions with a broader polity. At the meeting of 5 October the LTSpA resolved to send a two-man delegation of Jānis Vilcāns and Ādolfs Kūrējs to Kurzeme (Aļķis 1997, p. 272). On 10 December Vilcāns made contact with Fric Kankliņš who led a national partisan group near Kabile, to the east of Kuldiga. After a meeting with several local commanders, Vilcāns stayed on in Kurzeme, returning to Latgale and then the Dunava forest near Ilūkste only in summer 1946 (Aļķis 1997, p. 304). The same 5 October meeting made a new effort to establish more secure contacts with Riga. Back in mid-July 1945 Rudzats had told Puids that he had arranged a meeting near Jerzika with a lawyer from Riga. That meeting was followed by another, but then the contact lapsed. The 5 October meeting agreed to send a mission to Riga, funded by the post office raid, to purchase supplies of paper and medicines and 'to make contact with foreign representatives if they could be found'.

The person selected for the Riga mission was Valerija Mundere, a local school teacher, who had been made vice president of the LTSpA with responsibility for editing Fatherland Guard. Mundere left for the capital on 12 October and returned on 16 October. In Riga, where she arrived on 13 October, no contact was made with foreign representatives, but she did succeed in establishing contact with the underground Latvian People's Party. Thus, by the LTSpA presidium meeting of 11 November, copies of the Riga underground newspaper produced by the Latvian People's Party (The Little Latvian) could be distributed and the presidium could decide that the program of the Latvian People's Party was so similar to their own that members of that party could be included in the LTSpA's plans for a Provisional Government (Strods 1999, p. 278).

At the 11 November presidium meeting Zelčans was able to update members with the current state of relations between the LTSpA and the LNPA after a trip had been made to Vidzeme and north Latgale. Acting on presidium instructions sent to him on 10 September at the time of the original visit undertaken by Zelčans and Blūms, Roberts Timmermanis had set about extending the LTSpA's authority into the LNPA homeland of Abrene and Madona. As Timmermanis recalled, on 20 September he persuaded Pēteris Supe, the LNPA leader, to act as commander of the Seventh Abrene Regiment and on 8 October a Madona Battalion Commander was appointed; this, the Third Division of the LTSpA commanded by Timmermanis, issued its first order on 10 October (Strods 1999, p. 252). However, something went wrong. Supe was away on a mission to Kurzeme for at least part of Timmermanis' initial mission.³⁸ It appeared that, on his return, the LNPA had not accepted that it would simply slip under the LTSpA umbrella, for on 11 November the presidium resolved to contact Supe once again. Not all can have gone well on this occasion either, because when the LTSpA presidium next met on 1 December 1945 there was discussion about how Timmermanis had been absent without leave; it was decided that he should be temporarily relieved of his post and that Blūms, even though he was due to depart on another contact mission, should take over as commander of the Third Division. This decision was then rescinded on 7 December when Timmermanis was restored to his post as Third Division Commander. However, the 7 December presidium meeting

resolved once again to establish contact with the LNPA, stating that the earlier decision of 11 November had not been implemented. Timmermanis was now asked to 'invite' Supe to attend a presidium meeting, even though, on paper Timmermanis was Supe's superior officer and could have commanded his presence (Strods 1999, pp. 284–90).

What Timmermanis was up to during his spell of absence without leave is impossible to tell. Absence without leave could simply mean that contact with the presidium had been lost, at a time when many surrenders were taking place. Had Timmermanis been deflected from his mission to the LNPA to meet an important emissary? Speculation is fruitless, but he arrived at the presidium meeting of 7 December with important news. At that meeting Timmermanis, as the Commander of the Third Division, reported that he was the bearer of the instructions that had been handed to him by someone working for the British Secret Intelligence Service. The LTSpA presidium duly heard these instructions and ordered all commanders and units to take them on board and communicate them to all national partisans loyal to the LTSpA and any other nationally minded compatriots. ³⁹

The authenticity of this message has always been doubted by Latvian scholars. Strods set the scene. He discussed this document in the context of the use of NKVD agents against the national partisans. That the Soviet Latvian Riflemen Division was working at this time to encourage surrender has already been established by the case of the Puids surrender on 7 November. On 11 November the LTSpA presidium discussed the activities of a certain Colonel Briedis, who was appealing for national partisans to surrender and trying to establish a meeting with the presidium itself, a meeting that the presidium decided against. On this essentially circumstantial evidence Strods suggested that the letter from British Secret Intelligence was the creation of Colonel Briedis or some NKVD agent working with him. Strods reinforced his argument by suggesting that an appeal from London was hardly likely to end with the words 'Death to the Red Terror' (Strods 1996, pp. 301–2; 1999, p. 278). However, the content of the letter is arguably the best evidence to suggest the document did indeed originate with those Latvian émigrés in Sweden who were in touch with London.

The text of the document merits consideration in full:

- Latvians, listen to the foreign news, follow the international situation, you have not been forgotten, you have not been abandoned but are in the thoughts of Latvians living abroad and the foreign states which are doing and all they can and will do all they can for the good of Latvia.
- 2. Officers and commanders of the former Latvian Army. Uphold your holy obligations towards the freedom and independence of our fatherland. Compatriots, very soon, in the very near future we will be able to unfurl the maroon and white flag in our courtyards.
- 3. To the command staff of the national partisans of Latvia. I order you not to engage in heavy fighting with the Red Terror. Preserve your strength and bring into your ranks those officers who have not yet joined you. Demand from your subordinates the strictest discipline allowing no theft,

arson or similar actions which will bring harm to our people and which lessen your glory, for then people will fear you and not give you the various things you need.

- I call on the national partisans of Latvia, struggling for the independence of Latvia: until the moment when foreign states intervene to restore the independence of the Baltic States by force of arms, be passive in your attitude to the Soviet authorities, preserve your loves and organizations and wait for instructions from abroad to begin active operations. Then every able-bodied man should rise with his weapon in his hands, to prevent the communists killing and exiling people once again, and to preserve valuable property.
- 5. National partisans of Latvia. Organize yourselves into small groups and hide, so that when needed, you can unite and struggle as military formations. When it proves necessary to undertake military action, then aid, orders and detailed instructions will be sent by air in the hands of specially prepared people. The provision of arms and ammunition will be organized and all will be obtained at special places according to a given signal. More detailed instructions will be given by parachutists who will contact the national partisans of Latvia in good time.
- Make people aware that abroad there are several thousand Latvians, forced to leave their fatherland because of the national convictions. These Latvians are united under the name 'Society of Latvia' (Obshchestvo Latvii) which devotes all its efforts to the fatherland. Its paper is 'Unity of Latvians' in which it brings to light the full reality of the Red Terror in Latvia even before 17 June 1941 as well as the situation today.

In the charter adopted on 25 June 1945 in San Francisco at the conference of the United Nations the independence of each state and nation is stressed. This charter is already in force and the Soviet Union has already referred to it more than once, but not implemented it. We will be strong and, armed with patience and not caring if blood be spilled for the fatherland, we will make the power of the Reds respect the UN charter and implement it fully.

Latvians, God be with you in the just cause of driving the reds from our dear Latvia. God be with you. God bless Latvia. Death to the Red Terror. 40

The clear message of this document was that there should be no immediate action against Soviet forces until the international situation was right. This was precisely the message that the LCC had communicated to its supporters as the Second World War came to an end. Before he left Sweden for Kurzeme in early March 1945 Arturs Arnitis, one of the key figures involved in ferrying Latvian refugees across the Baltic on behalf of the LCC, was told by de facto LCC leader General Verners Tepfers that 'the international situation was such that it was unsustainable for staging an immediate armed uprising and starting a struggle against Soviet power and for a democratic republic'; instead, it was essential to preserve the forces of Latvian nationalists and establish a widespread underground network. Arnitis not only delivered this message, but once he had returned to Sweden tried to get Swedish intelligence

to broadcast the same message to the group he had left behind so 'that under no circumstances should they undertake any armed opposition to the Red Army' since this had been Tepfers's clear instruction. ⁴¹

Essentially the same message was transmitted when Arnitis returned to Kurzeme on 14 October 1945. Arnitis was soon captured but one of his companions, Edgars Andersons, succeeded in getting to Riga where on 28 October he held a meeting to re-establish the LCC's presence in Latvia. Andersons was helped to Riga by the remnants of the LCC organization in Latvia, namely activists such as Voldemārs Mežaks, Pēteris Klibikis and Ernsts Prieditis. When Klibikis told Andersons that the armed groups in the forests were now attacking targets and taking part in active struggle against the Soviet administration, Andersons expressed concern. In the paraphrase of those NKVD officers who interrogated Mežaks, for he was also present when Klibikis and Andersons met:

Andersons explained, that the situation in Latvia was still not clear, the question had still not been decided, but he categorically condemned active military action by anti-Soviet groups, which, by such actions, would only bring harm to the peaceful population; he therefore suggested that all groups should sit it out calmly and not show themselves.⁴²

After the meeting, Prieditis agreed to make contact with the Vidzeme national partisans, and did so successfully, before his arrest on 27 November. ⁴³ Timmermanis was possibly not so far from the truth when he told the LTSpA presidium that the message had been transmitted by 'a communications lieutenant who had come from England'. ⁴⁴

The LTSpA had endorsed these 'English instructions' and seemed happy to abide by them, even though they meant an extended period of 'passivity' and in December 1945 its agenda was dominated by the need to develop a broadly based People's Mutual Aid organization, set up to help the families of victims of communism as a way of securing the national partisans a base among the population at large (Strods 1999, p. 285). The LNPA took a different view, even though it too had received a copy of the 'English instructions'. In fall 1945, convinced that a third world war was imminent, the LNPA staff had continued to call for active struggle, issuing two key orders. The first, that 18 November should be celebrated, was relatively uncontentious, but the second, that the Soviet elections of 10 February 1946 should be disrupted, was more controversial (Turčinskis 2002, p. 344). It seemed to fly in the face of the British advice and provoked tension with the LTSpA. When on 15 December Supe finally attended a meeting of the LTSpA presidium, the attitude of the LTSpA towards the LNPA and its proposals was rather lukewarm. The LTSpA presidium voted to do everything possible to bring about a joint meeting not only of the LTSpA and the LNPA but to include the Latvian People's Party as well. While talks with the LNPA would continue through the good offices of Supe, a further meeting would be necessary and then 'after detailed consideration of the plans presented by the LNPA' those plans could be discussed 'at a future presidium meeting'. 45

The LNPA, on the other hand, was keen to make progress straight away on its plans for the February Supreme Soviet elections. Preparations for the disruption of the elections had begun as early as 6 November, and a month later a plan had

been agreed. 46 This plan was based on the premise that close and stable contacts had now been established between the LNPA, the LTSpA and the Kurzeme-based LNPO, so that the boycott would take place on a nationwide scale; representatives from both the LTSpA and the LNPO had reportedly taken part in drafting the plan (Strods 1999, p. 267) Order No. 1 of the LNPA Central Directorate was issued on 15 December and presented to the LTSpA presidium by Supe on the same day. It alerted the population to the current international situation, the calling of the Moscow Meeting of the Allied Foreign Ministers in December 1945 at which the issues to be resolved at the January General Assembly of the United Nations would be decided. If neither of these two meetings produced sufficient diplomatic pressure on the Soviet Union for it to abandon its communizing mission in Europe and leave the Baltic states, then war would follow. In such circumstances the 'character and order' of the 10 February 1946 elections could play a role. Order No. 1 went on: 'independent of the development of international politics, we have been given clear instructions from England and Sweden to be organized and ready for both military and political struggle in the interest of the West'. The elections would be a 'test for the partisans before the eyes of the Allies and the United Nations'. 47 This was a questionable reading of the 'English instructions'.

The LNPA's Order No. 1 concluded by stating that to implement its policy, as well as appealing to the LNPO in Kurzeme, it had formed 'a brotherly alliance' with the LTSpA. With the LTSpA presidium decision of 15 December the alliance seemed to have collapsed at the first hurdle. On 16 December, LNPA commanders were ordered by Supe to start activities related to the election boycott (Strods 1999, p. 266). When the operation against the Supreme Soviet elections began, it was far more effective in the LNPA strongholds than in LTSpA areas. On the night of 13 January 1946 an armed group of between 20 and 25 broke into an isolated village election center near Vilaka and seized the electoral register, seven rifles, and the telephone; they also captured three members of the local Destroyer Battalion and the secretary of the village soviet. 48 On the eve of the elections leaflets in the name of the Northern Latgale Partisan Staff announced that they would occupy Viļaka on 10 February – election day itself. Telephone contact with the town was cut, and at 5.30 in the morning a fierce gun battle took place some way outside the town. The national partisans were driven back and telephone communications were restored, but in the surrounding area several polling stations were attacked and hundreds of people prevented from voting. 49 In Mālupe, half-way between Alūksne and Viļaka, a band of 16 men staged an armed assault on a polling station. 50

A Soviet report on the election campaign in Jēkabpils, Ilūkste and Daugavpils districts — the area where the LTSpA had been so strong — revealed nothing so horrific. Activity by 'bourgeois nationalists' in the run-up to the elections in the Daugavpils area was more limited in scale. In Asūne, where the 'bandit' problem had been particularly acute throughout the year, the authorities were pleased that only a small five-strong group called the 'Grey Horse' had shown any activity during the election period. During the same weeks the Soviet authorities in Rēzekne destroyed the one remaining stronghold of the LTSpA in the region: in an operation against the Fifth Rēzekne Regiment of the Second Daugavpils Division, 15 national partisans were killed, 23 arrested and 79 agreed to legalize. ⁵¹ Even before this final debacle,

the military power of the LTSpA had been drastically reduced. As Mundere told her contacts in Riga, since November 1945 the LTSpA fighters had been 'in a bad situation, with many ill and in urgent need of medicine'; a strategic withdrawal to the Lubane forest was likely. 52

Conclusion

Within the LTSpA one finds very clear echoes of the divisions that Turčinskis detected in the early history of the LNPA. Serious divisions developed between those who called for continuing active struggle and those who called for underground preparatory work in anticipation of an English landing. This was precisely what the disagreement about 'passivity' was all about. As the interrogation of Juhnēvičs makes clear, this tension could be resolved relatively easily when English action was felt to be imminent, and even a man of God could sign a statement calling for the 'extermination' of chekists if British Tommies were on the horizon. Once it was clear that they were not, tension between those seeking to avoid conflict and those seeking it was inevitable, even when, as in the case of the Vārkava post office raid, the purpose of that military action was to strengthen the propaganda work of the LTSpA. The drift towards legalization was an inevitable consequence of the failure of foreign intervention to materialize; after all, Order No. 1 of the LTSpA Second Division of 15 July had suggested that volunteers should be prepared for a struggle lasting 'one to two months', and by mid-November four months had passed (Strods 1999, p. 242).

It is more difficult to draw an exact parallel between the tension that Prazmowska identified between WiN and NZN in Poland, and that tension which developed between the LTSpA and the LNPA; but tension there seems to have been. Prazmowska's comment about 'determined and reckless' military action by the NZN could well be applied to the LNPA's determination to push ahead with disrupting the Supreme Soviet elections, and on other issues there are hints that the LTSpA, like WiN, preferred to act within a broader political framework. Although the LNPA did adopt quite a radical political program, the LTSpA seems to have taken political activities more seriously. Thus on 15 June 1945 Order No. 2 of the LTSpA Fifth Latgale Regiment stressed the need for political work among the peasantry, to organize resistance to the communist 'executive committees' and prevent deliveries being made to the state (Strods 1999, p. 231). Order No. 2 of the Second LTSpA Division, issued on 10 August 1945, talked of organizing base units to supply the national partisans with weapons 'only in the houses of democratically inclined Latvians', rather than the LNPA phrase of 'nationally minded' Latvians (Strods 1999, p. 246). Unlike the LNPA, the LTSpA was also extremely keen to develop a broadbased People's Mutual Aid organization at the very same time the LNPA saw the election boycott as its greatest priority. The LTSpA was also keenly interested in the possibility of forming a provisional government, putting forward its leading members for government portfolios. At the presidium meeting on 11 November it suggested making Zelčans Minister of the Interior, Mundere Minister of Education, and Supe Minister of Agriculture; even though Supe was an agronomist by profession,

Minister of War might have been a more tactful post to offer the LNPA leader (Strods 2003, p. 60).

According to a Declaration of the LTSpA presidium dated 1 March 1946, the organization continued to see coordinating its activities with those abroad as crucial. Point 4 made it clear that the LTSpA stood ready to begin the work of establishing 'a national, independent, democratic Latvian state' in cooperation with Latvian émigré representatives abroad: anticipating that a Government in Exile might be formed, the presidium made clear that it was ready to send emissaries to hold substantive talks. The declaration at the end of the LNPA Struggle Program issued the previous month was far less fulsome, stating simply that 'we support the Latvian emigration and representatives of the Latvian State abroad who are carrying out the struggle' (Strods 1999, pp. 149, 156). A year earlier the LNPA statutes had devoted four whole subparagraphs to the subject of establishing foreign contacts and working with the old diplomatic corps (Strods 1996, p. 188). The LTSpA seemed to place contacts with ordinary people, and links with political parties and foreign contacts, higher up the agenda than the LNPA.

In his study of the Kurzeme national partisans, Felder showed how groups founded by the Germans in summer 1944 became by summer 1945 the armed wing of the pro-Anglo-American LCC. This study hints at a further evolution. It would suggest that those national partisans who continued the struggle into summer 1946 were once again drifting away from the democratic ideals of the LCC. With the demise of the LTSpA, the LNPA seemed to harden its stance as time passed. Whereas the LNPA Statutes, adopted in May 1945, had made reference to the Latvian Constitution (Strods 1999, p. 186), a year later the LNPA in north east Vidzeme issued a statement to mark the 13 years since Ulmanis' coup of 15 May 1934. This was described as the 'unforgettable' day when 'class government' was replaced by 'national government', a dream achieved 'without bloodshed'. Ulmanis was described as unfurling 'the banner of Latvia's new democratic republic' (Strods 2003, p. 119). This LNPA peon of praise for Ulmanis made no mention of the Nazis, whereas one of the last LTSpA statements, the Declaration of 1 March 1946, made clear that the independent Latvian state of 1940 had been destroyed by the Red Army 'with the help of Hitlerite Germany' (Strods 1999, p. 149).

The distinction that Oškalns drew between aizsarg and 'bourgeois democratic' national partisans is crude, but there seems to be some reality behind it. Although at one level the bitter personal clash between Blūms and Juhnēvičs was over morality, tactics and strategy, Juhnēvičs clearly also looked forward to a Christian Democratic future for Latvia, devoid of aizsarg uniforms. Although the LTSpA leadership defeated Juhnēvičs on the issue of Christian morality versus the use of targeted violence, it appears to have accepted the broader 'passive' strategy advocated by the 'English instructions'. The LNPA, on the other hand, hoped that by disrupting the Supreme Soviet elections it would be able to influence events taking place abroad, rather than simply waiting upon those events. The winter of 1945–46 thus marked an important transition in the evolution of the national partisans. In summer and fall 1945 they constituted a mass movement of volunteers keen to take part in a brief campaign which would give coherence to a popular insurrection supported from abroad. In such an atmosphere it was possible to put the divisions within the movement to one side.

These divisions were partly, as with Juhnēvičs, around issues from the pre-war period, the parliamentary republic versus the Ulmanis dictatorship, and partly, as with others who surrendered, between those who had fought both Nazis and communists and those who had fought only communists. By summer 1946 the national partisans were almost exclusively those who had fought only the communists and were well on the way to becoming something more akin to isolated die-hards, whose violence was as likely to terrify ordinary Latvians as impress the West.

Notes

- 1 Oral History Centre, Daugavpils University, Interview 31.
- 2 Latvian State Archives, fond 101, opis' 8, ed. khr. 1, p. 122 (henceforth 101.8.1.122). In multi-volume files, the volume number is given in roman.
- 3 101.8.63.1, 27, 31.
- 4 101.8.18.67, 71.
- 5 101.9.69.8.
- 6 101.8.18.55.
- 7 301.1.29. 46–7.
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- 9 'Rassekrecheno', Istochnik, 13, 6, 1994, p. 114.
- 10 1986.1.28785.I.18, 25, 27.
- 11 1986.1.28785.I.27–9.
- 12 1986.1.28785.I.45.
- 13 1986.1.28785.III.10 et seq.
- 14 1986.1.28785.I.224.
- 15 1986.1.28785.I.31.
- 16 1986.1.28785.I.35.
- 17 1986.1.28785.III.158.
- 18 1986.1.28785.I.54.
- 19 1986.1.28785.I.36.
- 20 1986.1.28785.I.31.
- 21 1986.1.28785.I.31.
- 22 1986.1.28785.III.27, 55.
- 23 1986.1.28785.I.36, 74.
- 24 1986.1.28785.I.42, 48–9.
- 25 1986.1.28785.I.34—5.
- 26 1986.1.28785.I.226.
- 27 1986.1.28785.I.25, 74.
- 28 1986.1.28785.I.27-8.

- 29 1986.1.28785.I.79.
- 30 For the LCC attitude to Bangeris, see Andersons and Silins (1994, p. 293); for the tensions among émigrés, see 1986.1.99.I.169.
- 31 101.9.73.75.
- 32 1986.1.28806.23-5, 36.
- 33 1986.1.28806.20-1.
- 34 1986.1.28806.38.
- 35 1986.1.28806.46.
- 36 1986.1.28785.III.64, 71.
- 37 Under repeated NKVD interrogation, Mundere gradually revealed more about her journey, see 1986.1.22233.I.36-8, 41, 45, 160, 184.
- 38 1986.1.30641.I.3, 5.
- 39 1986.1.28785.III.86-7.
- 40 1986.1.30641.III.76-7.
- 41 1986.1.99.I.165-6, 168.
- 42 1986.1.99.II.152.
- 43 1986.1.99.III.95.
- 44 1986.1.28785.III.86.
- 45 1986.1.28785.III.89.
- 46 1986.1.30641.I.143; III.71.
- 47 1986.1.30641.III.72, 75.
- 48 101.9.55.14.
- 49 101.9.55.69.
- 50 101.9.69.19.
- 51 101.9.69.23.
- 52 1986.1.22233.I.169.

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