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## NATIONALISM AND EDUCATION IN LATVIA, 1918-1940

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In 1991, Latvia made the headlines by recapturing its independence. After fifty years of Soviet Russification and unstable economic progress, one of the Latvian national leaders' greatest inspirations in calling for reforms came from the image of the independence Latvia had enjoyed between 1918 and 1940. Lacking other political traditions, national leaders often modeled their ideas and actions on those of the interwar period. This alone makes the 1918-1940 period an essential object of study, not just to gain a better understanding of the current Baltic scene, but also to probe the roots of contemporary Latvian nationalism. Latvian nationalism on a wider scale is a relatively new phenomenon, developing only during the last half of the nineteenth century. As Latvia became independent in 1918, many of the parameters that now define the Latvian nation were not yet laid out. The spirit of national self-consciousness and the longing for independence was still not shared by a large part of the Latvian population. Most of the foundations of contemporary Latvian identity and patriotism originated in the nationalizing and unifying endeavors of the Latvian government between 1918 and 1940. Thus, Latvia's first republic was a crucial time in the maturation and development of the Latvian nation.

In 1918, the nature of the nationalist movement was to change radically. While the search for national identity had been a central concern for Latvia's growing intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, it was only during the years of independence that national leaders had the means to implement their cultural and political ideals throughout the population, without the constraints that existed within the Russian Empire. The early years of the first Latvian republic witnessed, for example, the creation of many national institutions, such as a national theater, library, archives, museums, as well as a national school system. But the special difficulty faced by the independent Latvian government was that it inherited a nationalist tradition aimed against both foreign rule and economic privilege. As Latvia separated from the Russian Empire, the nationalist

tradition had to be reinterpreted and adapted to integrate the different national communities and visions into one coherent Latvian nation.

The Latvians were one of the most educated and literate nations of the defunct Russian Empire at the end of the war.<sup>1</sup> A large network of country and city schools had been established in the second half of the nineteenth century and Riga had a technical university which opened its doors in 1862. By establishing a national policy in education, Latvia's leaders could reach the great majority of the population in every region, regardless of ethnic background or economic condition. The school system that emerged after 1918 had to be adapted to respond to new conditions. New books appeared, new school buildings sprang up everywhere, and education adopted new foci: to teach with Latvian as the primary language of instruction and to promote Latvian history and culture. The school system was to become one of the main agencies in the dissemination of patriotic and nationalist sentiment in Latvia and a key instrument in the promotion and validation of the new Latvian state and its government.

In order to understand the impact of the Latvian government's efforts in fostering national identity and promoting patriotism through education, three fundamental aspects of educational policy and practice must be considered: first, the official policy and pedagogical theory which reveal the intentions of the policy makers; second, the implementation of the new regime's goals and the ideological content of schooling as seen through classroom curricula, textbooks and study plans; third, the influence of education on the pupils as viewed through school inspectors' reports, the surveys and debates in pedagogical journals, and interviews conducted with Latvians who were educated in Latvia during the period in question. This study examines education between grades three and six, since schooling was mandatory up to the sixth grade and the teaching of complex subjects such as history and literature did not begin until grade three.

One must also consider the political context between 1918 and 1940. This period included two distinct political eras: a pluralistic democracy between 1918 and 1934, and president Ulmanis' subsequent dictatorship from 1934 to 1940. The pre-1934 period was characterized by political instability, as thirteen prime ministers succeeded one another between 1922 and 1934, the longest term lasting less than three years.<sup>2</sup> As any five people were able to register as a political party, a large number of groupings reflecting the various ethnic, regional, religious, rural or urban divisions in society sat in the hundred-member Saeima (parliament).<sup>3</sup> This problem persisted until 1934 when president Kārlis Ulmanis established an authoritarian, albeit widely accepted, government. During both periods, national education policies stressed the study of Latvia and Latvians, but

the rigor of the nationalist content and the central elements of the patriotic message differed from one period to the other.

Another task which confronted the national leaders was to convince non-Latvians of the legitimacy of the state and to integrate them into the new Latvia. Historically, the region that became Latvia had been inhabited by people of many ethnic backgrounds, including Latvians and important minorities of Germans, Russians, Jews, and others. In 1920, within a population of about two million, Latvians made up about 72 percent of the population.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the nationalist government, hailed and criticized by different factions of the population, now had the challenge of legitimizing its power and unifying this ideologically divided state.

### **The Government's Aspirations for Education**

To assist Latvia's political and social unification the nationalist government sought to mobilize patriotic organizations, political parties, the press and the school system as potential agents of social change. Of all of these nationalizing instruments, the school system was to play a particularly important role. During the period of the national movement, the promotion of education in Latvian had been a major goal of the intelligentsia. With the fall of the Russian Empire, the national leaders could finally attempt to reform the system according to their nationalist ideals. One of the leading Latvian intellectuals and pedagogues, Leon Paegle, wrote in 1917:

A new and important era now enters our life. For centuries, our working people themselves exhaustingly upheld their fate and fashioned their lives. A new life is beginning everywhere, and that also means in the schools. Schools have become free from all constraints. The persecuted Latvian language is allocated its due place. For the Latvian working people, the road towards greater autonomy and general human culture is wide open.<sup>5</sup>

Even if the socialist wording of this statement might not have pleased all the national leaders, all of them basically agreed with the idea that Latvians needed a school system adapted to their own needs and reality. In the following years, new laws, books and attitudes helped to completely transform education in Latvia and make it an important tool for the "Latvianization" of the population.

The government's intention to use the school system for forging national identity is clearly stated in its legislation. The second article of the first legislative proposal of 1919 specified that education had to be conducted "within the national spirit and on virtuous foundations."<sup>6</sup> This clause was reworded and re-incorporated in all the following reviews of

laws on education. By 1937, it read: “[It is the state’s duty to] promote in all ways national education and to bring up the people in a loyal, national spirit...” This was followed by a description of the values that should be inculcated in school children such as “love of work and fatherland, and understanding of the national and cooperative spirit.”<sup>7</sup> These were not just the intentions of nationalist politicians—leading pedagogues and educators of the time also shared these ambitions. Juris Bebris, one of Latvia’s most influential pedagogues, proclaimed in 1922 that “the school is the state’s most important institution. It brings up and educates our state’s future citizens and prepares them to work for the state and for society.”<sup>8</sup> Such convictions remained strong all through the interwar period, and were re-emphasized after 1934 by president Kārlis Ulmanis. In 1936, he proclaimed that his government would “take care that the school in Latvia [would] really be a sanctuary of culture that calls, stimulates, prepares and strengthens our sons and daughters of the nation in their honorable work for the good of the fatherland.”<sup>9</sup> A national education system was considered essential for the development of the state and the well-being of the Latvian people.

However, before the full implementation of a national policy on education, many obstacles needed to be overcome. A 1923 report from Krišs Melnalksnis, an important official in the Ministry of Education, suggests that Latvia’s education system was in relatively poor shape when hostilities ended in 1920. In certain regions of the country, many teachers and children, since they had never undergone education in Latvian, possessed a very limited knowledge of Latvian grammar and literature; many school libraries had few Latvian-language books; and teaching methods still varied greatly from one school to another. The first major problem concerned school teachers. The Ministry of Education and the pedagogues could elaborate grandiose plans for Latvian education, but only the school teachers could implement these ideas in the schools. According to a 1919-1920 report about the general conditions of the school teachers’ corps, it seemed that many teachers were ill-prepared to undertake the transformation. The school system in Latvia had almost disappeared during the war—many of the teachers had been recruited into the armed forces or were left without dwellings or teaching materials. After almost six years of war, few teachers were ready to return to their previous profession, and many did not possess the necessary qualifications to carry out the educational reforms. The majority of teachers had received their education under Russian rule and did not possess a broad knowledge of Latvian subjects. The survey showed that only 35 percent of teachers had acquired their positions in the last five years—the other 65 percent had received their training within the Russian system. Almost 18 percent of all

practicing school teachers did not possess the Ministry of Education's minimum education prerequisite for employment, and the majority of them lacked the specialized education required to teach specific subjects, such as foreign languages, natural sciences, and most important, Latvian. The Ministry of Education needed six times more Latvian-language teachers than it had in 1919 in order to carry out the plans for language instruction.<sup>10</sup>

For the first few years, the Ministry of Education offered summer classes in order to familiarize teachers with the new Latvian-language instruction programs and new teaching methods. Melnalksnis reported after the summer of 1920 that, in general, the teachers, especially the younger generation, were quite receptive to the reforms. As for older teachers, he indicated that their energy and enthusiasm was not as pronounced: some of them even reacted negatively to the reforms.<sup>11</sup> The situation seemed to have been more complex in rural schools. In 1923 Melnalksnis noticed that teachers experienced harder conditions in the countryside and were often incapable or unwilling to implement the new education policies. He complained that because of the lack of adequate dwellings, oversized classes, and the scarcity of teaching materials, teachers had trouble advancing at a satisfactory rate.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, these reports seem to indicate that the great majority of teachers were willing to go along with the reforms. By 1921, favorable reports were received on the competence of school teachers. In Riga, Juris Bebris, the district inspector, reported that in 1921 very few teachers were still without the necessary education requirements, and that the majority were following the Ministry of Education's programs.<sup>13</sup> In 1922, he gave a similar report, adding that teachers were making a great effort to follow the pedagogical demands of the new era, even though noticeable progress was still relatively slight.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, pedagogues were preparing new school programs and completely revising school curriculums to bring them in line with the government's intentions. Aside from the elevation of Latvian to the primary language of instruction, the most important and meaningful of these reforms was the introduction of secondary languages, such as German and Russian, only in the third grade. In addition, pedagogues thoroughly "Latvianized" school subjects such as history, geography, and literature in order to carry out their national aspirations in education. One instance of this was the addition of singing hours and applied arts to the school curriculum in order to familiarize children with different aspects of Latvian folk culture. Another striking example was the conception of a new program called "Native Land Studies" (*dzimtenes mācība*). It called for the re-organization of history and geography programs, the inclusion of lessons on the country's industries, government, and many other topics related to the "native land," as well as the incorporation of educational excursions

into the school curriculum. In a 1921 article, the pedagogue Z. Lančmanis explained the goals of such a plan of studies:

The goal, that must permeate all of the school's work, is the development of pupils as Latvian citizens, who possess a wide, profound and versatile knowledge of their native land, its nature and its culture. Also, the students must gain knowledge of their capacities, their responsibilities and their rights. They must also acquaint themselves with Latvia's close and distant neighbors in order to ensure through this knowledge their own development and the improvement of their native land's and everyone's prosperity.<sup>15</sup>

The government later implemented this program in Latvian schools through the study of history, geography and natural sciences. The Ministry of Education published new books, devised new subjects and abounded with new ideas, all with the aim of insuring the maturation of a new generation of nationally-conscious Latvians.

On a more technical level, one of the first obligations of the government was to provide well-built, spacious schools adequately equipped with the necessary libraries and laboratories. The war had destroyed many schools and many regions were left without adequate facilities. In the region of Riga only two out of 156 schools survived the war intact. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education exerted great efforts for their renovation and by 1919, 87 schools were already in adequate working order, and by 1921, as many as 110 schools were able to host classes.<sup>16</sup> In Riga and in the countryside as well, many schools had to be completely reconstructed, and some new schools opened their doors where none had existed before. Nothing better symbolized the building of the "new" Latvia than the transformation of abandoned countryside baronial manors into school houses. On this point, Kārlis Melnalksnis stated that "the manor estates of the past, which earlier were our country's houses of darkness and violence, will be transformed into Latvia's castles of light."<sup>17</sup> As a result of these efforts, the number of certified primary and secondary schools more than tripled, from 2,580 in 1919-1920 to 9,137 in 1937-1938,<sup>18</sup> and, despite Latvia's greatly diminished population after the ravages of war, the total number of pupils in 1937 was twice that of 1914.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Education equipped a great number of country schools with boarding houses in order to ensure access to education to those children who lived in remote areas. Between 1918 and 1940 the government of Latvia spent, on average, 15 percent of the state budget on education while the European average during the same period was 12 percent. A large part

of this money went directly to the construction and maintenance of the physical school structures.<sup>20</sup>

Another difficult obstacle facing the new Latvian government was the integration of national minorities into the education system. How far could the development of a Latvian identity and of national unity go before it infringed on the rights accorded to minorities in the constitution? More than a quarter of the country's population in 1920 was of non-Latvian descent. The Ministry of Education protected cultural autonomy by permitting and subsidizing separate school systems for national minorities. Even after 1934, as the government's aims became increasingly centered on the Latvian nation, the Ulmanis regime curtailed the cultural and educational rights of minorities, but did not eliminate them.<sup>21</sup> In order to integrate these minorities into the nation, Latvian-language classes were made mandatory from the second grade, and Latvian history and geography classes from the third grade.<sup>22</sup> All school teachers in minority schools were required to have a working knowledge of Latvian. They were to teach Latvian-language classes, as well as history and geography, in the state language whenever possible. The suggested readings and the class plans in history and geography differed very little from what was offered in Latvian-language schools and were regulated by the Ministry of Education.<sup>23</sup> Even if ethnic minorities had some autonomy in education, the government's nationalist policies always influenced the educational content in their schools.

The Ministry of Education also set forth special measures for the integration of the eastern province of Latgale. Since they had been part of a different province of the Russian Empire for over a century, the inhabitants of Latgale spoke a distinct dialect of Latvian and had not known the same national revival movement as the rest of Latvia. Consequently, the education system here compared very poorly with the advanced schooling network that had been established in the Baltic provinces. In order to awaken the potential of Latvia's "sleeping beauty"<sup>24</sup> (so-called because of the large number of Latvians living in the region and their unexploited potential, as well as the richness of the folk culture), the government invested immense sums of money to improve the level of Latgale's schooling system and promote education. The number of schools more than quadrupled in five years.<sup>25</sup> To make schooling more accessible to Latgallians, the government allowed instruction and publication of school books in their dialect. Nevertheless, the standard Latvian language, history and geography were to be taught in order to assure the full integration of Latgale into Latvia.

To integrate education in Latgale with the rest of Latvia, the Ministry of Education had to exert much effort and follow closely the rate of



transformation. As in the other regions of the country, the first major problem concerned the quality and the quantity of teachers. This problem seemed to be more acute in Latgale than elsewhere, as Melnalksnis indicated in a 1925 report, stating that “in the future, no new teacher should be hired without a complete high-school education,” suggesting that there were still teachers who did not meet employment requirements five years after this province’s integration into Latvia.<sup>26</sup> Until 1932 school inspectors reported frequently that Latgale lacked teachers.<sup>27</sup> Yet the few comments found in inspectors’ reports about the condition of education in Latgale indicated slow but steady progress: in fact, a 1924 regional report on Latgale gave generally good comments on the teachers, and even commended the “self-sacrifice” shown by some.<sup>28</sup> This report also related that the “Latvian spirit” was slowly gaining strength in Latgale. According to the inspectors, in the majority of the cases, teachers conducted education in “a true Latvian spirit” and “in general, students leave the impression of being well disciplined, and from them, in time, will grow upstanding Latvian citizens well-disposed to Latvian, and strong in their national knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> Just as education had been an important force in the development of Latvian nationalism in the late nineteenth century in the Baltic provinces, the government used it in the 1920s as an ideological tool to help “Latvianize” the Latgallians and unify the Latvian nation.

### National Ideology in Education

In order for education to be adapted to Latvia’s new political and social situation, it was not enough to build schools and train teachers—the content of the school curriculum and of schooling implements had to be modified to reflect the new nationalist orientation in education. One of the most important of these nationalizing measures was the ideological transformation of school textbooks. Books in every subject had to be rewritten to replace the books lost during the war and to adequately fill the ideological need for the proper Latvian-language texts.

Even though a respectable amount of books from the prewar period survived the hostilities, they were not adapted to the new goals. This does not mean that nationalist themes were completely absent from prewar Latvian-language readers, but they were always counter-balanced with Russian content. For example, in three readers published between 1901 and 1906, *Skolas Druva* (volumes I to III), many texts discuss the Latvians, their *dzimtene* (native land), their history and their culture, and yet, the staunchly nationalist tone found in post-independence texts was not present. A few texts, when discussing the fatherland or the native land, do not express clearly whether they are talking about Russia or Latvia, and in

some other writings, the focus is clearly on Russia. In general, educational material was meant to promote a sense of belonging to the Russian Empire at the expense of any emotional or cultural attachment to one's nation.

Much work was urgently needed after 1918 to compose Latvian textbooks in order to validate Latvian as a the language of instruction, to bring education up to the ideological standards of the government, and to de-Russify the system. In 1918, there were no books in Latvian in many subjects, since their teaching had always been carried out primarily in Russian or German. Because Latvian was written mostly in Gothic script until 1918, scarcely any books existed in the modernized form of Latvian in the Latin script. By 1924, we still find articles in the *Izglūības Ministrījas Mēnešrakts* (The Ministry of Education's Monthly Bulletin) complaining of the lack of adequate Latvian-language books in schools.<sup>30</sup> By the school year 1926-27, the situation seems to have been corrected, as the same source reports that all was in order, and that the supply of books was sufficient to carry out a full curriculum in the Latvian language.<sup>31</sup>

The Ministry of Education took great care in choosing the books that would educate Latvian pupils. A 1923 article in the pedagogical magazine *Mūsu Nakotne* (Our Future), spoke of a Ministry of Education committee dedicated solely to the selection of adequate textbooks.<sup>32</sup> The author raged against the book selection committee which had accused his writings of propagating socialist tendencies and revolutionary symbols. He argued that such "revolutionary" messages could often be found in any of the popular writings of Latvian authors from the prewar period, and that the committee was discriminating against him simply as a known social democrat. Such evidence indicates that the state was meticulous in its selection, and suggests that books were closely monitored to fit the government's nationalist designs. School books were of great importance for the Ministry of Education, because they would be the main instruments for communicating nationalist ideologies to the students.

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Since the great majority of the books used in the Latvian school system were written after World War I with the specific goal of supplying the needs of independent Latvia's Ministry of Education, they reflect quite well the intentions and the goals of the policy-makers. This is especially true in history and language-training textbooks. Not only were history and language the best subjects for the transmission of national ideals, but they were also among the subjects most enthusiastically studied. According to a 1922 survey, history and language were among the top three favorites of teachers and students in Latvian schools. This survey published in the

*Izglūības Ministrijas Mēnešrakts* evaluated the preferences and impressions of 852 students and 658 teachers in primary schools. It showed that the three favorite subjects of both teachers and students were, in order, mathematics, Latvian language and history.<sup>33</sup> According to school curriculums published in different years, these were the three subjects to which teachers usually devoted the most hours per week.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, history and language-training books present a good foundation for the exploration of the nationalist content of textbooks, since they were well adapted to the diffusion of patriotic messages, and seemed to be subjects to which the teachers and students responded positively.

The books used for our study were picked from lists published in 1925 and 1928, which enumerated all the texts used as well as the number of copies in circulation in Latvia's elementary school system.<sup>35</sup> It is possible to establish from these lists which books were most frequently used, which authors were present in school libraries, and which books and teachings the children had the greater chance of encountering. No lists of the kind were found for after 1928. Nevertheless, after the 1934 coup, as president Kārlis Ulmanis implemented additional measures to promote national unity and patriotism, all books had to meet the high standards of the Ministry of Education and be approved before distribution to the schools. To update some books that were not entirely adequate, the Ministry of Education even went so far as to add an annex containing nationalist readings. Therefore, for this period, only books with the government's approval, or writings by approved authors, were used. The stories, the authors cited in readers, and the interpretation of historical events are quite similar from one textbook to another. In history and literature, the emphasis remains on Latvia, its people and its culture.

In the interwar Latvian-language readers, the nationalist character of school textbooks is at times evident just by looking at their illustrations and format. For example, the cover of a 1925 reader entitled *Saulīte* (Little Sun) displays a pastoral scene with, in the foreground, a young man and woman dressed in folk costumes seated under oak trees (Latvia's national tree). The image is adorned with sun symbols and fire-crosses, representing strength and energy in Latvian folk iconography. Inside this same book, every quoted author is illustrated in elaborate designs composed of oak leaf wreaths, roses, folk art, Latvian musical instruments, and symbols of power and intelligence.<sup>36</sup> In another reader called *Darbs un Dzīve* (Work and Life), sections are separated by designs taken from Latvian folk art.<sup>37</sup> These illustrations suggest that the books were not just designed to *be* Latvian, but also to *look* Latvian. The national character of education was to be extended to every aspect of textbook publication.

In contrast to prewar textbooks, those of the Ministry of Education after 1918 contained large proportions of text (sometimes over half the book or even the entire book after 1934) dedicated to uniquely Latvian subject matters. The books talk about Latvia's cities, rivers, folk heroes, authors and about the history and accomplishments of the Latvian people. Since the 1860s, Latvian authors had been producing literature of different genres and by 1918 an extensive Latvian literary corpus was already in existence. The works of popular national authors such as Juris Alunāns, Auseklis, Jānis Rainis, and Rudolfs Blaumanis composed the majority of the writings in school readers. The rest was made up mostly of the four-line folk songs (or *dainas*), folk music and folk-tales. The Latvian national epic, "Lāčplēsis" (Bear Slayer), created by Andrejs Pumpurs in the late nineteenth century from a hodgepodge of folk legends, was also omnipresent in elementary school readers. A spirit of national love and pride animated most of these texts from start to finish, whether the author was discussing the rigors of Latvian winters or relating the legendary heroism of Lāčplēsis who united the Latvian nation and fought to the death to protect his land from evil enemy forces. These school readers were meant to promote pride in the Latvians' folk heritage and history and were, for many children, their first exposure to concepts of Latvian national identity that went beyond language or family ties.

In the textbooks of the 1920s the national messages, even if sometimes subtle, were staunchly patriotic. Most of the texts, while discussing light subjects such as Latvian nature, city life and travels around the country, depicted a land full of beauty, a nation of hard workers and a country brimming with wonders. From the fabricated entity it had been under Russian rule, Latvia had now become a virtual utopia. Some writings attributed a supernatural quality to the land and its people, and everything Latvian seemed to be graced with a sacred spirit. One text expounded the mystical character of the forest, and a few others referred to Latvia as God's land. Some poems repeated, as mantras, "This land is ours," or "Dear, happy land of God."<sup>38</sup> The oft-conveyed message seemed to be that it was a God-given privilege for Latvians to inhabit this wonderful land, and that Latvia was thus their rightful domain.

Since the Latvians constituted a small nation of less than two million people, it was of great importance to the national leaders that a spirit of belonging develop rapidly within Latvia. Before the war, over a quarter of a million Latvians already lived outside the country.<sup>39</sup> According to some authors, it was almost inconceivable for Latvians to live anywhere else except in Latvia. A great number of writings described the agony of Latvians who were forced to leave the fatherland, their longing for its beauty and comfort during exile, and the feeling of ecstasy that overcame

them upon return. In one such text from 1922, the Latvian nation was described as the mother who gave birth to all Latvians, and who needed them to stay with her, love her and work for her, because, as the children were told, “the death of the nation is also your death.”<sup>40</sup> Through such messages, Latvian leaders hoped to promote within the young generation a sense of belonging to this new state, and a greater sense of love and pride centered primarily on the nation.

Along with this veneration of Latvia and the Latvian nation came the glorification of the farmer and of country life. Since Latvia was a small country, poor in natural resources, it depended on its fertile lands and agricultural output for economic stability. Many Latvians encouraged a return to country values, since urban centers in their outlook and attitude had been largely influenced by the Germans or the Russians and, thus, did not emanate a true “Latvianness.” Therefore, the Latvian government tended to encourage the image of a primarily agricultural nation, with the farmer as the pillar of its existence. In line with this effort, the Ministry of Education included a clause in the proposed legislation for 1919 noting that

Latvians are a peasant nation; therefore, especially country school children, have to learn to love and cultivate the land. This matter is seen by the Ministry of Education as very important... Without outdoor exercise and games and a school garden, successful activities in school are to some extent unthinkable. Likewise, a small piece of land will be allotted to country school teachers for a vegetable garden and the upkeep of a cow...<sup>41</sup>

Even after 1934, President Ulmanis put great emphasis on this aspect of the national image, and according to Plakans, fostered “the belief that farming was the occupation closest to the Latvian soul and a necessity for Latvia’s survival in the world economy.”<sup>42</sup> Consequently, throughout the interwar period, school books presented a very idealized and romanticized image of farm-life and the countryside. These texts often implied that the essence of the Latvian nation was rooted in the countryside, and that the basis of national identity lay in country traditions and family ties. They usually conveyed the image that Latvians inhabiting the countryside lived in harmony with nature and in touch with their folk traditions. For example, a 1922 text called “The Latvian Farmer” painted a peaceful picture of the farmer’s life. It emphasized the beauty of the countryside, the advantages of living on the land, and the genuine character of country folk traditions. This emphasis on the prominence of the peasantry and its pivotal role in the survival of the nation inserted itself into larger government plans for the economic future of the nation, but could also have been an attempt by the

national leaders to make Latvians proud of their peasant roots. For centuries, under the rule of the Germans and Russians, the Latvian peasants had occupied the lower echelons of the social ladder. Through this glorification of peasant life, the government made the Latvian farmer one of the most critical figures in Latvia's economy and culture, and did away with the image of servility that had plagued this occupation for centuries. Pedagogues and educators, therefore, encouraged the children to be proud of the pastoral character of their nation.

An interesting contrast can be made between the pastoral portrait encouraged by Latvian nationalists in education and the Communist ideals of industry, the proletariat and urban development that were being promoted in the neighboring Soviet Union at the time. The Bolshevik Party's popularity in Latvia after World War I had been one of the principal obstacles on the Latvian nationalists' road to independence, and this glorification of peasant life may be interpreted as a deliberate attempt on the part of the nationalists to counter the influence of the social democratic parties in Latvia, to undermine any lingering attachments to socialist values and Bolshevik culture, and to promote a genuine Latvian identity by contrasting it with Communist Russia. Instead of promoting the image of an industrial nation, Latvian nationalists encouraged the peasantry; instead of advocating collectivism, they glorified the independent farmer; instead of attempting to construct a new political culture, they championed the return to folk life and traditions. Because of the great diversity of political allegiances and ethnic groupings in Latvia, the promotion of a single unique political culture was not only advantageous but necessary to solidify and legitimize the existence of Latvia.

In order to encourage pride in their nation, the children were taught about the many Latvian heroes and were given role models to follow. The children were taught to respect and admire their elders and national leaders, since they were the ones responsible for bringing Latvia to its present stage in history. In the 1920s the emphasis was more on cultural figures, such as Lāčplēsis, hero of many folk tales; authors like Rainis, or folklorists such as Krišjānis Barons who spent his life building up a very large collection of *dainas* and folk tales. In history books, the emphasis was on the national leaders of the nineteenth century. Their work for the nation was credited with having dissipated the dark clouds of centuries of German "occupation." The first Latvian national leaders were often portrayed as unwavering crusaders, willing to surmount impossible obstacles for the growth of the nation. Every one of their endeavors became a building block for the nation, and every one of their struggles an example to follow. In one passage, Birkerts praised the work accomplished by the publishers of the first nationalist newspaper, the *Peterbūrgas avīzes* (The St-

Petersburg Newspaper), who eventually became the leaders of the Latvian national formation movement. He described them as working with a “warm pulsating heart” for the needs of the nation, and went on to acclaim the result of their work:

The newspapers accomplished a great amount of work in the awakening, education and upbringing [of the Latvians]. The Latvians needed to be conscious of the fact that they were not slaves anymore, but people, and that they did not stand alone anymore, but were members of a cultural collective. Thus they [the publishers] awoke in the Latvians their self-confidence, their social and national consciousness, as well as their love for the Fatherland.<sup>43</sup>

With no dearth of laudatory terms, and with obvious respect for the “fathers” of the Latvian nation, nationalist textbook authors optimistically presented examples of determination and patriotism to be followed.

Along with national heroes, parents and grandparents were often referred to as important role models as well, since most of them had lived through the war and the preceding period of Russian rule. Authors often beckoned the pupils to listen to their parents and respect them, and more important, some books invited them to use their parents as sources of information. In two books, one published in 1922 and the other in 1939, the children were offered tasks to accomplish after reading certain texts. Many of these included discussions with the parents about national subjects, such as, “What have you heard from your parents and other people about our native land?” or “Ask your parents about the fugitive-times.”\* Other homework suggestions invited the children to reflect directly on their feelings towards the nation, for example: “Tell us at what time you felt the strongest love for the fatherland,” “What do you yourself want to do to help the native land be richer and grander?” and “How do you depict Latvia’s future?”<sup>44</sup> Tasks such as these encouraged the child to discuss patriotic themes not just at school, but also in the familiar setting of the home, as well as to develop, early on, opinions and views about one’s place in the nation. In this fashion, the Ministry of Education could make sure that nationalist ideas were part of the child’s upbringing even if he came from an indifferent or unpatriotic home.

Another of the national leaders’ important tasks was to justify the political existence of the Latvian state after its sudden and unexpected

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\* The “fugitive-times” refer to a period at the end of World War I when much of Latvia was completely devastated and many Latvians had to flee to foreign lands in order to survive.

accession to independence in 1918, and to assure its permanence through the widespread support of the population. In the 1920s, attempts to legitimize the country's existence were done through epic historical accounts of medieval Latvian "kingdoms." These stories presented the picture of a glorious past when the Latvians were in charge of their own land, culture and political destiny. There were detailed readings on how the ancient Latvians dressed, ate, lived, fought and administered their land during a time when harmony seemed to reign supreme. There is rarely any reference to problems such as inter-tribal warfare, epidemics or any other difficulties that could have affected human life in the Middle-Ages. The historian Leon Paegle describes the ancient Latvians in this manner:

The ancient Latvians were a helpful and hospitable people. If someone, in a fire or through disease, lost his farm animals, then the neighbors would willingly give him some of theirs until he would be able to raise a new herd. They would welcome any visitor in their homes, with no regard to whether he was a stranger or an acquaintance. For them, they would bring out only their best. All Latvians saw it as an obligation to protect foreigners within the country's borders. It was in the Latvian's nature to be frank and good-hearted. Only later, the German lord's sharp whip rendered him somber, reserved and full of hostility against his oppressors.<sup>45</sup>

Such interpretations served to reinforce the idea that Latvians were victims of history and that the arrival of the Germans had been destructive. Paralleling this idea was the notion held by some national leaders that the accession to independence meant the return to more peaceful times and to the "true" Latvian character of the land and the people.

The stories and historical accounts in school books implied that before the Germans' arrival and the subjugation of the Latvians in the thirteenth century, embryonic Latvian state units already existed. According to these accounts, the advent of German rule obliterated these prosperous states and left the Latvians stateless. Most authors go so far as to qualify the German arrival as the German "occupation" of Latvia. In a 1922 text, one of the most respected Latvian historians, Arvēds Švābe justified the use of the term in this way:

**Latvia's Occupation.** Occupation means to overtake. In 1915 as well the German army occupied Kurzeme, and later Riga, Vidzeme and Latgale. The German occupation in Kurzeme lasted four years or was shorter in other regions. If the Germans had not been defeated by the Allies, then Latvia would have remained under German occupation until the next war. In the same way, the Germans occupied Latvia in the



thirteenth century. This occupation lasted not just four years, but almost 400 years.<sup>46</sup>

Even though the two events had little in common, Švābe could be assured that most of the children would be able to relate to the struggle of the ancient Latvians, since most of them had lived through World War I and the latest German occupation. Through such interpretations of history, the authors implied that Latvia's accession to independence was simply a legitimate return to a previous state of affairs and, had it not been for the Germans, Latvia would have always existed.

The idea of an ancient Latvian kingdom comes from the German chronicles of the Baltic invasions and other later documents in Latin, which refer to the many groupings in the Baltic area as states and to their leaders as kings. In reality, what existed before the arrival of the Germans were five multi-centric Baltic tribes with no concept of common identity, and no state structures in the modern sense of the word.<sup>47</sup> But for these authors, it seemed to be taken for granted that Latvia had always existed and that Latvians had always been a nation. Their descriptions concentrated mostly on one of these groupings, the Semigallians, since they were the last of the Latvian tribes to fall to the Germans. Their leader, Viesturs, was depicted in these stories as a courageous hero of the Latvian nation. Švābe wrote in 1922 that "Semigallia was a free and independent state, and it wanted to remain free in the future as well. Its leader, Lord Viesturs, was an intelligent and visionary statesman. [But after the German conquest], Semigallia was transformed from a flourishing country to a barren plot of land."<sup>48</sup> In many ways, he considered the struggle of the Semigallians against the Germans and the pursuit of independence at the end of the First World War as one and the same process, the only difference being that, in the latter battle, the Latvians were victorious. After discussing the conquest of Semigallia, Švābe concludes patriotically: "The Latvian nation must always remember Semigallia's heroic struggle for its independence! Only then Latvia will be strong and free."<sup>49</sup> For Švābe and many other historians, the German conquest of the Baltic region in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries meant, first and foremost, the interruption of Latvia's state formation process. The fall of Semigallia became synonymous with the fall of the Latvian nation and the start of all the hardships, such as serfdom, that affected Latvians in the following centuries. These historians' interpretations attempted to demonstrate to the pupils that there was a time when Latvians were a flourishing nation, and that their fall was not due to ineptitude or incapacity, but to the greed of foreign powers. Now that Latvia was once again independent, it was possible to go back to the way things had been before the German conquest.

Such positive and fantastic renditions of Latvia's ancient past were written in order to elevate the self-image of Latvians and to help the new generation see their nation only in a positive light. For centuries, Latvians had been under the rule of many mighty nations such as the Swedes, the Germans and the Russians, had lacked political or military power, and had been described by foreign authors mainly as a subjugated people. But the national leaders were set to change these perceptions. Švābe, in his praise of the ancient Latvian culture, even went so far as to elevate the Latvians to a superior culture in comparison to other ethnicities:

The Finno-Ugric people learned a lot from their Baltic neighbors who, for their part, drew their knowledge of life from other Indo-European peoples who had lived closer to the high cultural centers of southern Europe. The Finno-Ugric people did not know how to build houses from logs. Their habitats were huts made of layers of inclined beams which were covered with animal skins, sod or bark. Only the Baltic people were able to teach them to divide the house into rooms, elevate walls, construct saunas and erect bridges.

The Finno-Ugric people also learned to harvest the hay from the Balts, and maybe also to cultivate wheat, linen and peas... This proves that the Baltic peoples were culturally a step ahead of the Finno-Ugric people.<sup>50</sup>

Nationalist authors tried to change the image presented in foreign historical accounts of the powerless, cultureless Latvian peasant, and demonstrate that a flourishing culture existed before the arrival of the German.

A strong will to get rid of all foreign influence on their history seemed to animate these writers as well. In all books, instead of German or Russian written sources, folk songs were frequently used as historical references. Since Latvians began developing a truly literate society only in the eighteenth century, very few existing written documents, aside from German and Russian accounts, discussed the life and attitudes of the Latvian people. On the other hand, the Latvians orally transmitted from one generation to another a rich legacy of folk songs, the *dainas*, folk tales and legends that, it was assumed, reflected life in the past. Not satisfied with the historical writings of German and Russian authors, who concentrated too little on the history of the peasantry or gave it a negative portrayal, Latvian historians of the independence period began using the oral heritage of the people to discover truth about the past. Their accounts of the ancient Latvians, their life, occupation, religion, as well as peasant life and attitudes before the seventeenth century, depended in great part on the folk legacy of the Latvian people. The historian Leon Paegle even devoted a full section of a book to an explanation of the worth of folk songs

and folk tales in learning about the past.<sup>51</sup> Sometimes, even facts that could have been proven through conventional documentary evidence were demonstrated through folk songs. By including familiar songs and stories within their historical interpretations, Latvian scholars attempted to show that Latvians, even if they had been subjugated to the power of the German land barons, were still the main participants in their land's history. On this topic, Birkerts declared in 1920 that "the Latvian nation must now stand in the center of our history, and other nations should be mentioned only as long as they can bring clarification to our historical development."<sup>52</sup> By using their folk songs and *dainas* as primary sources, historians attached intellectual value to the folk heritage of the Latvians and attempted to eliminate the influence of foreign powers on their historical development.

In sharp contrast to the positive and patriotic account of the Latvian nation was the image that textbooks projected of all the foreign powers that ruled over Latvia in the past. Since they were the first, as well as the longest, foreign presence in Latvia, the Germans received the worst coverage: they were described as power-hungry and without principles. According to a 1925 book: "...The Baltic inhabitants could not expect anything good from the Germans.... A few among them truly wished to spread the Christian faith, but for the majority, they were simply in foreign lands looking to expand their business endeavors and [looking] for a richer life; something that they could not receive from their own fatherland."<sup>53</sup> Later on, as the Germans imported Christianity and feudalism into Latvia, they were depicted as inflexible rulers, who would ruthlessly punish the Latvians for every possible reason. In one history book destined for grades three and four, an imaginary voice related how religious offenders were treated under German rule:

Every Sunday we have to go listen to what the Catholic priest has to say. But we cannot understand anything he says, he speaks in a foreign language. We cannot refuse to go to church. When we do not go, we receive immediate punishment. We can expect that most often we will be beaten with a rod if we do not go to church. There are even more punishments when someone prepares a service for the old deities in the sacrificial places, under an oak tree... In addition, we must bring to the church some building materials and we must help in its construction. If we don't do that, then we receive a harsh punishment.<sup>54</sup>

These historical accounts also included narrations and illustrations of other forms of punishment for failing to pay taxes or for refusing to give the landlords their dues. The emphasis was constantly on negativism, nothing good seems to have ever resulted from the German presence in Latvia.

The denigration of the Germans' image continued into the modern period of Latvian history. Historians constantly reproached the invaders for their Germanization efforts. Many authors started by relating the tragic story of the Old Prussians, a Baltic people who were partly annihilated and partly assimilated into the German culture, while losing their language and cultural heritage. According to them, the Germans had the same plan in mind for the Latvians, but the difficulty of bringing in colonists from Germany stunted their efforts. Nevertheless, the Germanization efforts continued in the churches, schools and towns. Alfred Birkerts described some of the Germanization efforts of the nineteenth century:

**Germanization policy.** The German's goal has always been to keep Latvians under their rule. This lasted until the Latvians started showing signs that they wanted and could get along without this guardianship, and then the German leaders started to get worried... Bishop Valters (1864)... sermonized the land-owners in a harsh way: they had not fulfilled the duty they had received from God—to turn the Latvians to German culture...and he said: 'demonstrate your repentance in a respectable manner, Germanize the locals! This is your duty, this is your plan of action!'

In reality, the Germanization movement had started a long time before... If a Latvian wanted to become a skilled worker, then he had to feign being a German. It was the same with education, and intellectual jobs, which were also offered only to Germans.<sup>55</sup>

Even if other nations such as the Poles, the Swedes and especially the Russians had ruled over the Latvians for long periods of time and affected their lives in different manners, they never received as much criticism as the Germans, who were usually blamed for all the miseries that affected the Latvians from the twelfth century to the First World War. It is important to note that the historians who wrote these accounts were among the generation of intellectuals who had to struggle in a Germanized society in order to succeed, and were among those who witnessed the war against the Germans between 1914 and 1918. Clearly, the message of these texts was that, throughout history, the only ones to have treated the Latvians righteously were the Latvians themselves. In a time when Latvia was still trying to justify itself as a state, this message influenced the young generation to conclude that a free Latvian state was the best and only viable option for the Latvian nation.

### **The Years of Dictatorship, 1934-40**

After Kārlis Ulmanis established a dictatorship in 1934, the government pushed the development of a stronger Latvian patriotism and the promotion

of national unity to the top of its list of priorities. This reinforcement of nationalist policies greatly influenced the evolution of education in subsequent years and contributed to augmenting the already staunchly patriotic content of school curriculums. The nationalist messages which had been, for the most part, centered on pastoral themes and patriotic interpretations of the past, now adopted a more militant character and, in some cases, bordered on militarism. After 1934 there were no more figurative interpretations and messages between the lines: the commentaries were direct and unambiguous.

One of the first noticeable changes was in the iconography and structure of the books. For example, in a 1939 reader by Jānis Broka, the actual text only begins on page eleven, as patriotic illustrations, songs and quotes take up the first ten pages. A colorful drawing of a radiant map of Latvia with the Latvian flag adorns the first page, followed by Latvia's national anthem, a picture of President Ulmanis, a quote from the president inviting children to work for their country, a prayer for Latvia, and finally a stanza from a song called "Fatherland."<sup>56</sup> Inspiring quotes from the president and other national leaders, strategically distributed throughout the book, summoned the children to listen to the words and teachings of their national heroes. In the opening pages of Broka's book, a quote by President Ulmanis was presented to the children as a pledge of allegiance to the nation:

I swear diligence and assiduity in my studies, I will listen to my parents and teachers, I will collaborate and trust my colleagues, and exert control and courtesy with all.

For you, dear, beloved Fatherland, I give my word to offer a fervent heart, kind thoughts, and honest work!

I give my word to be inflexible in my obligations, in responsibilities at home and at school, with the most rigorous severity towards myself, because I also want to be a brave and devoted carrier of the flag of unity.

I promise to grow for the Fatherland! Glory to Latvia!<sup>57</sup>

In addition, throughout the text, illustrations of the president, of heroic veterans and of scenes of war occupied the space where there would have been pictures of nineteenth-century national leaders in books from the 1920s. Naturally many of the illustrations in post-1934 books were similar to what can be found in the 1920s, but in general, books published after 1934 were designed to transmit direct nationalist notions through every possible medium.

New types of texts also appeared after 1934. Instead of folk tales, one could encounter military stories from World War I veterans, and instead of

reading inoffensive stories about life and nature, the children were presented with political speeches on national pride and unity. President Ulmanis' writings, quotes and speeches quickly penetrated elementary school readers—by 1940, he was one of the most widely quoted authors in school textbooks. One of the texts, present in a majority of the school readers, was his speech to the nation after the May 1934 coup. It is a clear, precise explanation of why he took over the state's government and what he intended to do as dictator of Latvia.<sup>58</sup> Along with folk tales and poetry, grades three and four were now reading political manifestos as well. The books also contained political and military accounts on how independence was won in 1918, as well as stories about the military battles that helped consolidate the Latvian state, with titles such as "Eternal Life to You, Latvia," "We and Our United Land," "What to Give for Latvia," and "You, God's Land, are the Most Beautiful." In the story "What to Give for Latvia," which can be found in many books, a young Latvian boy watches the German Army march through Riga during World War I and wonders what he could give up in order to save his fatherland. After offering to cut off his little finger and sacrifice his younger brother's life, his teary-eyed mother answers: "It's too little my child, too little... We need to give ourselves completely, with all our belongings, with all our heart, with all our life, only then can we save Riga and Latvia." The story ends with the youth of Latvia going to the barricades in song, and a bolt of thunder tearing open the skies to let the sun shine upon them. The author concluded that with the power of the sun in Latvia's hands, they would always conquer, today and for eternity.<sup>59</sup> With such texts, the post-1934 readers presented a more militant and calculated selection, compared to the pastoral and more diversified content of earlier books. Nationalism now entailed more than glorification of the land and veneration of the folk heritage, it also included work, dedication and total sacrifice for the nation.

In texts, such as "What the Fatherland Expects From You" and "How to Make the Fatherland Stronger," children received specific instructions on what they were expected to accomplish as true Latvian citizens. In a 1939 text called "What Will Make Latvia Stronger," the author gave instructions on what were their responsibilities to the nation.

Latvia will be strong:

- 1) if our state is dear to everyone, but especially the younger generation;
- 2) if we don't lose our courage, resourcefulness and hardiness;
- 3) if we hold on to the land and only leave if it indispensable to do something somewhere else;

- 4) if beloved are our songs, Latvian songs, Latvian art, Latvian language, Latvian culture and
  - 5) if we trust and listen to every one of our leaders in the home, at school and all our beloved national leaders.
- Then, we will be all united in our work for the nation's good.<sup>60</sup>

The message in these texts was quite direct: the younger generation was expected to stand by the national leaders and prepare themselves to be the future of the Latvian nation. Since such texts were approved by the Ministry of Education and distributed in every primary school, the Ulmanis government could hope to create throughout the country a common consciousness of the needs and goals of the nation. The main objective of Ulmanis' authoritarian government was to create a more patriotic and politically united nation, and writings such as the previous examples contributed in this effort.

Moreover, the theme of devotion and self-sacrifice for the freedom and unity of the nation appeared very frequently after 1934. By exploiting the hardships of the Latvian nation during the First World War, some authors discussed how Latvians have to be ready at all times, as a unified force, to safeguard their freedom and avoid the return of the occupiers. School readers included many texts explaining how the Latvians won their military battles at the end of the First World War, as well as poems and songs glorifying Latvia's war heroes. The greater emphasis on unity, freedom and military might was probably brought on by the uncertain state of politics in Europe in the 1930s when Germany, the traditional enemy, reemerged as a military power with Hitler at its head.

Instead of citing the legendary figures and cultural heroes as role models (in the 1920s), the post-1934 books summoned the children to follow the example of current political figures, such as president Ulmanis, or war heroes, like the Minister of Defense Balodis and veterans of World War I. In a 1939 book, fifteen pages related the life of President Ulmanis, nine pages, including a picture, were dedicated to Minister of Defense Balodis, and seven pages to a victorious war hero, Colonel Kalpaks.<sup>61</sup> In comparison, biographical descriptions in pre-1934 books usually occupied about two pages. A book from 1935 destined for grade three contained a five-page story relating the courage and valor of President Ulmanis during the First World War. In this story, he received all the credit for the victorious conclusion of the military struggle for independence after World War I, and was made to appear as a hero with unwavering courage. At one point in the story, as Latvia was split in two along the shores of the Daugava and all things seemed lost, the president gives himself an

inspirational talk that would eventually provide him all the necessary spiritual strength to lead Latvia to victory:

In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the President sat as in a shelter. Grenades were falling against his walls and exploding all around, but the President had no time to listen and to hear. He was listening to only one voice, that came from the depth of his soul: 'This time is your time. You do not have to answer to anyone for this city [Riga], except to all of Latvia, which is now being torn in two. Never allow the enemies to separate the shores of this river [Daugava], one from another. Under that water lies Latvian land as well. Do not let the days, the hours or the minutes run by, but fill them with hate against your land's invaders. You have to create a magnet, which will bring the two separated parts together again.'<sup>62</sup>

The story ends with Latvia's victory and Ulmanis reminding the nation that these battles shall never be forgotten, so that Latvia's freedom shall be eternal. The cult of personality that surrounded Ulmanis presented him as the loving and all-knowing protector of the nation, and the children were instructed through such texts to follow his example of devotion and sacrifice. These images, promoted not just through education but through every aspect of life, have left such an imprint on the Latvians, that even today, Ulmanis' figure inspires respect and admiration among a large part of the population.

### **The Results of the National Education Policies**

After all these reforms in the education system, did the national leaders succeed in creating a stronger, more united and more nationally conscious Latvian nation? It is difficult to demonstrate conclusively that the national education policies succeeded in creating generations of proud, nationally conscious Latvians. Any assertion that education was the main force in the unification and nationalization of the Latvian nation would be to over-estimate its real impact. But there are indications which suggest that the government's efforts in the schools were quite fruitful, and that the national education program did affect, in a positive fashion, the way some Latvians viewed their country and nation.

Before it was able to reach the pupils, the Ministry of Education had to make sure that their intermediary, the teachers, would be in tune with the government's national aspirations. The previously mentioned survey conducted in 1922 indicated that even in the first years of independence, a large proportion of school teachers shared the same hopes as the government. Although only 36 percent of the questionnaires sent were



returned (658 out of approximately 1,830), this survey gives an overall idea of the state of education at the time. When asked why they became teachers and what were their motives for maintaining the profession, patriotic answers were among the most popular in both cases. The teachers' answers included the following: "The desire to raise proud and patriotic Latvian citizens"; "to work for the future of the nation"; "to raise the children as free citizens and to strengthen to state"; "when the fatherland is in need, its sons and daughters must go to its rescue"; "to bring the nation forward"; "to correct the mistakes of the past"; and "to rejuvenate the school after the German occupation." The survey also asked the teachers to list the subjects they found the easiest and most difficult to teach. The five subjects they found the easiest were mathematics, Latvian language, natural sciences, history and geography, all of which (except for mathematics) fell under the national policies in education and the native land studies program. One teacher commented that he/she enjoyed Latvian language classes the best because: "This subject is most favorable to raise knowledgeable citizens," and another commented about history classes: "In this hour it is possible... to tell the children how our Latvia was formed and what it will become." Imperfect as it is, this survey does suggest that, as early as 1922, many teachers shared the national leaders' patriotic and nationalistic ideas and promoted them in the classroom.<sup>63</sup>

But were the children even present in the schools to hear this message? One of the main problem encountered in reaching the children was vagrancy. School authorities had anticipated that, for some time after the war, many children would not be able to return to school because of the destruction of many school buildings and the financial, physical and mental hardships experienced during the hostilities. In 1920 some regions of the district of Riga reported that over 30 percent of school age children were not attending classes. In such urban districts, the situation quickly corrected itself in the post-war years as schools reopened and life returned to normal. Nevertheless, it remained a problem in rural areas, and especially in Lātgale, all through the 1920s. The main reasons for not attending school, according to a 1925 report on Latgale, were:

- 1) a few older children are occupied in the family with the raising of their brothers and sisters; 2) certain parents, because of poor living conditions, cannot send all their children to school at the same time; 3) some schools lack space to accommodate all the children at once; 4) the teachers' passivity and the parents' ignorance.<sup>64</sup>

To this list should be added poverty, and more importantly, work on the family farm. In most rural areas, it became normal practice for children to

start school only in October and finish in April, in order to help the family in the fields. O. Svenne reported in 1928 that in Latgale, 30-40 percent of school age children did not frequent school, and of those who did, 40-50 percent missed over 60 days of classes every year.<sup>65</sup> In 1931, the school inspector indicated that the situation was improving: in the four districts of Latgale vagrancy had decreased to a level between 14 and 30 percent. At the same time, vagrancy in Riga and the other provinces was at a negligible level. This did not mean that all "vagrant" children avoided school altogether, since most of them would complete the first few grades and then terminate their studies before finishing the mandatory requirements. To remedy this situation, the Ministry of Education constructed new schools and new boarding houses to accommodate students in remote regions, and also imposed penalties for vagrancy.<sup>66</sup> Through these efforts, the situation continuously improved through the 1930s; after 1932, it is no longer mentioned in inspectors' reports as a major problem. In general, documents suggest that vagrancy occasioned concern in Latgale only until the early 1930s, and was not an important issue for long in other provinces. For the Ministry of Education, it was of primary importance that children frequent schools, because only then could they be included in the nationalizing and unifying efforts of the Latvian government.

With all these efforts, did the Ministry of Education succeed in reaching the younger generation, in creating a more patriotic and unified nation? Unfortunately, sources documenting the success of the national education policy are scarce. School inspectors' and teachers' reports only give sporadic comments about the children's success in school, and no detailed account of the effects of these policies on the pupils. Various reports from 1924, 1931, 1937 and 1939 mention that the students' progress and achievements were satisfactory, but with no further comments. Nevertheless, the 1922 survey on the state of the schools gives some indications that children had already developed a more patriotic outlook. As mentioned earlier, the results of the survey show, first of all, that the subjects pupils most enjoyed were, in order, mathematics, Latvian language and history. Some of the reasons given for liking Latvian and history were: "because it is our ancestors' language"; "it is the language of our fathers"; and "[History] gives the best descriptions of the hardships and struggle of the Latvian peasant, as well as of the magnificent nature of ancient times." On the other hand, the subjects children liked least were German and Russian, and some of their comments were: "it is not necessary"; "it is the language of other peoples"; "...the Germans have ruined our fatherland"; and "I hate Germans because I see them as a nation that oppresses others." Perhaps, because of the proximity of the war years, and also because of the orientation taken by primary education, students

seemed to show a much greater affinity for subjects that dealt with Latvia rather than with other topics. These results were constant all through the survey. When asked what kind of literature they preferred reading, children overwhelmingly answered "Latvian books"; and as for school books, history texts were the ultimate favorite. Asked about their heroes, children reported admiring the national heroes most, after parents and acquaintances. When asked why he most admired King Viesturs, one pupil responded: "I want to be as courageous as he was and protect my fatherland," while another remarked that he admired the writer Rainis because the author "has accomplished a lot for the Latvian nation." The results of this survey suggest that at least some of the Latvian pupils in 1922 had acquired patriotic inclinations.<sup>67</sup> Whether this was triggered by the national education policy or other factors is debatable, but one way or another, it seems that the government's nationalist goals were being met.

In order to better understand how these nationalist policies in education affected the children, we can analyze the interviews of two Latvians who underwent their schooling in independent Latvia before 1940. Mrs. Dzinta Sipoliņš, born in 1922, completed her education in Riga, and Mr. Raimonds Šilders, born in 1928, was a pupil for four years in the coastal city of Liepāja during the Ulmanis regime. At the time of the interview, both of them lived in Canada, having immigrated from Latvia after the Second World War. They both agreed that schools of the time were very nationalist, that teachers encouraged patriotism, and that the curriculum, the books and the teachings were oriented specifically towards nationalist goals. They also added that they often sang patriotic songs or joined nationalist school clubs in schools, corroborating the fact that Ulmanis' government greatly amplified the nationalistic character of education. But secondly, and more importantly, they both declared that the national education policies did have an effect on them, serving to make them more patriotic citizens of Latvia. They stated that the school was definitely more nationalist than their families or society in general, and that it was the place where they developed most of their ideas and opinions on the nation. On this subject, Mr. Šilders remarked:

I cannot remember my parents ever taking up these subjects, they just made sure that I did everything that the school was asking me to do, and yes, at school, ...we believed every little thing that they told us... We, I mean the kids, really believed.<sup>68</sup>

For her part, Mrs. Sipoliņš said that her generation was much more nationalist than that of her parents or grandparents, who were more "international," having been raised under the influence of many nations. The two

also added that the ideas received during their schooling years stayed with them and influenced their views and opinions in later years. Mrs. Sipoliņš mentioned that the reason why the younger generation had so much difficulty accepting the Russian invasion in 1940 was the fact that they had grown up in such a patriotic environment.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Šilders added that everything he learned back then, is still with him now. According to these two testimonies, the nationalist message of the Latvian government did reach and influence its targeted audience. This is not to say that everybody came out of Latvian primary school with the same high level of patriotism, but it is a strong indication of the efficiency and success of the government's program. Nevertheless, more interviews of this type would need to be conducted to get a better idea of the overall effect of the national education policies on Latvian pupils.

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Ever since the beginning of the national movement, education had been an important instrument in the Latvian leaders' hands for the sensitization of the population to nationalist ideas, and this held true as well during the entire independence period between the wars. There is no question that the Latvian government placed the education of the population among its top priorities and made fervent efforts to supply the Ministry of Education with new schools, adequate books and a well-trained staff. There is also no doubt that the government exerted great control over education and used it in its nationalizing efforts as a vehicle for the transmission of the ideas of unity, patriotism and "Latvianness." On the other hand, the efficiency of these measures in the Latvianization of the population is still in question. This study has argued that the interwar government of Latvia did have a nationalizing strategy in education and that it produced results. Such an argument does not exclude the possibility that political disagreements and ethnic tension continued, and that other factors could have played a greater role in stimulating Latvian nationalism. But the fact remains that the Latvia which the Soviets invaded in 1940 was dramatically different from the Latvia which had unexpectedly appeared on the international scene in 1918, and that during those twenty-two years of independence, the Latvian people gained a greater sense of national unity and consciousness.

Since many of the roots of contemporary Latvian nationalism originated in the 1920s and 1930s, the history of Latvia's period of independence between the wars is thus a force in shaping the politics of the present. The depth of nationalist feeling in present-day Latvia, and its survival after almost fifty years of Soviet rule and intense Russification, could very well be an indication of the success of the nationalist policies

of the 1920s and 1930s, but such a theory still needs to be proven. Nevertheless, a study of education and nationalism in independent Latvia can provide some indication of the source of the ideas that animated the recent re-emergence of strong national sentiments in the Baltic area, and reveal the crucial importance of the interwar period in the development and evolution of the Latvian nation.

### Notes

1. Andrejs Plakans reports that in 1897, the literacy rate in the province of Livonia was already 79.1 percent and 76.1 percent in Courland, compared with only 21 percent in the rest of Russia. See Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvian: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 95.
2. *Ibid.*, 199-201.
3. Graham Smith, *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman, 1992), 56-57.
4. Plakans, 88.
5. Leon Paegle, *Ievads Vēsture* (Riga: Valters un Rapa, 1925), 1.
6. "Motiwejumi un paskaidrojumi pee 'Likuma par Isglihtigas Eestahdem,'" 2, 1919: Latvian State Archives, 1307. f., 1. apr., 1318 lieta, 94. Ip.
7. Latvian Ministry of Education, *Izglītības un kultūras nolikums* (Riga, 1937), 5.
8. Juris Bebris, "Pārskats par Rīgas aprinķa pamatskolu stāvokli un darbību 1921./22. mācības gadā," *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* (IMM), 1922 (No. 2), 1058.
9. As quoted in *Pedagogģiska doma Latvijā, no 1890.g. līdz 1940.g.* (Riga: Zvaigzne), back cover.
10. J. Kronliņš, "Latvijas skolas 1919./20. m.g. pirmajā pusē," *IMM*, 1920, no. II, 322-333.
11. Kārlis Melnalksnis, "Laukskolu stavoklis," *IMM*, 1920 (No. 2), 580-583.
12. Kārlis Melnalksnis, "No skolu prakses," *IMM*, 1923 (No. 2), 68-73 and 421-426.
13. Juris Bebris, "Rīgas aprinķa pamatskolu stāvoklis 1920./21. mācības gadā," *IMM*, 1921 (No. 2), 1082-83.
14. Juris Bebris, "Pārskats par Rīgas aprinķa pamaskolu stavokli un darbību 1921./22. macibas gada," *IMM*, 1922 (No. 2), 1058-1061.
15. Zelmars Lančmanis, "Dzimtenes mācības programmas projekts pilsētu pamatskolu III. klasei.," *IMM*, 1921 (No. 2), 1338.
16. Juris Bebris, "Rīgas aprinka pamatskolu stāvoklis 1920./21. mācības gadā," *IMM*, 1921 (No. 1), 1080.
17. Kārlis Melnalksnis, "Laukskolu stāvoklis," *IMM*, 1920 (No. 2), 583.
18. Plakans, 138.
19. A. Spekke, *History of Latvia* (Stockholm: M. Goppers, 1957), p. 370.
20. *Ibid.* 181-197.

21. Plakans, 132-138; Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 70; also see Dietrich Andre Loeber, "Language Rights in Independent Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, 1918-1940," in Sergij Vilfan, *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940, Ethnic Groups and Language Rights*, Volume III (Dartmouth: New York University Press, 1990).
22. Latvian Ministry of Education, *Latvijas mazākuma tautību skolu jautajumos* (1925), 3.
23. Latvian Ministry of Education, *Latviešu valodas programma, mazākuma tautību pamatskolām Latvijā* (1925).
24. Kārlis Melnalksnis, "Par skolu stāvokli Latgalē," *IMM*, 1925 (No. 1), 409.
25. Melnalksnis, *Ibid.*, 406-409.
26. Melnalksnis, *Ibid.*, 408.
27. O. Svenne, "Obligatoriska skolas mācība Latgalē," *IMM*, 1928 (No. 1), 494-495 and K. Ozoliņš, "Tautskolu inspektoru konference," *IMM*, 1932 (No. 1), 251-252.
28. E. Blese, "Daži noverojumi Latgales skolu dzīvē," *IMM*, 1924 (No. 2), 520-525.
29. *Ibid.*, 520-523.
30. E. Blese, *Ibid.* and Latvian Ministry of Education, *Pārskats par skolu departamenta darbību, 23. VII. 1919- 7. VIII. 1924* (Rīga: Izglītības ministrijas izdevums, 1924).
31. J. Kronliņš, "Mācības grāmatas latviešu pamatskolas 1926./27. m.g.," *IMM*, 1928 (No. 2), 17-21.
32. Kārlis Dzilleja, "Kā izglītības ministrijas novertē skolas grāmatas?," *Mūsu Nakotne*, (MN), 1923 (No. 9), 261-264.
33. Jānis Broka, "Mūsu pamatskolas," *IMM*, 1922 (No. 2), 1162-75, 1259-83.
34. "Latviešu skolu stundu plāni 1924./25. mācības gadam," *IMM*, 1924 (No. 2), 104 and "Likumi un Rikojumi," *IMM*, 1926 (No. 2), 183-191.
35. J. Kronliņš, "Mācības grāmatas latviešu pamatskolas," *IMM*, 1925 (No. 2), 566-80 and J. Kronliņš, "Mācības grāmatas latviešu pamatskolas 1926./27. m.g.," *IMM*, 1928 (No. 2), 17-21.
36. S. Svenne, *Saulīte, Lasāma grāmata pamatskolām, II daļa* (Rīga: Jauna Straume, 1925).
37. Kārlis Dzilleja, *Darbs un Dzīve*, IV (Rīga: Kultūras Balss, 1922).
38. *Ibid.*, 100 and 95-101.
39. Plakans, 88.
40. Dzilleja, *Ibid.*, 182.
41. "Motiwejumi un paskaidrojumi pee 'Likuma par Isglihtigas Eestahdem'," 3, 1919: Latvian State Archives, 1307. f., 1. apr., 1318 lieta, 96. Ip.
42. Plakans, 134.
43. *Ibid.*, 163.
44. Dzilleja, *Ibid.*, and J. Broka and H. Kreicers, *Lasāma grāmata, pamatskolas III un IV klasei* (Rīga: A. Gulbis, 1939).
45. Paegle, *Ibid.*, 76.

46. Arveds Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture*, II daļa (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1922), 7.
47. Plakans, 6.
48. Švābe, *Ibid.*, p. 9.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
50. Arveds Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture*, I, 5-6.
51. Paegle, *Ibid.*, 153-162.
52. *Pedagoģiska doma Latvijā*, 133.
53. Paegle, *Ibid.*, 95.
54. Birkerts, *Maza Latvijas vēsture* (Rīga: Zvaigzne, reprint. 1990), 31.
55. Birkerts, *Latvijas vēsture*, 166.
56. Broka and Kreicers, 1-11.
57. *Ibid.*, 5.
58. Broka, *Jauna Literatūras viela, IV un V pamatskolas klasei* (Rīga: A. Gulbis, 1937), 18-19.
59. L. Berziņš and A. Dravnieks, *Tēvu Valoda, lasāma grāmata pamatskolam, ceturtaī klasei* (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1935), 218-19.
60. Broka and Kreicers, *Ibid.*, 246-248.
61. *Ibid.*
62. L. Berziņš and A. Dravnieks, *Tēvu Valoda, lasāma grāmata pamatskolam, rešai klasei*, 194.
63. Jānis Broka, "Mūsu pamatskolas," *IMM*, 1922 (No. 2), 1265-1283.
64. Kārlis Melnalksnis, "Par skolu stāvokli Latgalē," *op. cit.*, 408.
65. Svenne, *op. cit.*
66. Bilmanis, *op. cit.*
67. Jānis Broka, "Mūsu Pamatskolas," *op. cit.*, 1163-1174, 1259-1265.
68. Interview with Raimonds Šilders conducted by Gaston Lacombe in Ottawa on January 24, 1995.
69. Interview with Dzinta Sipoliņš conducted by Gaston Lacombe in Ottawa on December 8, 1994.