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**The Thaw in Soviet Latvia
National Politics 1953-1959**

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**THE THAW IN SOVIET LATVIA: NATIONAL
POLITICS 1953 - 1959**

Michael Loader

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy**

Department of History

King's College London

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Abstract

My dissertation offers the definitive account of the history of national communism in Soviet Latvia. I define national communism within the context of the concepts of Russification and Sovietisation. I provide an assessment of the contention of the school of Latvian historiography that Russian migration to Latvia was due to an official policy of Russification.

I found that in the wake of Joseph Stalin's death, leadership rivals Nikita Khrushchev and Lavrentii Beria cooperated to formulate a new nationality policy in the Soviet Republics in 1953, demonstrating the manipulation of nationality policy as a feature in the power struggle. I argue that it was in this context that Latvian national communism originated rather than its previously assumed emergence in 1956. In contrast to previous scholarship, I insist that the national communists operated as an identifiable faction within the Latvian Communist Party. I investigate the political rise of the national communists between 1953 and 1958, examining and evaluating each national communist policy including their controversial language and residency laws, and I uncovered new evidence of autarkic national communist economic plans. I identify their policies as nationalist and, ultimately, incompatible with Soviet socialism despite the partial liberalisation of the Soviet Union under Khrushchev.

My dissertation uses complementary new evidence from Latvian and Russian archives to support and radically expand upon the theory of recent Western scholarship that an alliance of Stalinist hardliners in Moscow and Latvia, rather than Khrushchev, conspired to purge the Latvian national communists in 1959. This throws into question the causes of the other purges in nine republics between 1959 and 1961. Finally, my project augments our understanding of how the Soviet Communist Party functioned, particularly by showing precisely how the relationship between Moscow and the Soviet periphery relaxed before the Latvian purge but became strained again afterwards.

My dissertation offers the only comprehensive history of national communism in Soviet Latvia. In their attempt to wrench more autonomy from the centre, the Latvian national communists presented the greatest challenge to Moscow from the Soviet Republics in the Khrushchev era.

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Introduction

Latvian national communism epitomised the 1950s Thaw in the Soviet Union. A cultural reawakening took place, which celebrated pre-Soviet Latvian cultural achievements. Ordinary Latvians relished this uncertain but tangibly liberalised atmosphere. Many in Latvia, as elsewhere in the USSR, breathed a collective sigh of relief at the repeal of Stalinism's arbitrariness. Bold and energetic leaders in the Latvian republic sought to use these new circumstances to renegotiate with Moscow the demarcation of autonomy vis-à-vis the centre. The Thaw, initiated by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, was part of a tactical masterstroke designed to outmanoeuvre his enemies, but it also brought real change to the USSR.

The Thaw relaxed the repressive bonds holding the Soviet Union in its Stalinist shape. It offered Eastern Europe and the Soviet republics the opportunity for limited experimentation with economic and political decentralisation. Yet, the Thaw was malleable and the original bounds vaguely delimited by Khrushchev were quickly exceeded as socialist states and Soviet republics used the greater flexibility proffered by Moscow to explore different avenues to Socialism. In Hungary, Poland and Latvia this translated into 'national communism', an inherently national (and therefore treacherous) road to socialism implicitly separate from Moscow. It was only because of the Thaw that national communism was allowed to flourish. The *ad hoc* nature of Soviet reform in the 1950s ensured that these experiments with national communism rapidly developed into more determined calls for autonomy (or freedom in Hungary's case), which overtook Khrushchev's designs and proved incompatible with the Soviet system. The Soviet government was unable to cope with more than a 'tweaking' of the system. By comparison, Latvian national communist reform was radical. It was for this reason that the Latvian national communist Thaw closely resembled the greater Thaw project, both encountering concerted Stalinist resistance, eventually culminating in the purge of the Latvian national communists in 1959 and Khrushchev's own removal in 1964.

Latvia was absorbed into the Soviet Union in summer 1940 following the 1939 agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) to

divide Eastern Europe between them. The invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany on 22nd June 1941 brought the Sovietisation of Latvia to an abrupt halt, however following Germany's defeat, Latvia was reincorporated into the Soviet Union by the advancing Red Army in September 1944. The immediate post-war period in Latvia was characterised by a mass influx from the USSR. Thousands of ethnic Latvians (the so-called 'Latvichi') who had resided in the USSR during the interwar period returned or migrated to Latvia. They were the backbone of the Latvian Communist Party's (LCP) small indigenous cadre, dwarfing the few hundred partisans and underground Latvian communists who survived the German occupation, which included many future national communists.¹ A majority of Latvian Party members and government personnel were composed of Slavic migrants sent to staff the republic and facilitate Sovietisation.

Latvia possessed a historical Russian community comprising 10.6% of the population in 1935.² Latvians treated these Russians, who arrived before 1940 differently, calling them 'our Russians' because they integrated into Latvian society and learned the Latvian language. Between 1940 and 1945, Latvia suffered a demographic collapse: the Soviets deported 15,000 people from Latvia in June 1940, while 120,000 fled to the West. In total, war deaths and other losses are estimated at 600,000, leaving just 1.4 million people in Latvia in 1945 (70% of the 1939 population).³ In addition to Slavic administrators, enormous waves of Slavic workers migrated to Latvia due to severe labour shortages in the early post-war period. In the Stalinist post-war years, the ethnic Latvian population fell from 83% in 1945 to approximately 62% by 1953.⁴ Slavic migration into Latvia peaked between 1947 and 1949 but continued until Stalin's death in 1953 when political turmoil caused anxiety about migrating to Latvia.

After the war, Stalin's nationality policy in the Western borderlands was based on coercion. Upon his death, Stalin bequeathed a Latvia in which Sovietisation wrought a dramatic remaking of the political, economic, and social system and a sharp alteration of Latvia's

¹ When Latvia was absorbed into the USSR in June 1940, there were just 967 members of the Communist Party, Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: The Years of Dependence, 1940-1990*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 359.

² See Appendix A, Table 9.

³ Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History*, (California: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 155; Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 354.

⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 112.

demographic make-up but failed to co-opt the population; insurgency was rife in rural areas, and the Party remained overwhelmingly dominated by Russians. The *Latovichi* retained their ambiguous stance on national issues. In this context, the Latvian national communists emerged to challenge the status quo in summer 1953. For the subsequent six years they fostered a measure of popular support, a ‘Latvian Thaw’, that was previously unseen in Soviet Latvia and not witnessed again until the independence movements of the late 1980s. As academician Jānis Stradiņš puts it, under the national communists ‘Latvia regained its self-confidence’.⁵

This dissertation examines many themes: nationality policy, centre-periphery relations, specifically the relationship between Moscow and Riga, and the workings of high politics in Riga and Moscow. The Party and those persons who occupied leading positions within it made the most important decisions on policy and its implementation. As such, it is important to take a close look at the Party and those in command by focusing on Latvian high politics. In many ways, this is also a case study of the Khrushchev era. My thesis covers seven of the twelve years that Khrushchev dominated Soviet politics. I explore Khrushchev’s rise and many of his policies and problems, external to Latvia, in relation to their impact upon Latvia: nationality policy, the 20th Party Congress, de-Stalinisation, the *sovnarkhoz* reforms, Khrushchev’s education reform, and his vacillation on decentralisation and the Latvian purge.

In my thesis, I ask and attempt to answer the following key research questions: Were the Latvian national communists nationalists? To what extent were the national communists successful in enacting their reform programme? Did Latvian national communism affect decision-making in Moscow, and if so, how? Does Latvian historiography offer an objective and reliable view of the events covered in my thesis? Who caused the purge of the Latvian national communists and how was it achieved? The overarching question I ask is how did a faction, which succeeded in gaining dominance over its republic’s leadership, challenge Moscow in a bid to renegotiate the centre-periphery relationship?

⁵ Round Table: ‘Nacionālkomunisti 1959 gada notikumam kontekstā: Apaļā galda diskusija “Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāla” redakcijā’, *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 71 (2009), 153.

i. Historiography and Sources

As one would expect, Latvian historians, both émigré and those who lived in Soviet Latvia, contribute the majority of the historiography. This historiography, however, is fixed squarely within the Latvian paradigm of treating the USSR as an occupying power and views Moscow as monolithic and uncompromising in all circumstances. Following the Latvian purge in 1959, there were articles published in Western newspapers suggesting a purge had taken place. Afterwards, the only mention of the purge appeared in the *samizdat* (dissident publication) 'Letter of 17 Latvian communists' written by Berklavs and his associates, which was smuggled out of the USSR and published in the West in 1972.⁶ The letter was rebuffed in the USSR as a forgery and made little impact in Latvia.⁷

In the perestroika period, Latvians began to re-examine their history as a Soviet republic. Discussions about the national communist period, particularly the Latvian purge, exploded in autumn 1988 as Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost policy took effect. In this new atmosphere, there was an upsurge of public and academic interest in the purge, especially because the political struggle took place behind closed doors. Historians began publishing on the subject for the first time. Editors filled newspapers and journals with articles about national communism. Elderly national communists emerged from obscurity, and described national communism's role in Latvian history in interviews and serialised memoirs published in popular news organs.⁸ The pages of *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and Art), for example, were an astoundingly open discussion forum from 1985. The contributions of Vilis Krūmiņš, Eduards Berklavs, Voldemārs Kalpiņš and Indriķis Pinksis, hitherto pariahs, provide invaluable insight in their published recollections of the period. Krūmiņš alone published seven articles and interviews between 1988 and 1990. In 1998, Berklavs published his autobiography. Memoirs are not always accurate and rarely objective. However, in a study of high politics they provide a useful supplement to archival evidence and assist in our understanding of the subtexts

⁶ 'Protest Letter' by 17 Latvian communists, (http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm).

⁷ Andres Küng, *A Dream of Freedom*, (Cardiff: Boreas Publishing House, 1980), 175.

⁸ Memoirs, interviews and articles by national communists appeared in both Latvian and Russian publications: In the Latvian daily *Cīņa* (Struggle); the Latvian literary journal *Literatūra un Māksla* the journal *Latvijas likteņgadi* (Latvian Years of Destiny); the Party journals *Karogs* (Flag), *Liesma* (Flame) and *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii* (Communist Soviet Latvia), and the youth publications *Sovetskaia molodezh'* and *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth), among others.

of official documents and newspaper articles. They reveal opinions formed on the basis of subtle policy shifts, personal relationships, and changes in behaviour. Once discussion became permissible, these leaders were desperate to present their interpretations of history, thirty years after the suppression of all mention of national communism in the USSR. Many attempted to justify their position in jettisoning national communism to save themselves from the purge. Some, including Berklavs and Krūmiņš, went on to join or form independence movements during the last years of the USSR.

In many respects, glasnost permitted national communism's return to Latvia. There was strong support among the population, who believed it was step towards greater democracy, special status for Latvia in the USSR, and later autonomy. In the late 1980s, the LCP underwent a re-examination of itself. At the May 1988 and January 1989 plenums, the LCP resolved to 'restore an objective picture of the July plenum 1959' and considered revoking the July plenum's decisions, which marked the beginning of the purge.⁹ In 1989, the LCP sent two Latvian historians to Tashkent to conduct an interview with Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, dispatched by the Presidium in June 1959 to investigate charges of nationalism in Latvia. Mukhitdinov participated in the pivotal meeting that decided the national communists' fate, and was the only surviving full Presidium member from 1959. This little known interview appeared in a 1990 edition of *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*.¹⁰ Public clamour for information about the circumstances surrounding the purge compelled the Latvian bureau to request that the Institute of History gather all available material about the July 1959 plenum concerning the purge. In February and June 1989, in an unprecedented move, the bureau ordered the plenum's stenogram published uncensored in *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*. By 1990, the Latvian bureau was in the midst of a struggle between a new generation of national communists and those loyal to Moscow, eventually splitting into two parties. At the 25th LCP Congress in April, the pro-Moscow faction scuppered attempts to repeal the July plenum's decisions. They determined there had been 'an insufficient level of research' on the subject. Furthermore, the discussion

⁹ 'Iz arhivnykh fondov: Stenogramma 7-ia zakrytogo Plenuma TsK KPL 7-8 iulia 1959', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 2 (1989), 87.

¹⁰ Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, Interview with Lubova Zile and Valdis Blūzma, '1959 god v Latvii: vzglyad izvne', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 5 (1990), 85-93.

became, as Daina Bleiere puts it, ‘a political weapon’ in the struggle against the LCP’s reactionary wing.¹¹ As the Party fractured in 1990, the loyalist faction refused to declare the July plenum’s decisions null and void, but the founding congress of the Independent Latvian Communist Party did so.¹² Public interest in Latvia about the purge waned after independence, but resurfaced with Latvia’s opening of Soviet archival holdings in the late 1990s. This led to a flurry of publications on the subject by Latvian historians Daina Bleiere, Ilga Apine, Gundar King, Irēne Šniedere, Jānis Stradiņš, Ilga Kreituss, Heinrich Strods and Jānis Riekstiņš, who defined the Latvian interpretation of national communism according to Latvia’s politically charged narrative of the Soviet period.

Russian historical literature tends to repeat the static rhetoric of the Soviet period, maintaining that Latvia absorption into the Soviet Union was popular and legitimate. Ludmilla Vorob’eva’s *Istoriia Latvii ot Rossiiskoi imperii k SSSR* (The History of Latvia from the Russian Empire to the USSR) is a prime example of this practice. The great exception is Elena Zubkova’s book *Pribaltika i Kreml’* (The Baltic and the Kremlin), which provides a rich analysis of events in the Baltic republics between 1945 and 1953.

The first in-depth study on the national communists in Western historiography is Michael Widmer’s 1969 unpublished Harvard Ph.D. thesis. Widmer’s exhaustive study of newspaper articles, the only sources available before the 1980s, puts the Latvian *nomenklatura* under scrutiny.¹³ Widmer draws conclusions from leadership changes and statistical information, and makes many pertinent observations considering the lack of reliable material available at the time. Yet, because he lacked archival access, and because his primary source was the Party newspaper *Sovetskaia Latvija* (Soviet Latvia), which was controlled by arch-Stalinist Arvīds Pelše’s Department of Propaganda and Agitation (*Agitprop*), his analysis was incomplete. Widmer’s thesis was also a product of the Cold War era. For example, he states in his introduction that ‘the fundamental aim of the Soviet regime is to destroy the national

¹¹ Daina Bleiere, ‘Nacionālkommunisms Latvijā: Historiogrāfija’, *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 46 (2003), 111-12.

¹² Valdis Blūzma, ‘Pirmais akmens’, *Latvijas Jaunatne*, 1st May 1990.

¹³ The *nomenklatura* was an index or list of key positions in government to which only Party members could be appointed. The *nomenklatura* covered the most important positions in industry, agriculture, the soviets, schools and higher learning institutions.

identity of the Latvian people'.¹⁴ Widmer assumed that public support emboldened the national communists to the point that 'Moscow could not long tolerate [the national communist] challenge, especially when it became apparent that events in Latvia were gaining momentum and developing certain features of a full-scale movement'. This obscures the subtleties of power politics, which triggered the purge.¹⁵ Widmer's great mistake is attributing the Latvian purge to Khrushchev, but considering the lack of sources, this is understandable. With a greater range of sources such as archives, memoirs and interviews, historians are now able to better analyse the complexities of the Latvian purge to reach a different conclusion. Questioning the precise origins of the purge is imperative because if the purge originated in Latvia then it contradicts the predominant Latvian historiographical school.

There have been very few English language works published on Soviet Latvia thus far. The existing historiography covering Latvia mainly consists of general works that lump the republic in with the other Baltic States and tend to focus on Latvia's incorporation into or exit from the USSR or isolated events from the period covered by my thesis. Even fewer modern publications in English examine the Latvian national communists. Articles by Geoffrey Swain and William Prigge's 2015 monograph *Bearslayers* are the only current examples. Prigge's study is unique because he conducted two interviews with the 89-year old national communist leader Eduards Berklavs in 2003, shortly before the latter's death. Such a rare insight into Berklavs's actions and motivations is an extraordinary resource.

Prigge's work relies on Latvian archival sources but includes very little material from Russian archives, which is crucial to understanding central processes and reactions to events in Latvia. The LCP CC (Central Committee) archive in Latvia provides rather limited insight into centre-periphery relations between Riga and Moscow, but materials in the CPSU CC archives in Russia, included in my thesis, significantly improve the picture. Though many decisions were resolved verbally in private meetings or over the telephone, the complementary use of these archives offers a more reliable assessment of Khrushchev's intentions and motivations.

Among the post-Soviet republics, few countries provide as rich a source base as Latvia.

¹⁴ Michael Jean Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism in Latvia: the Latvian Communist Party under Soviet rule', (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis, 1969), 7.
¹⁵ Ibid., 116.

This is due to almost unrestricted access to archival documents, a range of published sources, numerous published interviews with leading national communists and their opponents, and memoirs. Studies of Latvia enhance our understanding of how the Soviet system functioned to an extent rarely found in the former Soviet Union.

ii. In search of a definition of national communism

The theory of ‘national communism’ is oxymoronic. By its very nature, communism is incompatible with national aspirations because of its basic tenets, the socialisation of the means of production and the Party’s dominance. The conditioning of communism and its limitation by national considerations is the antithesis of classical Marxism.¹⁶ National communism means an ‘independent road to socialism’ in contrast to the orthodox Soviet-style socialism dictated by Moscow. By implying there were other paths to communism, it was a rejection of the Kremlin’s own strategic imperatives. These other socialist paths during the construction of communism should account for the individual characteristics and conditions of each republic in which they are attempted, hence the ‘national’ element.¹⁷ National communism cannot be called ‘National Socialism’ because that term is already taken. In this section, I will ask what was national communism, and how did the Latvian variant develop, and why?

Between 1953 and 1968, indigenous politicians in a number of Eastern European republics became increasingly sensitive towards national concerns. Walther Kemp identifies the growing concern of leaders with national issues, which led to more intra-party disagreements about the characteristics of ethnic conflicts. This was the case in Latvia, in which the intra-party split was largely along national lines. Kemp describes this as ‘a short step from domesticism or localism (*mestnichestvo*) to national communism. Leaders wittingly and unwittingly created a political atmosphere, which heightened the sense of national consciousness among their elites and populations - which, because of the dynamics of nationalism, took on a political

¹⁶ Walter Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradiction?*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 127.

¹⁷ Daina Bleiere et al, *History of Latvia: The 20th Century*, (Riga: Jumava Ltd, 2006), 393.

component'.¹⁸ Therefore, Kemp finds national communism to be the political expression of identification with national concerns.

National communism existed in various forms in post-war Eastern Europe. It was first detectable in Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito who practiced an independent form of communism following his *'Informbiuro'* split with Stalin in 1948. The other examples of European national communism all occurred inside the Soviet bloc. The reconciliation between the USSR and Yugoslavia following reciprocal visits between Khrushchev and Tito in 1955 and 1956, and the Soviet declaration in October 1956 on 'the Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Co-operation between the Soviet Union and other Socialist States' indicated that the USSR would recognise there were alternative paths to communism. This encouraged the development of Hungarian and Polish national communism in 1956. Such declarations, however, proved hollow because national concerns and Soviet socialism were fundamentally incompatible: Moscow was unable to cope with the destabilising influence of ideological divergence, as the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising in November 1956 demonstrated. Poland, however, was not invaded, and 'Polish October' survived, though it was gradually eroded. There were no further instances of national communism in Eastern Europe following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The suppression of Aleksander Dubček's Prague Spring finally subdued attempts to create a national variant of communism that could coexist with Soviet socialism. The subsequent 'Brezhnev Doctrine' explicitly limited the sovereignty of the satellite states and ensured that the Soviet's 'real existing socialism' remained the only road to communism.¹⁹

National communism was a term for Eastern European states (excluding Yugoslavia) that wrested limited independence from the Soviet Union. It is rarely applied to republics in the USSR. Latvia is the exception. The national communists never referred to themselves as such. The moniker was first applied by an émigré newspaper in August 1959 in London.²⁰ The national communists received various epithets: King calls them 'autonomists' in light of their

¹⁸ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 127-28.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Swain, 'Before National Communism: Joining the Latvian Komsomol under Stalin', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64, (2012), 1239-40.

²⁰ Arveds Švālbe, 'Pirmais Latvijas nacionāļkomūnistu upuris', *Londonas Avīze*, 28th August 1959, 1.

economic policies, in German they are known as the ‘national democratic movement’, and Uldis Ģērmanis calls them ‘*Berklaviešu*’ (‘Berklavists’).²¹ According to Thomas Hammond, national communism implies that Marxism can and should be adapted to local conditions, as interpreted by the local leader’.²² Like other national communist leaders, Tito, Imre Nagy, Władysław Gomułka and Dubček, who shaped and personified their varieties of socialism, so too future national communist leader Eduards Berklavs was central to the formation and development of Latvian national communism.

An important distinction that separates national communism from other terminology is that its proponents wanted to maintain the one-Party system. In Latvia’s case, this meant remaining within the USSR and not attempting to gain independence. Instead, they wanted to exert autonomous control over various aspects of life in Latvia such as migration and the economy; enthusiastically supporting efforts at the centre to decentralise the Soviet system. The Latvian national communists were committed activists who were not against Latvia’s membership in the Soviet Union; rather, they were instrumental in the Sovietisation process in Latvia in 1940-41, loyal to the USSR in wartime and in its aftermath, and that they were ‘true believers’ in the Soviet socialist model. As Aldis Purs puts it, however, ‘they became disenchanted with the Russian face of [socialist] construction’.²³ Ilga Apine defines national communism as ‘opposition with a national hue’ and argues that it was the Latvian response to Moscow’s chauvinistic national policies.²⁴ Latvia’s national communists objected to the priority accorded to the interests of the centre over the republics. In the late 1980s, in interviews, memoirs and publications the national communists defined national communism as ‘an attempt to improve the system, to make it more humane, more appropriate to the Latvian nation’s interests’.²⁵ The national communists wanted their own socialist transformation according to

²¹ Gundar J. King, *Economic Policies in Occupied Latvia: A Manpower Management Study*, (Nebraska: Pacific Lutheran University Press, 1965); Vilis Krūmiņš, ‘Par nacionāldemokrātisku Latviju’, *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 13th May 1999; Uldis Ģērmanis, ‘Nevar atrisināt neatrisināmo’, *Latvija Šodien*. 1st November 1989.

²² Thomas Hammond, ‘The Origins of National Communism’, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 34 (1958), 277-78.

²³ Aldis Purs, *Baltic Facades: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania Since 1945*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 68.

²⁴ Ilga Apine, ‘Latviešu nacionālkomunistu politiskās sagrāves sociālpolitiskie aspekti’, *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, (2000), 69.

²⁵ Round Table: ‘Nacionālkomunisti 1959’, 150.

Latvian conditions and without the ‘assistance’ of post-war Russian functionaries dispatched to Sovietise Latvia, who were generally unwilling to learn Latvian and understand Latvian culture and customs.²⁶ National communism was a form of resistance to official policy. It was not opposition to the regime as such; it was opposition to the official line on national politics, which they perceived as favouring Russians.²⁷ It is in this context that the national communists sought to build ‘socialism with a Latvian face’ or as Alfrēds Bērziņš puts it, ‘to blend communism with the interests of the Latvian nation’.²⁸

From the Latvian perspective, because the national communists’ were committed to Latvia remaining part of the USSR, they were viewed as collaborators despite their attempt to improve the lives of ordinary Latvian citizens. In the early 1990s, Berklavs was accused of collaboration in several articles in the press, for example, Oļģerts Dzenītis’s article published in *Rīcība* on 26th March 1993. Even in the late 1980s, national communists Benjamiņš Treijs and Pavel Cherkovskii were still against Latvian independence. In the 1950s, the national communists would not have benefitted from Latvia becoming independent, as they were in control of the Latvian Party. In the 1980s, however, as disgraced old men, the independence movement offered them the opportunity to reinvent themselves as dissidents who battled Moscow in the 1950s. The populace and most Latvian historians accepted this portrait of the national communists in the late 1980s.²⁹ Yet, this position has not been fully re-examined since. The national communists continue to be venerated. In 1995 and again in 2000, the Latvian government awarded Eduards Berklavs the Order of Three Stars. On 15th June 2014, on Berklavs’s centenary, a plaque was unveiled at his former house on Brīvības Street followed by a commemoration with speakers who knew him. This nostalgia, however, ignores the complexities and complicity of national communists in maintaining the Soviet system in the 1950s.

Latvian national communism was much closer to the Polish variant than Hungary’s non-Leninist, ‘Titoist’ style of independent communism, though the national communists drew

²⁶ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 395.

²⁷ Ilga Apine, ‘Vai Latvijā arī bija nacionāļkomunisti?’, *Neatkarīgā Cīņa*, 6th October 1993, 4.

²⁸ Alfrēds Bērziņš, *The Unpunished Crime*, (New York : R. Speller Publishers, 1963), 34.

²⁹ Apine is the exception, arguing that the national communists were not dissidents. Ilga Apine, ‘Disidentisms Latvijā’, *Latvijas Vēsture*, 9 (1993), 51.

inspiration from Albania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. According to the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy, 'The inner tension in Hungary is caused by the [Soviet] leadership's opposition to ideals of national independence, sovereignty, and equality, as well as Hungarian national feeling and progressive traditions'.³⁰ Nagy's call for a restoration of the socialist values of non-interference in internal affairs, sovereignty and equality was attractive to Latvia's national communists. Yugoslav politician turned dissident Milovan Djilas correctly predicted that national communism would clash with Stalinism and this is precisely what occurred in Latvia in the late 1950s.³¹ This is because national communism sought to redress Stalinist hegemony, to undermine the Stalinist 'old guard' of functionaries and with national communism as the engine of de-Stalinisation, return to Leninism, to the true principles of the revolution as the national communists perceived them. As Widmer puts it, the national communists were the 'heirs to the tradition established by the Latvian Bolsheviks fifty years earlier'.³² The national communists were communists according to their interpretation. The national communists did not refer to Marxism. Their relationship with Marxism was filtered through Leninism because Lenin, not Marx, was the primary ideologue of the CPSU. They saw themselves as Leninists, cherry-picking the Lenin they wanted, the Lenin who espoused decentralisation and autonomy within the framework of Soviet socialism. Ultimately, national communism in the Soviet bloc failed in every instance because national concerns could not be used as the foundation to reform a rigid system that proved incapable of accommodating national aspirations.³³

iii. The Migration Debate

It is important to consider the causes of Russian migration to Latvia. The question is whether migration was an official and centrally directed policy, as claimed by Berklavs and many Latvian historians, or if it was voluntary. The answer to this question determines whether Latvia underwent deliberate demographic Russification or whether it was a side effect of other

³⁰ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 141.

³¹ Milovan Djilas, *New Class*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), 184.

³² Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 256.

³³ As an example of the Soviet system's inability to withstand reform, Apine points to the classic case of the collapse of the USSR under Mikhail Gorbachev when another serious attempt was made to reform the system; Apine, 'Vai Latvijā', 4.

processes. Anatol Lieven supports the notion that Russians were motivated to migrate to Latvia in search of a better life. He writes, 'economic opportunity and higher living standards sucked in workers, especially those young and unmarried, from all over the union'.³⁴ New arrivals were mostly young Russians seeking social advancement by moving to Latvia because of its higher living standards and attractive Western influences. The advertisement of good jobs with wages substantially higher than the Union average through the All-Union agency *Orgnabor* (Organised Recruitment), attracted workers from across the USSR. This, coupled with a reasonable supply of consumer goods, appealed to a broad spectrum of Soviet society: workers, managers, specialists, Party personnel and military retirees.³⁵ The employment of the majority of incoming young proletarian Russian speakers is consistent with the idea that they migrated to Latvia for its industrial employment options and higher living standards.³⁶

Some historians, Thomas Remeikis for example, argue that these employment trends were desirable from a colonial perspective and were deliberately orchestrated, for example, through the better advertisement of jobs in Leningrad or Moscow than at the location where labour was needed.³⁷ According to Juris Dreifelds, throughout the 1950s and 1960s Soviet officials continued to offer huge incentives for Russians to move, especially to farm communities. 'Such inducements promised to new rural settlers included grants for each member of the family, cost-free moving, provisions on arrival, and a suspension on taxes and rents. Other incentives were choice of the best cows as well as construction and relocation credits of five thousand rubles'.³⁸ Despite Dreifelds's claims, Russian migrants predominantly settled in urban areas.

Undeniably, new arrivals were privileged by the Soviet system both politically and materially, for example, in prioritisation for housing, which contributed to deteriorating relations with the indigenous population. According to Rasma Karklins, ethnic relations

³⁴ Michele E. Commercio, 'Russian Minorities in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan', *Problems of Post Communism*, 51 (2004), 28.

³⁵ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 185; Juris Dreifelds, 'Latvian National Demands And Group Consciousness Since 1959', in George Simmonds (ed.), *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the Era of Brezhnev and Kosygin*, (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1977), 143.

³⁶ Ole Norgaard, *The Baltic States After Independence*, (Brookfield: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1996), 174.

³⁷ Thomas Remeikis, 'The Impact of Industrialisation on the Ethnic Demography of the Baltic Countries', *Lithuanus*, 13 (1967), 34.

³⁸ Dreifelds, 'Latvian National Demands', 143.

problems between Russians and Latvians revolved around a clash of identities, perspectives and interests. Latvians had a strong notion of being ‘the proprietors of their republic and of being entitled to a dominant socio-economic and political role within their native environment’.³⁹ Thus, Latvians identified emotionally only with their republic as a homeland and not the wider USSR. For Latvians, the Russian presence was not only ethnically and culturally alien, but politically oppressive as well. This contrasts sharply with Russian self-identification with the whole USSR as their homeland, combined with the state-sponsored predominance granted to the Russian people and language, as well as conscious or unconscious chauvinism, which produced widespread resentment among indigenous Latvians.

Other historians believe it was official policy to move reliable and loyal ethnic groups, the Slavic peoples, to the periphery to guard against nationalism, especially in the ‘new’ republics incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940. Karklins supports this ‘security’ notion, arguing that ‘Soviet authorities relied not only on the support of a rotating security elite sent to the non-Russian republics, but also on the loyalty of the more permanent mass of Russian settlers’.⁴⁰

The Latvian government-sponsored documentary source volume *Policy of Occupation Powers in Latvia 1939-1991*, published in 1999, embodies the most extreme but generally accepted theory in Latvia that demographic change in Latvia was predetermined by Moscow. The chapter entitled ‘Colonisation and Russification’ edited by Jānis Riekstiņš, the strongest proponent of this theory, argues that the arrival of demobilised officers and soldiers was part of an effort to colonise Latvia. Riekstiņš also argues that industrial growth was deliberately designed to facilitate an influx of workers to staff factories.⁴¹ Riekstiņš partially subscribes to the security theory by noting that through ‘the influx of immigrants, the Soviet leadership sought to attach closer the occupied Baltic States to the Soviet Union’.⁴² Yet, conspiracy theories that Moscow wanted to swamp Latvia with Slavs to deliberately facilitate the Russification of Latvians raise more questions than they answer. Why were there no

³⁹ Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR*, 51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴¹ Elmārs Pelkaus, *Policy of Occupation Powers in Latvia 1939-1991*, (Riga: Nordik, 1999), 367.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 367-68.

concentrated efforts to ‘colonise’ recalcitrant Lithuania or Transcaucasia and why has no ‘smoking gun’ been discovered in either the Latvian or Russian archives? Riekstiņš attempts to explain the latter question by claiming that ‘during the totalitarian regime many essential instructions were given and decisions adopted only verbally - they were intentionally not fixed in documents’.⁴³ Naturally, evidence of this practice is lacking. *Policy of Occupation Powers* attempts to provide evidence of a manufactured migration policy with a selection of documents, but the choice of such documents, the researchers admit, ‘most openly and clearly characterise the essence of the regime’, which casts doubt on the volume’s objectivity.⁴⁴ The book appears to have an ulterior political agenda because of its government sponsorship and foreword by then-President of Latvia Guntis Ulmanis. It represents the official stance of the Latvian government on the Soviet occupation. Unsurprisingly, Berklavs repeatedly alleged that there was a conscious plan for the Russification of Latvia through colonisation.⁴⁵ In the 1972 ‘Protest Letter’, Berklavs and his disciples offer a similar interpretation to the authors of *Policy of Occupation Powers*. The letter implicates Moscow in stage-managing the influx of Russian migrants arguing that industrial enterprises were expanded against the dictates of economic rationality: ‘Construction workers were recruited outside the republic, raw materials were transported from the Urals or the Donbass... specialists and workers were likewise brought in, but the output was shipped out of the republic’.⁴⁶

Prigge challenges the views expressed in the ‘Protest Letter’ and *Policy of Occupation Powers*, one of the key tenets of post-Soviet historiography in Latvia. He takes issue with the theory that the Soviet government forced Latvian industrialisation, intentionally creating a labour deficit, which required imports of Slavic manpower. Instead, Prigge incisively argues that industrialisation in Latvia was connected to its history as an integrated region of the Russian Empire (Latvian industrialisation was financed by Baltic Germans in the 19th Century). This argument helps answer my question, was the purpose of industrialisation in Latvia to deliberately change the republic’s demographic makeup? When Latvia was separated from

⁴³ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Eduards Berklavs, ‘Visiem, kam ir interese par mani’, *Montreālas Latviešu Biedrības Ziņotājs*, 1st July 1993, 16.

⁴⁶ George Saunders (ed.), ‘Against Russification’ in *Samizdat: Voices of the Opposition*, (London: Modad Press, 1974), 430.

union with Russia in 1918, the loss of its evacuated or destroyed industrial base led to Latvia's evolution into an agrarian republic. Prigge highlights the continuities with Latvia's industrial development after its incorporation into the USSR, particularly because Riga offered similar economic advantages to the Soviet Union as it did in the Russian Empire. The labour gap and consequent mass migration of Slavs to Latvia, while useful for Soviet authorities, was in fact a by-product of these industrialisation trends.⁴⁷ Prigge's reassessment suggests that Latvia's 're-industrialisation' was financed by the Soviets. The Latvians self-style their history by making 1918 (the year of Latvian independence) a 'Year Zero' but describe 1940, the year of Latvia's annexation, as an aberration. Post-1940 economic development, however, had many similarities with pre-1918 Latvia. If anything, interwar Latvia's economy was the aberration.

I am unconvinced by the Latvian argument that there was a concerted and deliberate 50-year campaign of demographic Russification in Latvia orchestrated by Moscow. Migration between republics and intermarriage between the Soviet peoples facilitated conditions for Sovietisation because it eroded ties between individuals and their native republics with their pre-Soviet traditions. It offered a more practical path to the creation of a Soviet identity than lofty pronouncements by Soviet leaders of the creation of a Soviet people, of a rapprochement between peoples, or their fusion. Undoubtedly, therefore the presence of large numbers of Slavs in Latvia was convenient and desirable for Kremlin leaders unable or unwilling to correct a deficient Stalinist nationality policy. Yet, Moscow offered incentives and encouragement for Russians to migrate to Latvia, but because of economic concerns rather than colonial ones.

The migration issue holds particular contemporary relevance. Twenty-First Century Latvia is comparable to independent Ukraine, with a large Russian majority in its south-eastern districts. Latvia contains the highest percentage of Russians in any country outside Russia.⁴⁸ Discussion about this topic is highly sensitive because of the Soviet legacy of the sizeable Russian population in Latvia, with Russian resentment towards the titular nationality creating tensions surrounding issues of citizenship and Latvian language competency, and reciprocal

⁴⁷ William Prigge, *Bearslayers: The rise and fall of the Latvian national communists*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 98-106.

⁴⁸ Latvia's governmental statistical database shows Russians comprised 26.2% of Latvia's population in 2013.

http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/Sociala/Sociala__ikgad__iedz__iedzskaitis/IS0070.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=992a0682-2c7d-4148-b242-7b48ff9fe0c2

nationalist resentment from Latvians towards Russians. Finally, Latvian historiography is riddled with the standard narrative about the Soviet period elaborated above. Therefore, it is all the more imperative that there is third-party historical writing on the subject.

iv. Latvian National Communism

My thesis is structured chronologically. Chapter One examines the formation of the national communists in the context of the power struggle in the wake of Stalin's death. I argue that 1953, rather than 1956, was the year Latvian national communism emerged. I discuss at length the authorship of the new nationality policy, the so-called 'New Course', which developed as a reaction to Stalinism and the failure of Sovietisation. I argue that it was not only the nationality policy of Minister of Internal Affairs Lavrentii Beria, but that Khrushchev was heavily involved in the policy's formulation. Beria and Khrushchev attempted to exploit the untapped potential of the long-dormant *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation) policy. This chapter questions how this revived nationality policy affected Latvia and culminated in the June 1953 Latvian Party plenum. Furthermore, I show how the national communists made political capital out of the leadership contest between Beria and Khrushchev. At the June 1953 plenum, national communists emerged to castigate Russian dominance of the Party. I argue that although *korenizatsiia* began to spiral out of control in summer 1953, as in the 1930s, forcing the authorities to re-impose some controls, the 'New Course' in Latvia endured beyond 1953, despite its official suspension.

Chapters Two and Three focus on the period between 1953 and 1959. I investigate the controversial legislation the national communists enacted, with an evaluation of each initiative's implementation. These chapters are divided between the activities of the national communists during their rise between 1956 and 1957 in Chapter Two, and their undertakings once they were in control of their Latvian leadership between 1958 and early 1959, including resistance to diktats from Moscow in Chapter Three. Chapter Two analyses the composition and *modus operandi* of the national communists. I make the case in Chapter Two for the national communists to be considered a definite faction within the Latvian Party leadership, contrary to Latvian historiography. After defeating Beria, Khrushchev faced a new power struggle with the

other members of Stalin's inner circle. At the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, he accelerated de-Stalinisation by denouncing Stalin's cult of personality and ushering in the Thaw in an effort to outmanoeuvre his Stalinist opponents. I also advance the idea that the Thaw initiated by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress empowered and inspired the national communists. In Chapter Two, I argue that the national communists opportunistically took advantage of Khrushchev's Thaw and used it to further their aims. I find that the Congress offered the national communists the necessary Leninist ideological armour to initiate their own reform programme. The limited liberalisation provided by Khrushchev's Thaw allowed the national communists to conduct their own concurrent 'Latvian Thaw', encouraging a resurgence of Latvian cultural identity including the release of previously banned works from the interwar period and public support for environmental concerns. In Chapter Two, I examine and evaluate national communist policies before their political dominance of the Latvian Party. These included cultural policy, media campaigns, the language law, which required knowledge of Latvian for Party, government functionaries and service sector personnel, and the imposition of regulations restricting immigration to protect Riga from further influxes of Russians.

Chapter Three (1958-1959) details the continued political rise of the national communists and their takeover of the Party following the January 1958 ouster of the Russian Second Secretary installed by Moscow. In this chapter, I argue that Khrushchev's 1957 *sovmarkhoz* (Regional Economic Council) reforms encouraged the national communists to develop their own economic policy. Their central aims were the rebalancing of the economy towards the domestic market and consumer goods production, while limiting the growth of industries requiring large inputs of external labour. I argue that national communist economic plans were elaborated in a controversial research plan created by national communist Pauls Dzērve, the existence of which has been repeatedly denied. I evaluate the impact of national communist economic policy against claims by their opponents that they intended to isolate Latvia. In Chapter Three, I examine how the national communists, at their zenith, emboldened by the Thaw and control of the Party, championed resistance to Khrushchev's education reform, how a Latvian public campaign over environmental concerns defeated All-Union interests, and why national communist cadres policy encouraged the Party's 'Latvianisation'.

Subsequent chapters primarily engage in discussions about the battle between the national communists and the Stalinists grouped around Arvīds Pelše within the leadership, and the unique challenge to centre-periphery relations presented by the national communists. Chapters Four and Five examine the origins and process of the purge of the national communists from March to July 1959. From 1957, national communist policies disturbed Russian economic and political vested interests and galvanised an alliance of opposition. This opposition comprised the Soviet military based in Latvia (angered by residency restrictions and loss of housing privileges); disaffected Stalinists, Russians and Russian-Latvians in the leadership grouped around Stalinist Arvīds Pelše (because of de-Stalinisation and the national communists' political takeover and reforms); the bureaucracy (due to the Latvian language law and Latvianising cadres policy) and conservative leaders in Moscow (concerned about the national communists' nationalist programme). Yet, the national communists were enthusiastically de-Stalinising and therefore they enjoyed Khrushchev's favour. The 'loyalist' alliance reacted by developing a strategy to draw Moscow's attention to 'nationalist abuses' in Latvia through a letter-writing campaign and several high profile confrontations over Latvianisation and the dismissal of Russian personnel. Chapter Four examines how the national communists were undermined by the results of a commission sent in May 1959 to investigate charges of nationalism following the letter-writing campaign. From the perspective of conservative leaders Aleksandr Shelepin, Vladimir Semichastnyi and Mikhail Suslov in Moscow, Latvian national communism was an experiment in decentralisation and *korenizatsiia* that should never have happened. To them national communism represented a resurgence of nationalism in the republics, created enormous enmity, resistance and instability inside Latvia and in Moscow, and needed to be crushed. Historians often view Kremlin politics in monolithic terms. In Chapter Four, I show that this is inadequate, and instead present a complex web of shifting alliances that influenced Moscow's policy.

In Chapter Five, I forensically examine the circumstances that preceded the purge of the national communists in summer 1959 and seek to disprove the theory that Khrushchev ordered the purge of the national communists. Khrushchev vacillated over how to deal with the national communist affair but ultimately could not save Berklavs. Instead, the opposition alliance in

Latvia carried out the purge after the national communist faction disintegrated under pressure from Moscow. This culminated in the July 1959 plenum, in which Pelše purged Berklavs and brought the 'Latvian Thaw' to an end. Nonetheless, the national communists created a faction of sufficient strength and scope to pose one of the most far-reaching challenges to Stalinism of any Soviet republic since the 1920s.

Chapter One: The ‘New Course’ and the June 1953 Latvian Party Plenum

Joseph Stalin’s death on 5th March 1953 was the catalyst for a renegotiation of the relationship between the non-Russian Soviet Republics and central authorities in Moscow. Ambitious protégés of the late dictator scrambled for support in the periphery in the ensuing power struggle. Contenders to succeed Stalin needed to strengthen their support bases in the Union Republics if they hoped to make a successful bid for the leadership. The leadership contest was a protracted one involving the formation and breaking of alliances among the competitors. The initial leadership struggle was between Minister of the Interior Lavrentii Beria and the new First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev. Surrounded by the hostility and suspicion of his colleagues who controlled the Party and State apparatus, Beria logically decided if he were to succeed Stalin then it was necessary to replace that apparatus wholesale.⁴⁹ Beria’s strategy was to break with Stalinism and offer the republics’ communist parties a measure of control over their own affairs. In Latvia, this increase in decision-making caused the most radical reaction of any republic, particularly with regard to nationality relations. The LCP debated its new powers at the June 1953 Latvian Party Plenum, which became the first milestone on the road towards Latvian national communism.⁵⁰

For the first time since its incorporation into the USSR, national elites were able to represent Latvian interests. Gerhard Simon suggests it was this generation of non-Russian elites who first contributed to the Soviet system’s destabilisation, in part owing to protectionist policies in their republics.⁵¹ Historians consider Beria’s nationality policy a leading factor, but due to insufficient case studies on individual republics, we barely understand how the power struggle played out in the periphery. Gerhard Simon and Jeremy Smith have considered the general effects of Beria’s changes in central nationality policy on the republics, but only in brief

⁴⁹ Yevgenii Zhirnov, ‘Rokovaia oshibka Berii’, *Kommersant*’-*Vlast*’, 26th May 2008.

⁵⁰ Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml’*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008), 259-60; Apine, ‘Disidentisms Latvijā’, 54.

⁵¹ Gerhard Simon, ‘Entkolonisierung in der Sowjetunion. Die neuen nationalen Eliten in den sowjetunion Unionsrepubliken seit den 1950-er Jahren’, in Florian Anton and Leonid Luks (eds.), *Deutschland, Russland und das Baltikum*, (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 277.

articles. Russian language specialists on the Baltic Republics Elena Zubkova and Tynu Tannberg make detailed contributions, though they assess the Baltic Republics collectively. Consequently, analysis on Latvia receives but a few pages in their respective books. Moreover, Zubkova and Tannberg utilise Moscow archives exclusively, omitting crucial Latvian responses to central directives. Latvian historiography on the subject remains limited, but all publications maintain the same argument: Latvia's leaders sought to redress the ethnic power balance in Latvia permitted by Beria's so-called 'New Course' only to have these attempts thwarted a few weeks later once the immediate power struggle in the Kremlin ended. Most of the historiography excludes any mention of Khrushchev's role. This chapter offers a 'third way', demonstrating that the policy was co-authored by Khrushchev but officially associated with Beria and therefore it was temporarily discredited after Beria's fall. This chapter aims to answer the question what Latvia's role in the power struggle between Nikita Khrushchev and Lavrenti Beria's power in 1953? In Latvia, contrary to Latvian historians' assertions, the 'New Course' was merely slowed down and the basic provisions remained in force. Other historians identify the beginnings of national communism in Latvia in 1956 or 1958, but I contend that events in summer 1953 drew together those like-minded individuals who created Latvian national communism.

At the 12th CPSU Congress in 1923, Stalin identified Great Russian Chauvinism as the most serious threat to the success of the Party's nationality policy. From this point, the *korenizatsiia* policy was introduced. Primarily, it consisted of promoting representatives from Soviet Republics' titular nationalities into local government, management and the *nomenklatura* of corresponding national entities. By the mid-1930s the policy had made considerable strides towards indigenising the apparatus of the Soviet Republics to the extent it was felt the policy might have exceeded its bounds and begun to oppress Russians within the republics. The policy was quietly curbed and purges of the republics' leaderships ensued. In 1953, despite nine years inside the USSR, the Baltic Republics remained restive. Stalin's neglect of local cadres in favour of Russians in these republics compounded the problem and represented a political conundrum that any would-be successor needed to address. Despite the reversal of *korenizatsiia* 20 years previously, the weight of the republics' representation in Party

and state institutional structures ensured support from the republics was too important for any contesting candidate to ignore. Simon contends that no one could succeed Stalin without the wide support, or at least benevolent neutrality, of the periphery. Furthermore, political contenders would have to make concessions to secure that support. Therefore, non-Russian elites, who wanted a greater role in government and society, made themselves assets in the succession battle.⁵²

Beria had long held a pro-nationalities position. He most fully elaborated this at the 19th Party Congress on 5th-14th October 1952. Beria specifically designed his speech to portray himself to minority cadres as their friend. According to Charles Fairbanks, Beria alone referred to the Union Republics as ‘independent’, and as ‘nations’ on eleven occasions. Beria condemned ‘Great power chauvinism’ and ‘national oppression’, and lambasted the Tsars for ‘conducting all work in institutions in Russian’.⁵³ He emphasised the need for native languages teaching and a ‘highly developed system of higher education to ensure the training of national cadres of specialists for all spheres of the economy and culture’.⁵⁴

After Stalin’s death, Beria’s efforts to reinforce the authority of the titular nationalities at the local level dovetailed with moves to strengthen his own position at the centre.⁵⁵ Beria and the other candidates made only tentative moves in spring 1953, attempting to gauge the political environment and opponents’ potential weaknesses. In Latvia, much remained the same. As future national communist Vilis Krūmiņš wrote in his memoirs, ‘there was no doubt that changes should occur after the death of the “Great Leader”’. ‘But’, he noted, ‘change did not begin immediately’.⁵⁶ An LCP bureau resolution on 14th April demonstrates continuity with Stalin’s nationality policy. The resolution criticised the implementation of an October 1951 Education Ministry decision on language learning in the republics’ schools: ‘The educational organs and individual Party committees still do not value Russian - the exceptional meaning of

⁵² Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 228.

⁵³ Charles H. Fairbanks Jr., ‘National Cadres as a Force in the Soviet System: The Evidence of Beria’s Career, 1949-1953’, in Jeremy R. Azrael (ed.), *Soviet Nationality Policy and Practices*, (London: Praeger, 1978), 146.

⁵⁴ *Pravda*, 9th October 1952, 2.

⁵⁵ Jeremy Smith, ‘Leadership and Nationalism in the Soviet Republics 1951-1959’ in Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic (eds.) *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and government in the Soviet Union: 1953-1964*, (Oxon: Routledge/BASEES, 2011), 80.

⁵⁶ Vilis Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga k demokratii’, *Sovetskaia Latvija*, 3 (1990), 89.

the language of Lenin and Stalin for the overall development of Latvia's culture'.⁵⁷ The resolution mentioned that there were 1,553 Russian-language teachers and 1,311 Latvian-language teachers in schools, yet the complaint was about an insufficient focus on Russian despite the fact that there were more Russian instructors than Latvian. Therefore, the bureau resolved to organise training for 75 further Russian-language teachers. The resolution's language was characteristic of the late Stalin era, emphasising the primacy of Russian. Moreover, there was no attempt to challenge the decision. Instead, the bureau resolved 'to pay particular attention to teaching the Great Russian language as it is significant for raising the level of Latvian national culture'.⁵⁸ The first perceptible challenges to the Stalinist status quo on the Union level appeared in the press from April. A contributor to *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Literary Newspaper) noted that 'being diverted to Russian nationalism' was as despicable as diverting to 'local nationalism'.⁵⁹

1.1 The Memorandums and the Authorship Debate

In most of the historiography, particularly Latvian, Beria is assumed the sole author of the new nationality policy that would become known as the 'New Course'. Yet, Beria was not the only leader hoping to cultivate non-Russian support. Khrushchev's political machinations were crucial to the outcome of the contest for peripheral support. Aware of Beria's initiatives, Khrushchev sought to deflect them and make his own mark on the formulation of nationality policy. Khrushchev outlined his policy in three separate Presidium resolutions. The 'New Course' was, in some ways, similar to the process of initiating *korenizatsiia* in the 1920s, the rivalry between Beria and Khrushchev in 1953 comparable to that of Leon Trotsky and Stalin in the 1920s. On Beria's orders, the Interior Ministry (MVD) gathered materials and information on the situation in the most troublesome republics and prepared reports on each. He first circulated a memorandum about the situation in Lithuania on 8th May before presenting the first

⁵⁷ Andrejs Plakans (ed.), *Experiencing Totalitarianism: The Invasion and Occupation of Latvia by the USSR and Nazi Germany, 1939-1991: A Documentary History*, (Indiana, USA: AuthorHouse, 2007), 233-34.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 230.

of these resolutions as a note about Western Ukraine to the Presidium on 16th May.⁶⁰ The memoranda revealed unjustified deportations and repressions against ethnic groups who were not involved in anti-Soviet activity. Western Ukraine and Lithuania were dealt with first precisely because resistance movements in those regions were strongest. Latvia followed because the situation there was not nearly as pressing. According to Pavel Sudoplatov, a close associate of Beria's within the security services, 'Beria suggested the republics establish their own systems of medals and awards to build local pride. He stressed the need to encourage the spread of native cultural traditions and languages'. Sudoplatov describes how this led to some awkward moments. 'The newly appointed Minister of the Interior of Lithuania, in all innocence, forwarded to Beria a memorandum in Lithuanian, creating uproar in the secretariat since nobody could read it'.⁶¹

At this point, in May, Khrushchev became involved in the process by requesting that the CC collect information about the situation in the Baltic Republics. From this point, policy on the Baltic Republics was constructed along two lines: one emanating from the CC as directed by Khrushchev, and the other from the MVD according to Beria's designs. Beria's own report on Lithuania was not formalised as a CC resolution like the one on Western Ukraine. The document was revised over May, and on 25th May, Khrushchev received a copy. Apparently, Khrushchev was dissatisfied and the next day presented an adapted version as a resolution to the Presidium. Zubkova, however, admits that because power sharing within the collective leadership was unclear it is difficult to say whether Beria directed Khrushchev to work on the document or whether he acted on his own enthusiasm.⁶²

1.1.1 Khrushchev's role

On 8th June, Khrushchev complemented the resolution on Lithuania by circulating a draft memorandum to the Presidium on the situation in Latvia. It combined information provided by both the MVD and CC. According to Zubkova and Tannberg (historians who emphasise Khrushchev's involvement), Party Organs Department Chairman, Yevgenii Gromov, compiled

⁶⁰ Leonid Maksimenkov, 'Priznaniia Lubianskoi Marshala' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 8th August 2005; Leonid Maksimenkov, 'Neuslyshannoe preduprezhdenie' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 3rd December 2004.

⁶¹ Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness - A Soviet Spymaster*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1995), 356.

⁶² Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 323-24.

the report under Khrushchev's supervision.⁶³ On the one hand, Beria's analysis of the situation in Lithuania informed Gromov's report. On the other, however, Gromov incorporated aspects of Khrushchev's document on Lithuania from 26th May. Thus, Beria and Khrushchev, together, formulated the central tenets of the 'New Course' in their respective documents about Lithuania, and further developed it in their memorandums about Latvia and Estonia. Tannberg alleges that after the note on Lithuania, Beria was no longer involved in drafting the documents about the Baltic Republics, and that Khrushchev was solely responsible for drafting the report about Latvia.⁶⁴ Yet, this does not explain why the MVD collected its own data on Latvia. Nor does it account for it being Beria who delivered the final, collaborative version of the report to the Presidium on 12th June. Instead, Beria worked on his own appraisal of the situation in Latvia and the result was a collaborative effort.⁶⁵

In his 8th June report, Khrushchev noted that between 1950 and 1953, censors in Latvia confiscated more than 155,000 letters expressing negative opinions about the Soviet regime. Latvians complained about 'arbitrariness' and 'misuses of power', particularly religious repression and the pervasive use of the Russian language in all spheres of life.⁶⁶ In the document, Khrushchev provides examples of these abuses; interestingly among the deficient local leaders listed, there was not a single person with a Latvian surname.⁶⁷ Khrushchev's report underscored an unsettling legacy of Russian control over state institutions in Latvia. Only 8 out of 66 large industrial factory directors were Latvian and just 6 of 47 Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) directors were natives. In State Bank departments, only 20% were Latvian managers, and Latvians represented only 37% of district and city prosecutors.⁶⁸ Khrushchev explicitly criticised the overuse of Russian in Latvia in his report, noting that even in schools with Latvian

⁶³ The Party Organs Department prepared all the important decisions on national politics.

⁶⁴ Tynu Tannberg, *Politika Moskvy v respublikakh Baltii v poslevoennye gody, 1944-1956: issledovaniia i dokumenty*, (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2008), 83.

⁶⁵ Oleg Khlevniuk (ed.), *Regional'naia politika N.S. Khrushcheva: TsK KPSS i mestnie partiinie komitety 1953-1964: 'dokumenti sovetskoi istorii'* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 33-35, 'O polozhenii del v Latviiskoi SSR', 12th June 1953.

⁶⁶ Russian State Archive for Contemporary History (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii) fond 5, opis 30, delo 6, list 21-22 - hereafter RGANI f.5, op.30 (Obshchii otdel), d.6, l.21-22, 'O polozhenii del v Latviiskoi SSR', Nikita Khrushchev, 8 iunია 1953.

⁶⁷ Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 328.

⁶⁸ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.22-23.

student majorities, Russian was often the language of instruction.⁶⁹ He found similar conditions in office work in general, including all official Party and state meetings and correspondence. Khrushchev concluded that this was due to the ‘misuse of Soviet national policy’ but admitted no central responsibility, instead accusing the Latvian Party leadership of ‘serious mistakes’.⁷⁰

Though Beria initiated the ‘New Course’, Khrushchev made a substantial contribution towards the finished product. Beria provided a face for the programme while Khrushchev operated behind the scenes. Unlike his memorandum on Lithuania, which commented on religion, national personnel and language policy, Beria made no mention of economic problems (an area where Khrushchev considered himself particularly proficient). Khrushchev wrote about the dismal failure of collectivisation, which devastated Latvian agriculture. In 1952, of 1,437 *kolkhozy* (collective farms), 398 did not pay workers with money, and in 238 workers received only 500 grams of grain per workday.⁷¹ Consequently, large numbers of Latvians fled the *kolkhozy* (18,000 people fled in 1952), reminiscent of the mass flight from Soviet *kolkhozy* in 1928.⁷² As collectivisation in Latvia withered, agricultural output fell to just 77% of its 1940 level, compared to 85% for Lithuania and 88% for Estonia, while private plots accounted for 74.8% of production (excluding grain) despite 90% of farms being collectivised.⁷³ For the Presidium, these figures reinforced the failure of Sovietisation in another sphere of Latvian life.

In his report, Khrushchev did not miss the opportunity to indirectly criticise Beria as security services chief. Khrushchev began by discussing post-war guerrilla tactics in the Baltic Republics. He exposed the disquieting reality that large-scale repression of the armed resistance movement failed to achieve Sovietisation. During the decade 1945-1955, up to 12,000 ‘Forest Brothers’, organised into some 700 bands, carried out 3,000 raids on uniformed military personnel, Party cadres (especially in rural areas), buildings, and ammunition depots. According to official statistics, 1,562 Soviet personnel were killed and 560 wounded in the conflict.⁷⁴ Beria saw the armed resistance as the cause of instability within the Baltic republics, which had

⁶⁹ Beria’s reports list comparable categories and similar figures for the respective republics.

⁷⁰ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.25.

⁷¹ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.25.

⁷² RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.25.

⁷³ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 362, 369; Geoffrey Swain, ‘Deciding to Collectivise Latvian Agriculture’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55 (2003), 39.

⁷⁴ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 155.

inhibited the Sovietisation of the region. Instead, Khrushchev viewed the insurrection as a symptom of the poorly implemented Sovietisation process. He went on to explain that there was support for the resistance movement 'from some part of the population'. Khrushchev characterised these disappointing results, as he had in his 26th May document on Lithuania, as the MVD's failure. Their mistakes and misinterpretations included 'full use of punishment measures and repressions, often involving innocents'.⁷⁵ Similarly, in placing the blame on MVD personnel and tactics, Khrushchev implicitly criticised Stalinist practices. The task of combating resistance was assigned only to the security organs, which relied on repression and violence to achieve results; little attention or time was devoted to uncovering the initial causes of discontent. Khrushchev concluded that this was because the security services were formed of Russians, rather than local cadres. In February 1953, only 17.5% of Ministry of State Security (MGB) employees and 6% of its leadership were Latvians. Not a single employee in eight districts knew Latvian.⁷⁶ Khrushchev proposed a new strategy, rejecting punitive Stalinist methods and emphasising inclusive indigenous recruitment. Beria incorporated this concept within his own plan for Latvia. He was anxious to end the embarrassing partisan struggles that had blighted Soviet control over the Baltic Republics. Beria ordered the co-opting of locals into the security services, with the aim of increasing their efficiency. This represented a new strategy in the fight against the nationalist partisans, and became a pillar of Beria's new nationality policy.

On 12th June, Beria presented a final version of the report on Latvia to the Presidium, where it was adopted as a resolution. Beria launched his gambit, arguing that Russification in the Baltic Republics, but Latvia in particular, had reached damaging proportions. The 12th June resolution began by noting 'that the deficiencies uncovered in the 26th May decree in regards to Lithuania apply equally well to Latvia'.⁷⁷ The resolution made clear that Sovietisation failed because Latvia had not embraced its status in the Soviet Union. Rather than accepting the

⁷⁵ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.21.

⁷⁶ Latvian State Archives - Party Archives (Latvijas Valsts arhīvs - Partija arhīvs), fonds 101, apraksts 16, lieta 41a, lapa 104 - hereafter LVA-PA f.101 (TsK KPL), apr.16, l.41a, lp.104. Osobaia papka v biuro i sekretariata zasedanii v 1953, 'O ser'eznikh nedostatkakh v rabote MGB LSSR s kadrami', TsK KPL pervyi sekretar' Ianis Kalnberzin; 'O rabote s kadrami MGB LSSR', Latviiskii zamestitel' ministr MGB dlia kadrov V. Allabert, 2 fevralia 1953.

⁷⁷ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.28. Postanovlenie TsK KPSS, 'O polozhenii del v Latviiskoi SSR', 12 iunia 1953.

‘privilege’ of this status, nine years later thousands of Latvians were still violently resisting it. Continued armed conflict was merely a symptom of the fiasco of the Sovietisation project.⁷⁸ In admitting that the Latvian Party and State apparatus remained dominated by Russians, Beria and Khrushchev found that Latvia had Soviet structures and mechanisms, but behind that ‘Potemkin’ edifice, the Latvian people remained un-sovietised, and therefore, the republic never properly integrated into the USSR. The majority of the population considered the Soviet regime as ‘alien’ and temporary.⁷⁹ The purpose of the ‘New Course’ was to correct this situation, and the resolution provided instructions and concrete initiatives on how to do so:

The CPSU CC decides:

The LCP should quickly put an end to distortions of Soviet nationality policy [and] eliminate the hostile nationalist underground.

1. To consider the main task of the Latvian Party organisation... the preparation, cultivation and widespread advancement of Latvian cadres to leading Party, Soviet and economic work. To end the practice of selecting non-Latvian cadres as second secretaries of *raikomy* [District Committees], Vice-Chairman of People’s Deputies, Directors of *sovkhozy* [state farms], MTS and industrial enterprises, and as a rule, assign [the position] to Latvian cadres. In connection with this, release [from their jobs] *nomenklatura* who do not know the Latvian language, and put them at the CPSU CC’s disposal.
2. To stop record keeping in all Party, government and public organisations of Latvia, not in Latvian. Conduct Council of Ministers meetings and plenums of the LCP CC in Latvian.
3. The LCP CC is to strengthen political and explanatory work among the population... carrying it out in their native language.⁸⁰

Though the wording was vague, Fairbanks describes the implications of this document as revolutionary. If strictly applied, this decree would result in thousands of Russians losing their

⁷⁸ Elena Zubkova, “‘Drugoi SSSR?’” *Osobennosti realizatsii sovetskogo proekta v respublikakh Baltii 1950-1960*, *Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia: Proceedings of the International Conference ‘Occupation Regimes in the Baltic States (1940–1990): Research results and problems’* (Riga, 2008), 682.

⁷⁹ Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml’*, 326.

⁸⁰ RGANI f. 5, op.30, d.6. 1.28-29.

positions in Latvia. In cases where Russians remained, the rule about knowledge of Latvian assured that they were Russians who had long resided in Latvia and perhaps joined the local Party organisation, rather than those sent from the centre on a 'tour of duty'. Thus, a powerful tool used by the central government in curbing local autonomy was wrenched away.⁸¹ This resolution represented the final stage in the development of the 'New Course' and combined Khrushchev and Beria's approaches to national policy. Khrushchev and Beria had to be capable of cooperation in this period of fluid alliances. In the context of the memoranda on nationality policy, this was a process of review and adjustment to achieve a compromise for the final Presidium resolution.⁸²

The 12th June Presidium resolution, as a final product, contained some significant differences from Beria's original memorandum. In content and style, it was more reminiscent of an official document, with a summary of the situation and the appropriate measures needed to rectify complications in Latvia. According to Zubkova, Khrushchev revised Beria's content to 'fit into the broader political context and receive the necessary ideological shell'.⁸³ In other words, Khrushchev provided a theoretical, Marxist-Leninist structure for the information Beria collected, presenting the 'New Course' as a project that was ideologically sound. Therefore, Beria only *appeared* to have directly created the conditions for what transpired in Latvia in summer 1953. In preparing a report, Khrushchev was responding to Beria by constructing his own nationality policy. Alternatively, it is possible that Khrushchev was 'piggybacking' on Beria's initiative, providing a way to convince the Presidium of the need for fundamental changes in nationality policy. Khrushchev's biographer William Taubman asserts that 'Khrushchev not only supported Beria's nationality reforms at the time but borrowed wholesale from them'.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, we must avoid misconstruing Khrushchev's policy formulation as an outright attempt to undermine Beria. The resolution approved by the Presidium was far more a joint venture between Beria and Khrushchev than anything else.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Fairbanks, 'National Cadres', 169.

⁸² Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 324-25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁸⁴ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 249.

⁸⁵ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 228, Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 324.

In a single stroke, Beria and Khrushchev condemned Stalin's nationality policy, whilst advocating a return to the 1920s policy of indigenisation. This undertaking marked the first concerted anti-Stalinist policy since Stalin's death. It widened the powers of local authorities and the borders of acceptable cultural autonomy. The unveiling of the 'New Course' caused a furore in Latvia. This was nothing short of a volte-face by a government that had deliberately dispatched large numbers of Russians to run the Party and state administration (due to a shortage of suitable Latvian cadres) and was now recalling them specifically so indigenous cadres could take their place. This became a catalyst for social complications between Latvians and migrant Slavs. In his memoirs, Berklavs recalled the initial reaction within the LCP: 'it was so unusual and unexpected. It caused a shock in both Moscow and the national republics. However, the decision was made, and nobody argued with the Party'.⁸⁶

1.1.2 Beria's aims

For his part, Beria intended the 'New Course' to encourage a moderate renationalisation of the Party, reducing the most glaring indications of external control. The 'New Course' permitted the republics' parties to take account of local characteristics in carrying out their policies, in order to further Sovietisation. As Tannberg puts it, the policy encouraged the Baltic Republics to accelerate adaption to, and reconciliation with, the regime 'with their own hands'.⁸⁷ For Beria, this principle offered a way of recruiting a following within the Party elite. This was a general, impersonal principle that would generate appointees who knew they were indebted to him for their posts without his having personally chosen them.⁸⁸ Yet, there was no intention to reinforce indigenous traditions and attitudes in their own right.⁸⁹ It was, however, the objective of zealous (future national communist) Latvian officials, keen to improve the position of Latvians, to do just that.

After 12th June, the 'New Course' offered Beria, as the public face of the policy, the potential to make enormous political capital. Privately, Khrushchev had good reason to resent Beria's public imposition of the 'New Course', particularly as he must have realised it

⁸⁶ Eduards Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, (ebook: Eraksti, 2011), 83.

⁸⁷ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvā*, 104, 368-9.

⁸⁸ Fairbanks, 'National Cadres', 170-71.

⁸⁹ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 314.

threatened his control of Ukraine, where it struck directly at his powerbase. Amy Knight maintains that despite this, 'he was compelled to go along with it for the time being'.⁹⁰ Though careful to 'forget' his role in the formulation of the 'New Course' in his memoirs, Khrushchev accepted it had Presidium support: 'it so happened that Beria's position on this question was correct. Russian dominance in the leadership of non-Russian republics had to end and it coincided with the position of the CC... Everyone knew this was true' - including Khrushchev himself.⁹¹ Khrushchev even admitted limited participation: 'We made the decision that a local person should be First Secretary in each Union Republic instead of some Russian sent from Moscow'.⁹² Beria correctly assumed the Presidium would not contradict him. Convinced about the dire situation with security and titular representation in the Baltic Republics, the Soviet leadership displayed a readiness to take steps to redress the ethnic imbalance in the republics' leaderships. This is evident from the lack of resistance from Beria's Presidium colleagues and, likewise, that the Presidium swiftly formalised his initiatives as CC resolutions, bypassing the usual central debate.⁹³

1.2 The 'New Course' and the Latvian Interior Ministry

In May 1953, the 'New Course' was very much in the developmental stage. Without a resolution from the Presidium, Beria could not enact substantial reform within the republics. He could, however, reorganise his personal preserve, the MVD, to implement the principles of the 'New Course' without Presidium approval. In late May, Beria personally implemented rapid and far-reaching changes to the Latvian Security Services in advance of the Presidium resolution.

As an area of widespread opposition to Sovietisation, Latvia contained heavy concentrations of Soviet security forces and personnel. Under Stalin, this caused the number of non-indigenous People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) officers to swell to the

⁹⁰ Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 190.

⁹¹ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), 330; Tannberg, *Politika Moskvu*, 83.

⁹² Sergei Khrushchev (ed.), *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Volume 2 Reformer 1945-1964*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 189.

⁹³ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 228; Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 320.

extent that the personnel department hired an interpreter because it only employed two Latvians.⁹⁴ Beria saw the importance of rebalancing the composition of the security services as part of his campaign for support in the periphery and to end the struggle between the predominantly Russian Soviet security forces and nationalist partisans. Therefore, on 11th June 1953, Beria issued order No.00355, noting that ‘crude mistakes occurred in cadres preparation for the Latvian MVD with respect to Leninist-Stalinist policy’.⁹⁵ Beria blamed these mistakes on the shortage of Latvian cadres in his ranks: ‘[We failed] to create operatives of Latvian nationality. The existing police school in Riga is made up, mostly, of citizens from the USSR’s central regions, instruction takes place in Russian, and there are no learning materials in Latvian. Consequently, there are very few Latvians working in the Latvian MVD’.⁹⁶ Beria was ordering the ‘Latvianisation’ of the security services. In summer 1953, only 5% of leading cadres were Latvians; just 4 of 56 regional unit chiefs were Latvians; 31% of militia (police) were Latvians but they only occupied 17% of leading positions.⁹⁷ Overall, indigenous Latvian representation comprised just 15% in 1953.⁹⁸ Incredibly, this percentage represented a slight *decline* from 16.5% in 1945.⁹⁹ On 19th June, Latvian Interior Minister Ivan Zujāns reported to Latvian First Secretary Jānis Kalnberziņš about the inclusion of Latvians in the MVD: ‘In order to guarantee that the Latvian MVD have operational and supervisory functionaries from the titular nation, two schools have been created in Riga... Training in the schools will take place in the Latvian language... with an annual intake of 550 and all places reserved for Latvians’. Zujāns noted ‘considerable difficulties with organising teaching in Latvian’, and requested help in supplying Latvian lecturers for the new school.¹⁰⁰

Beria’s personal intervention had a profound and immediate effect on the security services. He personally ordered 11 Russians back to Moscow, and according to MVD Cadres Department Deputy Head Burbo, Beria directly ordered a thorough replacement of personnel

⁹⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.59. Stenogramma 6-ia TsK KPL plenuma, 22-23 iunija 1953.

⁹⁵ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvj*, 90-91.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.61, 65, 70, 71. Stenogramma 6-ia TsK KPL plenuma, 22-23 iunija 1953.

⁹⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10a, lp.6. Protokoly plenuma TsK KPL, 22-23 iunija 1953.

⁹⁹ Russian State Archive for Social-Political History (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii) hereafter RGASPI f.600 (VKP(b) Orgbiuro dlja Latvii), op.1, d.2, l.78-79. Sostav organov bezopasnosti.

¹⁰⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.99, lp.44-46.

and issued a stern warning: 'If even one Russian surname remains on the lists, you will be arrested and prosecuted for distortion of Party policy'.¹⁰¹ The ethnic Russian, Ivan Mitrofanovich Ivanov, himself later removed as Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs by Beria and sent to Moscow *oblast* (Regional) Police Department, specified his orders as to 'replace all governing bodies of the Interior Ministry, including the police, with employees of Latvian nationality, and transfer all Russian leaders to lower positions'.¹⁰²

The Latvian MVD swiftly implemented the fledgling 'New Course'. One letter reported that at 'the direction of Comrade Beria, the Latvian MVD is now solidly replacing... not only leading, but rank and file employees who are not Latvians'.¹⁰³ The results were remarkable; within days of the June LCP plenum Latvians replaced nearly all senior officials. Of the 17 department heads, 16 were replaced, and 51 of 56 city and district chiefs were deposed. In all 232 officers lost their positions.¹⁰⁴ Attitudes inside the MVD changed as suddenly as its officers. In one example, Department Head Korshunov gave instructions to one of his employees, in Latvian. When the employee replied that he could not understand, Korshunov rebuked him: 'You have been living in Latvia for 12 years, eat Latvian bread, and you do not know how to speak in Latvian!'¹⁰⁵ Inflammatory statements were recorded by former Interior Minister Nikolai Kovalchuk, who perhaps recalling his native Poland, stated at a meeting of MVD operatives that 'the imperial government pursued a national policy on the periphery of Russia, that was ostensibly more flexible than our Party', and along with Police Chief Krastiņš, referred to Russians as 'occupiers of Latvia'.¹⁰⁶

Later, at the July LCP plenum, future national communist Indriķis Pinksis revealed an extraordinary practice established during the 'New Course' under Beria. When appointing personnel within the apparatus, the decision was not the Party organs but the MVD's. Pinksis

¹⁰¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.99, lp.57. Stenogramma zakrytogo zasedaniia Latviiskoi MVD partii organizatsii obsudit' postanovlenie TsK KPSS, 7 iiulia 1953.

¹⁰² RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.45. Pis'mo v Suslov ot byvshego zamestitel' ministra vnutrennikh del Ivan Ivanov, 7 iiulia 1953.

¹⁰³ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.53, Anonymous letter to Georgii Malenkov, Beria and Khrushchev, 13th July 1953.

¹⁰⁴ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.6, l.73. Pis'mo ot Mikhail Polekhin, Zaveduiushchii Baltiiskogo sektora otdel partiinykh organov k Khrushchevu obsuzhdeniia iiunia 1953 plenum.

¹⁰⁵ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.6, l.72.

¹⁰⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.99, lp.58. Zasedanie partorganizatsii Latviiskogo MVD obsudit' rezoluiutsiiu TsK KPSS, 7 iiulia 1953.

said that ‘to Party committee requests for employees, the MVD would decide: “unusable” or “undesirable”’.¹⁰⁷ Having the final say in any recruitment or removal of Party and government personnel reflected the extraordinary role of the security organs’ in society. By usurping Party control over the final decision for apparatchiks, the MVD could shape the Party, and this gave Beria ‘Stalinesque’ powers to promote his supporters within the republics. It appears Beria left nothing to chance in Latvia; according to Krūmiņš, Beria personally secretly visited the MVD headquarters in Riga in June 1953 without the knowledge of the Latvian leadership.¹⁰⁸ Presumably, Beria wanted to directly oversee the implementation of his resolution and the MVD’s restructuring.

1.3 The ‘New Course’ reaches Latvia

At the beginning of the summer, it seemed that the Party would initiate a full-scale return to *korenizatsiia*. *Kommunist*, the CC’s theoretical organ, celebrated the ‘flourishing’ and continued development of ‘the national character of all the USSR’s socialist nations’. There was no mention of a ‘merger’ or even of ‘drawing together’ of nations. Instead, the media dutifully adopted the new line and encouraged the ‘diligent advancement and promotion of local cadres, who know their peoples’ languages, lifestyles, and traditions’.¹⁰⁹ June 1953 represented the first hints of de-Stalinisation as a pillar of Stalinist doctrine was dismantled.

Several Latvian leaders (First Secretary Kalnbērziņš, Council of Ministers Chairman Vilis Lācis and Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Chairman Kārlis Ozoliņš) were present at the 12th June Presidium meeting for the decision on Latvia.¹¹⁰ The 12th June resolution ended with an encouragement for the Latvian Party to develop the ‘New Course’ and to supervise its implementation themselves: ‘The Latvian CC [should] discuss the resolution at a CC plenum; within a month develop and submit for approval by the CPSU CC concrete measures to remedy the situation’.¹¹¹ If the Latvians were unsure how to implement the ‘New Course’, they did not have to wait long for specific instructions. When the Latvian leaders returned from Moscow, an

¹⁰⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.12, lp.28. Stenogramma 7-ia TsK KPL plenuma, 12-13 iiunia 1953.

¹⁰⁸ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 229.

¹¹⁰ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.28.

¹¹¹ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6. l.29.

aircraft carrying a note from Beria was waiting.¹¹² In this note, Beria went further than the resolution, expressly criticising the ‘chauvinistic’ character of nationality policy in Latvia. He went so far as to refer to the deportations from Latvia in 1941 and 1949 as ‘terrible ills’ and even referred to the number of deportees (which he would have known because he personally organised the June 1941 deportations as Minister of Internal Affairs), evidently attempting to demonstrate his sympathy towards the Latvians. Beria ordered that all First *and* Second Secretaries (including at the city and district levels) and directors of all industrial enterprises and associations be persons of Latvian nationality. Furthermore, Beria required that officials immediately translate all paperwork into Latvian.¹¹³ Beria similarly stated that it was unacceptable that instructors at Latvia State University (LSU) taught 85 courses only in Russian.¹¹⁴ Finally, he instructed that all senior officials who did not speak Latvian, be sent to Moscow within two to four weeks. The note instructed the LCP to immediately hold a plenum to discuss these issues.¹¹⁵ To ensure his orders permeated the bureaucracy, Beria sent his note to all branches of the Latvian MVD, *gorkom* (City Committee) and *raikom* first secretaries.¹¹⁶ In his memoirs, Krūmiņš aptly highlighted the extraordinary nature of Beria’s note and its rebuttal of Stalinism: ‘In my opinion, no one, even the most extreme radical today [Krūmiņš was writing in 1990 during Latvia’s ‘Third National Awakening’], conceived of the extremes Beria’s note contained’.¹¹⁷

1.3.1 Changing the rules: The second secretary

Before his note arrived in Riga, Beria was already engineering its application. The Kremlin summoned Valentin Yershov, the ethnic Russian LCP Second Secretary, to Moscow a few days before Beria’s note arrived in mid-June. Moscow appointed Vilis Krūmiņš as his

¹¹² Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 89.

¹¹³ Ibid., 89-90.

¹¹⁴ Daina Bleiere, *Eiropa ārpus Eiropas... Dzīve Latvijas PSR*, (Riga: University of Latvia, 2012), 91.

¹¹⁵ Vilis Krūmiņš, Interview with Jānis Lapsa, ‘Tas drūmais piecdesmit devītais’, *Karogs*, 9 (1988), 131.

¹¹⁶ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 89.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Krūmiņš maintains that Beria’s note was removed from the archives and surmises it was returned to Moscow.

replacement.¹¹⁸ This political manoeuvre deliberately flouted the practice of maintaining Russian second secretaries in the republics to act as a ‘watchdog’ or as Ilga Apine puts it, ‘Moscow’s ever-vigilant eye’.¹¹⁹ The Second Secretary monitored the activities of the First Secretary and was in charge of cadre affairs. These changes were not only applicable to Latvia. As the ‘New Course’ gained momentum, in many republics, indigenous officials supplanted Russians in the Party and state apparatuses. That summer all three Baltic republics replaced their Russian second secretaries with native Balts.¹²⁰

There is some confusion among historians regarding Krūmiņš’s promotion to Second Secretary. At the June plenum, Yershov was not present because Krūmiņš attests he left for Moscow before the plenum began. On the first day of the plenum, Krūmiņš was introduced as a CC Secretary, but, at the end of the second day, 23rd June, Kalnbērziņš announced that Yershov needed to be replaced. He proposed a vote for the position of Second Secretary, suggesting Krūmiņš’s candidacy to the plenum, who obediently and unanimously elected him.¹²¹ Kalnbērziņš’s words support Krūmiņš’s assertion that Beria summoned Yershov so that Krūmiņš could replace him from early June. As usual, the plenum merely formalised Krūmiņš’s appointment. Prigge offers a dissenting voice, arguing that Krūmiņš did not become Second Secretary in 1953. Prigge cites his 2003 interviews with Berklavs in which Berklavs insisted that Krūmiņš was only Second Secretary once, in 1958. Prigge accepts that Krūmiņš held the role in 1954 (which contradicts Berklavs’s assertion), citing a plenum in which Krūmiņš was elected to the post. However, this was part of the routine of annually rubber-stamping the re-election of the leadership. Kalnbērziņš was re-elected in the same manner just before Krūmiņš and Peļše followed him.¹²² Regardless, Prigge downplays the importance of Krūmiņš’s elevation to Second Secretary. He believes that Krūmiņš held the role in a caretaker capacity:

¹¹⁸ Krūmiņš appointment was a radical one because he had only joined the Party in 1942 and had no prior connection with the Soviet Union or LCP before 1940. The ardent Stalinist Arvīds Peļše was passed over for promotion, despite being the senior secretary on the Latvian bureau and an apparatchik who had spent the entire interwar period in the USSR. Evidently, Beria insisted upon a representative of indigenous Latvia, not one of the Russified Latvians imported from the RSFSR. LVA-PA f.15500 (personnel files of *nomenklatura*), apr.2, l.1682, Vilis Karlovich Krūmiņš personnel file; LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.9386 Arvīds Janovich Peļše personnel file.

¹¹⁹ Ilga Apine, ‘Latvija un padomju nacionālā politika’, *Latvijas Vēsture*, 15 (1994), 42.

¹²⁰ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 229.

¹²¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.37.

¹²² LVA-PA f.101, apr.17, l.12, lp.2. Stenogramma 1-i TsK KPL plenuma, 11 fevralia 1954.

‘Krūmiņš was Second Secretary in name only and all understood he would not have the power of a Second Secretary and that as soon as a suitable Russian replacement was found, Krūmiņš would step down from the post... his nomination was nothing more than a formality’.¹²³ Though providing useful insight into the period from a central figure, the interviews between Prigge and Berklavs were conducted when the latter was 89 years old, just 13 months before his death. I consider that the role carried more weight than Prigge, and in any case, it had enormous symbolic significance - all three of the previous second secretaries between 1944 and 1953 - Ivan Lebedev, Fedor Titov and Yershov were Russians and after Krūmiņš’s promotion all three CC secretaries were Latvians (the others being Kalnbērziņš and Pelše). In the literature, Krūmiņš’s promotion is cited as the primary achievement of the ‘New Course’ and the first inroad made by national communism.¹²⁴ Krūmiņš often had to travel to Moscow to visit the Party Organs Department’s Baltic Sector.¹²⁵ Krūmiņš’s attendance at these meetings indicates he was in full control of his office, or it could mean that he was being kept on a tight leash. Either way his appointment was no formality. Moreover, it is unlikely that Krūmiņš would have been allowed to remain in an ‘acting’ capacity in such a prominent position for long, and yet he remained Second Secretary until January 1956.

1.4 The June 1953 Latvian Party Plenum

Scarcely ten days after *korenizatsiia* was revived at the 12th June Presidium meeting, the LCP held its 6th plenum on 22nd-23rd June. There are a few points worth noting about the circumstances of this plenum. Firstly, it commenced just five days after the first anti-Soviet uprising in Eastern Europe. We can surmise both the wrath of the German populace and Moscow’s heavy-handed response was in the minds of some Latvian leaders after Soviet tanks rescued the GDR government. Secondly, the plenum closed on the evening of the most important event in the Latvian cultural calendar, the pagan festival of ‘*Jāņi*’ or ‘*Līgo*’, which celebrates the summer solstice; on this occasion the Latvian leadership celebrated by utilising

¹²³ William Prigge, ‘Power, Popular Opinion, and the Latvian National Communists’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 45 (2014), 13 footnote 3 (hereafter fn.3).

¹²⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 132; Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 229.

¹²⁵ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

their newly granted powers to promote Latvian national interests for the first time since incorporation into the USSR. Finally, during this meeting, one by one, the Latvian leadership vociferously denounced Russification in Latvia, which was unthinkable only three months earlier.

One of the most incredible aspects of this plenum and representative of the atmosphere created by the ‘New Course’ was that 26 of the 36 speeches at the plenum were given in Latvian.¹²⁶ Kalnbērziņš admitted it was a deliberate decision to hold the plenum in Latvian to demonstrate that almost everyone in the leadership spoke Latvian at a high level.¹²⁷ Speakers usually made speeches only in Russian and therefore this simple yet bold act did not go unnoticed. Ivanov complained later that he could not remember ‘all the details of the plenum because it was in Latvian and only those with headphones could listen to the translation’ because ‘they were not provided to all’.¹²⁸ This perhaps accounts for the silence of the Russian-dominated CC during the plenum. Not only were its members resentful and dumbfounded by the Latvians’ hostility (Ivanov describes the presentations as making ‘a painful impression on the audience’), they were unable to understand many speeches.¹²⁹

First Secretary Kalnbērziņš opened the plenum of 108 members of Latvia’s leadership.¹³⁰ According to Krūmiņš, Kalnbērziņš constructed his report to the plenum ‘in accordance with the basic provisions received in the documents from Moscow’.¹³¹ His speech made two points very clear: failure to promote local cadres to leading positions in the Party would result in dismissal, and that Russian officials’ lack of local cultural knowledge alienated Latvians. He said: ‘The Latvian CC... coarsely overstepped Soviet nationality policy principles in the training of cadres and in their selection for leading work. The result of this harmful practice is that among the republic’s leading cadres the majority of officials have not mastered Latvian and poorly understand local conditions’.¹³² Kalnbērziņš provided examples of ‘serious shortcomings’ in ideological work, attacking the fact that ‘in many enterprises and *kolkhozy* all agitation, work

¹²⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10.

¹²⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.8, lp.203. Stenogramma 6-ia TsK KPL plenuma, 22-23 iiunia 1953.

¹²⁸ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.45.

¹²⁹ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.45.

¹³⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.1.

¹³¹ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

¹³² http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm.

with the masses and meetings happen in Russian... In Riga only 1/3 of lectures and speeches are read in Latvian'. Latvians were not enthusiastically participating in Party work, primarily because it was in Russian. He concluded his point by explaining the Presidium's opinion that all these factors undermined support for the Party and aided the nationalist partisans: 'The use of Russian in Party and soviet offices and social organisations, weakens the links between state power and the masses... it elicits justifiable national grievances'.¹³³ Kalnbērziņš's counterpart in the government, Council of Ministers Chairman Lācis, agreed with Kalnbērziņš, declaring that the Latvian population was unimpressed with the current state of affairs. 'This situation', Lācis said, 'is without a doubt the reason for the complaints and dissatisfaction we have earned from the people'.¹³⁴ The Party saw the opportunity to increase its dismal popularity through the 'New Course' and attempt to improve its connection to the people.¹³⁵

Kalnbērziņš did not outright state that many of the republic's problems were caused by a lack of indigenous cadres but he alluded to that fact. He noted that Latvians were a definite minority in the Party hierarchy, listing an array of statistics to illustrate his point. Latvians accounted for only 47.2% of *raikom* and *gorkom* secretaries, 42% of the CC (less than half of those addressed in this closed plenum accessible only to CC members), 38.9% of the Komsomol and 43.9% of the Council of Ministers, and therefore 'the Council of Ministers cares little about the nomination of local cadres'.¹³⁶ Kalnbērziņš went on to explain the nature of *nomenklatura* promotions within the Party, 'Numerous Party, Soviet and economic executives', he said, 'basing their actions on false vigilance expressed their distrust of local cadres and for leading positions picked mostly non-Latvians'.¹³⁷ Kalnbērziņš was primarily referring to the Stalinist atmosphere, which maligned Latvians within the Party because of their suspect biographies as members of organisations in bourgeois Latvia. This was the reason the Ministry of Education delayed the certification of more than 600 teachers and the agricultural academy drew up a list of 60 teachers for dismissal on political grounds.¹³⁸ It was also why the Latvian share of the

¹³³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10a, lp.6-15.

¹³⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.8, lp.96.

¹³⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.132-33.

¹³⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.59.

¹³⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.46.

¹³⁸ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.47. Pis'mo ot Kalnbērziņš v Khrushchevu, 'O vneocherednom plenumе TsK KPL', 27 iunija 1953.

nomenklatura dropped from around 70% in 1945 to approximately 30% by 1953.¹³⁹ Kalnbērziņš chose his words carefully and did not use the phrase ‘Russification’ but he certainly implied it. For example when talking about Latgale (Eastern Latvia), he remarked that there was an ‘established erroneous and harmful view that if everyone is fluent in Russian then only newcomers [from Russia] can work there’.¹⁴⁰ Agricultural Secretary Aleksandr Nikonov, a native of Latgale, confirmed this, agreeing that ‘the main mistake is that Latgale is considered a Russian region. The *raikom* secretaries and Propaganda Departments heads who know Latgalian or Latvian can be counted on the fingers of one hand’.¹⁴¹ In response, Kalnbērziņš said ‘the LCP is outlining measures to return cadres who previously worked in Latgale, who are familiar with local conditions and customs, to leading positions’.¹⁴²

In an extraordinary move, which resembled elements of Khrushchev’s Secret Speech three years later, Kalnbērziņš revealed to the plenum the atrocities committed by the NKVD. He reported that in the post-war years the NKVD repressed at least 118,873 people in Latvia. At least 72,850 people were arrested and deported, 43,702 imprisoned, and 2,321 were killed.¹⁴³ Incredibly, Kalnbērziņš implied mistakes were made on the part of Soviet security services, saying that the repressions were not only of ‘enemies, bandits and other state criminals, but of innocent Latvians’.¹⁴⁴ The usually obsequious Kalnbērziņš acquired this brazenness by example. In his 8th June note, Khrushchev quoted the same total (almost 119,000 people) and mentioned that unfortunately the security services had suppressed some innocent people.¹⁴⁵ Beria had likewise lamented the repressions in his special note to Latvia. Both are significant because Kalnbērziņš, or anyone else for that matter, could not have discussed this subject even within the Party during Stalin’s rule.¹⁴⁶ Open discussions about the innocent casualties of an overzealous security force drew a stark dividing line between the Stalin and post-Stalin eras.

Other Latvian Party leaders followed Kalnbērziņš’s example in their criticism and self-criticism: they remained strictly within the sphere of promoting the Latvian language and

¹³⁹ Apine, ‘Vai Latvijā’, 4; Egīls Zirnis, ‘Latviskā sociālisma gals’, *Diena*, 5th July 2009.

¹⁴⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.18.

¹⁴¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.97.

¹⁴² LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.18.

¹⁴³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.7.

¹⁴⁴ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.45.

¹⁴⁵ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.20.

¹⁴⁶ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.21.

measures to combat insufficient indigenisation. There was only one specific mention of Russification, although many hinted at it, and there was no discussion about reversing migration. Instead, Latvia's leaders castigated Russians for their lack of proficiency in Latvian, their chauvinistic attitude towards the Latvian language and the weak representation of Latvian cadres in the Party hierarchy. In his speech, Lācis unleashed a withering attack on Russian chauvinism. Lācis condemned the use of Russian: '[Through] political short-sightedness in the Justice Ministry... the condition was created that not one of the five people's judges understands Latvian or can hold court sessions or review materials in Latvian'. Lācis referred to this as 'a king-of-the-mountain attitude'. He gave the example of Riga People's Education Section Chief Yevgenii Ronis. Lācis said, 'Ronis began by prohibiting office work in Latvian... later, Ronis openly declared that it was time for Riga to go over completely to Russian'. Lācis implicitly blamed the persistent use of Russian on the pervasive fear of Stalinism. He said that 'responsible and leading figures of the Party who show excessive fear of the so-called "shadows of the past" demonstrate too much timidity and insecurity in the placement of Latvian cadres'.¹⁴⁷

1.4.1 Unacceptable biographies

Lācis went on to make a controversial argument against the current system, which penalised a person because of their family's record in pre-Soviet Latvia:

We have cadres who continue to be governed by *curricula vitae*, which are fifteen or twenty years old and completely ignore what citizens did in the Soviet years. *Aizsargi* ['defenders' interwar paramilitary organisation], Boy Scouts, served in the Legion, such words act like a scarecrow, hanging over their whole life... What were the employment conditions in bourgeois Latvia? One could not stay in a job if he did not join an organisation.¹⁴⁸

Through the 'New Course' Beria repudiated this policy, turning the Stalinist system on its head. Ivanov summarised Latvian sentiment on this matter in a letter to Mikhail Suslov, 'organisations and institutions blindly guided by the personal data of 15 years ago, found fault

¹⁴⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.96-97.

¹⁴⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.97-98.

with each misdemeanour in the past, looked at who the grandfather and grandmother was and were not interested in the worker at the present time'.¹⁴⁹

Latvian cadres who were war veterans and best placed to run the republic because of their knowledge of local conditions were excluded. Before 1953, Latvians dominated only lower *nomenklatura* positions, the *ispolkom* (Executive Committee) and *raispolkom* (District Executive Committee) of villages and districts especially in rural areas. Latvians generally filled roles in science and (niche) culture, art, education (school directors), agriculture (*kolkhoz* chairmen). In contrast, directors of major factories, chief engineers, managers and cadre secretaries of Party organisations in enterprises constituted an absolute majority of Russians. According to Apine, 'whole industries, particularly the management of industry, security organs, diplomatic service, railways, Party instructors, military cadres, construction, commerce and the navy were purified of Latvians'.¹⁵⁰ The displacement of Latvian cadres to rural committees led to the creation of a more independent *nomenklatura*. These peripheral districts became the eventual support base for national communism.

A dramatic case in neighbouring Lithuania demonstrates Beria's personal intervention in the biographical matter. After the MGB and MVD were merged in March 1953, the Russian MGB Chief Dmitrii Yefrimov was made deputy to Lithuanian former MVD Chief Jonas Vildžiūnas. Under normal circumstances, the Russian could have expected to head the new unit. Vildžiūnas had been sidelined from police work in the 1940s because his brother resided in the United States, being considered unsuitable for such service according to the canons of Stalinist eligibility. In his interview with Beria upon his new appointment, Beria supposedly answered Vildžiūnas's mention of his American brother with: 'We will discuss that when we decide to appoint *him* minister'.¹⁵¹ At the July 1953 CPSU CC plenum Lithuanian First Secretary Antanas Sniečkus explained, 'Last year [1952] we made it clear that we could not put Lithuanian communists in the MGB because of all those uncles and aunts living abroad who could not be overlooked... Along came Beria, who put on a generous air and announced a new approach'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.45.

¹⁵⁰ Apine, 'Vai Latvijā', 4; Apine, 'Latvija un padomju nacionālā politika', 43.

¹⁵¹ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 133 fn.2.

¹⁵² Sergo Beria, *Beria, My Father: Inside Stalin's Kremlin*, (London: Duckworth, 2001), 366 fn.27.

Beria was in no uncertain terms throwing Stalin's rulebook out the window. Unfortunately for Vildziūnas, he was returned to lower levels of officialdom after Beria's removal.

1.4.2 The blame game

In his memoirs, Khrushchev declared that 'Beria was promoting the idea that Russian domination held sway in local areas... [Local cadres] began thundering not only against Russians but also against national cadres who would not fight against Russian "domination". This happened in many Party organisations in the republics'.¹⁵³ Khrushchev was describing precisely what had occurred during the Latvian Party plenum. There was bitter recrimination among Latvian leaders about who was to blame for the situation. Lācis blamed the Ministry of Agriculture for ignoring the bureau's directives on appointing indigenous MTS and *sovkhosy* chairmen.¹⁵⁴ Lācis singled out former minister Vācietis for allowing the situation to develop where only 5 of 31 *sovkhos* directors and 23 of 107 MTS directors were Latvians.¹⁵⁵ This was not unusual: many leaders complained in their speeches that resolutions were obstructed or improperly carried out. Interior Minister Albert Sieks gave the example of the May 1952 Council of Ministers decision to publish 15,000 copies of the Highway Code in Russian and Latvian within a month. However, over a year later the Transport Ministry had only published the rules in Russian.¹⁵⁶ Robert Ķīsis, Public Utilities Minister, accused Lācis and Kalnbērziņš 'of trying to destroy the Latvian nation' by allowing this situation to develop.¹⁵⁷

Propaganda Chief Jānis Avotiņš voiced similar concerns in his speech. Avotiņš implied that Kalnbērziņš was 'allergic' to nationalist insinuations and sided with Stalinists in the past. According to Avotiņš, Kalnbērziņš showed his colours during the purges under Stalin: 'Kalnbērziņš said it was necessary to stop discussing carrying out political work among Latvian workers in Latvian... Comrade Kalnbērziņš undoubtedly feared that a politically immature communist would call him a nationalist if he supported such ideas'.¹⁵⁸ Latvia's Party School Director, Kārlis Pugo, joined Avotiņš in criticising Kalnbērziņš. He said: 'I think [he] was very afraid to boldly promote Party workers from among the best local people. He feared higher

¹⁵³ Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Khrushchev*, 189.

¹⁵⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.24.

¹⁵⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.8, lp.95.

¹⁵⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.130.

¹⁵⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 90; LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.301-306.

¹⁵⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.167.

authorities would think... he was actively pushing local talent and would have drawn the conclusion that Latvia has local chauvinist tendencies'.¹⁵⁹ Avotiņš showed how this led to the absurd situation where Latvians spoke Russian at Party meetings. 'Ignorance of Latvian was so great', he stated, 'that during the recent session of the Riga City Soviet even Latvians, who knew their mother tongue well, delivered speeches in Russian... Even the decision of the session was not read by Comrade Straujums in Latvian, although he knows it well'.¹⁶⁰ Avotiņš used the hitherto inadmissible word 'Russification'. In discussing the mistakes of the Party, Avotiņš lambasted the CC for 'ignoring the native language... [which] undoubtedly estranges us from Latvian workers and nationalists use it as a weapon. We gave them a reason to talk about the Russification of Latvia'.¹⁶¹ There were frequent assertions at the plenum that mistakes in nationality policy were effectively a gift to the nationalist underground.

1.4.3 The speeches

Eduards Berklavs, Riga *gorkom* First Secretary, delivered the penultimate speech on 22nd June. Berklavs spoke of the need to learn both languages, fully aware that many Latvians had a good command of Russian. He couched his criticism in Kalnbērziņš's terms, noting that cadres' insufficient knowledge of Latvian (Berklavs pointed out that only 800 of Riga's 20,000 agitators worked in Latvian) meant that Party agitation was ineffective in penetrating the local population. Berklavs offered the Riga railway carriage factory as an example of how this left the Party organisation almost without Latvian members (a paltry 28 of 214).¹⁶² Moreover, he criticised migrants for their inability to learn Latvian:

We have not devoted the attention it deserves to the question of the acquisition of Russian and Latvian. Almost nine years have passed since liberation. That is enough time in which each person, if they were willing, could have acquired another language... That is why today there should no longer be a language problem.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.108.

¹⁶⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.168.

¹⁶¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.168.

¹⁶² LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.297-98.

¹⁶³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.299.

Berklavs, known for his controversial comments, did not shy away from explaining why the language problem persisted. He brazenly told the Russian-majority CC that the bureau made two resolutions on the question, 'but beyond that, nothing further has been done. The CC is not interested in the implementation of [the bureau's] decisions'.¹⁶⁴

Not every speaker at the plenum followed Kalnbērziņš's lead. Some, such as Presidium Chairman Ozoliņš simply ignored the national question. Among others, we can detect a formula in their speeches. Wavering Latvians would criticise the language or cadres situation within their domain but often conclude with an effusive point demonstrating that they were not hostile towards Russians. A useful example is Liepāja *gorkom* First Secretary Ivan Desmitnieks who complained about the situation in Liepāja with only 10 of 85 primary Party organisations run by Latvians and the locomotive plant only accepting two Latvians into the Party organisation in the previous five-year period, before praising the 'fraternal help of the Great Russian people with cadres'.¹⁶⁵

There was a minority of dissenting voices among committed Stalinists. These men had spent the interwar period in the USSR and continued to praise Russian primacy. In his speech Culture Minister Jānis Ostrovs carefully phrased his criticism of the lack of work in Latvian in factories to ultimately support Russian cadres, 'I do not want to say that we should stop the political work of Russians who do not speak Latvian. On the contrary, it is necessary to conduct political work in Russian more widely than it is today'.¹⁶⁶ Of the two leading orthodox Stalinists, Arvīds Pelše, was the more conciliatory in his speech, agreeing that Beria's resolution gave 'clear and unmistakable directives to end Soviet nationality policy perversions... in the immediate future to prepare, educate, and broadly promote Latvian cadres to leading work'.¹⁶⁷ Even Pelše, whose adversaries described him as 'a lackey of great power politics' and 'unquestioningly obedient to Moscow', admitted to personal mistakes in ideological work but attributed this to the Party's inattention to the national question.¹⁶⁸ Pelše was a cautious operator. He conveniently took ill during preparations for the June plenum, leaving Krūmiņš to

¹⁶⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.299.

¹⁶⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.45-47.

¹⁶⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.43.

¹⁶⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 83; Saunders, *Samizdat*, 432.

¹⁶⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 83; Saunders, *Samizdat*, 432; LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.80.

make arrangements, possibly in a tactical decision limit his involvement.¹⁶⁹ Pelše balanced his speech carefully, firstly agreeing that replacing cadres with Latvians and transferring institutional work into the Latvian language would be ‘on the right track’, but then asking ‘would it fundamentally improve the political situation in our republic?’ Pelše argued it would only silence ‘hostile elements [who] will have no reason to conduct anti-Russian propaganda’. Pelše’s suggestion to rectify the situation was couched in traditional Stalinist rhetoric, warning against bourgeois nationalism and stressing the need for vigilance.¹⁷⁰ On one point, Pelše made a definite stand. He refuted the popular idea, proposed in the speeches of Jānis Peive, Ozoliņš, Lācis, Desmitnieks and Ostrovs, that it was unnecessary for new cadres to have their biographical histories scrutinised, announcing to the plenum that ‘it would be completely wrong. Not one iota do we have the right to abandon the Party principle for selection. We need to know everything’.¹⁷¹ Berklavs described the performance of his future nemesis Pelše as that of ‘a chameleon suddenly changing his colours’ to adapt to the new Party line, though in a manner that would allow him to still criticise other speakers’ speeches.¹⁷²

More reactionary than Pelše’s speech was that of Jānis Bumbiers, Economics Institute Chairman and Berklavs’s’ foe. Bumbiers focused his speech on attacking Ķīsis and Avotiņš for praising the work of the ‘Young Latvians’ (a group of Latvian nationalist intellectuals who attempted to preserve Latvia’s cultural and linguistic heritage in opposition to Germanisation between the 1850s and 1880s. The unspoken comparison was with contemporary Russification and a need to take similar action). In stark contrast to the other speakers at the plenum, Bumbiers went on to say that it was completely correct that the name of one of Riga’s most famous streets, Krišjāņa Valdemāra (the Young Latvians’ leader), was changed to Gorky Street in 1953.¹⁷³

Krūmiņš’s speech was unlike that of other future national communists. In his memoirs, he offers insight as to why he moderated his speech, explaining that he ‘intuitively felt that something was wrong’. Therefore he reiterated Kalnbērziņš’s line ‘that, of course, people

¹⁶⁹ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

¹⁷⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.80.

¹⁷¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.82.

¹⁷² Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 83.

¹⁷³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.98-100.

coming to Latvia should learn Latvian' as all speakers did, but mitigated this by remarking 'at the same time we cannot lament the fact that Latvia's youth has learned Russian over the years'.¹⁷⁴ Krūmiņš suspected that the new nationality policy might be temporary: wanting to protect himself, he took a risk and went against the grain. In a 1988 interview, he revealed he was sceptical about the 'New Course' because of the deportations, believing that to be 'Beria's real "concern" for nationalities'.¹⁷⁵ In doing so, he potentially exposed himself to Beria's wrath. Moscow's emissary, Department for Party Organs Baltic Sector Head Mikhail Polekhin, who was at the plenum as Beria's representative, warned him pointedly after his speech that 'these words will cost you dearly'.¹⁷⁶

In his closing speech, Kalnbērziņš addressed some questions raised during the plenum. Kalnbērziņš defined the LCP's answer to the language question and its impact on cadres composition in uncompromising terms, 'how do we have meetings and plenary sessions if all the leading personnel do not have a command of Latvian? There is one solution - replace all personnel who do not speak Latvian. All meetings, all office work must be in Latvian'. Yet, he alluded to the possibility of non-Latvian speakers remaining in office, 'comrades who continue to work and do not speak Latvian, have to learn Latvian. No matter how difficult that may be, it needs to be overcome and Latvian must be learned'.¹⁷⁷

Discussions of hitherto unacceptable topics such as ethnic Latvians being a minority in their own Party and how to redress the balance, would inevitably lead to a resolution that discriminated against Russians. If Latvians received promotions regardless of their competency then it implied that Russians would be correspondingly downgraded through dismissals and demotions of the occupants of these posts. This became evident from the plenum's resolution, which declared an end to the practice of non-Latvians being first or second secretaries of Party organisations and government institutions. The resolution pledged to install, by law, Latvian employees as directors in soviets, MTS, and factory enterprises. Furthermore, the resolution ordered all official paperwork in Latvia's Party (including CC, plenum and bureau meetings),

¹⁷⁴ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 90.

¹⁷⁵ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 131.

¹⁷⁶ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 90.

¹⁷⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.8, lp.199.

state, and social organisations, transferred into Latvian.¹⁷⁸ The resolution was remarkably similar to that published by the Lithuanian CC's 4th plenum, complaining of 'inadequate advancement and promotion of cadres to top positions in the Party, soviets, and economy'.¹⁷⁹ Though dramatic, the Latvian Party resolution was unsurprising given the extent of Russian encroachment in the nine years since Latvia re-joined the USSR. The plenum's vociferous anti-Russian tone and overtly nationalistic resolution represented the Latvian reaction to this encroachment as soon as it became permissible. Beria may have prodded the Latvians but they were enthusiastic and required little encouragement.

The June 1953 plenum unleashed a six-year process of nativisation that ended with the July 1959 plenum. In his memoirs, Krūmiņš singled out Ķīsis's speech and the fact that most national communists deserted Berklavs in 1959. 'Amazingly,' Krūmiņš pointed out, 'it was Ķīsis who at the plenum in 1959 no less vehemently accused [everyone] of nationalism. And there were many turncoats'. Krūmiņš reflected on Berklav's performance saying that his 'speech at the plenum was much more restrained than those of his prosecutors six years later'.¹⁸⁰ Krūmiņš's words are those of a man cynically attempting to deflect accusations that he likewise abandoned Berklavs.

1.5 The 'New Course' in Action

In the wake of 12th June Presidium resolution, the results of the 'New Course' became immediately apparent because the process of removing officials began swiftly in Latvia. Polekhin arrived to monitor the situation at Beria's behest. He visited Krūmiņš and demanded 'lists of those who [you] are going to send [to Moscow]!' Krūmiņš calmly replied that there would be no lists and that only two people (perhaps one was Yershov) would leave Latvia.¹⁸¹ In his memoirs, Krūmiņš recounts how he and Agriculture Minister Nikonov (also a future national communist) called the 107 Russian MTS political department chiefs to the CC one night. Krūmiņš explains that 'people were concerned and were already hearing rumours about

¹⁷⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.1a, lp.16-20. Reshenie iun'skogo plenuma, 'O nedostatkakh v politicheskoi rabote i v rukovodstvom khoziaistvennogo i kulturnogo stroitel'stva v respublike', 23 iunia 1953.

¹⁷⁹ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 229.

¹⁸⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 90.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Beria's note'. Instead of an exam, he tested the officials by simply asking them to say 'bread' and 'good evening' in Latvian. Concluding 'that the overwhelming majority of members are trying to learn Latvian', in the morning he let them go home.¹⁸² An outraged Polekhin then came to see him. 'How is it you have no one to send? [the officials] have you for [one] night and learned the language?' he asked sardonically. Krūmiņš replied sarcastically 'yes - imagine that you've learned [Latvian]'. Furious, Polekhin stormed off to call Gromov, his boss. Gromov then called Krūmiņš demanding a response: 'The Lithuanians already sent their [officials]... what are you waiting for? This will be regarded as sabotage. You know who signed the document, you will be responsible not only to the Party', referring to Beria on both counts. Regardless of warnings from Gromov and Polekhin, Krūmiņš reiterated in his memoirs, 'all the same we did not send people to Moscow'.¹⁸³ This seems like strange behaviour from a man who would become a leading national communist. Why did Krūmiņš not compile a list? This episode took place between 12th June and 21st June so *before* the plenum. In his speech, Krūmiņš hedged his bets because he anticipated that the situation would change. His reluctance to pursue to the 'New Course' was due his anticipation of a backlash from Moscow triggered by incensed Russians.

Regardless of Krūmiņš misgivings, the 'New Course' was unleashed, and lists were drawn up. Director Vushkan of 'Skultes' farm, Saulkrasti District, compiled a list of 49 Russians for dismissal, which according to Instructor Petrov 'caused ethnic strife'.¹⁸⁴ Within days of the June plenum, there were sweeping personnel shifts within the CC with many non-Latvians dismissed. No less than five new department heads were replaced.¹⁸⁵ Future national communists moved into positions of responsibility in the Party and state hierarchies. Nikolai Bissenieks returned to head the Party Organs Department, which he previously directed between 1949 and 1951.¹⁸⁶ Very much in the spirit of the 'New Course' Voldemārs Kalpiņš became First Deputy Minister of Culture, providing a check on the Russianised Minister Jānis Ostrovs.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 131.

¹⁸³ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 90.

¹⁸⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.643, lp.126. Kritika i predlozheniia ot uchstnikov plenumov, partiinoi konferentsii i komitetov respubliki, 15 avgusta 1953.

¹⁸⁵ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 189.

¹⁸⁶ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.80, lp.29, Nikolai Yakovlevich Bissenieks personnel file.

¹⁸⁷ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.874, lp.26, Voldemārs Krishianovich Kalpiņš personnel file.

One of Krūmiņš's first acts as Second Secretary was to reorient Komsomol policy (he was Komsomol First Secretary between 1948 and 1951) towards 'support for the "core" nationality'.¹⁸⁸ Almost immediately, the Agricultural Ministry transferred all its work into Latvian.¹⁸⁹ On 25th June, the Academy of Sciences Presidium decided that all clerical work, meetings and Academy institutions must use Latvian.¹⁹⁰ On the orders of Deputy Minister Grāvītis, the Ministry for Food and Light Industry would not accept a single document in Russian.¹⁹¹

The 'New Course' was implemented in an atmosphere of optimism. Native cadres filled thousands of top and mid-level executive positions in a process that continued more subtly after Beria's arrest until the purges of 1959.¹⁹² Yet, many opposed the 'New Course'. Ivanov interpreted the immediate enthusiasm among Latvians for the 'New Course' as akin to a coup: 'the day after [the plenum], the whole population had learned their instructions and on the streets told Russians that they occupied Latvia'.¹⁹³ Paradoxically, a part of the Latvian population also treated the 'New Course' with suspicion. Elksnitis, a solicitor, concluded its purpose was to 'lift the spirits of Latvian communists, [who were] placed on the step below the Russians', and therefore, 'you can not attach much importance to the New Course, as this is a game and there will not be a radical shift'.¹⁹⁴ By this, Elksnitis meant that the effects of the 'New Course' would only be felt by Party apparatchiks and that it was an internal Party matter. Accountant Pēteris Ozoliņš's opinion was stronger, predicting that indigenisation would be counterproductive to Soviet designs:

Russification is weakening and Latvians are nominated for leading positions...

The people have endured and that creates an opinion among the masses about the weakness of Russians and reduces fear [among] Latvians. This will only

¹⁸⁸ Swain, 'Before National Communism', 1268; Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 89.

¹⁸⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.643, lp.125.

¹⁹⁰ Jānis Stradiņš, *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmija: Izselsme, Vēsture, Pārvērtības*, (Rīga, Zinātne, 1998), 223.

¹⁹¹ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.73.

¹⁹² Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 229.

¹⁹³ RGANI f.101, op.30, d.6, l.46.

¹⁹⁴ Latvian State Archives (Latvijas Valsts arhīvs) hereafter LVA f.270 (Sovet Ministrov), apr.1-s, l.872, lp.67.

strengthen nationalist spirits and increase confidence that the USSR will be defeated.¹⁹⁵

Finally, Interior Minister Zujāns noted the enthusiasm among a nationalist segment of the population that the 'New Course' would result in the 'strangulation' of the Russians.¹⁹⁶ Judging by the strained relations between Soviet authorities and the Latvian populace, under these circumstances, it is unsurprising that many Latvians were sceptical about the promise of greater representation among a leadership that was divorced from the population.

1.6 Beria's Downfall

An unforeseen consequence of Beria's initiatives was the struggle between central apparatchiks and newly promoted indigenous cadres. This was the case between Pavel Meshik, Beria's Interior Minister in Ukraine, and local Party officials. In an attempt to discredit his opponents, Meshik ordered regional MVD leaders to find compromising information about the Ukrainian leadership. It is unclear if Meshik instructions came from Beria but it was enough for Khrushchev's associate, Lviv MVD Chief Timofei Strokach, to warn Khrushchev of an imminent coup attempt by Beria in Moscow on 21st June.¹⁹⁷ Strokach informed Khrushchev that Beria intended to send special MVD divisions to Moscow.¹⁹⁸ While it is unlikely that Beria was actually preparing a coup, there were few options left to Beria by June 1953. Among his rivals, Beria had the greatest capability to seize power with his militarised and independent NKVD. This was enough to arouse the suspicions of his colleagues, who unified against him. It seems Beria sensed that his Presidium rivals would never allow him to accumulate enough support to legitimately claim the leadership; thus, his only option was to seize power. If this is accurate, Beria's strategy was probably designed to rely on the support garnered in the periphery after his

¹⁹⁵ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.872, lp.66.

¹⁹⁶ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.872, lp.67.

¹⁹⁷ Zhironov, 'Rokovaia oshibka Berii'.

¹⁹⁸ John Lowenhardt (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo*, (London: UCL Press, 1992); O. Gorchakov, 'Dokumenty general-leitenanta T.A. Strokacha o podgotovke Beriei zagovora v 1953', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 3 (1989), 166-76.

seizure of power in Moscow. Apine concurs, noting that ‘Beria was ready to do anything to gain the support of the national republics for his coup’.¹⁹⁹

To win that support he fostered anti-Russian reactions in the republics with the ‘New Course’ hoping to emerge as a non-Russian champion after the power struggle. To sweeten the deal he cooperated to decentralise the system with his contender Khrushchev, who also relied on peripheral support from his Ukrainian Party base. Together they dismantled some of the centralised bureaucracy that smothered the republics by reducing All-Union *nomenklatura* oversight, known as ‘counselling’. This reduced the number of upper level *nomenklatura* posts from 45,000 to 25,300. The republics’ leaderships benefited from the reduction, which curbed Moscow’s supervisory capabilities.²⁰⁰ According to Riekstiņš, ‘Beria understood very well that the retention of a Stalinist national policy in the USSR’s western republics could provoke wide scale destabilisation processes’, something to be avoided if he was to hold the country together after a coup.²⁰¹ Yet, there was no guarantee that this sudden and unchecked *korenizatsiia* would not have spiralled out of control given the leeway permitted to republics in interpreting and enacting the Presidium’s resolutions. When he reflected on summer 1953 six years later, Khrushchev claimed that ‘Beria was preparing a meat-grinder’.²⁰² Certainly, by July expressions of nationalism among the population and middle management within the bureaucracy threatened a major crisis in centre-republic relations.

Khrushchev sensed the danger long before and worked to isolate Beria. As Taubman puts it, what finally turned Khrushchev against Beria was the fear that ‘Beria would get him if he did not get Beria first’.²⁰³ He gathered support for his arrest by persuading individuals of Beria’s ambitions for power and playing on their fears of the ‘Marshal of Lubyanka’. In disrupting the Beria-Malenkov alliance, Khrushchev warned Premier Georgii Malenkov about Beria’s plans, persuading him that Beria was ‘getting his knives ready for us’.²⁰⁴ Consequently,

¹⁹⁹ Ilga Apine and Arnolds Zandmanis, Interview with Jānis Lapsa, ‘Tas drūmais piecdesmit devītais’, *Karogs*, 1 (1989), 119.

²⁰⁰ Tannburg, *Politika Moskvj*, 59; Khlevniuk, *Regional’naia politika*, 6.

²⁰¹ Jānis Riekstiņš, *In Defence of the Latvian Language: Against Russification, 1944-1989*, (Riga: Latvian Language Academy, 2012), 44.

²⁰² A.A. Fursenko (ed.), *Arkhivy Kremliā: Prezidium TsK KPSS: 1954-1964, Tom 1*, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 374.

²⁰³ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 249.

²⁰⁴ Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Khrushchev*, 189.

Malenkov reconsidered his position. Beria's policy was ultimately unsuccessful with the Presidium. Between March and mid-June the 'New Course' was the *raison d'être* of Beria's collaboration with Khrushchev, but in late June it was a crucial factor in creating the coalition against him.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, Beria's manoeuvres began to cause alarm among his Presidium colleagues, which Khrushchev deftly exploited.²⁰⁶ He talked of plans to normalise American relations and permit Germany's reunification. In one alleged scenario, Beria wanted to grant autonomy to the Baltic Republics as People's Democracies modelled on the East European satellites.²⁰⁷ Horrified by these plans, in a dramatic meeting on 26th June, three days after the conclusion of the Latvian plenum, the Presidium confronted Beria, denounced his actions, and arrested him.

A special CPSU CC plenum was convened between 2nd and 7th July to denounce Beria. One of Khrushchev's accusations against him was his interference 'with Party organisations in the Baltic Republics'.²⁰⁸ Khrushchev used Beria as a convenient scapegoat, heaping blame upon the imprisoned MVD Chief for permitting an overzealous and uncontrollable nationality policy. This was despite the Presidium giving its support to Beria's proposal on 12th June. Since Khrushchev benefited from this policy and repeatedly espoused a relatively pro-minority view, one might have expected him to have this aspect of the attack on Beria muted unless he was convinced of the danger it posed.²⁰⁹ At the plenum, Khrushchev omitted his role in the construction and promulgation of the 'New Course'.²¹⁰ This demonstrates Khrushchev's skill as a politician. The Party accepted that Beria was the sole initiator of the fiasco in the republics.²¹¹ Latvia's leaders were not present at the plenum but Zubkova believes they dutifully attempted to 'hush up' (*zamiat'*) Khrushchev's initiatives.²¹² Therefore, Khrushchev was successful in masking his contributions to the 'New Course' once it became convenient to denounce it as Beria's 'erroneous' policy.

²⁰⁵ Fairbanks 'National Cadres', 175.

²⁰⁶ Yoram Gorlizki, 'Party Revivalism and the Death of Stalin', *Slavic Review*, 54 (1995), 20.

²⁰⁷ Elena Zubkova, 'Review of Tynu Tannberg's *Politika Moskvyy*', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 44 (2013), 419-421.

²⁰⁸ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 230.

²⁰⁹ Fairbanks, 'National Cadres', 175.

²¹⁰ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvyy*, 175.

²¹¹ 'Iiul'skogo 1953 TsK KPSS Plenum Stenograf', *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1 (1991), 152.

²¹² Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 324.

At the plenum, speakers laid bare the nationality policy wholly attributed to Beria. Beria's aim was to sow discord and split the Soviet nationalities for his own nefarious machinations, as Khrushchev put it, 'Beria speaks under the guise of implementing Stalin's policy on nationalities, but in reality he drives a wedge between ethnic groups'. Leningrad *oblast* First Secretary Andrianov implied it was a conspiracy directed at Russians: 'Beria attempted to make other nationalities bitter, to set them against the Russian people... This is a great wrecking act'.²¹³ The Presidium annulled the resolution from 12th June but crucially did not order the republics' parties to do the same. Instead, the republics' branches were obliged to hold their own plenums and meetings in all Party organisations to join the chorus in criticising Beria.²¹⁴ This implied Khrushchev wanted the nationality policy he and Beria constructed to survive his opponent. He used it against Beria at the July CPSU CC plenum but avoided properly abrogating the 'New Course', thereby allowing it to remain in the background until he elaborated his own nationality policy in 1956, which included many aspects of the 'New Course'. In December 1953, Beria was sentenced to death for 'spreading animosity and dissent among the USSR's peoples, and particularly for undermining the friendship of the USSR's peoples with the Great Russian people'.²¹⁵ After the July plenum, Khrushchev's accusations stuck. On the rare occasion when Party members referred to Beria, he was portrayed, as Lācis put it, as having 'started to collide the Party with the people'.²¹⁶ Beria was sentenced to death at a secret trial on 23rd December 1953 and executed the same day.

Between 12th and 13th July, a united plenum of the LCP CC and Riga *gorkom* convened to discuss the results of the July CPSU CC plenum on the 'Beria conspiracy'. The July plenum in Latvia demonstrated the Latvian leadership's confusion over the official reversal of the 'New Course' by Moscow. Questions were raised about whether to uphold the June plenum decisions since Beria authorised them. Another question was what to do with the Russians that were

²¹³ D.M. Sickle (ed.), *The Beria Affair: The Secret Transcripts of the Meetings Signalling the End of Stalinism*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1992), 22.

²¹⁴ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvu*, 371-72.

²¹⁵ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 230.

²¹⁶ Fursenko, *Arkhiy Kremlia*, 374.

dismissed.²¹⁷ Neither question could be answered at the plenum with any surety. The plenum savaged Beria's attempts 'to undermine the multi-century friendship of the Great Russian people and the Latvian people'.²¹⁸ Concurrently, however, the Latvian leadership did not downplay the rhetoric of the 'New Course'. Speeches appeared contradictory, simultaneously repudiating Beria and his machinations, as in the case of Kalnbērziņš, yet calling for improvements in 'the training and rearing of national cadres who are familiar with local conditions, language, customs, culture and life of the Latvian people' and for their promotion 'to leading posts. The ties between the Party and working masses will be strengthened by conducting propaganda and political-educational work [with] the masses in their own language'.²¹⁹ Kalnbērziņš emphasised a central tenet of the 'New Course' associated with Beria. This was despite the plenum resolution pledging to halt the 'inappropriate replacement of [Party and state functionaries] who do not know Latvian, and to decide to keep records in Russian and Latvian'.²²⁰

1.7 Ethnic Discrimination?

By all appearances, the plenum was successful in its annulment of the 'New Course' but throughout July, complaints flooded Moscow and the LCP made little attempt to correct the situation. There was further confusion during a bureau discussion on 21st July. The bureau criticised the reluctance of *raikomy* and *gorkomy* to promote Latvian cadres. In Ludzas District, 'the leaders were ingrained with the misconception that working with the population, you can ignore national peculiarities, this has led to the fact that there is very little political work with Latvians in Latvian'. Only Russian newspapers were available in the *kolkhozy* despite half the workers being Latvians. Teaching at the local agricultural school was exclusively in Russian.²²¹ Bizarrely, at the same meeting there was also criticism of mistakes made in nationality policy

²¹⁷ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.186-87. Pis'mo ot Iosif Shikin, Zamestitel' zaveduiushchego otdela partiinykh organov, v Khrushchevu, 'Na obsuzhdenii reshenii plenuma TsK KPSS ot 7 iulija 1953 v Latvii, Litve i Estonii SSR', 18 iulija 1953.

²¹⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.12, lp.75.

²¹⁹ *Sovetskaia Latvija*, 15th July 1953; LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.12, lp.9.

²²⁰ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.76.

²²¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.24, lp.76. Zasedaniia KPL buiro, 'Ob itogakh obsuzhdenia na plenumakh gorkomov i raikomov KPL postanovleniia plenuma TsK KPSS o prestupnoi antipartinoi i antigosudarstvennoi deiatel'nosti Beriia', 21 iulija 1953.

such as the removal of Russian banners in Rēzekne and Jelgava and the hasty compilation of lists for the replacement of non-Latvian personnel. The bureau admitted there was ethnic discord in Latvia because the situation ‘revitalised and energised nationalist elements, and fomented ethnic hatred between the republic’s workers’. In its resolution, the bureau played this down, emphasising that ‘communists misunderstood the June plenum’s decisions’.²²² Quite simply, Latvia’s leaders did as they were bidden but were reluctant or even unwilling to interrupt the ‘New Course’, or as one letter to Moscow phrased it - ‘everything known in Riga but for some reason they are silent’.²²³ So why did Moscow tolerate this? Widmer argues that ‘even after Beria’s ouster a green light was granted on this score’. The Soviet leaders realised it was in the regime’s interests to attract reliable cadres from among the local populace although there were limits on how far this would be tolerated.²²⁴ Widmer is correct, between 1953 and 1959, greater numbers of local Latvian functionaries were appointed to posts in the middle and upper levels of the Party, state and economic hierarchies especially within the bureau.

By late July Kalnbērziņš was becoming reticent about the ‘New Course’. Writing to Khrushchev he explained his fears that ‘in some *raikomy*, *gorkomy*, ministries and departments, rushed lists of replacement workers of non-Latvian nationality were made. Too many Russian workers were told that they would be relieved from their positions and should be ready for departure’.²²⁵ According to Kalnbērziņš, Party ‘principles in cadres’ selection were not taken into account; nationality was the main reason [for Latvian promotions]’.²²⁶ This was the justification of several Latvian leaders who wished to deflect charges of nationalism. Lācis recalled the pressure: ‘directives from above, from Moscow, made us put together lists of people to release from work who were not Latvian. We were rushed by phone calls, harried, checked on - whether it was done quickly enough’.²²⁷ Latvian leaders often used the speed of implementing the ‘New Course’ to explain the ‘unanticipated’ consequences of the top-down change in nationality policy, which Moscow foisted upon them. The rapid implementation of

²²² LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.24, lp.70-71.

²²³ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.54.

²²⁴ Widmer, ‘Nationalism and Communism’, 306.

²²⁵ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.68. Pis’mo ot Kalnbērziņš v Khrushchevu, ‘O provedenii partiinikh sobranii v pervichnikh partorganizatsiakh respubliki po itogam plenuma TsK KPSS’, 29 iulia 1953.

²²⁶ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.68.

²²⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.27. Stenogramma 7-ia TsK KPL plenuma, 7-8 iulia 1959.

the plenum's decisions was a cause for complaint on the Russian side. Its swiftness indicated enthusiasm on the part of the Latvians. An anonymous letter to the Presidium explained that the 'the ink had not yet dried and the excesses had already begun. Despite the Riga *gorkom* comprising 80-85% Russian comrades, 80% of the delegates selected for the Party conference were Latvians'.²²⁸

Returning to the subject of the lists, Prigge asserts that after Yershov returned to Moscow, 'it can be surmised that the list [of names of Russians to be removed, referred to by Polekhin and Gromov] would have eventually expanded to those with pro-Russian sympathies'. 'Pelše', Prigge wrote, 'was almost certainly spared removal from power by Beria only because of the latter's arrest'.²²⁹ Prigge's claim seems unlikely. Russified Latvians were still ethnic Latvians and their expulsion would have followed the removal of thousands of Russian officials from Latvia. This would have not only hollowed out the Party but threatened it with collapse because the core indigenous strata represented only a small minority, hence the original problem. The question is whether these reputed lists of Russians to be dismissed were used but this is difficult to assess. There are numerous examples of Russians being removed. On 23rd July, Kalnbērziņš released eight regional leaders 'for work in other republics and regions'. All eight had Russian surnames.²³⁰

What was the fate of all these removed Russian officials? Budding national communist Party Control Commission (KPK) Chairman Pēteris Plēsums remarked in his June plenum speech 'do not worry about whether those who do not know Latvian will remain. Communists are sent to where they are needed'.²³¹ Krūmiņš stated that Yershov was 'given a position of no small importance in Moscow, CPSU CC Deputy Head. He recalled that Yershov was 'the most intelligent of all second secretaries sent from the centre. He constantly and consistently emphasised that he was proud to be working in a republic with such a high level of culture and

²²⁸ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.39. Pis'mo ot 'Ozolin' v Presidium, 17 iiulia 1953; RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.43-44.

²²⁹ William Prigge, 'The Latvian purges of 1959: A revision study', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 35 (2004), 229 fn.15.

²³⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.90, lp.48. Perepiska nabora i rasstanovki kadrov, 1953. Pis'mo Kalnbērziņš v Khrushchevu, 23 iiulia 1953.

²³¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.89.

traditions'.²³² This lends credence to the argument that Russians were removed not because of deficiencies in their work, but as the plenum resolution implied, simply to create room for indigenous cadres. Ousted Russians were not repressed, in Yershov's case he was even promoted.

There were, however, serious consequences attached to the process of 'Latvianisation' triggered by the 'New Course'. After Beria's arrest, the Presidium became nervous, having unleashed forces that they did not anticipate, evidenced by the unexpected level of anti-Russian sentiment at the Latvian Party plenum. The removal of the most brutal aspects of Stalinism permitted an explosion in expressions of nationalism in the most unlikely of places. In a report to Moscow, several senior Interior Ministry officials (where the 'New Course' had been in effect since May) were criticised 'for nationalistic actions... Deputy Minister Sieks writes instructions on official documents in Latvian, knowing that there will be employees implementing them who do not know Latvian'.²³³ After Beria's arrest, MVD leaders met to discuss the situation. The MVD chiefs complained that Beria's restructuring brought the fight with the nationalist partisans to a standstill. Ratov stated that 'for the last two months the MVD was inactive. Operational work was not conducted. Arrests were not carried out. On the contrary, some of those arrested for serious crimes were released from custody'. According to Ratov, Kovalchuk said this was part of a change of tactics designed to end repression of the nationalist underground.²³⁴ Zujāns confirmed this, criticising the fact that 'we were given instructions not to use weapons against the bandits'.²³⁵ Ending the worst excesses of MVD repressions was an important point in both Khrushchev and Beria's memorandums. Initially, Beria's initiatives appeared to have a counter-productive effect. Yet, the partisan war dwindled rapidly, largely due to amnesties organised by Beria. Between 3rd April and 1st June 1953, 2,481 individuals in Latvia were amnestied.²³⁶ The 'New Course' changes wrought upon the MVD continued, and by late July, the MVD's Section for Letters received numerous reports that

²³² Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 89.

²³³ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.74.

²³⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.99, lp.57.

²³⁵ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.184.

²³⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.35, lp.145. Zasedaniia biuro, 'O merakh po osvobozhdeniiu zakliuchennykh', 8 iunia 1953.

‘under Beria’s direction, the Latvian MVD hastily conducted the replacement of non-Latvian employees’.²³⁷

1.7.1 The ‘New Course’ continues unabated

Following Beria’s arrest, Khrushchev began to receive appeals and letters from concerned individuals. These concerns snowballed into an avalanche of criticism about the ‘New Course’, which poured in to Moscow from Latvia and undoubtedly contributed to Khrushchev’s decision to apply the brakes. Many letters complained that the July CPSU CC plenum denounced Beria and his nationality policy, but all the while, the ‘New Course’ persisted in Latvia. Russians felt that they were not consulted about the changes and were ignored by the Latvian leadership and abandoned by Moscow. The anonymous author, who used the pseudonym ‘Ozolin’, wanted a CC inspection team to come to Latvia to ‘control the implementation of the Presidium decision’ and remarked that the team ‘would find the time to talk with Party activists’.²³⁸ The Presidium received another anonymous letter in mid-July frantically entitled ‘If this letter reaches you!’ expressing this confusion: ‘We, communists of the periphery, do not completely understand the national policy conducted by you now’. The author of the letter reminded the Presidium that many Party workers and specialists arrived in the Baltic Republics at the behest of the Party and did not know why the Party had forgotten them. Demonstrating the mood in the workplace, the letter reported that a number of managers in different enterprises told Russians to ‘go back where you’re from, you were not asked to come’. The letter concluded by hysterically demanding ‘why now does everyone want the Latvianisation of the leadership and language???’ This is overkill’.²³⁹

After Soviet leaders reversed their official opinion on the ‘New Course’, Moscow dispatched the ever-loyal Polekhin (who confronted Krūmiņš about lists of Russians to send to Moscow but was only too keen to demonstrate his adherence to the post-Beria political line) to observe the situation in Latvia. Polekhin investigated complaints about excesses and wrote to inform Khrushchev of Latvia’s new restrictions on the use of Russian. A recurring theme was

²³⁷ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.101. Pis’mo v Khrushchevu ot latviiskogo MVD nachal’nik sektora I. Kabashkhin, ‘O pis’makh, postupivshikh v TsK KPSS ob izvrashchenii national’noi politiki v riade soiuznykh respublik’, 31 iulia 1953.

²³⁸ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.40.

²³⁹ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.53, 56.

the Latvians' volatile reaction towards the Russian language. Examples poured in from across Latvia. Gulbene *raikom* secretary Zarinia forbade personnel to talk on the telephone in Russian and told his employees who did not speak Latvian to look for another job.²⁴⁰ The director of Ventspils fish processing complex banned the airing of Russian gramophone records on the radio. There were reports about the distribution of anti-Russian slogans and leaflets.²⁴¹ Some of the most alarming examples, which reached the Presidium, reported the situation on the factory floor. Minister for Trade Kukainis ordered board meetings to be held only in Latvian, despite 80% of participants not knowing Latvian, and instructed directors to immediately replace ethnic Russians with Latvians employees.²⁴² Ivanov reported that 'those who do not know Latvian were removed from meetings'.²⁴³ According to Riga transport political department instructor Tatianchenko, at a meeting of Riga's Moscow *raikom* on 29th June, 'Secretary Pakaln proposed Latvians for leading positions, and said that from now on all decisions [and] all documents should only be in Latvian. When someone objected because no one could write in Latvian, he said it was necessary to learn Latvian, and whoever does not may leave Latvia'.²⁴⁴ It seems clear from numerous reports that the majority ethnically Russian apparatuses of Riga's *raikomy* dutifully transferred their work into Latvian. One such *raikom* Party employee, Kroshev, reported that 'now there is a great hindrance for us Russians, since everything is rearranged in Latvian, all the paperwork, without a Russian translation'.²⁴⁵ There were instances of sacking qualified Russians because of their nationality. Ivanov reported that the situation on the street was just as tense:

In some shops, if you do not know Latvian, the sellers do not pay attention [to you] and sell you the fewest goods... National animosity began to flare up increasingly every day. Work in offices and factories almost ground to a halt as

²⁴⁰ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.71, 73.

²⁴¹ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.74.

²⁴² RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, 71-73.

²⁴³ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.46.

²⁴⁴ LVA-PA f.108 (Moskovskogo raikoma Rigi), apr.16, l.1, lp.46. Protokoly 8-go partiinoi konferentsii, Moskovskogo raiona Rigi, 29-30 avgusta 1953.

²⁴⁵ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.872, lp.68.

each worker sat and waited to be fired, to see how his fate is decided, for he saw no prospects.²⁴⁶

In this remarkable comment, we see the economic impact of the ‘New Course’ by causing work stoppages.

The rampant ‘New Course’ both targeted ethnic Russians and was a defensive Latvian reaction towards perceived Russification designed to protect the Latvian language and culture. Some alluded to a programme of ethnic cleansing. ‘Even the Russian who speaks Latvian’ one anonymous letter said, ‘and lived all his life in Latvia is replaced. As they say here: “There is a campaign for the Latvians and forcing [out of] Russians”’.²⁴⁷ Another anonymous letter to the Presidium reinforced the notion that there was a distinctly ethnic flavour to the situation; it concluded, ‘now the man of Russian nationality in the Baltic Republics even conceals his nationality and gives up Russian’.²⁴⁸ Ample archival evidence illustrates the ethnically charged circumstances. Abrene District MTS Political Department Chief Cheremnikh, reported that in *kolkhoz* Kalinin, during a report in Russian, a group of farmers rose from their seats shouting: ‘Down with the Russian agitator. We do not need this report’.²⁴⁹ Reports such as these demonstrate the situation in the countryside where Latvians represented a majority. There is evidence that Latvians deliberately misinterpreted the June LCP plenum resolution in order to replace more Russians. During a discussion on the implementation of the state plan at the factory ‘Azintars’, plant workers said ‘they will not work under [the] leadership [of engineer Korotaeva] because she is Russian, and by the Latvian CC decision Latvians should replace all Russian employees’.²⁵⁰

These rumours made those in the RSFSR hesitant to migrate to Latvia. In 1953, immigration largely stopped as people adopted a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude, despite the fact that there were no recorded incidents of violence between Russians and Latvians. Party membership stagnated as a result. Between 1948 and 1952, membership grew by an average of 2,350 annually. Between September 1952 and 1954, the Latvian Party only grew by 700 members

²⁴⁶ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.46.

²⁴⁷ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.53.

²⁴⁸ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.53.

²⁴⁹ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.184-85.

²⁵⁰ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.184.

(approximately 18% of the pre-September 1952 rate).²⁵¹ This was no anomaly. Rather it was a combination of concern on the part of migrants about moving to Latvia combined with dismissals from the 'New Course'. It appears that rumours were already widespread by the time of the June plenum because in his speech Berklavs referred to the need to 'struggle against the incorrect judgments about the alleged anticipated forcible expulsion of other nationalities from Latvia'.²⁵² At the July plenum, Pinksis noted that 'some bourgeois-nationalist elements threw aside all restraint and openly said that all Russians should leave and conversations must only be in Latvian. There is evidence that Latvians who know Russian, did not converse with Russians in that language, spreading rumours that hurt the friendship of the Latvian and Russian peoples'.²⁵³ We can at trace at least one example to the beginning of the 'New Course' inside the MVD. Within the militia, being an ethnic Russian appeared grounds for dismissal. Talsi District Police Chief Yenishonok was born and raised in Latvia, spoke fluent Latvian, and had 'good knowledge of local conditions' but was dismissed. He was offered a position in the RSFSR instead. In Elejas, there were reports of Russian *kolkhoz* directors and their deputies being replaced.²⁵⁴ Similarly, in Madona District, *kolkhoz* Director Ivanov was released 'because he is Russian', and a Latvian, Travis, was appointed, who served as a captain in the Wehrmacht.²⁵⁵ Certainly, there was a degree of anti-Russian sentiment connected to the dismissal of Russians from managerial positions. Latvians viewed Russian party secretaries as haughty and arrogant because they had not learned Latvian, comparing them to Latvia's 19th Century German barons.²⁵⁶

The dismal level of indigenous participation in the Party could hardly have been surprising in 1953. In 1905 and 1917, Latvia proved fertile ground for revolutionary socialism. Several high-ranking Bolsheviks were Latvians: Deputy Chief of the *Cheka* Yakov Peters, Party Control Commission Chairman Janis Rudzutaks and Commissar for Agriculture Roberts Eiches. After the Civil War, the Latvian population's enthusiasm for socialism waned and was practically wiped out following Latvia's incorporation into the USSR and the 1941 and 1949

²⁵¹ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 359.

²⁵² LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.299.

²⁵³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.12, lp.27.

²⁵⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.643, lp.57, 125.

²⁵⁵ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.183.

²⁵⁶ Smith, 'Leadership and nationalism', 84.

deportations. In their speeches, Latvian and Muscovite Party functionaries constantly attempted to reignite Latvia's passion for socialism by referring to Latvia's strong revolutionary traditions, praising the Latvian Riflemen's role in the Russian Civil War including their position as Lenin's bodyguard. Yet, the Party was unsuccessful in this endeavour and remained very much an import in terms of manpower and structure from the RSFSR, without which it could not have functioned, especially given the raging nationalist insurgency. If the 'New Course' had continued with the full endorsement of Moscow, successfully returning tens of thousands of monolingual Russians to the RSFSR, the implication was that the Party would have required an urgent recruitment drive. The state of Latvian recruitment was dire: in Riga, between 1944 and 1953 only 2,000 Latvians were admitted to the Party as candidates, compared with 6,000 from other nationalities.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, on 1st January 1953 the Party comprised just 29.2% Latvians including the '*Latovichi*' from the RSFSR, which made the number of homegrown Latvian communists even smaller.²⁵⁸ This figure indicates the enormous task the LCP faced to create a genuinely Latvian communist party.

So ultimately, what was the specific transgression of Slavs in Latvia? What was truly unforgivable appears to have been those Russians who could not speak Latvian. A report from 29th June (compiled by future national communist Deputy Justice Minister Emīlia Veinberga) presented a thorough examination of Justice Ministry staff and their language competency. Where there were cases of a lack of proficiency in Latvian, personnel were dismissed in favour of ethnic Latvian employees. The *official* line on whether a person could keep their job can be inferred from this document. Being an ethnic Latvian such as Administration Department Instructor Valtgail, despite not having 'mastered the Latvian language', was sufficient to allow him to retain his position as the report stated 'this drawback could be eliminated in the next 5-6 months because Valtgail is energetic and capable'. Latvian-speaking Russians retained their positions. Of the four state arbiters, one, Ivanov, was Russian. It was decided he could remain because he was studying Latvian and could work 'on the large number of cases associated with

²⁵⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.10, lp.78.

²⁵⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.70; RGANI f.5, op.15, d.409, l.44.

organisations and institutions outside of our republic'.²⁵⁹ Similarly, Savelev was Russian but was allowed to retain his position because it involved transport coordination across the USSR and he was proficient in Latvian.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, when there were no Latvian cadres available it was permissible to retain Russians as in the case of engineers and other specialists within the Gulag bureaucracy.²⁶¹ Therefore, it appears that when it was useful for Russians to remain in their positions, it was language, not nationality, that was the determining factor. Yet, without specific instructions as to how to carry out the 'New Course' the results were not uniform, with differing consequences across government departments and Party organisations. Considerable hostility had generated among Latvians towards Russians since Latvia's annexation, which was manifested in the wave of Russophobic incidents that swept across Latvia in the haphazard implementation of the 'New Course'.

1.8 The Uncontrollable 'New Course'

Not only Russian officials and citizens felt it necessary to draw Moscow's attention to events in Latvia. In late July, Kalnbērziņš wrote to Khrushchev perhaps perceiving that the 'New Course' had exceeded its anticipated bounds and was slipping out of control into febrile Russophobic activity. Thus, Kalnbērziņš could become Moscow's local scapegoat, charged as a 'Beriaite' if the Party found him to have permitted the persecution of Russians, especially after continuing to promote the cause of national cadres at the 12th July LCP plenum designed to malign Beria. Kalnbērziņš described the severity of anti-Russian action. He recounted that Culture Ministry Vocational Training Chief Trinkler, announced in one meeting, 'all Russian directors and head teachers would soon be replaced by Latvians, and that Russians who didn't know Latvian, will be thrown out of Latvia'. Trinkler personally dismissed 10 Russian employees.²⁶² In early August, an embattled Kalnbērziņš tried to persuade Khrushchev that the situation was in hand. He wrote, 'no employee of the Riga *raikomy* apparatus has been released [since mid-July]. There were instances where a different job was offered to certain employees of the *raikomy*

²⁵⁹ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.914, lp.3. Doklad Emilia Veinberga, zamestitel' ministra iustitsii, 'Po ukomplektovaniuu apparata ministerstva iustitsii LSSR kadrami mestnoi natsional'nosti', 29 iunija 1953.

²⁶⁰ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.914, lp.5.

²⁶¹ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.914, lp.6.

²⁶² RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.68.

apparatus who do not know Latvian, but soon these conversations ceased and these comrades remained in place'. He refuted the claim that the CC or Riga *gorkom* advised the Riga *raikomy* on transferring paperwork into Latvian, though four *raikomy* did hold their June plenums in Latvian and translated speeches into Russian despite three having Russian majorities.²⁶³

Forty days into the 'New Course' and MVD Section Head Kabashkhin evidently concurred with Kalnbērziņš on the worsening situation in late July. His report informed Khrushchev that many letters and statements still complained of 'gross perversion in nationality policy'.²⁶⁴ Kabashkhin confirmed that 'Russians are expelled from everywhere, removed from leadership positions in ministries, enterprises, MTS, etc'.²⁶⁵ Kabashkhin even revealed rumours about the 'imminent overthrow of Soviet power and the intervention of England and the USA', as had been the case after Latvia's reincorporation into the USSR.²⁶⁶ There was talk of a revolution in the countryside.²⁶⁷ There were also pervasive rumours about the dissolution of *kolkhozy*. Peasants acted upon these assumptions: In *Viļāni and Jaunjelgava districts, farmers stopped work on kolkhozy and began to remove cows and horses from farms*.²⁶⁸ In Zilupe district, the agronomist Hermia (a former *Aizsarg*) said at a public meeting that 'Beria was the defender of the peasants'. We can see here that Beria's plan to emerge as a champion of non-Russian nationalities against the Russian-dominated centre gained some traction.²⁶⁹

1.8.1 The shadow of the deportations

From July, rumours abounded about the forced expulsion of Russians.²⁷⁰ Deportation was Russian inhabitants' greatest fear and was exacerbated by comments made by some Latvians, which indicated contempt towards Russians. One letter to Moscow demonstrated that the replacement of Russians by Latvians was happening in all spheres of life not just within the Party and state hierarchies, 'they released executives, foremen, tractor drivers, janitors and

²⁶³ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.44-45. Pis'mo ot P. Vakulenko, zamestitel' zaveduiushchego sektora, otdel partiinykh organov v TsK KPSS obshchii otdel, 14 avgusta 1953.

²⁶⁴ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.101.

²⁶⁵ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.101.

²⁶⁶ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.101; RGASPI f.600, op.1, d.23, l.1. Otchet o rabote Orgbuira dlia Latvii.

²⁶⁷ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.54.

²⁶⁸ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.74-75.

²⁶⁹ Knight, *Beria*, 186.

²⁷⁰ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.872, lp.76. Pis'mo ot Zujan v Latsis, 'O reagirovanii naseleniia na informatsionnoe soobshchenie o reshenie plenuma TsK KPSS', 11 iulija 1953.

guards from work and offered to transport them to Siberia'.²⁷¹ From comments such as this one, there is a sense that Latvians considered themselves protected by the new legislation. There was a perceptible undercurrent that Latvians were exacting revenge for the 1940s deportations of Latvians. On the farm *Kommunar* (Communard), communist Proll said that 'Russians have one week left to live in Latvia, they have nothing to do here'. In Saldus District, Ezeres MTS workers reputedly stated 'there will not be Russians in Latvia, we vote for the expulsion of Russians from Latvia'.²⁷² Leaflets addressed to the secretaries of Ventspils *gorkom* and the *ispolkom* chairman demanded 'the return of Latvians deported to Siberia; to sack all Russians and throw them out of Latvia'.²⁷³ Aneta Schultz, who lived in Ventspils, declared 'if you had seen the Russians with all their families leave. It's all happening in a big hurry. I heard quite pleasant conversations that absolutely all the "Ivans" will leave, and [deported] Latvians will all return to their homeland'.²⁷⁴ The return of deported Latvians was a common theme linked to the removal of Russians, for example in Liepāja, 'nationalists declared that all Russians should leave Latvia, that in 1949 Russians evicted Latvians, and now "we will evict Russians". There are cases of sudden attacks against workers who do not speak Latvian'.²⁷⁵ From testimony such as this, we can see that many Russians did indeed leave Latvia. Judging by Party membership data, I estimate around 1,000-2,000 left. In Gulbene District, Financial Department Acting Head Mielaes casually remarked at a buffet 'soon all Russians shall be expelled from Latvia and Latvians will remain the masters here'. When barmaid Pokrovskaja spoke to Mielaes, he reputedly said to her 'oh you Russian dog, tomorrow you will not be here'.²⁷⁶ One letter wrote that 'if more things change, 500,000 Russians will be forced to leave Latvia'.²⁷⁷ Hysterical anonymous appeals to the Presidium such as this must have made uncomfortable reading for Soviet leaders.

²⁷¹ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.54.

²⁷² LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.643, lp.124.

²⁷³ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.75.

²⁷⁴ LVA f.270 apr.1-s, l.872, lp.67. Pis'mo ot MVD v Latsis, 'O reagirovaniikh na sobytiia mezhdunarodnoi vnutrennei obstanovki', 7 iulija 1953.

²⁷⁵ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.184.

²⁷⁶ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.74.

²⁷⁷ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.40.

1.8.2 The Russian backlash

It is important to note that Russians and Moscow loyalists in Latvia were not passive during this period and railed against the plenum decisions. The Presidium placed considerable emphasis on ensuring that the Party collectively renounced Beria and his works. In July there were over a thousand anti-Beria speeches in meetings of Party cells across the republic.²⁷⁸ There was vociferous criticism of the decision to completely transfer office work in Party, soviet and public organisations into Latvian.²⁷⁹ There was ‘sharp criticism’ of the most enthusiastic advocates of the ‘New Course’ such as the aforementioned Food and Light Industry Minister Grāvītis and Vocational Training Chief Trinkler.²⁸⁰ Having lost their privileged management of the Party, Russian attendees criticised the abolition of the practice of nominating non-Latvian cadres as *raikomy* second secretaries, *ispolkomy* deputy chairmen, *kolkhoz* and enterprise directors.²⁸¹ Any particular outbursts of anti-Russian sentiment were judged not as an assessment of the popular mood within the Latvian Party but as ‘the manifestation of bourgeois nationalism among individual managers’. Jelgava Railways Political Department Deputy Chief Žilina was one such individual whose transgressions were so numerous that he appears to have been singled out for punishment. Polekhin wrote to Khrushchev about Žilina’s activities at railway political apparatus meetings:

He said that Russians occupied the Baltic and that all the Russian workers in leadership positions should be replaced. Žilina gave an instruction to accept only Latvians into the Party, replace all slogans and banners in Russian... conduct office work and meetings only in Latvian. He refused to sign a commendation for a young Russian railway worker who distinguished himself.²⁸²

Polekhin reported that the Latvian bureau expelled Žilina from the Party.²⁸³ The bureau concluded that Žilina was ‘unaware’ of the decision of the June plenum and was acting without

²⁷⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.24, lp.69.

²⁷⁹ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.76.

²⁸⁰ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.67-68.

²⁸¹ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.76.

²⁸² RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.73.

²⁸³ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.73.

guidance although many of his actions corresponded with the Party's resolution.²⁸⁴ Žilina's enthusiasm was merely a consequence of the Latvian Party's decisions, which were bound to inflame local nationalist sentiment. Žilina's expulsion as a zealot was designed to distance the Party from a beast of its own making.

1.9 The 'New Course' Reversed?

There is a significant divergence of opinion among historians and contemporaries as to whether the Party halted the 'New Course' after the July plenum. Outside Latvia, it appears the Kremlin applied greater pressure to curb the policy. Berklavs's 1972 'protest letter' described the fate of the 'New Course' following Beria's arrest:

In 1953, it was officially admitted that the nationality policy of Marxism-Leninism was grossly vitiated in our country. But was the perversion ended after this plenum? No. The new course lasted only one week. Subsequently, although this Presidium decree was not withdrawn, all the intended measures were halted and everything remained the same as before. Even more - in the national republics there began an increasingly insistent and consistent implementation of a carefully thought out programme for the forced assimilation of small nations.²⁸⁵

In his memoirs, Berklavs asserts that the plenum decisions lasted slightly longer, but still only 'for a few weeks'. Presumably, he was referring to the period from 23rd June when the Latvian plenum closed until the CPSU CC plenum on 2nd-7th July, which denounced Beria. Berklavs remarked upon the 'New Course that 'if it was realised, then today [1998] there would not be so many Russians in Latvia, many other things would be better... I do not know how the decision about the withdrawal of Russians from the republics was cancelled but it was not realised'.²⁸⁶ This is representative of the historiography on the 'New Course' and not exclusively in Latvia.

²⁸⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.24, lp.94. Protokol zasedania biuro, 21 iiulia 1953, 'O A.P Zhilina'.

²⁸⁵ Saunders, *Samizdat*, 432; http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm

²⁸⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 88.

David Brandenberger makes the orthodox case, attributing the changes solely to Beria and claiming they vanished with him:

The spring of 1953 hinted at imminent changes in nationality policy and a retreat from official russocentrism, [but] they receded almost as unexpectedly, linked, as they were, to the brief ascendancy of Beria. Beria's prompt removal in June 1953 denied any of his innovations a chance to mature, let alone affect any sort of lasting change.²⁸⁷

It is my contention, however, that the 'New Course' made significant inroads in Latvia that were not easily curbed nor completely reversed, though I concede that Berklavs is correct that only a small fraction of the Russians in Latvia actually returned to the RSFSR. The plenum that resulted from the 'New Course' fostered an atmosphere in which discussions about nationality were no longer taboo, which had been the case since the mid-1930s under Stalin. In Latvia, the real significance of the 'New Course' was that it permitted the national communists to coalesce, attract interested individuals, and evolve to become a cogent faction within the leadership. Some its members rose to prominence even before the Secret Speech in 1956, when Khrushchev launched a 'New Course' explicitly of his own making. Misiunas and Taagepera's appraisal is accurate: 'on the whole... Beria's death did not result in a change in the nativisation policy, although it came to be pursued at a gentler pace'.²⁸⁸ Most Latvian historians, however, disagree. Bleiere maintains 'the measures envisaged by resolutions of the plenary meeting were not implemented', but concedes 'this brief attempt was not forgotten'.²⁸⁹ Riekstiņš, supports the conventional Latvian line that 'after the arrest of Beria... these [decisions] were quickly "forgotten", Latvia's leaders failed to enforce them'.²⁹⁰ Aldis Bergmanis similarly argues that 'in July 1953 the USSR's political leaders changed their attitude... For that reason, no consistent changes happened in nationality policy. The inhabitants of the Baltic republics were still regarded as potential traitors and all positions of trust were assigned to immigrants'.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*, (USA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 242. Furthermore, Russian returned as the CC's working language.

²⁸⁸ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 133.

²⁸⁹ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 394.

²⁹⁰ Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 19.

²⁹¹ Aldis Bergmanis, 'Political Changes in Latvia in 1953', *Symposium of the Commission of the*

Bergmanis's statement disregards the key positions secured by future national communists because of the 'New Course' and that the balance of power continued to shift in their favour for the remainder of the decade. The Liepāja *gorkom* replaced Desmitnieks with future national communist Indriķis Pinksis as First Secretary at its plenum on 30th June, after Beria's arrest.²⁹² The Liepāja plenum decided to 'pay particular attention to the issue of local ethnic people and their advancement to leading positions in Party, Soviet and economic work'.²⁹³ Instead of being removed after Beria's fall, Pinksis held the role until his promotion to Trade Union Council Chairman in May 1958.

A number of historians support my contention. Zubkova, Tannberg, Taagepera, Misiunas, Smith and Widmer all agree that the 'New Course' was not so easily dismantled after the July CPSU CC plenum. Nor do I think that was Khrushchev's intention. Artis Pabriks agrees Khrushchev intended to continue the 'New Course', as does Smith when he stated that 'Beria's colleagues never really abandoned these mild, pro-nationality cadre policies'.²⁹⁴ Likewise, Zubkova maintains that 'even after Beria's arrest and the accusation of carrying out the wrong national policy, the "New Course" in practice continued through the development of the national language, the expansion of the zone of economic freedom for the Union Republics and the liberalisation of cultural policy'.²⁹⁵ Widmer's line is more moderate. He asserts that many of the concessions granted to titular nationalities were not withdrawn after Beria's ouster. The new Soviet leaders were in a 'sufficiently precarious position to discourage a re-imposition of the very rigid controls of Stalin's last years... regular emphasis was placed on the necessity to develop Latvian national cadres and to conduct public activities in Latvian. But from all indications the actual state of affairs did not change markedly'.²⁹⁶ At the Union level, Beria's fall ended 'linguistic prescriptivism', and the media dropped references to 'great power chauvinism' or the republics' 'independence'. Along with this went a vast expansion in the use

Historians of Latvia: The Soviet Occupation Regime in the Baltic States: 1944-1959, 9 (2002), 109-19.

²⁹² LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.3768, lp.31. Indriķis Ottovich Pinksis personnel file.

²⁹³ William Prigge, 'Berija Latvijā - draugs vai ienaidnieks', *Diena*, 15th October 2005.

²⁹⁴ Artis Pabriks, *In Defiance of Fate: Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Latvia*, (UNRISD), 2003; Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 193.

²⁹⁵ Zubkova, "'Drugoi SSSR?'" , 682.

²⁹⁶ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 528, 534.

of formulas celebrating the dominance of Russia, beginning with ‘great Russian people’.²⁹⁷ The USSR Academy of Science’s Institute of History was called upon to renew its ‘study of the progressive role of... the Russian people in the USSR’s brotherly family of nations’.²⁹⁸ In Latvia, however, as we have seen, the Kremlin did not revoke the policy. Instead, Moscow applied pressure to reduce the significance of the Latvian plenum’s resolutions. This formally froze the measures, although the Party did not repeal the resolutions themselves until July 1959.²⁹⁹

Archival evidence supports the argument that the ‘New Course’ survived Beria’s downfall. In Polekhin’s July letter to Khrushchev, he evaluated the progress of the rollback of the ‘New Course’ as dismal. From his description, we can infer that Latvia’s leaders and mid-level officials did the minimum required to appease the Presidium but exerted no rigorous or immediate effort to undo the results of the ‘New Course’.

In the execution of the July CPSU CC plenum resolution, the Latvian CC has begun to correct its mistakes. However there is great sluggishness in this process; insufficient resoluteness in the struggle against bourgeois-nationalists. In Riga, Liepāja, Daugavpils and Jelgava some nationalists were exposed among leading workers, but *gorkomy* did not... take any steps to prevent these things. For a long time, the Latvian CC has not considered incoming materials about ministers’ nationalist activities.³⁰⁰

This last comment implies that the Latvian leadership was ignoring Russians’ grievances. Kabashkhin likewise protested Latvians’ lack of activity in the struggle against ‘bourgeois-nationalist elements spreading among the population’.³⁰¹

Krūmiņš described another useful episode about the persistent effects of the ‘New Course’ in his recollections to the Presidium in 1959. In 1954, he made inflammatory remarks of the kind prohibited the previous year.

²⁹⁷ Fairbanks, ‘National Cadres’, 174.

²⁹⁸ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 242.

²⁹⁹ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1267, lp.122. ‘Ob ispravlenii dopushchennykh oshibok v dele propiski grazhdan v Rige’, 15 iiulia 1959.

³⁰⁰ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.445, l.76.

³⁰¹ RGANI f.5, op.30, d.6, l.101.

I said that local staff were under-promoted. I must say I have never made any speeches about that matter anywhere but in the CC... Why did I say this? Because, according to my understanding of things during this time, I thought it was wrong that in meetings [composed] of 90% Latvian-speaking people we usually used the Russian language.³⁰²

This indicates that despite Beria's denunciation and with him the 'New Course', it was still possible to talk relatively openly about the hitherto Stalinist taboo of nationality. Latvian communists began to test the demarcations of Khrushchev's developing Thaw. This kind of talk appeared permissible so long as it remained inside the Party.

The situation began to stabilise from August. There were no more dismissals of Russian officials but many of the gains for indigenous Latvians were preserved. Furthermore, Party institutions continued to advance the status of the Latvian language without opposition. On 21st September, the Ministry of Education recognised the poor standard Latvian language learning in Russian schools and that students lacked Latvian grammar textbooks. The ministry decided that schools should not be exempt from teaching in Latvian.³⁰³

1.10 The Growth of National Communism

The 'New Course' was undoubtedly popular with the Latvian public. This was the first time that Latvian politicians gained a measure of popular approval from the indigenous population and it affected future policy, as the national communists displayed an unusual responsiveness towards public opinion.³⁰⁴ The anti-Russian character of events in Latvia resonated with disaffected Latvians who were enthusiastic about being able to 'punish' Russians for their chauvinism. Enthusiasm for the 'New Course' within the Party emanated from its emerging national communist segment, which was more focused on enhancing the position of Latvians than on pandering to the populace's anti-Russian hostility, resisting perceived Russification by coalescing around Berklavs. There were exceptions, however, as even respected former

³⁰² Fursenko, *Arkhiv Kremli*, 375-76.

³⁰³ Bleiere, *Eiropa ārpus Eiropas*, 91.

³⁰⁴ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 305-19.

politicians were caught up in the nationalist furore. The Latvian Presidium received a note about its former Chairman, Augusts Kirhenšteins, then Academy of Sciences Vice-President, which reported that at a meeting at Riga University Professor Kirhenšteins said that 'Latvia does not need Russians'. Furthermore, Pelše confirmed that at a graduation ceremony, in a conversation with students Kirhenšteins 'made nationalist statements and praised his line of national policy during his tenure as chairman'.³⁰⁵ In 1959 as Krūmiņš desperately tried to distance himself from Berkļavs, he reflected on the anti-Russian fervour within the Party and what he called the 'difficult days of 1953'. 'During that time' he said, he had to 'respond not just to very wrong actions of young people, but to actions of some old Party members who threw out typewriters with Russian letters, threw out portraits'.³⁰⁶ He was referring to Deputy MVD Minister Albert Sieks, who spoke Latvian quite haphazardly but who personally broke a typewriter with Russian letters.³⁰⁷

If the 'New Course' gave birth to Latvian national communism, the Komsomol was its embryo. Six prominent national communists served in the Komsomol leadership in the 1940s. Geoffrey Swain considers that the 'New Course' formed deep roots in the Latvian Komsomol and that 'the Russification of the Latvian Komsomol was promptly ended in June 1953'.³⁰⁸ After the official end of the 'New Course', the Komsomol ignored Moscow's dictate. On 5th August, a Komsomol bureau meeting called for improving 'the preparation, encouragement and advancement of local cadres with a knowledge of the customs, culture and life of the Latvian people and a knowledge of Latvian'. Although the resolution conceded that it was equally essential to 'stop to all carelessness in confronting bourgeois nationalism' implying not enough was being done to root out nationalists.³⁰⁹ Instead, the resolution stressed mass political work should be carried out 'in the native language' and thereafter, conscious efforts were made to stress the Komsomol's 'Latvianness' such as the return to presenting the work plan of its newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* in Latvian.

³⁰⁵ RGANI f.5, op.15, d.307, l.183-84.

³⁰⁶ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 375.

³⁰⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 131.

³⁰⁸ Swain, 'Before National Communism', 1268.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

In 1959, during the denunciation of the national communists, when Lācis's addressed the Party, he referenced the events of June 1953 and how it led to the creation of national communism.

Beria was soon discovered, his attempt to break apart the people of Soviet Union was a disaster, but some uncertainty and nervousness remained amongst comrades. Everything settled down but seemingly among part of the comrades there was a residual uncertainty, and bourgeois nationalists [the national communists], also having quietened down, were apparently waiting it out for another suitable opportunity to openly express themselves.³¹⁰

Here Lācis corroborates the argument that Latvia's national communists played a more clandestine game after Beria's arrest. We can infer from Lācis's words that the national communists were waiting for a politically opportune moment to openly promote their plans. This moment came in 1956 with the 20th Party Congress.

Conclusion

In 1953, Khrushchev's political manoeuvring was exceptional. He eliminated Beria, his most serious rival. At the July 1953 CPSU CC plenum he found it politically expedient to denounce the very same nationality policy he helped to create. Khrushchev then appropriated the policy he blamed Beria for designing, modifying it as he saw fit.³¹¹ Unlike Beria, Khrushchev's nationality policy was subject to purely pragmatic considerations. He went from a strongly pro-minority position in December 1949 to cooperate with Stalin's campaign against bourgeois nationalism and the Jews in autumn 1952, before collaborating with Beria in 1953.³¹² Khrushchev incorporated many of the elements of the 'New Course' into his own nationality policy from 1956. Tannberg confirms this assertion: 'In 1956 Kremlin leaders had not yet abandoned the principles of the "new national policy" [of] 1953... As before attention was paid to using local languages in office work and in the organisation of Party life and the

³¹⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.27.

³¹¹ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 230.

³¹² Fairbanks, 'National Cadres', 155.

advancement of national cadres to management positions'.³¹³ After Beria's denunciation, Khrushchev walked a tightrope as he developed his nationality policy, oscillating between *korenizatsiia* and *sblizhenie* (the drawing together or rapprochement of peoples) between 1953 and 1956. From the end of 1953, Khrushchev tried to use nationalities policy as a sectarian weapon, as Beria did. Like Beria, he took a pro-minority stance, but with a new twist: Slavic solidarity. The Ukrainian people were elevated to the Russian level, being called a 'great people' for the first time.³¹⁴ This benefited Khrushchev whose client base was Ukrainian. Interestingly, a stance favourable to non-Russian nationalities was not delegitimised by its connection with a disgraced former leader.

The June 1953 Latvian Party plenum marked a remarkable break with Stalinist nationality policy. It was not merely reminiscent of the atmosphere of the *korenizatsiia* period of twenty years previously. This was about promoting national cadres, but also about combating concentrated Russification efforts. The speeches were unprecedented. With thinly veiled ferocity and contempt towards the perceived Russification of Latvia, Party leaders spoke passionately in defence of Latvian language and culture and, as Apine phrases it, registered their 'smouldering dissatisfaction'.³¹⁵ What is more, this took place nearly three years before de-Stalinisation officially began with Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress. Therefore, it was an early foray into de-Stalinisation, a 'knee-jerk' reaction to Russification, which had been an integral component of Stalinism since the mid-1930s.

The significance of the June plenum for Latvia cannot be overstated though Krūmiņš tried to do so in 1959 to the Presidium. He did not want to 'exaggerate the significance of the year 1953', but even in those personally trying circumstances he conceded that the impact of the 'New Course' 'created a really difficult situation'.³¹⁶ That the plenum's resolution was obstructed but not repealed demonstrates the contentiousness of the policy. Furthermore, Krūmiņš recounts an extraordinary conversation (probably in 1957) with Kalnbērziņš who told him that he once asked Khrushchev 'what about the decisions of the June 1953 Latvian

³¹³ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvy*, 175.

³¹⁴ Fairbanks, 'National Cadres', 175.

³¹⁵ Apine, 'Vai Latvijā', 4.

³¹⁶ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 375.

plenum?’ Khrushchev supposedly replied, ‘you have made them, and you follow them, and Beria has nothing to do with it’. Krūmiņš adds cryptically, ‘later, this conversation affected the infamous events of 1959’.³¹⁷ Here Krūmiņš concurs that the ‘New Course’ created the conditions for Latvian national communism, and ultimately led to the purge of the national communists. This also demonstrates Khrushchev’s tacit acceptance and even support for further Latvian indigenisation, so long as references to Beria’s initiatives were omitted. This is in keeping with the idea of Khrushchev appropriating the co-authored ‘New Course’ strategy and using it for his own ends.

In 1959, Lācis mused about how he thought the situation was brought under control in 1953, ‘thank god another plenum took place two weeks afterwards [the 2nd-7th July CPSU CC plenum] and it put an end to all that. It worried Latvians as well, but they calmed down afterwards’. Faced with the same issue of how to bring the national communist leadership under control in 1959, Khrushchev replied to Lācis’s statement sarcastically remarking that ‘they just appeared to be calm’.³¹⁸ Khrushchev recognised the common national communist element in the events of 1953 and 1959. Krūmiņš certainly thought so. In May 1958, with the national communists ascendant, he raised the issue of holding a plenum to discuss the June 1953 plenum decisions. The day after his return as Second Secretary, Krūmiņš visited Aleksei Kirichenko (effectively CPSU Second Secretary with responsibility for cadres, and Khrushchev’s heir apparent). Krūmiņš told Kirichenko that ‘despite some of the costs [of the plenum], its provisions remain relevant national policy in the republic’. Krūmiņš considered the June plenum’s resolutions sufficiently important and, crucially, still pertinent enough for them to be resurrected. Kirichenko supported Krūmiņš’s proposal to hold a special plenum for work with cadres in autumn 1958.³¹⁹ Krūmiņš’s speech at the October 1958 plenum favoured increasing national cadres’ representation.³²⁰

Zubkova provides a theory, which might explain the ‘New Course’. She argues that in the period 1953-56 the model of incorporation, of Sovietisation, changed. After Stalin’s death,

³¹⁷ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

³¹⁸ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 374.

³¹⁹ Vilis Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga k demokratii’, *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 4 (1990), 86.

³²⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.29-57. Stenogramma 4-i TsK KPL plenuma, 1-2 oktjabria 1958.

Khrushchev and Beria recognised the attempt to make the Baltic Republics a complete part of the USSR as a failure. Instead, Zubkova contends that there was an idea within the leadership, in the spirit of ‘the Thaw’ to make the Baltic into ‘another USSR - a showcase of Soviet life,’ although with defined limits that ‘could not be crossed’.³²¹ Considering that the Baltic Republics’ achieved the highest wages and living standards in the USSR there is some merit to this theory. Such a contention supports the idea that Latvia constituted a special case where attempts to dismantle the ‘New Course’ were not as concerted as elsewhere.

In Latvia, it proved impossible to quash the national question after the June 1953 plenum. Beria’s courting of the republics permitted them greater flexibility over local affairs and this proved difficult to rescind. The July reversal and Beria’s execution in December 1953, however, ensured there could be no public discussion about the plenum’s decisions. It was not until after the 20th Party Congress in 1956 that Latvian national communism could openly take shape. The origins of national communism were discussed at length in 1959 when the Stalinist faction of the leadership seized the opportunity to attack Berklavs and his followers. The 7th plenum in July 1959 described the results of the June 1953 plenum ‘as politically incorrect’ and ‘imposed by the enemy of the Party and state, Beria’, and ordered their abolition.³²²

In the summer of 1959, at the 20th June Latvian bureau session, Khrushchev’s representative Nuritdin Mukhitdinov blamed Berklavs for the trouble caused by the national communists. Mukhitdinov supposedly reprimanded him, drawing another comparison with 1953: ‘Comrade Berklavs, Beria was shot for similar views. What do you suggest we do with you? You have something to think about’.³²³ Six years later, the issue of Latvian nationalism was even more controversial. This time it was Berklavs ‘on trial’. The spectre of Beria’s fate persisted long after his death.

³²¹ Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kremļ*, 337.

³²² LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.10, lp.30. Resheniia 7-ia LCP plenum, ‘O ser’eznykh nedostatkov i oshibkakh v rabote s kadrami i v praktike national’noi politiki v respublike’, 8 iulija 1959.

³²³ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 132; Krūmiņš ‘Tas drūmais’, 136. Only Berklavs and Krūmiņš refer to this threat. The stenogram does not record this particular accusation.

Chapter Two: Children of the Twentieth Party Congress: Policies and Structure of the Latvian National Communists, 1953-1957

Chapter One analyses how the power struggle following Stalin's death and ensuing appeals for support in the periphery by his would-be successors created fertile conditions for Latvian national communism to develop. Yet, the political rise of the national communists was slow between 1953 and 1956, partially due to the vacillation of central authorities because Khrushchev's authority remained tenuous. Similarly, the national communists only gradually coalesced during this period, while members steadily climbed the Party and state hierarchies. This chapter addresses who the national communists were and examines their origins. I also re-evaluate the prevalent notion in Latvian historiography that the national communists were a collection of individual politicians loosely cooperating because of their interest in preserving the Latvian language and culture. While the national communists formed between 1953 and 1956, following the sudden opportunities created by the June 1953 Latvian Party plenum, they were limited in their ability to enact significant reform until the extraordinary 20th Party Congress in February 1956 in which Khrushchev denounced Stalin's cult of personality to a closed session of the CPSU. The profound effects of the Congress gave the national communists the flexibility necessary to launch a series of campaigns and policies in an effort to realise their vision for Latvia. The national communists used the 20th Party Congress as justification for undoing the Stalinist crimes they felt were inflicted upon their generation and the Party. Their cohort benefitted from the Congress's decision, and the national communists were the children of the 20th Party Congress. Taking their cue from Khrushchev, the national communists unleashed a Latvian variant of de-Stalinisation in Latvia. This chapter asks if the national communists were pursuing a 'Latvianisation' policy with the reform programme.

The consensus among historians is that the national communists enjoyed limited, generally symbolic, success before provoking Moscow. This was purportedly due to their brief

period of hegemony and resistance to the implementation of their policies from the Russian-dominated LCP bureaucracy. Furthermore, Latvian historians criticise the national communists for their concern with reforming the Soviet system, not liberation from it.³²⁴ For example, Riekstiņš sees their achievements as quite limited: ‘Documentary evidence shows that, on many points of ideology and politics, they completely supported views of the CPSU CC and Khrushchev. Their success in resolving several problems was due to the topicality of these problems, as well as widespread popular support’.³²⁵ This understanding, however, was predicated upon analysis of official newspapers and dissident reports by émigrés and Western academics (though many Latvian historians continue to subscribe to this viewpoint). The access afforded to researchers in Latvian archives since the late 1990s now reveals a more active and aggressive reform campaign initiated by the national communists, and an equally determined counteroffensive waged against them from within the LCP.³²⁶ There were tangible political effects from national communist rule and though some policies were short-lived, in key areas such as migration and cadres, the national communists were successful in furthering their ultimate aim of halting the Russification of Latvia. Chapters Two and Three chart the rise of the national communists and evaluates the success of the full range of initiatives they undertook.

The historiography on the Latvian national communists often portrays them as an assorted group of Latvians dominated by Berklavs, who gained control of the levers of power in the late 1950s and enacted radical nationalistic reforms. This put Latvia on a collision course with Moscow and its vested interest in protecting the position of Russians in the periphery. There has been little analysis of the nature, composition or operation of this dynamic and unique group. Generally, the national communists are assumed to be a group formed on the basis of their common military service during the Second World War or during their political training in the Komsomol. Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs write that they were ‘baptised during World War Two and indoctrinated with Soviet methods of upward mobility and dealing with dissent. They benefitted from a sort of affirmative action for the lowest classes both in educational

³²⁴ King, *Economic Policies*, 195.

³²⁵ Jānis Riekstiņš, ‘The Struggle by Latvian National Communists Against the Colonisation and Russification of Latvia’, in Valdis Blūzma et al, *Regaining Independence: Non-Violent Resistance in Latvia 1945-1991*, (Riga: Latvian Academy of Sciences, 2009), 195.

³²⁶ Purs, *Baltic Facades*, 68.

opportunities and, with loyal service to the Communist Party, in governmental employment'.³²⁷ While many senior national communists did meet in the Red Army and Latvian Komsomol, in this chapter I aim to expand our understanding of the national communists and challenge some of the preconceptions about their nature.

2.1 Who were the Latvian National Communists?

The national communists' odyssey began with the friendships forged during the Second World War between Eduards Berklavs, Vilis Krūmiņš and Pauls Dzērve. They served in the Red Army's 201st Latvian Rifle Division. After the war, Berklavs was appointed Komsomol First Secretary aged 31. He was permitted to appoint other Komsomol leaders and requested the demobilisation of Krūmiņš and Dzērve.³²⁸ Krūmiņš then followed Berklavs's rapid ascent up the Party and government ladders as Komsomol First Secretary (1948-1951), then CC Third Secretary (1951-1952) and Riga *obkom* (Regional Party Committee) First Secretary (1952-1953). Many of those Berklavs and the others established contact with in the Komsomol in the late 1940s and early 1950s later became senior national communists. Indriķis Pinksis, Komsomol First Secretary (1944-1946) and wartime partisan leader, became Berklavs's most loyal ally. Other prominent future national communists in the Komsomol leadership during this time included Pavel Cherkovskii (Deputy Minister of Culture 1958-1959), Vladislavs Ruskulis (Komsomol First Secretary, 1958-1959) and Vilis Samsons (Education Minister, 1950-1960). According to Pinksis, 10 former Komsomol secretaries were sacked during the purges, demonstrating the Komsomol's role as the crucible in the national communists' formation.³²⁹ An analysis of the careers and backgrounds of the national communists reveals a complex web of correlations and connections. Many were young, committed, 'true believing' communists who worked in the Communist Party underground during Kārlis Ulmanis's dictatorship between 1934 and 1940, which clamped down on opposition. Important figures such as Arnolds Deglavs (Riga City Executive Committee Deputy Chairman, 1958-1960), Voldemārs Kalpiņš (Minister

³²⁷ Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 32.

³²⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un Neizmirst*, 59.

³²⁹ Indriķis Pinksis, Interview with Jānis Lapsa, 'Tas drūmais piecdesmit devītais', *Karogs*, 10 (1988), 126.

of Culture, 1958-1961) and Kārlis Ozoliņš (Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Chairman, 1952-1959) all met in a Latvian prison in 1935.³³⁰ Kalpiņš and Aleksandr Nikonov (Agriculture Minister, 1952-1960) were wartime comrades, as were Eduards Liberts (Transport Minister, 1951-1961) and Visvaldis Vallis (Deputy Agriculture Minister, 1958-1959).

One myth is that the national communists were a homogenous Latvian group. Instead, they were a diverse collection of like-minded individuals from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities and ages. Despite the sectarian nature of Latvian politics in the mid-late 1950s, it is worth noting that Russian politicians were not automatically members of the 'loyalist' faction grouped around Arvīds Pelše, nor vice versa for Latvians. Though Latvians comprised an overwhelmingly majority of the faction, there were exceptions. Nikonov, born in Pskov region on the Latvian border was the senior Russian national communist. Aleksandrs Straujums personnel file (Riga *gorkom* First Secretary, 1958-1960) lists him as a Russian.³³¹ Belorussian Pavel Cherkovskii was born on the Latvian side of the Belorussian-Latvian border. Others were ethnic Latvians who were born outside Latvia and even Imperial Russia. While this does not affect their nationality, it suggests they spent their formative years outside their ethnic homeland. *Zvaigzne* magazine editor Rafael Blūms, was a Jew born in the Baden-Wurtemberg region of Imperial Germany. Economics Institute Deputy Chairman Benjamiņš Treijs was born in Samara province, Kalpiņš in Smolensk, Riga *gorkom* Department Head Albert Tseplis in Yaroslavl and Council of Ministers Secretary Arnolds Zandmanis in Bashkiria. Moreover, Latvians who spent the interwar period in the USSR were not necessarily Russified Latvians and precluded from membership. Agricultural Secretary Nikolai Bissenieks, one of the most prominent national communists, spent 15 of the interwar years living in Turkmenia between 1933 and 1947 and before that as Komsomol First Secretary in Komsomolsk-on-Amur.³³² Among the national communists were also representatives of the younger generation who began their careers in Soviet Latvia such as Riga Education Department Head Jānis Ģibeitis and Riga's 49th High School Director Milda Vernere.³³³

³³⁰ Voldemārs Kalpiņš, Interview with Jānis Lapsa, 'Pirms drūmā piecdesmit devītā', *Karogs*, 11 (1988), 113.

³³¹ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.5432. Aleksandrs Ivanovich Straujums personnel file.

³³² LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.80.

³³³ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 396.

Historians such as Prigge often claim that the conflict within the Latvian leadership was a generational dispute between a gerontocracy unwilling to yield power to a rising young cadre of technocrats.³³⁴ My analysis of the careers of approximately 100 leading officials in Latvia between 1944 and 1962, based on available data for the dates of birth of 81 apparatchiks, allows us to compare the median ages of the two factions for 1959, the year of open confrontation between the two sides. Interestingly, the generational divide referred to by Prigge is actually very small. The average age of 38 national communists was 46.7, slightly older than they are often perceived to be. Forty-three of Pelše's acolytes, at 49.3 were less than three years older than the national communists and hardly the elderly old guard they appear in the literature.³³⁵ Comparisons such as the twenty-year age gap between Pelše and the 40-year old Krūmiņš are not representative because many national communists were in their late forties or older; Berklavs himself was 45. Furthermore, several prominent national communists were considerably older in 1959 such as Ozoliņš at 54 years old he was closer in age to Stalinist Roberts Ķisis at 63 than Krūmiņš or KPK Chairman Pēteris Plēsums (64). This is in contrast to the numerous young Russified Latvians who rejected the national communists and followed Pelše such as Agriculture Minister Pēteris Strautmanis (40), Komsomol First Secretary Augusts Zitmanis (30), *Cīņa* editor Ilmārs Ivert (35) and Secretary for Industry Voldemārs Leiņš (39).

If ethnicity, age, place of birth and residency are insufficient explanations, on the surface, the common denominator seems to be that all national communists could speak Latvian. Yet, there are even exceptions in this case. Bissenieks struggled with learning Latvian upon his return to Latvia from Turkmenia.³³⁶ Certainly, there was an element of unity through their shared experience in the communist underground, military service or the Komsomol leadership in the early post-war years. This background gave these former underground activists and veterans significant political capital and according to Smith 'even a certain independent legitimacy'; as such, they were considered the next leaders of the republic.³³⁷ Smith believes that this 'left them both susceptible to the mood of the local population and confident enough to

³³⁴ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 218-19, 222.

³³⁵ See Appendices for details on *nomenklatura* positions, bureau composition and extensive supplementary information on the national communists and their opponents.

³³⁶ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.80.

³³⁷ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 84-85.

stand up to Moscow and Russians sent from Moscow'.³³⁸ Certainly, members were aware of their dual roles as Party leaders and representatives of their nationality. Consequently, their intellectual potential and understanding of conditions in Latvia seriously threatened the old guard causing a factional dispute between the orthodox and the emerging reformer wings of the Party.³³⁹

Another aspect of the glue that held the national communists together was their shared embrace of Latvian culture and traditions. Riekstiņš goes so far as to say the national communists 'shared the higher goal of ensuring the survival of the Latvian people'.³⁴⁰ Apine describes the national communists as 'internationalists, but not cosmopolitan. Their focus was on Latvia - its culture, language, environment and people'.³⁴¹ The national communists stood in contrast to the Russified Latvians who wanted to supplant Latvia's culture with an internationalist Soviet culture. The pervasive influence of Russian culture upon Soviet cultural development made it especially difficult for the Latvian population to accept the replacement of their culture with one so distinctly Russian without a concomitant sense of colonisation. The national communists exploited this in their competition with the loyalists for popular support.

2.1.1 National communist organisation

The literature on the national communists emphasises the loose and informal nature of their connection, defining them rather as a group of like-minded individuals who acted in consensus by voting together at bureau meetings and Congresses, and playing down their level of organisation.³⁴² That definition fails to accurately represent Latvian national communism. I argue that the national communists operated as a definite *faction* within the leadership. In this context, I define a faction as a cogent bloc of allied politicians with identifiable members, leadership, aims and ideology. This was not a faction in Lenin's embryonic CPSU. This faction emerged during the resurgence of the Party under Khrushchev, when it was again permissible to hold divergent views. According to Apine, the use of the term 'group' for the national

³³⁸ Smith, 'Leadership and nationalism', 85.

³³⁹ Ilga Apine, 'Vai Latvijā', 4.

³⁴⁰ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 195.

³⁴¹ Apine and Zandmanis, 'Tas drūmais', 119.

³⁴² Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 175. According to Egil Levits, 'the group was not organised and did not have a coherent [structure], it was united by similarity of views on vitally important issues rather than those of Latvian national identity', Egil Levits, 'Latvija padomju varā', in V. Blūzma, O. Cello and T. Jundzis, *Latvijas valsts atjaunošana, 1986-1993*, (Riga: Latvijas Vēsture, 1998), 54.

communists was interpreted as an insult and cast aspersions that they were part of an anti-Soviet conspiracy.³⁴³ Prigge concurs, using the word faction to refer to them throughout his book.³⁴⁴ At the July 1959 plenum, Pelše himself described them as an ‘organised group’.³⁴⁵ King grudgingly admits that the national communists were organised but stipulates that this was only the case after they gained control of the bureau and the Council of Ministers chairmanships from 1958, at least two years later than I argue.³⁴⁶

Admittedly, in arguing that the national communists were a faction it is necessary to note that while they had aims they did not have a cohesive plan for implementing their policies.³⁴⁷ They groped their way in the dark, jockeying for position within the leadership to enact legislation whose principal aim was to safeguard the Latvian population as a majority within the republic, promote Latvian traditions and culture, and especially preserve the primacy of the Latvian language, as well as prioritise Latvians for scarce resources such as housing.

One of the key indicators that the national communists were a faction can be seen in how they convened, discussed and plotted to expand their influence, something a coalition of independent politicians at the apex of Latvian politics would not do. In his speech at the July 1959 plenum, Kalnbērziņš revealed how the leadership functioned under the national communists. Decisions about many important issues took place during breaks between meetings, over ‘a cup of tea’ without an exchange of views among the wider bureau.³⁴⁸ The national communists would effectively bypass their non-members on the bureau, deciding the question at a break in proceedings, one of them would then propose a decision, and the others would vote for it. At the 20th June 1959 bureau meeting *Sovetskaia Latvija* editor Nikolai Saleev similarly described how many issues were resolved in coordinated so-called ‘working discussions’ (*v rabochem poriadke*) that excluded all bureau members except the national communists. Saleev explained this meant that the national communists would ‘make the decision collectively’.³⁴⁹ He gave the examples of Berkļavs’s proposal of a surprise ministerial

³⁴³ Apine and Zandmanis, ‘Tas drūmais’, 119.

³⁴⁴ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 72, 80, 96, 100, 110.

³⁴⁵ LVA-PA f.101, op.22, d.15, l.56.

³⁴⁶ Gundar King, ‘Management of the Economy and Political Power’, *Lituanus*, 14 (1967).

³⁴⁷ Widmer, ‘Nationalism and Communism’, 594.

³⁴⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.21.

³⁴⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.199. Osobaia Papka: Zasedanii TsK KPL biuro, 20-21 iunija 1959.

appointment without any information so Saleev could not express his opinion, and a discussion on the question of Russian language streams in schools in June 1959. The national communists reputedly said that it was unnecessary to discuss these items at the bureau, because it would be solved at one of their regular discussions. Saleev indicated that these private discussions helped protect national communists. After one 'tea break' in April 1959, Krūmiņš suggested that the bureau discuss problems in Berklavs's ideologically questionable 'Conversation from the Heart' article. Saleev described the ensuing decision as 'toothless'. Similarly, a report from a CPSU CC cadre instructor seriously criticised the shortcomings of the intelligentsia but after a 'consultation', the national communists proposed sacking the inspector.³⁵⁰

Another example from January 1958 further demonstrates the workings of a coordinated and determined faction within the leadership that presented a platform to the Party and lobbied for support. The national communists organised a successful and covert campaign for CC members' votes to prevent Russian Second Secretary Fillip Kashnikov's re-election. An investigation sanctioned after the defeat of the national communists in 1960 used the testimonies of several former *raikom* secretaries including Titov, secretary of Dagda District. This commission found that national communist leaders met before the opening of the 15th LCP Congress at the apartment of Jānis Kacens (a national communist) to galvanise support for the vote against Kashnikov. At Kacens's apartment national communists including Pinksis, Edgars Mūkins (Gosplan Deputy Chairman), Favišs Frīdmans and Anton Luriņš (CC Agricultural Department Head) gathered to discuss their strategy, and according to Titov, insisted he vote against Kashnikov's reappointment.³⁵¹

In their memoirs, former national communists often refer to each other as '*frontnieki*', literally frontline fighters, referring to the camaraderie forged between national communists during their service in the Red Army.³⁵² These friendships bound the national communists into a tightly knit faction. After Krūmiņš turned on Berklavs to save his own career at the July 1959

³⁵⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.199-200.

³⁵¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.23, l.10, lp.81. Zasedaniia 2-i plenuma KPL, 26-27 aprelia 1960.

³⁵² Vilis Krūmiņš, 'Laika pakāpienus skaitot', *Padomju Jaunatne*, 3rd November 1988, 2.

plenum, the latter only forgave the former when he attended Krūmiņš's funeral in 2000.³⁵³

Berklavs did not consider the betrayal merely politics but personal.

2.1.2 Structure

The national communists are often portrayed as an uncoordinated group because of their informal status. Yet, how else could they operate but informally? This was necessary because it was impermissible for factions to operate openly within the CPSU with factionalism closely monitored; the façade of unity was maintained at all times. Despite its informal appearance, a leadership structure within the national communists is discernable. This is another reason to view the national communists as a faction. All historians in the field acknowledge Berklavs as the national communists' leader. Despite arriving on the bureau relatively late, in January 1956, he offered the leadership, direction and personification needed to galvanise the national communists. Widmer refers to the national communists throughout his thesis as the 'Berklavs group', Uldis Ģērmanis referred to them by the sobriquet '*Berklavieši*' ('Berklavists').³⁵⁴ Berklavs was the undisputed leader of the national communists but around him, his senior acolytes were sometimes in unorthodox positions within the Party and state hierarchies. Krūmiņš was the highest ranked as Second Secretary (1953-1956, 1958-1960). Pauls Dzērve is listed as a leading national communist, especially by his enemies because of his role as the architect of the faction's economic plans and the national communists' ideologue. Yet, outside the national communists, Dzērve held more humble status, he was never a bureau member and only became Economics Institute Chairman in 1958. Pinksis was the fourth senior national communist. He had early connections with the others though he did not reach the bureau until 1958 (as a candidate) in the relatively unimportant position of Trade Union Council Chairman.

Outside these four men, the literature differs on the remaining senior members. As Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Chairman (nominally the Head of State), Ozoliņš is often included as a leading member. Another was Bissenieks as Secretary for Agriculture along with his counterpart Agriculture Minister Nikonov. Both held bureau seats and were prominent national communists not least because the faction identified agriculture as an area requiring

³⁵³ Zirnīs, 'Latviskā sociālisma gals'.

³⁵⁴ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism'; Uldis Ģērmanis, 'Nevar atrisināt neatrisināmo', *Latvija Šodien*, 1st November 1989.

major reform. Pavel Pizāns, editor of the main Latvian daily *Cīņa*, and Edgars Mūkins, Gosplan Deputy Chairman from 1958, are sometimes included as leading national communists though only Pizāns held bureau candidate membership.

Interestingly, many middle-ranking members held superior positions within the Party and state hierarchies to those commonly cited as leading national communists. In 1958, Berklavs was forced to become a Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman, a demotion from Riga *gorkom* First Secretary. His chosen successor, the 40-year old Aleksandrs Straujums effectively held the fourth most powerful position in the republic and gained bureau candidate membership, but is considered part of the intermediate level of national communists. Culture Minister Kalpiņš was a member of this layer, and along with his Deputy, Cherkovskii, they became prominent national communists for their leading roles in directing the resurgence of Latvian culture between 1957 and 1959. Many others have been linked with the national communists but held lower positions in the hierarchy, often as a CC department head or deputy, belying their clandestine seniority among the national communists. Yet, these were key positions because they provided representation for the national communists and allowed senior members placed within the bureau to effect significant change, which was implemented with less bureaucratic resistance in the various departments, ministries and regional offices they controlled.

2.1.3 Political developments 1953-1956

The small clique grouped around Berklavs at the end of the war benefitted from the upward mobility that existed under both Stalin and Khrushchev. The shortage of indigenous cadres, who were necessary for a degree of regime legitimacy, ensured that the Latvian minority within the Party experienced rapid promotion. The concerns over loyalties and suspect biographies, which dogged Latvians attempting Party careers since 1945, subsided after Beria's downfall. Those Latvians that joined the Party enjoyed considerable upward mobility. The 1972 'Protest Letter' claimed that Latvians were not promoted: 'Many Party, government, and economic officials, expressing an unwarranted mistrust of local cadres and lying about a need for security, promoted mostly non-Latvians to leading work'.³⁵⁵ Latvian historiography similarly downplays Latvians' ability to ascend the Party ladder. Riekstiņš states that 'local inhabitants were not

³⁵⁵ http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm.

promoted, but leading positions were taken mostly by immigrants from the USSR'.³⁵⁶ Prigge rightly points out the contradiction with Berklavs's own rapid rise.³⁵⁷ Examples of Latvian cadres' rapid promotion within the Party apparatus in the early post-war years are plentiful, such as Krūmiņš or Bissenieks. Prigge is perplexed as to the reasons for this but several are apparent. Promoting Latvian cadres made them beholden to the Soviets and there was an acute need to bridge the chasm between the brutalised population (who were reluctant to involve themselves with the regime) and the Party. Native Latvian cadres were designed to facilitate this and present a reassuring face to Sovietisation.

There was much cooperation between the national communists in their various shifting leadership positions. Krūmiņš became Riga *obkom* First Secretary (and Pinksis and Bissenieks, the first secretaries of the Liepāja and Daugavpils *obkomy* respectively) after Stalin reorganised Latvia into *oblasti* in April 1952. Between then and the dissolution of the *oblasti* in April 1953, Berklavs was a Riga *gorkom* secretary having returned from the Higher Party School in 1950. Since the *obkom* devoted most of its attention to Riga's city organisation, functionaries of the two committees kept in close contact. Furthermore, during the first year of Berklavs's tenure as a secretary on the Riga *gorkom* (1951-1952), Bissenieks was Riga *gorkom* First Secretary. From June 1953, Bissenieks as Department of Party Organs Chairman and Krūmiņš as Second Secretary presumably became closely acquainted in their joint responsibility for cadres. Nikonov and Bissenieks worked together in agriculture after Bissenieks became Secretary for Agriculture in May 1954. Upon Bissenieks's appointment, all four CC secretaries were Latvians (the others being Kalnbērziņš, Krūmiņš and Pelše). In February 1955, Lācis engineered Berklavs's promotion to Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman to replace the 'indolent' Jānis Ostrovs who was relegated to Culture Minister.³⁵⁸ The novelist cum Party leader Lācis enjoyed good relations with Soviet Premier Malenkov, who permitted him a special deal: half his days spent on Party work and the rest writing. Therefore, Lācis relied on the energetic Berklavs to make many of the day-to-day decisions, which permitted Berklavs remarkable freedom.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ Pelkaus, *Policy of Occupation Powers*, 368-69.

³⁵⁷ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 31-32.

³⁵⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 89.

³⁵⁹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 48.

Ahead of the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, in which de-Stalinisation began in earnest, not all the changes since Stalin's death were preserved. Beria imposed Krūmiņš's appointment as Second Secretary in June 1953 but in January 1956 Krūmiņš was removed. This was connected with a piecemeal attempt by Moscow to strengthen control over the republics.³⁶⁰ Even as the national communists were rising, Krūmiņš's removal and Nikonov's ejection from the bureau at the Congress suggests a crackdown. Supposedly, Krūmiņš and Nikonov were punished because of Latvia's agricultural disappointments in 1955, which were criticised at the Congress.³⁶¹ Yet, the agricultural link was merely a pretext. An October 1955 CPSU CC commission report on the fractious situation in the Azerbaijani leadership resulted in the dismissal of Second Secretary Vitali Samedov and his replacement by an official from Moscow's CPSU CC Department of Party Organs for Union Republics (hereafter the Department for Union Republics) in November 1955.³⁶² In August 1956, Pavel Kovanov replaced the indigenous Georgian Second Secretary Mikhail Georgadze, who had held the post since February 1954. It was in this context that Kashnikov was dispatched from the central apparatus to replace Krūmiņš. As a concession, Krūmiņš retained his seat on the bureau in his new position as Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman.

Within the leadership, the national communists only gradually assumed control over the bureau. At the level below the bureau, the national communists made considerable progress in 'Latvianising' the all-important republic CC. There was a great deal of turnover. At the June 1953 plenum, Kalnbērziņš stated that 42% of the CC were Latvians.³⁶³ Two and a half years later at the 14th LCP Congress in January 1956, half of the LCP CC elected at the 12th LCP Congress in September 1952, the last before Stalin's death, were removed.³⁶⁴ Latvians comprised 69.5% of the new CC.³⁶⁵ By January 1958, that figure had risen to 75%.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁰ The attempt was piecemeal because not every native Second Secretary was removed. In Estonia, Leonid Lentman, was promoted in summer 1953, like his Krūmiņš, but retained his position until 1964.

³⁶¹ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.41-49. Doklad zamestitelia nachal'nika otdela po sovetskim respublikam F. Iakovlev i zaveduiushchii sektorom V. Gorin, 28 ianvaria 1956.

³⁶² Jamil Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954-1959*, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), 38.

³⁶³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.16, l.9, lp.59.

³⁶⁴ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 244.

³⁶⁵ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvu*, 149.

³⁶⁶ Andris Trāpans, 'The Latvian Communist Party and the Purge of 1937', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 11 (1980), 26.

From the visibly increasing strength of the national communists from 1956, we can detect a methodical strategy to supplant those hostile to reform with carefully selected personnel. It seems there was a coordinated plan to gain full control of the leadership, to which Pelše and his *Agitprop* Department represented one of the last bastions of opposition in mid-1958. This organised effort saw dozens of personnel enter the leadership, particularly in middle management. The national communists identified vital sectors and strategically positioned their supporters in key roles in CC departments, government ministries, in the media and centres of economic decision-making. It is erroneous to portray the national communists as merely voting in unison on the bureau without any discipline. It was not by happenstance that by 1959 the national communists boasted extensive influence and control with identifiable representatives in 25 sectors: the Komsomol; the KPK; in the CC departments: for the Riga *gorkom*, Administration, Trade and Finance, and Agriculture. In the government: the Council of Ministers; the Presidium; the Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Culture, Transport, Foreign Affairs, Health, Justice, and the Trade Union Council; municipal control of Riga through its *gorkom* and *gorispolkom* (City Executive Committee). In the economy: Gosplan, the *sovnarkhoz* and the Economics Institute. Within the media: the newspapers and journals *Rigas Balss*, *Cīņa*, *Padomju Jaunatne*, *Zvaigzne* and *Literatūra un Māksla*. The reforms enacted by the national communists were within its spheres of hegemony: economics, culture, education, and chiefly concerned Riga.

2.1.4 Newspapers and public opinion

To achieve their myriad goals the national communists attempted to mobilise the Latvian population itself in support of their programme. They understood the importance of public opinion and hoped to exploit it for tangible political advantage. Berklavs intended to play the populist and tap into public opinion in a way atypical for the USSR. Despite the fact that by 1957 the national communists controlled most of the republic's print media, Berklavs set up a new newspaper - *Rigas Balss* (Voice of Riga). National communist *Rigas Balss* editor Oswalds Darbiņš, invited Western correspondent Frank Gordon to join his staff. This was to be a very different publication, as Darbiņš told Gordon there were to be 'no eulogies on Partyism and

ideology'.³⁶⁷ Gordon recalled that '*Rigas Balss* was from the beginning quite an unusual media product that blew the monotonous, mouse-grey conformity of the contemporary press to pieces'. He compared it to 1920s *Krasnaia gazeta* (Red Newspaper), which caused a furore in Petrograd during the NEP era. 'Since those days... no one in the Kremlin empire held anything like *Riga Balss* so hot from the press in his hands', wrote Gordon.³⁶⁸ Crucially, the newspaper was printed in both Russian and Latvian, unlike the other major dailies *Sovetskaia Latvii* and *Cīņa*. An exceptional graphic feature of *Rigas Balss* was that the newspaper's Latvian name was transliterated into Cyrillic on the Russian edition and underneath in very small lettering stood 'Voice of Riga' in Russian. Gordon described the layout as 'extremely "decadent-bourgeois" in those pleasant years'.³⁶⁹ As such, *Rigas Balss* came under fire in 1959 from the Department for Union Republics for its 'intrusive, flashy headlines, which relish some of the shortcomings in our Soviet life'.³⁷⁰ This was in contrast to the bureau's meeting on 17th February 1959, which discussed the editorial work of *Rigas Balss*. The bureau praised the newspaper's 'gradual strengthening of ties with readers' and its focus on 'actual problems'.³⁷¹

Berkļavs designed *Rigas Balss* to be the national communist mouthpiece and its direct link to the populace. Berkļavs used *Rigas Balss* as a vehicle for his various campaigns as Riga *gorkom* First Secretary, appealing for popular support to overcome the truculent bureaucratic machine. In the first issue, printed on 1st October 1957, Berkļavs promised to maintain close contact with the citizenry and to 'attentively heed your opinion'.³⁷² Prigge notes that the national communists recognised the potential for widespread popular support by providing a greater voice for the public on such explosive issues as anti-Russian sentiment.³⁷³ Berkļavs's most notable crusade was against corruption. According to Prigge, while criticising Party policies was strictly forbidden in the media, criticism of individuals, even high-ranking

³⁶⁷ Frank Gordon, 'An Adventure During the Thaw: The Evening Newspaper *Rigas Balss* - Personal Experiences 1957-1971', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 19 (1988), 165;

³⁶⁸ Gordon, 'Rigas Balss', 164.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

³⁷⁰ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.35-36. Pis'mo ot TsK KPSS Otdel' soiuznykh respublik Baltii sektora zaveduiushchii Mikhail Gavrilov i TsK KPSS inspektor K. Lebedev v TsK KPSS sekretaria Aleksei Kirichenko, 13 marta 1959.

³⁷¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.23, lp.85-87.

³⁷² *Rigas Balss*, 1st October 1957.

³⁷³ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 312.

officials, was permissible.³⁷⁴ One example is Pharmacy Management Chief Aleksandr Tumanov. Tumanov had no prior connection to Latvia. He was attacked in *Rigas Balss* and then sacked on Berklavs's orders for 'inflating prices, pilfering and poor management'.³⁷⁵ Pelše understood Berklavs's strategy, describing Tumanov's ouster as 'a very agile organisational technique: take the administrative decision and then shape public opinion in the press'.³⁷⁶ During Berklavs's own dismissal in 1959 his actions caught up with him. Kalnbērziņš accused Berklavs of having Tumanov removed unnecessarily. Ultimately, the bureau reinstated Tumanov.³⁷⁷

Berklavs used the national communist press to promote, and gain public support for, his initiatives such as the residency restrictions. *Padomju Jaunatne* published an article entitled 'So Riga is full', which expressed outrage that citizen Troshnikov brought his wife from Velikie Luki to live in Riga. The article awaited 'such a wonderful day when the people without residence permits, will leave the city and go back to where they used to live'.³⁷⁸ Another campaign began in November 1958, against drunkenness. A debate on the opinion page of the newspaper encouraged a large public response including suggestions to remove alcoholics from their jobs.³⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly this campaign contained an anti-Russian component. In 2003, Berklavs personally boasted to Prigge that he could ensure 'no Russian drunkard would head a *kolkhoz*'. He was referring to the retired Red Army officers who often 'poorly managed' *kolkhozy*.³⁸⁰ Berklavs's formula was to expose the inadequate work of officials in *Rigas Balss* before officially demanding their dismissal in response to public outrage. One 1957 campaign, against rudeness among sales staff, had anti-Russian overtones with poor competency in Latvian listed as a transgression. As with drunkenness, the charge of rudeness applied almost exclusively to non-Latvians. According to Berklavs, numerous officials, particularly in the economic ministries and Gosplan, were exposed and removed by the newspaper. 'Not for being Russian', he told Prigge, 'but for not understanding local conditions'. Nevertheless, it is clear

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ 'Stenogramma 7-ia Plenuma', 2 (1989), 103.

³⁷⁶ LVA-PA f.101, op.22, d.15, l.56.

³⁷⁷ LVA-PA f.101, op.22, d.15, l.9.

³⁷⁸ LVA-PA f.101, op.22, d.15, l.12.

³⁷⁹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 90.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 45-47.

that Russian officials were the targets of these campaigns.³⁸¹ Prigge notes that this was more than just a public relations measure. The Riga *gorkom* dismissed Party members judged not to have met ‘high moral standards’. In 1957, 44 Party members were removed on these charges and only one was Latvian. The specific charges in this morality campaign centred on problems that affected work performance: lateness, intoxication at work and pilfering, or a Party member was concluded to have conducted himself in an ‘un-Party-like manner’.³⁸² Yet, this worked both ways as ‘immoral behaviour’ assisted Pelše during the purge in dismissing national communists. Komsomol chief Vladislavs Ruskulis was sacked ostensibly for public inebriation and brawling.³⁸³ In August 1959, Riga *gorkom* First Secretary Straujums received a reprimand following an accusation by a Party member that he failed to provide child support to their 15-year-old son, ‘borne of their short-term intimate relationship’.³⁸⁴

Reflecting in the 1990s on the newspaper’s success, Berklavs wrote that *Rigas Balss* ‘had a great positive impact on our future work, because we were able to discuss household problems and convincingly demonstrate the existence of manifestations of Great Russian chauvinism. The newspaper helped awaken Latvians’ self-confidence and courage to fight for their legitimate rights’.³⁸⁵ Gordon believed *Rigas Balss* heralded ‘a new age of press creation’ in the USSR, terming it “‘the Thaw’ in black and white’.³⁸⁶ The newspaper style was undoubtedly popular; in 1959, *Rigas Balss*’s circulated 60,000 copies in Latvian and 40,000 in Russian.³⁸⁷ Berklavs explained that they could have sold three times as many copies were there not restrictions on scarce paper.³⁸⁸ Berklavs’s frequent contributions to the paper made him a household name and the face of the national communists. Yet, this also fed accusations that he was arrogant and haughty. At the July 1959 plenum, Nikolai Saleev attacked him for creating his own cult of personality. He noted Berklavs’s ‘aura of fame’ and that he became a sort of ‘idol’. Saleev said *Rigas Balss* followed Berklavs’s every step and carefully described his

³⁸¹ Prigge, ‘Power, Popular Opinion’, 312-13, 318 fn.21.

³⁸² Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 53-55.

³⁸³ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.7890, lp.30. Vladislavs Donatovich Ruskulis personnel file, 21 oktjabria 1958.

³⁸⁴ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.5432, lp.49.

³⁸⁵ Berklavs, ‘Visiem, kam’, 16.

³⁸⁶ Gordon, ‘*Rigas Balss*’, 167.

³⁸⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.50, lp.60.

³⁸⁸ Prigge, ‘Power, Public Opinion’, 311.

activities. 'In newsreels, on television, on all tribunes' he explained, 'people saw Berklavs'. He also quoted an article by national communist Vēra Kacena published in *Rigas Balss* on 1st March 1958. She wrote that Berklavs had 'such great talent, that he could accomplish any task without exception'.³⁸⁹ While it is unlikely that Berklavs actively cultivated a personality cult, Berklavs's behaviour created much enmity and contributed to his overthrow in 1959.

The people of Latvia were disenchanted with 'the sacrifices the republic was being asked to make for the cause of the larger Soviet state', as Widmer puts it. Through mediums such as *Rigas Balss* the national communists convinced the populace that they were defenders of Latvia's culture and traditions and therefore they increasingly lent the national communists their support. Indigenous Latvian enlistment in the Party grew significantly after the 20th Party Congress and contributed to the national communists' rise. Widmer thought that the improvement in Party recruitment and steady rise in LCP membership levels towards the CPSU average emboldened the national communists.³⁹⁰ Prigge considers that the national communists 'translated public support into real power in the Party... but the faction ultimately failed to make communism popular'.³⁹¹ The national communists were partially successful in using public support to manipulate the Party apparatus. Though Soviet socialism would never become popular among Latvians, the Latvian face that the national communists gave the Party encouraged rapprochement and boosted Latvian membership. The public identified them with pro-Latvian policies but they were incapable of making Soviet rule sufficiently palatable to the population to make Latvians a majority in the LCP during their brief dominance of Latvian politics.

2.2 The Twentieth Party Congress and De-Stalinisation

Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956 intensified de-Stalinisation and ushered in the Thaw era in the USSR. The significance of Khrushchev's speech is difficult to overestimate as it had diverse implications for the political development of

³⁸⁹ 'Iz arkhivnykh fondov: Stenogramma 7-ia zakrytogo Plenuma TsK KPL 7-ia-8-ia iulia 1959', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 5 (1989), 88-89.

³⁹⁰ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 116; See Appendix A, Table 4.

³⁹¹ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 311.

the USSR, Eastern Europe and the national communists. It facilitated Latvia's responses to, and exploitation of, events in the centre. The Congress altered nationality policy, permitting the national communists extraordinary flexibility to pursue their most controversial policies. As with the 'New Course' in 1953, six months later, Khrushchev struggled to regain control of the forces he unleashed at the Congress. The repercussions of the reaction to de-Stalinisation and the Thaw in the Soviet periphery and satellites led to riots in Poland and the Hungarian Uprising, countries chafing in their attempt to loosen their Soviet bonds. Furthermore, the subsequent release and return of thousands of Gulag prisoners distinctly affected Latvian society.

The 20th Party Congress took place between 14th and 25th February 1956. At the closed morning session on 23rd February, Khrushchev delivered his extraordinary Secret Speech 'Concerning the Cult of Personality and its Consequences' in which he castigated Stalin's regime. In repudiating Stalin's methods, Khrushchev affirmed his commitment to observe socialist legality and put an end to Stalinist-style 'barracks socialism'. This put tangible emphasis on the republics' constitutional 'sovereignty'.³⁹² Khrushchev could not secure full control over the Kremlin leadership while his rivals and their client bases obstructed his initiatives. The eternal pragmatist, Khrushchev used de-Stalinisation for his own designs to undermine his Stalinist opponents. Therefore it was symbolic that the core members of the national communists Pinksis, Krūmiņš and Berklavs received special invitations to the Congress and thus witnessed the Secret Speech, while Pelše was excluded.³⁹³ The denunciation of Stalin despite his 'demigod' status caught Khrushchev's political opponents off guard.³⁹⁴ The decisions of the 20th Party Congress initiated the partial liberalisation of the Soviet system, including in nationality policy. This was designed to galvanise support for Khrushchev in the periphery.

At the 20th Congress, Khrushchev signalled the return of the powers Stalin stripped from the Party. To do this he repeatedly invoked Lenin to portray Stalinism as an aberration that should be corrected. Khrushchev echoed Lenin: 'Far from erasing national differences and

³⁹² Tannberg, *Politika Moskvy*, 144-45.

³⁹³ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 3 (1990), 92.

³⁹⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 131.

peculiarities, socialism assures the all-round development and flourishing of the economy and culture of all peoples. It is our duty not to ignore these peculiarities and differences, but to take careful account of them in our work in directing economic and cultural construction'.³⁹⁵ Krūmiņš recalled a comment by Khrushchev's ally Anastas Mikoian, which had an oddly religious undertone: 'I think that Lenin is present at this Congress'. Delegates to the Congress received copies of Lenin's last will and testament.³⁹⁶ This collection of letters written shortly before his death (and subsequently suppressed by Stalin) exposed, among other things, his revulsion towards Stalin's treatment of ethnic minorities. Krūmiņš reflected on the Congress: 'We first learned the true opinion of Lenin's union of free republics, on what principles it should be, the complete independence of sovereign republics... except defence and foreign policy. We learned what Lenin... wrote [about] great-power chauvinism'.³⁹⁷ The revelations about Lenin profoundly affected the national communists. Whether as reform-minded communists or pragmatists they based the foundations of their policies on Lenin's teachings. Berklavs explained that in every situation he strategically employed Lenin, particularly in his statements about Russian chauvinism. 'It was not that I was a believer in Lenin, but it was the only legal way', he told Prigge.³⁹⁸ As Prigge puts it, 'Lenin's words, tightly censored before, now provided Latvians with the justification they needed for a full-scale rollback of pro-Russian policies'.³⁹⁹

Before the 20th Party Congress, the political development of the national communists was limited. The Secret Speech offered the national communists their most substantial boost since Beria in 1953.⁴⁰⁰ Khrushchev's call for de-Stalinisation dovetailed with national communist aims. De-Stalinisation implied a rejection of Stalinist 'old guard' apparatchiks throughout the apparatus and their supplanting with a new generation of Party cadres. In the same way as Beria intended to gain from the 'New Course' in 1953, this new, rising generation would be beholden to Khrushchev for their advancement and thus would expand and secure his powerbase allowing him to become the undisputed Soviet leader. Furthermore, Khrushchev's

³⁹⁵ Leo Gruliow (ed.), *Current Soviet Policies II: the Documentary Record of the 20th Communist Party Congress and its Aftermath*, (New York: Praeger, 1957), 53.

³⁹⁶ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 50.

³⁹⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 92.

³⁹⁸ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 54.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

implementation of economic, social and administrative reforms offered the republics greater autonomy, making the national communists natural allies. The denunciation of Stalin released a shockwave, which launched decentralisation initiatives that increased the stature of the Soviet Republics within the system by restoring their authority. Thus, from 1956 Khrushchev initiated a series of administrative reorganisations favourable to the development of the republics' power at the expense of the excessively centralised management system.⁴⁰¹ This was a conciliatory move towards the republics, in which Khrushchev continued with Beria's original plan to reduce the *nomenklatura* and thus the power of the centre. By June 1956, the *nomenklatura* was further scaled back by 9,402 positions, to 62.8% of its 1953 level.⁴⁰²

The Secret Speech did not remain secret for long. The Latvian bureau ordered its translation and 300 copies were produced just two weeks afterwards.⁴⁰³ The national communists wanted to spread the word. Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation campaign in Latvia was unleashed swiftly and with enthusiasm. Shortly after the Congress, Pinksis, decided to order a 'cleansing of the cult of personality'. Portraits of Stalin were removed in the Liepāja *gorkom* and soviet. The *Krasnyi Metalurgs* (Red Metallurgy) factory followed Pinksis's example by swiftly removing the large bust of Stalin that had stood at the factory entrance.⁴⁰⁴ The national communists could only become properly active and openly articulate their programme after the 20th Party Congress when de-Stalinisation was sanctioned by Moscow.⁴⁰⁵ The combination of their aggressive reforms and the implication that they were marked to succeed the obsolete Stalinist generation set them on an inevitable collision course with Stalinists in Latvia and Moscow.⁴⁰⁶ Tensions further escalated after Khrushchev defeated the attempt by his rivals, the other surviving members of Stalin's inner circle: Viacheslav Molotov, Georgii Malenkov and

⁴⁰¹ Daina Bleiere, 'Kā nīdēja nacionālkomunistus', *Latvijas Avīze*, 7th August 2004.

⁴⁰² Tannberg, *Politika Moskvā*, 59.

⁴⁰³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.50, lp.157. Informatsiia, zasedaniia, proekty reshenii, stenogrammy i drugie materialy biuro marta 1956. 'O perevode rechi Khrushcheva "O kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviiah" na latyshskii iazyk', 12 marta 1956.

⁴⁰⁴ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.54, l.6-7. 'O khode oznakomleniia kommunistov, komsomol'tsev i bespartiinogo aktiv s dokladnom Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviiah', zamestitel' zaveduiushchego Otdel partiinykh organov TsK KPSS F. Iakovlev i zamestitel' zaveduiushchego Sektor organizatsionnykh voprosov i informatsii V. Gorin, 13 apreliia 1956.

⁴⁰⁵ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 396.

⁴⁰⁶ Krūmiņš, 'Laika pakāpienus skaitot', 2.

Lazar Kaganovich, the so-called Anti-Party group, to oust him in June 1957. This ended the equilibrium still in place after the 20th congress.

2.2.1 The impact of events in Poland and Hungary and Gulag returnees

After the 20th Party Congress, Kremlin politicians remained undecided about how to proceed with de-Stalinisation: there was no plan for remaking Soviet society. The Secret Speech created circumstances that the Kremlin leadership did not anticipate.⁴⁰⁷ Khrushchev did not provide a true assessment of the Stalin era regime, which would have highlighted his culpability. Instead, he attempted to shore up his position and outmanoeuvre the Stalinists. Yet, the speech appeared to suggest to leaders in Eastern Europe that there were multiple roads to socialism. According to Kemp, by allowing for more openness and sensitivity to national concerns, Khrushchev overlooked the degree to which Eastern European regimes sought domestic stability through popular acceptance, making them more susceptible to nationalist infection, which was bound to damage Soviet interests.⁴⁰⁸ Moscow considered Hungary's Imre Nagy and Poland's Władysław Gomułka's attempts to reform their respective regimes a serious threat. The Soviet leadership found it necessary to restrain society with repression, as with East Germany in 1953. This culminated in intervention with Soviet tanks to suppress the subsequent uprising in Hungary and riots in Poznań, Poland during October and November 1956.⁴⁰⁹

In the Baltic Republics, events in Poland and Hungary were watched closely. The open expression of nationalism became more commonplace in the wake of the Secret Speech and more so after the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising. Reports of nationalist activity both at the grassroots and official levels mushroomed in the wake of the Secret Speech.⁴¹⁰ Amir Weiner quotes Baltic dissidents in their expectation that Eastern European rebellions would trigger a chain reaction that would sweep the region: '[It will be] the beginning of the end. Soon all the democratic countries will overthrow the hated system and breakaway from the Soviet Union. The unrest will then spread to the Baltics, which will be liberated from the Russians'.⁴¹¹ Weiner

⁴⁰⁷ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 373-74.

⁴⁰⁸ Melvin Croan, 'Moscow and Eastern Europe', *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1966), 61.

⁴⁰⁹ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvy*, 144-45.

⁴¹⁰ Smith, 'Leadership and nationalism', 84-85.

⁴¹¹ Amir Weiner, 'The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics', *The Journal of Modern History*, 78 (2006), 356.

emphasises that these instances of Baltic instability were ethnically charged. The authorities were aware that ‘in the hierarchy of animosities, ideology and politics took a backseat to ethnicity. Anti-Soviet leaflets or individuals shouting in the streets “down with the Russian government” and “death to the Russian occupiers” did not even bother mentioning the Communist Party’.⁴¹² Citizen Justin Liepa drew parallels between the situation in Latvia and what he considered a Russian occupation in Hungary. He wrote several letters to *Cīņa* complaining about Russification in Latvia.⁴¹³ This was deeply concerning to the Latvian leadership. Reflecting on this period in 1959, Lācis noted that events in Eastern Europe spurred the national communist cause.

The Hungarian events raised a lot of dust among the intelligentsia and young people... [they] thought it was a revolution. Even our nationalists felt threatened, [recognising]: “If those events develop here, we will be the ones hung or shot”... Some comrades, concerned with avoiding such large-scale problems considered the Hungarian events as a negative example. That was the beginning of everything.⁴¹⁴

Pelše was similarly troubled. At the October 1957 plenum, he described the period after the 20th Congress and Polish and Hungarian incidents as a time when press and culture were lacking in Party values, a period of ‘confusion and sailing without a rudder’.⁴¹⁵

The Secret Speech, the Hungarian revolution and Polish ‘October’ all unleashed the desire for greater freedom of expression in Latvia, which translated into increased pressure from the populace to give voice to its national feelings.⁴¹⁶ No doubt, the national communists closely observed Gomułka’s Polish ‘road to socialism’. Gomułka made peace with the Catholic Church, secured the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Warsaw, and disbanded of over 80% of *kolkhozy*. All of this was admissible, as it did not challenge the Soviet bloc’s security.⁴¹⁷ One observer summarised the Polish situation: ‘Gomułka has been the model of how Communism can be

⁴¹² Ibid, 357-58.

⁴¹³ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1205, lp.41. Soobshcheniia iz KGB LSSR dlia 1958. Ob’iasnenie, Justin Liepa, 8 maia 1958.

⁴¹⁴ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremli*, 374.

⁴¹⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.5, lp.13-14.

⁴¹⁶ Widmer, ‘National and Communism’, 529.

⁴¹⁷ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 146.

united with national interests. Lively contacts are maintained with Poland, and Polish newspapers have many interested readers in Latvia today'.⁴¹⁸ It is possible that Berklavs considered himself a 'Latvian Gomulka', representing the cause of Latvian national identity. Gomulka removed the Russian-Polish Defence Minister General Konstantin Rokossovskii. There are parallels in the denial of Russian General Pavel Batov a seat on the Latvian bureau in April 1958. Misiunas and Taagepera consider the Baltic leaderships' reassertion of their prerogatives within the system a consequence, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, of de-Stalinisation's psychological impact.⁴¹⁹

The Kremlin viewed developments in the Baltic as dangerous and turned its attention there in late 1956. Tannburg suggests that events in the Baltics were one of the factors that contributed to the application of repressive measures in Poland and Hungary.⁴²⁰ In late November, the Department for Union Republics prepared a memorandum entitled 'Nationalistic and anti-Soviet manifestations in the Baltic Soviet Republics'. Department Chairman Gromov found that 'in recent years nationalism in the Baltic Republics poses a certain danger because it does not received a proper rebuff and communication between local authorities and the people is weak. According to some leaders, the situation could be remedied by replacing cadres with local-born leaders'. Gromov proposed that the CPSU CC interview each Baltic First Secretary.⁴²¹

In November 1956, Department for Union Republics Baltic Sector Chairman Mikhail Gavrilov met with Baltic leaders. Gavrilov's report examined the causes of the spread of nationalist and anti-Soviet sentiment in the Baltic Republics and found similarities to problems occurring in the recalcitrant Eastern European satellites: 'The intensity of the internal political situation was linked to the fact that the role of local cadres in these republics was too small. Political work is weak among the masses with [ignorance] of the Baltic Republics' peculiarities. The national cadres question has been linked directly with the Poles'.⁴²² Reports like this indicate that Moscow remained acutely nervous about a rebellious contagion spreading from

⁴¹⁸ King, 'Management of the Economy'.

⁴¹⁹ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 131.

⁴²⁰ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvu*, 373-74.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴²² RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.210-11. 'Na natsionalisticheskikh i antisovetskikh proiavlennii v Pribaltiiskikh respublikakh', Mikhail Gavrilov, 27 noiabria 1956.

Eastern Europe. The final section of the report addressed the populace's everyday problems using interviews with the public and local officials. Workers complained about their slowly rising living standards, the high price of consumer goods, the shortage of urban housing and insufficient salaries that did not provide a living wage, in other words, that the system was not delivering.⁴²³

The Soviet leadership paid close attention to this report. In 1953, Khrushchev accepted that the Sovietisation of the Baltic Republics had failed. Therefore, from 1956, Khrushchev tried a different approach, he attempted to improve life in the Baltic Republics and make them as Zubkova terms it, 'the shop window on Soviet life'.⁴²⁴ Riga was opened to foreign tourists. Citizens were allowed to exchange letters with their relatives abroad. This 'Soviet West' received greater investment, resources and privileges than other republics for the remainder of the Soviet era. Another consequence of the Congress and condemnation of Stalin's cult of personality was the reassessment of history with special 'overtures' made toward the Baltic Republics. In his speech, Khrushchev rehabilitated two important Latvian revolutionaries, Roberts Eiche and Jānis Rudzutaks, who were executed during the Terror.⁴²⁵ Latvia benefitted considerably from this change of tack, though ultimately this 'soft Sovietisation' proved little more effective than the brutal methods Stalin employed.

There was no equivalent of a violent uprising in Latvia. The repressions in Eastern Europe confirmed to Latvians that the Soviet regime would endure. Instead, unrest led to increasing support for the national communists, viewed as the only option for Latvians to improve their position vis-à-vis the centre by working within the system. The Latvian people grew more demanding, advocating limited freedom of expression, which manifested itself in increased concern for Latvia's national heritage.⁴²⁶ The 20th Party Congress raised hopes in Latvia that it would be possible to improve the status of the Latvian language and to limit migration, particularly in Riga, because housing construction and infrastructure no longer kept pace with population growth.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ RGANI f.5, op.31, 59, 1.211.

⁴²⁴ Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kremļ'*, 337.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 110.

⁴²⁷ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 110.

According to Thomas Simons, in both Poland and Hungary, there were pertinent questions as to why the leaderships ran ‘roughshod over local circumstances. The answer to these questions pointed to Moscow and raised the issue of national paths to communism’.⁴²⁸ In response to events in Hungary and Poland, Khrushchev backtracked on the idea of alternative ‘paths’ to socialism in his speech to the USSR Supreme Soviet on the October Revolution’s 40th anniversary in 1957. If republics could differ in their approaches to socialism, ‘singly, scattered... floundering about separately. There would be so many “paths” that people would lose their way as in a forest and would not know how to reach their great goal’. Khrushchev pronounced judgement on these Eastern European versions of national communism. There could be only one ‘highroad to socialism’, the tried and tested Soviet road.⁴²⁹ This was in contrast to his previous speech at the 20th Party Congress, promising to respect ‘national differences and peculiarities’.⁴³⁰ Kemp correctly recognises Khrushchev was ‘stuck in a cyclical pattern of compromise and crackdown. Every time he felt that he was rectifying the situation, he unwittingly unleashed new centrifugal forces’.⁴³¹ This applied to Latvia and Khrushchev’s ambivalent support for the national communists. Khrushchev’s quandary permitted the Soviet Republics considerable room for manoeuvre.

In 1956, to Latvia’s west, Eastern Europe was in rebellion, and from the east, another external factor confronted Latvian society, the return of deportees. In September 1955, a general amnesty was proclaimed for some 200,000 Latvian prisoners, and about 30,000 persons returned from various exile camps.⁴³² Amnesties released 80-85% of Latvians from the Gulag.⁴³³ More than 21,000 people repressed for ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’ returned to Latvia between 1956 and 1957, with an additional 7,022 families, some 18,318 persons, removed from the Council of Ministers’ special camp lists.⁴³⁴ After Khrushchev allowed deportees to return home, the housing shortage became acute. Krūmiņš received an instruction

⁴²⁸ Thomas Simons, *Eastern Europe in the Postwar World*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 95.

⁴²⁹ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 149.

⁴³⁰ Gruliow, *20th Communist Party Congress*, 53.

⁴³¹ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 149.

⁴³² Plakans, *The Latvians*, 155.

⁴³³ Ilga Gore, ‘1953. gada karstā vasara’, *Literatūra un Māksla*, 10th June 1989, 5.

⁴³⁴ Plakans, *Experiencing Totalitarianism*, 199. Report of KGB Chairman Vēvers to the LSSR Council of Ministers, ‘Concerning hostile and anti-Soviet expressions by persons who were previously repressed and have now returned’, 2nd January 1958.

from Presidium member Kliment Voroshilov to supply Gulag returnees with apartments.⁴³⁵ The Gulag amnesties of 1956 exacerbated tensions and displays of anti-Soviet behaviour, because nationalists and sectarian activists were allowed to return to their western republics, close to where rebellion flared. Latvian returnee Harlis Heislars caused a sensation in 1956 with the publication of his autobiographical poem *The Unfinished Song*, in which he told of ‘innocents languishing behind swamps and gullies of bluish hills’.⁴³⁶

There are numerous reports about the actions and statements of gulag returnees who were quite open about their hostility towards the Soviet establishment. Latvian KGB chairman Jānis Vēvers, reported on anti-Soviet expressions from Gulag returnees to Latvia. Vēvers claimed 1,000 former members of armed groups and nationalist organisations returned to Latvia, comprising 70% of the 1,630 persons who returned to Riga. Despite restrictions in their passports, many of those registered outside Riga lived in the city. Vēvers described a seemingly unopposed revival of anti-Soviet activities from former Gulag inmates: ‘Among the returnees there are many who have retained hostile opinions of Soviet power, [and] they anticipate or are already engaged in anti-Soviet activities... Some of them engage in anti-Soviet agitation, and threaten communists.’⁴³⁷ In the Limbaži district, the KGB reported several cases in which brazen Gulag returnees confronted Soviet officials. The Supreme Court reviewed the case of returnee Arvīds Lanks:

Working in the *kolkhoz* ‘Stanicele’, Lanks systematically disseminated anti-Soviet propaganda. To the communist Krūmiņš, Lanks, pointing out others who share his ideas and returned from imprisonment, stated clearly: ‘See our ranks are growing. You Russian black beetle, the time will come when our sparks will set a fire, and then we will settle the score with you and take your heads off’.⁴³⁸

This was a commonplace threat as many statements from vengeful Gulag returnees predicted the collapse of the Soviet order. Returnee Hermanis Francis openly expressed utterances such as ‘Russians out of Latvia’ and ‘they have no business being here’. In an election meeting, Francis

⁴³⁵ Krūmiņš, ‘Tas drūmais’, 133.

⁴³⁶ John Keep, *Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union 1945-1991*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 149.

⁴³⁷ Plakans, *Experiencing Totalitarianism*, 198-99.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 212, Limbaži *raikom* meeting, 18th July 1959.

openly said to communist Dārziņš: ‘We can probably break you’, and said to Orlov, a Russian: ‘If you were drowning then I would not help save you’.⁴³⁹ The returnees’ anti-Soviet fervour had not lessened. These reports gave authorities cause for concern. With terror curtailed, anti-Soviet moods became more overt in Latvian public opinion. The rise in anti-Soviet activity was linked to, and boosted by, the palpably anti-Russian atmosphere generated by national communist initiatives. In 1958, the KGB liquidated 11 anti-Soviet groups comprised of students, and in early 1959, seven similar groups were eliminated.⁴⁴⁰

2.3 Cultural Struggles 1955-1957

Perhaps the national communists’ most significant achievement was cultural preservation, which remained in place after their ouster. Retrospectively, the national communists viewed their contribution to Latvia’s cultural survival during the Soviet period as their most successful accomplishment.⁴⁴¹ In his memoirs, Kalpiņš refers to the period as ‘a time in which the active participation of popular forces was permissible’. He described the years 1955-1959 as the ‘Latvian nation’s era of revival’.⁴⁴² In the initial post-war Stalinist period, Latvia witnessed the direct suppression of intellectuals and the straightjacketing of Latvian culture. This was in contrast to the culturally liberalising effect of Khrushchev’s Thaw. The Thaw in Latvia gave the national communists considerable latitude and prompted something of a cultural renaissance in which the national communists sought to rehabilitate as much of Latvia’s pre-Soviet culture as possible. Pabriks and Purs agree that the national communists ‘spurred a revival of national and cultural identity’.⁴⁴³ Antagonism towards the subjugation of Latvian traditions and cultural heritage, and their replacement by an imposed Soviet culture, increased. Passive resistance towards cultural Russification became more apparent following Khrushchev’s Thaw, following the national communists’ arrival on the cultural scene. The defence of Latvian culture and resistance to Russification was their *raison d’être*. Jānis Stradiņš considers poetry, the fine arts,

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 213.

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Iz arkhivnykh fondov: Stenogramma 7-ia zakrytogo Plenuma TsK KPL 7-ia-8-ia iiulia 1959’, *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 6 (1989), 71.

⁴⁴¹ Vilis Krūmiņš, ‘1959 gads. Atmiņas un pārdomas’, *Latvijas likteņgadi*, 4 (1990), 80.

⁴⁴² Kalpiņš, ‘Pirms drūmā’, 118.

⁴⁴³ Pabriks and Purs, ‘Challenges of Change’, 34.

theatre, song festivals, and other spheres of culture the ‘arenas where most of the battles for national identity were fought’.⁴⁴⁴

During the cultural Thaw, the national communists made significant strides to reverse the suppression of Latvia’s literary heritage. The prevailing notion about Soviet Latvian literature was that bourgeois Latvia produced acceptable pieces but post-war publishing should concentrate on Soviet Latvian authors. Ozoliņš was the first to criticise this in an article published in spring 1954. He attacked the feebleness and formulaic nature of Soviet Latvian prose, describing it as unpalatable ‘assembly-line literature’. Ozoliņš’s implication was that the Party doctrine formulated by Stalin’s cultural mandarin Andrei Zhdanov (*zhdanovshchina*) in 1946, which forced the cultural intelligentsia to conform to the Party line, led Latvian literature into a ‘blind alley’.⁴⁴⁵

Yet, these early complaints did not produce immediate results. The national communists encountered opposition from Stalinist cultural ideologues Pelše and Bumbiers. Pelše’s role as Secretary for Ideology included work in agitation-propaganda, culture and publishing. Pelše and his allies objected to the national communist’s exploitation of the Thaw to ‘Latvianise’ culture. They did not want to focus on pre-1940 Latvian culture and only reluctantly recognised the works of the Latvia’s literary greats Rainis, Andrejs Upītis, Leons Paeģle and Eduards Veidenbaums.⁴⁴⁶ Kalpiņš, Ozoliņš, Pizāns and Berklavs led national communists efforts to preserve Latvian literary, cultural and historical heritage.

Consequently, a personal conflict developed between Pelše, the ideological dogmatist, and Deputy Culture Minister Kalpiņš. Prigge describes the clash between Pelše and Kalpiņš with the somewhat exaggerated phrase ‘The Latvian Culture Wars’. Nevertheless, it was a serious confrontation over ideological interpretations, émigré writings, and the censorship debate all initiated by Khrushchev’s Thaw. Prigge considers that ‘for the national communists, culture meant legitimacy or illegitimacy of the Soviet government in the eyes of the Latvian population. Whereas the national communists believed that local culture was something worthy

⁴⁴⁴ Jānis Stradiņš (ed.), *Cultural Policy in Latvia*, (Riga: Council of Europe, 1998), 33.

⁴⁴⁵ Rolf Ekmanis, *Latvian Literature under the Soviets: 1940-1975*, (Massachusetts: Nordland, 1978), 185-86.

⁴⁴⁶ Eduards Berklavs, ‘Atmiņu grubuļos, 22. aprīlis 1996’, in *Stāja Voldemāra Kalpiņa Laiks*, (Riga: Pils, 2011), 88.

of preservation, Pelše viewed it as a dangerous relic of a bygone age'.⁴⁴⁷ Their first dual was over the repertoire for the *Dekad*, a decennial 10-day cultural event hosted by Latvia on 14th-26th December 1955 in Moscow. This was an opportunity for Latvia to present its cultural achievements in the Union capital. Latvia's *Dekad* included opera, ballet, theatre, the national choir and symphony orchestra as well as amateur choirs, song, dance and folklore ensembles, writers and artists: over 1,000 performers in total.⁴⁴⁸ The point of contention between the national communists and Pelše was over the inclusion of Rūdolfs Blaumanis's 1902 Latvian comedy *Skroderdienas Silmačos* (The Tailors of Silmačos) in the theatre.⁴⁴⁹ Pelše opposed the play because it exhibited class differences. Kalpiņš believed Pelše's *Agitprop* Department were too restrained on Latvian classics and the play was important even though it did not follow the Party line.⁴⁵⁰ The local Latvian theatre director, Berklavs, and Kalpiņš refused to relent; threatening to send nothing if Blaumanis's play was not included. Pelše ultimately agreed.⁴⁵¹

The second major clash between Kalpiņš and Pelše came in 1957 following articles by Kalpiņš on the value of Latvia's pre-Soviet era literary heritage published in the journal he edited, *Literatūra un Māksla*. At this time, the press was more lenient and permissive with regard to Latvian national traditions. No doubt, this was not only related to the Thaw, but because the national communists dominated print media by 1957: Pizāns managed *Cīņa*; Rafael Blūms ran the satirical magazine *Zvaigzne*; Kristaps Kaugurs headed *Padomju Jaunatne*; and Darbiņš and his Deputy Anna Mūkina edited *Rīgas Balss*. Kalpiņš extolled the works of banned, 'bourgeois' Latvian writers Friča Bārdas, Andrieva Niedras, Pāvils Rozītis and Edvarts Virza, and successfully organised the printing of new editions of their work. In a series of articles, Kalpiņš even made some positive comments about works of émigré writers. He praised the recent relaxation on foreign publications and advocated publishing some of their writing. Like Ozoliņš, Kalpiņš, considered Soviet Latvian literature as primitive and wooden.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁷ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 68-69.

⁴⁴⁸ Voldemārs Kalpiņš, '1959. gads Toreiz apsūdzētā liecība', *Cīņa*, 1st September 1988, 3.

⁴⁴⁹ Berklavs, 'Atmiņu grubiņos', 88.

⁴⁵⁰ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 72-73.

⁴⁵¹ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 310.

⁴⁵² Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 530; Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 73; Berklavs, 'Atmiņu grubiņos', 88.

At the October 1957 plenum, the row between Pelše and Kalpiņš reached its climax. In his speech, Pelše attacked *Literatūra un Māksla* and *Zvaigzne* for being ‘ideologically undisciplined’ referring to the journals’ support for the printing of pre-war Latvian writers’ works.⁴⁵³ In response to *Literatūra un Māksla*’s crusade, the Union of Latvian Soviet Writers’ Party secretary Bertse, called for the establishment of a Russian language literary and art magazine in Latvia.⁴⁵⁴ Pelše lambasted the fact that a Latvian émigré article praised Kalpiņš’s initiatives, arguing that ‘all our blunders in literary and artistic policies, all [this] ideological vacillating is... picked up by our enemies’. He feared that Kalpiņš was weakening the Party’s grip on the cultural intelligentsia, noting that ‘some artistic workers are slipping from the Party position’. Pelše argued that Kalpiņš was throwing the Party’s position as the guiding force in cultural activity into question: ‘Each year in our republic, two million go to the theatre, nearly three million see films, millions of people read Soviet literature. Where there are millions, there is politics. That is why the Party organisation cannot stand on the sideline of artistic politics’.⁴⁵⁵

Krūmiņš, then responsible for cultural affairs, came to Kalpiņš’s aid, stating ‘The situation must not be considered normal when the enormous riches of our people’s cultural heritage remain in hiding’. As evidence Krūmiņš referenced a number of leading pre-war Latvian artists who ‘until recently’ were ignored in Soviet Latvia.⁴⁵⁶ Eventually, Pelše conceded that in the struggle against nationalism there were instances of ‘infringement upon the rights of the Latvian language’, but did not deviate from the standard rhetoric that this ‘gave nationalists cause to shout about Russification and great-power chauvinism’. Perhaps aware of his eroding authority within the Party, when he spoke again at the end of the plenum Pelše attempted to placate Kalpiņš, which concluded their dispute.⁴⁵⁷ At the July 1959 plenum, Department for Union Republics Deputy Chairman Petr Pigalev recalled the episode, and declared that Pelše rightly criticised Kalpiņš. Piglaev sarcastically remarked that Kalpiņš ‘took over the thankless mission of protecting Latvian émigré writers and their readers in matters of Party politics in

⁴⁵³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.5, lp.14-16. 5-ia plenum 9-10 oktiabria 1957.

⁴⁵⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.5, lp.44.

⁴⁵⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.5, lp.18.

⁴⁵⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.5, lp.25-29.

⁴⁵⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.5, lp.17, 72–73.

literature and art'.⁴⁵⁸ No doubt, these cultural struggles fuelled Pelše's two-year battle to expel Kalpiņš from the leadership between 1959 and 1961.

Moscow was willing to tolerate a national component in the republics' culture albeit within severely drawn limits. Kalpiņš boasted an extensive list of cultural achievements during this period: the preservation of the Dome Cathedral's interior, the revival of Latvian cultural activities in Latgale, the construction of a concentration camp memorial in Salaspils, and the Dzintari concert hall's construction.⁴⁵⁹ With the national communists approaching their peak, on 8th April 1958, the bureau adopted a decision 'On Latvia's National Heritage'. This provided for greater emphasis on the discussion of Latvian cultural heritage including a plan for the wider use of the work of pre-Soviet Latvian writers, artists and musicians on stage and in concert halls, and the construction of a Latvian literature and art museum in Riga.⁴⁶⁰ There were many other achievements. Latvia published more books per capita than any Soviet Republic except Estonia. Folklore groups, folk art and research developed under the auspices of the Emilis Melngailis Folk Art Centre. There was a heavy ideological component to the traditional Latvian Song Festival but it remained a powerful expression of national unity.⁴⁶¹ Finally, the national communists successfully secured the lifting of the ban on Midsummer's Eve celebrations.

The hitherto stifled Latvian creative intelligentsia championed the national communists' efforts. Egil Levits describes how the cultural Thaw revitalised this drive. The cultural elite radically renewed its ranks. Intellectuals who were already prominent during the interwar period, along with numerous intellectuals who were 'victims of the Stalinist repressions found a place here'.⁴⁶² Kalpiņš focused his reform efforts on theatre. In the 1956-1957 theatre season, just one out of five plays in Valmiera was related to 'Soviet life'. This was also the case at the Musical Comedy Theatre, the Daugavpils Theatre, and the Opera and Ballet Theatre in Riga.⁴⁶³ On Berkļavs's part, he worked personally to prevent the demolition of historical buildings in Riga. As a Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman, he persuaded Lācis and his colleague Matiss

⁴⁵⁸ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 84.

⁴⁵⁹ Kalpiņš, 'Pirms drūmā', 114-15.

⁴⁶⁰ Uldis Augskalns, '1959. gads Latvijā totalitārisma kontekstā', *Latvijas Jaunatne*, 18th January 1990, 2.

⁴⁶¹ Stradiņš, *Cultural Policy*, 34.

⁴⁶² Egil Levits, 'National Elites and their Political Function within the Soviet System: The Latvian Elite' in Dietrich Loeber, V. Stanley Vardys and Laurence Kitching, *Regional Identity Under Soviet Rule: The Case of the Baltic States*, (New Jersey: University of Kiel, 1990), 61.

⁴⁶³ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 189.

Plūdonis to let him direct the restoration of buildings on Lenin Street (now Brīvības or Freedom Boulevard). The work was completed in 1959. Berklavs's interference in this matter was listed among the nationalist charges made against him in July 1959; there was even a proposal that Berklavs should pay for the construction work himself, but this was later dropped.⁴⁶⁴ In November 1958, with the national communists politically dominant, to safeguard their cultural policy Berklavs secured the retirement of Jānis Ostrovs, a Russian-Latvian ignorant of Latvian culture, and his replacement as Minister of Culture by the erudite Kalpiņš.⁴⁶⁵ Ostrovs was demoted to the ceremonial post of Latvian Foreign Minister. Prigge is careful to point out that despite the national communists' notable victories, 'Pelše always had the final word in culture; on this front the national communists experienced as many defeats as victories. For example, Berklavs was never able to get streets renamed for prominent nineteenth-century Latvian figures'.⁴⁶⁶

2.4 The Language Law

Before the Second World War, German, Latvian and Russian were common languages in Riga. Yet, by the mid-1950s, a decade of Soviet rule and large waves of migration saw Russian become the dominant language in many spheres of life in Latvia. Most political, educational and cultural events were held in Russian. The name of some streets, some signs on institutions, businesses and shops were written only in Russian. In many ministries, such as finance and trade, Russian was the language of communication. The language issue was most serious in vital public services such as the police and hospitals. In the Riga Medical Institute, many doctors could not speak Latvian, which complicated communication with patients. Russian was used in many *kolkhozy*, *sovkhozy* and MTS.⁴⁶⁷ The problem was most acute among management. The industrial sector was the worst offender, in all major cities and especially Latgale region. Despite approximately 70% of industrial workers being Latvian, technical literature in the light, fuel, construction, textile, meat and dairy industries was only published in

⁴⁶⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 71.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁶⁶ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 310.

⁴⁶⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.30, lp.3-5. Zasedanii biuro TsK KPL, Protokol 51. 'Ob izuchenii partiinymi, sovetnimi i khoziaistvennymi rabotnikami latyshskogo i russkogo iazykov', 6 dekabria 1956.

Russian. Latvia's House of Scientific and Technical Propaganda did not produce a single sheet of information in Latvian. The Fuel Industry Ministry printed operating instructions for machines only in Russian.⁴⁶⁸ Most enterprise directors were Russian and therefore gave instructions and other administrative notices exclusively in Russian.⁴⁶⁹ According to a 1955 *Agitprop* report, despite Latvians comprising more than half the workers and engineers at VEF (the State Electro-technical Factory), political work was conducted mainly in Russian. The *Agitkollektiv* combine employed 292 people, of whom 87 were Latvians, yet visual aids (posters, various indicators of 'socialist competition') were in Russian. In this enterprise, even a letter from the USSR Council of Ministers was read in Russian. The report explains that it was no accident that in 1954 the Liepāja Party organisation recruited only 115 candidate members, just 35 of whom were Latvians. The report blamed the neglect of propaganda work in Latvian on the LCP CC for overlooking it.⁴⁷⁰ Interestingly, fluency in Latvia's service sector was higher. A majority of staff at Riga's general post office spoke both languages. At Riga's bread trading organisation, *khlebotorge*, of 350 salesmen, just 60 (17.2%) did not know Latvian. Of 69 shop managers there were only 20 (28.9%) monolingual Russian-speakers.⁴⁷¹

From his first speech as Komsomol First Secretary in 1946, Berklavs complained about the lack of effort among Russians to learn Latvian. According to Prigge, it was his priority as Riga's First Secretary to establish that in sectors where employees interacted with the populace, command of only one language was no longer permissible.⁴⁷² The national communists felt it imperative to act because the Soviets were altering Latvian orthography to make it more similar to Russian. On 5th June 1946, the Council of Ministers passed a law removing the palatalised 'r' (r̄) from the Latvian alphabet, and in 1957, the indicator 'c' for the palatalised 'h' sound was eliminated.⁴⁷³ As Donald Horowitz puts it, 'the status of the language denotes the status of the

⁴⁶⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 99; LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.30, lp.4.

⁴⁶⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.59, lp.6-10. Postanovlenie KPL CC, 'O partii, soveta i kolkhoznikov obuchenii na latyshskom i russkom', 6 dekabria 1956.

⁴⁷⁰ RGANI f.5, op.16, d.698, l.91. Zaveduiushii sektora otdela agitprop Andreev i Instructor Nikolaev, 'O ser'eznykh nedostatkakh partiino-politicheskoi raboty na promyshlennykh predpriatiiakh Latviiskoi SSR', 12 iulija 1955.

⁴⁷¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.59, lp.131-32. 'Ob izuchenii russkogo i latyshskogo kadrov obsluzhivaiushchie obshchee naselenie', dekabria 1956.

⁴⁷² Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 52.

⁴⁷³ Museum of Occupation exhibition, Riga.

group that speaks it'.⁴⁷⁴ Latvian was not dying out but the national communists feared that if Latvian were relegated to the status of a rural and cultural language, not only would it adversely affect Latvian identity but it would make Latvians second-class citizens in their own republic. Letters to Moscow showed its usage declining in the cities.⁴⁷⁵ With ignorance of Latvian high among Slavic migrants, in shops and on the street, Russian increasingly became the lingua franca.

With Berklavs heading the Riga Party organisation from January 1956 and circumstances radically altered in their favour by the 20th Party Congress, in winter 1956 the national communists were able to enact their first, and arguably their most controversial, major piece of legislation. As early as January 1956, at the 14th LCP Congress, there were specific calls for all government employees and those in the service industry to know both languages.⁴⁷⁶ The national communists realised that persuasion alone would not induce migrants to change their attitude towards Latvian. Only an official decree, one that could not be ignored by members of the Party, could enforce Latvian-language learning. The national communists had another motivation. Competence in both languages would have helped to bring the Party closer to the people and lent the regime more legitimacy.

In summer 1956, articles in support of Latvian-language learning appeared in the press. An article in *Sovetskaia Latviia* by a philologist offered practical advice on learning Latvian from textbooks to radio and on self-taught and classroom strategies. He noted that at Riga department store the few cashiers who did not know Latvian would soon acquire the necessary minimum of knowledge, because the personnel department would soon send them on language courses.⁴⁷⁷ The Russian secretary for Aizpute District, Nikolai Shalaev (who nominated Berklavs for Second Secretary in 1958), wrote an article about his experience of learning Latvian and emphasised the importance of doing so.

For each of us who live and work in Latvia, Latvian language skills should be urgently acquired. Particularly Party officials, heads of enterprises, institutions

⁴⁷⁴ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 219.

⁴⁷⁵ Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 112. Letter from Jānis Dīmanis to Khrushchev 'On the reasons for the exacerbation of national relations in Latvia', 20th April 1960.

⁴⁷⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.2, lp.62. Stenogramma 14-i KPL s'ezda, 17-19 ianvaria 1956.

⁴⁷⁷ K. Gailums, 'Slovo k izuchaiushchim latyshskii iazyk', *Sovetskaia Latviia*, 26th July 1956, 3.

and organisations, everyone who has to communicate with people on a daily basis. Knowledge of the language of the people among whom you live and work is necessary to listen to people, to better understand their needs and requests... But if you don't want to learn, it is disrespectful... it is absolutely unacceptable! We must persistently study not only the language but also Latvian culture and history.⁴⁷⁸

This suggests a subtle national communist campaign to prepare the population for more stringent measures to encourage Latvian language acquisition.

A resolution on Latvian-language learning in schools preceded the language law. In October, the Riga *gorkom* bureau declared that Latvian language study at Russian schools was unsatisfactory. According to the report, students at secondary school level could not converse in Latvian. The *gorkom* decided to appoint a commission to monitor teaching in Latvian and to approve funds for schools to replenish school libraries with Latvian writers' works. School directors and Party secretaries in schools were required to pay more attention to educating teachers, students and parents in Latvian culture and history, and to hold extra-curricular activities in Latvian. Furthermore, the national-communist controlled Riga Education Department was to discuss measures to improve the study of Latvian with teachers, Party secretaries and school directors.⁴⁷⁹ This drive to improve Latvian in schools demonstrated Berklavs's commitment to overhauling every sector required to reaffirm the primacy of Latvian.

It seems action on the language issue was prompted following Krūmiņš's attendance at an Estonian Communist Party plenum in October 1956. Krūmiņš reported to the Latvian bureau about the changes in Estonia and drew parallels between shortcomings in nationality policy in Estonia and Latvia, among them language and cadres policy. On 12th November, there was a heated debate at a bureau meeting, indicating that a resolution on the language question was forthcoming. In his speech, Berklavs presented a large amount of statistical data on the composition of the Riga *gorkom*, which indicated that Latvians comprised only a small stratum

⁴⁷⁸ Nikolai Shalaev, 'Budem izuchat' latyshskii iazyk', *Sovetskaia Latvii*, 14th July 1956, 3.

⁴⁷⁹ LVA-PA f.102 (Rizhskaia *gorkom*), apr.14, l.12, lp.99-101. Informatsiia o protokolakh biuro gorkoma Rizhskogo sentiabria-dekabria 1956, 'O postanovke izucheniia latyshskogo iazyka v shkolakh s russkim iazykom obucheniia', 26 oktiabria 1956.

of the *gorkom* and its leadership. Berklavs complained about the ‘ever-increasing flow of Russians to [Latvian] cities, especially Riga’. He stated bluntly: ‘Riga is losing its national identity and is being converted into a Russian city with Russian as the dominant language’. Other leaders agreed. Ozoliņš attributed the dominance of Russian to insufficient Party work in Latvian and thus the Party became ‘sectarian’. The meeting ended with an agreement to make a decision on the study of Latvian and Russian by all employees in the Party, government and economic apparatuses at the next bureau meeting.⁴⁸⁰

On 19th November, there was another dramatic discussion characterised by extraordinary comments from national communists. LSU Rector Jānis Jurgens drew an unflattering parallel between feudal 19th Century Latvia where German barons spoke with Latvian peasants in German, and Russian *raikom* secretaries who had worked in Latvia for 10 years but still did not know Latvian. Krūmiņš claimed that ‘Party activists want to eliminate Latvian because Latvians study Russian well, and therefore all Latvians will communicate in Russian’. Berklavs openly doubted that a decision on Latvian-language learning would be effective. Instead, for the first time, he proposed a two-year period to learn the language for ‘Russians and not real Latvians [the “Latovichi”]’ and if they did not comply, then they will be ‘removed from their jobs and invited to leave the republic’. Kalnbērziņš, who wanted to distance himself from this sort of dangerous talk, reported the content of these discussions to the Department for Union Republics. He maintained that, in contrast to the assertions of the national communists, the CC considered the mood among workers quite healthy and individual nationalistic manifestations did not characterise the overall situation on the national question.⁴⁸¹ Second Secretary Phillip Kashnikov reported that after the 19th November meeting State Control Minister Anton Ozoling, CC Agricultural Department Head Zhukov and other non-Latvian speakers approached him and Kalnbērziņš with a request to the CPSU CC for a transfer.⁴⁸² No doubt, these officials feared rising Latvian nationalism, as in summer 1953, therefore it was preferable to leave. It is worth noting that Ozoling remained in his position until 1962 and

⁴⁸⁰ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.59. Dolklad iz Kalnberzina v zaveduiushchii otdela TsK KPSS otdel po sovetskikh respublik E. Gromov, 23 noiabria 1956.

⁴⁸¹ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.60.

⁴⁸² RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.208.

therefore either this incident was exaggerated, the CC denied their requests, or these individuals felt subsequent developments were not as serious as they presumed.

Unsurprisingly, in his report, Gavrilov condemned the ‘non-Party views expressed by Berklavs, Ozoliņš and others’. He described their statements as ‘politically harmful nationalist attacks’.⁴⁸³ Interestingly, there was no reaction from Moscow to this report; in the spirit of the Thaw, the Latvians were allowed to decide how to solve the language question themselves. Furthermore, according to Kalpiņš, in December 1956, after the creation of the language law, Khrushchev received Lācis, Ozoliņš and Kalnbērziņš in Moscow. Lācis reputedly discussed the language law with Khrushchev among other proposals. Khrushchev acknowledged that the Latvian government’s concerns were legitimate and agreed in principle that cadres needed to know the local language.⁴⁸⁴ Although there is no archival evidence to corroborate this, it would be consistent with Khrushchev’s conciliatory position towards the national communists on many issues between 1956 and mid-1959. He approved the removal of Russian Second Secretary Kashnikov in 1958 and the Latvian Council of Ministers received permission from Moscow to institute a passport regime in 1956.

2.4.1 The resolutions

On 30th November 1956, the Riga *gorkom* bureau adopted a resolution ‘On learning Latvian and Russian by cadres serving the general public’. The resolution decreed that all those working in professions which served the general public must possess conversational language skills in both Latvian and Russian. It affected a broad stratum of employees particularly in the service industry, including trade union chairmen, managers of public businesses and establishments, bus and tram drivers, tradesmen, utilities workers, housing managers, medical facilities, pharmacies, hairdressers, shops, and the militia. The Party was not exempt from the law. It mandated that cadres be bilingual. Party secretaries and agitators connected to enterprises and institutions were particular targets. The resolution noted: ‘The placement of cadres is still unsatisfactory. In many commercial organisations, in enterprises dealing with communal

⁴⁸³ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.208-209; Zapiska Mikhail Gavrilov, zamestitel’ nachal’nika sektora, otdel’ sovetskikh respublik, ‘O natsionalisticheskikh i antisovetskikh proiavleniia v respublikakh Pribaltiki’, 27 noiabria 1956; RGANI f.5, op.31, d.59, l.60.

⁴⁸⁴ Voldemārs Kalpiņš, ‘1959. gads Toreiz apsūdzētā liecība’, *Cīņa*, 31st August 1988, 3; Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 396; Tannberg, *Politika Moskvyy*, 164-65.

services, in medical facilities... a significant number of employees who on a daily basis are in contact with the working masses know only one language'.⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, 'one of the most important and practical characteristics' to be considered in employing cadres was knowledge of both languages. Cadres were to take into account national peculiarities in their work with the populace and propaganda (slogans, leaflets, posters) were to be published in both languages.⁴⁸⁶

The legality and prospects for the realisation of Berklavs's resolution at the Riga *gorkom* was enhanced by the national communists' ability to convince the bureau to adopt a resolution on 6th December 1956 'On the need for Party and Soviet officials and economic managers to learn Latvian and Russian'. The resolution complained of numerous examples throughout Latvia where business was conducted 'only in Russian, disregarding the national composition of the workers'. This was said to have caused discontent among Latvian workers and allowed bourgeois nationalists to incite ethnic strife between Latvians and Russians. Directives from the 20th Party Congress on the need to abide by the principles of Leninist national policy were used to justify the resolution.⁴⁸⁷ The resolution accused the republic's *gorkomy*, *raikomy* and *raispolkomy* of being satisfied that cadres who had worked in Latvia for many years did not know Latvian and were not learning it. The statute ordered all local parties, ministries, organs of Latvia, and all other aspects of Latvian society, including schools and cultural organisations, to begin addressing the language problem no later than 1st January 1957.⁴⁸⁸ Crucially, the 6th December resolution replicated the provisions of the *gorkom* decision on 30th November, applying them to the whole republic. Berklavs claims that rural areas successfully attempted to follow Riga's example and create their own specific language laws and that the bureau adopted those proposals.⁴⁸⁹ Despite these resolutions referring to two languages, they were principally aimed at ensuring proficiency in Latvian, since a majority of Latvians in leading positions already spoke Russian.⁴⁹⁰ The law required proficiency in Russian to make it palatable and not appear directed at Russians. Prigge believes the law was not

⁴⁸⁵ LVA-PA f.102, apr.14, l.8, lp.83-84. Riga *gorkom* *reshenie nalozhit' ogranichenie vremeni priobretenia iazyka*, 30 noiabria 1956.

⁴⁸⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 98; LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.59, lp.6-10; LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.30, lp.3.

⁴⁸⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.59, lp.6-10.

⁴⁸⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.30, lp.3-6.

⁴⁸⁹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 98.

⁴⁹⁰ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 177.

nationalist in character. 'While the language policy itself cannot be termed bourgeois nationalism, it did signal that Latvia would no longer tolerate linguistic Russification'.⁴⁹¹ Yet, it is clear Russians were targeted and that the law constituted linguistic 'Latvianisation', which makes Prigge's assertion difficult to accept.

The most extraordinary feature of both directives was that they stipulated a timeframe, as Berklavs outlined at the 19th November meeting. They required that those employees in the aforementioned professions be proficient in Latvian as well as Russian within two years. The law assigned 'to the Party organisation secretaries... the task of initiating the learning of the Latvian and Russian languages among cadres so that they can acquire these languages in two years' time starting from 1st January 1957'.⁴⁹² An important clause was included concerning sanctions applicable to those who avoided learning these languages or failed to achieve proficiency within the allotted time. The issue would then be raised as to their suitability to occupy a position bringing them into direct contact with the public.⁴⁹³ Enterprise directors, state offices and organisations were to assess all new employees' language skills. The time limit was one of the most fiercely criticised aspects of the law. The resolution contained the ironic phrasing 'the bureau has forgotten previously adopted decisions regarding the [language] question', which was no doubt a reference to the previous resolutions about language learning that went unenforced.⁴⁹⁴ Berklavs defended his resolution by explaining that if the law had no deadline then it would be toothless and could be ignored or circumvented. He was of the same opinion about the need for sanctions for those who failed to obey the law.⁴⁹⁵ Unlike previous resolutions, these were not merely hollow edicts devoid of instructions for their implementation. Ministries and large enterprises were responsible for organising Latvian and Russian language courses in institutions, organisations, enterprises, MTS and *kolkhozy* from 1st January 1957. The Education Ministry was to prepare and distribute coursework and to develop a curriculum to

⁴⁹¹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 53.

⁴⁹² LVA-PA f.102, apr.14, l.8, lp.83-84.

⁴⁹³ LVA-PA f.102, apr.14, l.8, lp.83-84.

⁴⁹⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.59, lp.6-10.

⁴⁹⁵ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 97.

facilitate language acquisition. This was to be in the form of textbooks for adults and conversational dictionaries and vocabularies prepared by the education and culture ministries.⁴⁹⁶

The resolution asked the Ministry of Culture to play a role. The ministry was asked to allocate funding for publishing newspapers in Latvian and Russian in Maltas, Dagda, Zilupe and Krāslava districts. It was to improve musical culture by including Latvian and Russian musical numbers in travelling concerts and theatrical productions. A request was sent to the USSR Ministry of Culture to change over one Riga radio station to broadcast in Latvian. The resolution even took aim at the Russian dominated region of Daugavpils. It declared that a 'large percentage of the inhabitants within the city are Latvian' (though this was not actually the case) and asked the CPSU CC to permit the publishing of a Latvian newspaper in Daugavpils district.⁴⁹⁷

The language law had enormous scope. It affected at least 30,000 Soviet specialists in Latvia, requiring them to acquire a command of Latvian.⁴⁹⁸ Berklavs admitted that despite simultaneous efforts alongside the language law to halt the flow of migrants, the major problem remained the overpopulation of Riga, but migrants could not be expelled.⁴⁹⁹ One detects in Berklavs's language the hope that if migrants to Riga disliked the language law, they would simply leave. The language law was not merely aimed at ensuring Latvians could use their language in day-to-day activities or to improve propaganda to boost Latvian Party membership. It was an overhaul of society and a redressing of the balance between indigenous and Union influences on the functioning of the republic. The national communists aimed to radically strengthen the Latvian language's role in public life. Similar to the June 1953 plenum declarations, the resolutions stipulated that Party, soviet, Komsomol and *kolkhozy* meetings be held in both languages. Furthermore, these meetings' resolutions, reports, speeches and draft decisions were to be published in both languages.⁵⁰⁰

Ultimately, the 1956 Riga language law was a failure. The law existed for two and half years and in that time made very little impact. Though data on the subject is scarce, it appears

⁴⁹⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.30, lp.4.

⁴⁹⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.59, lp.6-10.

⁴⁹⁸ King, *Economic Policies*, 194.

⁴⁹⁹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 97.

⁵⁰⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.30, lp.5.

there was no discernable uptick in Latvian language competency. Although the 1959 census did not include a question about second language proficiency, the 1970 census did. The census revealed that 26 years after the re-establishment of Soviet power, just 18% of all Russians in Latvia spoke Latvian, as opposed to the 47.2% of Latvians who spoke Russian.⁵⁰¹

Some historians believe the language law was not a complete failure. It seems the law was used to remove some obstinate officials. King describes the language requirement as ‘probably the most potent lever used in removing or neutralising Russian influence... There are indications that it was used primarily to remove inefficient, dogmatic party hacks’.⁵⁰² Similarly, Prigge claims that ‘prior to 1959, a large number of Russians did indeed lose their positions’ because of failure to comply with the language law.⁵⁰³

Yet, by the end of national communism in summer 1959, six months after the end of the two-year period stipulated for service sector and Party employees to have gained a conversational level of Latvian and Russian, little had changed. A report from May 1959 about the situation in the Communication Ministry noted that a significant portion of the Ministry’s leaders and technical engineers still not speak Latvian. Of Riga Telegraph’s 226 employees, 144 (63.7%) did not understand Latvian, including the chairman and chief engineer. The report admitted there were ‘formal Latvian language courses, language groups have been established but lessons do not take place on a regular basis and attendance is low. In addition, a significant number of workers do not even participate in the language programme’.⁵⁰⁴ The issue appeared to be a failure to enforce the law. In October 1958, Krūmiņš enshrined the national communists’ cadres policy in a plenum resolution. The resolution required similar measures as the language law, that senior officials must possess both Latvian and Russian languages and especially those cadres involved in propaganda work. The resolution acknowledged a most unfavourable situation in language competency and cadres work, demonstrating that almost two years after

⁵⁰¹ See Appendix A, Table 10.

⁵⁰² King, *Economic Policies*, 194.

⁵⁰³ Prigge, ‘Latvian purges’, 228.

⁵⁰⁴ Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 69. LSSR Council of Ministers decision, ‘On the state of cadres in the Ministry of Communication and efforts to improve work’, 6th May 1959.

the language law came into effect new resolutions were still attempting to solve the problem because of a lack of progress.⁵⁰⁵

Pinksis lambasted the language situation in Riga's Proletarian District in April 1959, claiming that the trade unions in Riga reported that Latvian workers were not spoken to in Latvian. Pinksis accused the Proletarian *raikom* of not implementing the language law. He cited visits by foreign delegations to the district. On visiting the textiles factory *Rigas audums* an Albanian delegation asked 'why do only Russians work here?' Their hosts replied that Latvians comprised 70-80% of the factory's workforce, to which the Albanians responded 'but why do they all write in Russian?' A Finnish delegation to VEF similarly asked 'is the state language in your republic Russian? Why Russian?' The Latvians officials told the Finns that they used their own language to which the Finns replied '[then] why is all the writing in Russian?' Reputedly, the Proletarian *raikom* Secretary Matveev did not speak or attempt to learn Latvian, and at a Party conference asked 'why is there so much talk about Latvian. It is necessary to speak the Party's language, Russian'.⁵⁰⁶ On 23rd August 1958, the Ministry of Agriculture prepared a list of *kolkhoz* directors and key specialists who did not have a command of Latvian, revealing 63 such officials could not speak Latvian.⁵⁰⁷ It is possible that this list was compiled in accordance with the language law's provisions for monitoring language competency.

This situation was repeated across Latvia with leading cadres unable to speak Latvian. Riga's progress was little better than in Liepāja, Latvia's second largest city, where there was no special language law. National communist *Agitprop* Deputy Chief Herberts Valters, reported on the situation in Liepāja *raikom* in April 1959. Of 69 primary Party organisation secretaries, only 10 spoke Latvian. Propaganda work among the population was reputedly hindered because more than half of *raikom* employees did not speak both languages despite Latvians comprising 50.7% of Liepāja District's population.⁵⁰⁸ Another report on Liepāja from March 1959 highlighted poor competency in the construction and transport sectors. Of Liepāja's 318 *nomenklatura* personnel, 154 (48.4%) could not speak Latvian. Only half of the 36 Cadres

⁵⁰⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.38-39.

⁵⁰⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.52, lp.41, 44, 46.

⁵⁰⁷ Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 67-68.

⁵⁰⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.52. lp.39. 'Ob opyte partino-politicheskoi raboty Liepayskogo raikoma partii', zamestitel' nachal'nika otdela Agitprop Herberts Valters.

Department heads and enterprise cadres' inspectors knew Latvian. Again, the report concluded that though many voluntary circles for studying Latvian and Russian formally existed, attendance was poor.⁵⁰⁹

The language law was unsuccessful because it failed to penetrate the administrative bureaucracy's lower levels allowing officials to obstruct the law's implementation. This encouraged concerted opposition from the Slavic population. Substantial migrant turnover contributed to the lack of progress because they considered their time in Latvia temporary. In a letter to Khrushchev, former Marxism-Leninism lecturer Jānis Dīmanis complained that the language law failed because it was exploited through a loophole on the ill-defined level of competency required. He wrote: '*Raikom* instructors openly "revolted" at their seminar and a gnashing of teeth took place at the Riga *gorkom* conference. Discontent was inevitable, as the decision, through its strict terms, created the tactic of learning a convenient "basic" [Latvian] which satisfied everybody, while achieving nothing in practice'.⁵¹⁰ Dīmanis continued:

Public opinion is being strongly manipulated, intimating the CC's decision is due to nationalist pressure... The republic's Russian press and personnel are quiet, the cat has their tongue. They are obviously very interested in nothing coming of the decision... The decision on language is being thrown out... What sort of CC cannot implement its decisions? The foundation upon which it is based and dependent [Russian Party members], isn't satisfied with what the CC is doing... The justification was that if Latvians didn't want to look like nationalists, then they must know Russian; that they shouldn't harass Russians to learn Latvian.⁵¹¹

Dīmanis astutely critiqued the law's problems and insinuated that hostility from within elements of the Party leadership encouraged Slavs not to learn the language.

Frustration in the language law's implementation by no means weakened the national communists' resolve. They continued to incrementally introduce more Latvian into daily life

⁵⁰⁹ RGASPI f.17, op.89, d.514, l.58. Stenogramma zasedaniia TsK KPL sekretariata, 13 marta 1959, 'O vypolnenii Liepai gorkoma reshenii 6-go KPL plenuma "O sostoianii i merakh po uluchsheniiu raboty s kadrami"'.
⁵¹⁰ Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 112.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112-13.

despite their failure to induce Russians to learn Latvian en masse. Levits believes that due to national communist efforts, ‘the Latvian language was able to slightly recover its position in the public sphere’ but that the ‘decision was not practically realised’.⁵¹² Recognising the language law’s failure to improve knowledge of Latvian, Berklavs insisted that ‘at least it stopped [people] ignoring Latvian’.⁵¹³ One anecdote that illustrates the impact of Berklavs’s language policy was about the nickname given to vodka during the national communist period. It was called ‘crystal clear’ and ‘Berklavs’ because the branding no longer had any Cyrillic letters in Latvia. People asked each other in line, ‘how many bottles of “Berklavs”, 2 or 3?’ While this is only anecdotal, at the July 1959 plenum, Gosplan Chairman Augusts Čulitis revealed that print on drinks labels (his example was fruit water) had been solely in Latvian for some time.⁵¹⁴

2.5 Restricting Russians: The Passport Regime

The slump in Slavic migration between 1954 and 1955 is often attributed to the uncertainty that followed the ‘New Course’. Migration data indicates a reversal in the torrent of newcomers for the first time since 1945. Net migration slumped by 71% in 1954 to 2,200; in 1955, the outflow surpassed the inflow by 1,700.⁵¹⁵ Yet, there is an additional cause for the abrupt fall in migration. The CPSU sought to control where people lived with an internal passport system designed to manage migration through administrative means.⁵¹⁶ Therefore, to move to, and live, in Riga, it was necessary to obtain a *propiska*, a residency permit. The ostensible rationale for the system was to regulate the countryside’s massive depopulation by those attempting to escape rural poverty. On 21st October 1953, Soviet Premier Georgii Malenkov announced order No.2666-1124s relaxing the Stalinist passport regime across the country by reducing the number of cities and regions with passport restrictions.⁵¹⁷ A limited passport regime directed at

⁵¹² Levits, ‘Latvija padomju varā’, 52.

⁵¹³ Berklavs, ‘Visiem, kam’, 16.

⁵¹⁴ ‘Iz arkhivnykh fondov: Stenogramma 7-ia zakrytogo Plenuma TsK KPL 7-8 iulija 1959’, *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 4 (1989), 92.

⁵¹⁵ Dreifelds, ‘Latvian National Demands’, 131.

⁵¹⁶ Cynthia Buckley, ‘The Myth of Managed Migration: Migration Control and Market in the Soviet Period’, *Slavic Review*, 54 (1995), 896.

⁵¹⁷ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.849, lp.178. ‘O sokrashchenii kolichestva rezhimnykh gorodov i mestnostei i perechnia pasportnykh ogranichenii’, Georgii Malenkov, 21 oktiabria 1953.

those coming to Riga from rural areas had been in effect since July 1949.⁵¹⁸ The Latvian response to this decree is one of the most significant indicators that the ‘New Course’ was not fully halted in Latvia. On 18th November 1953, the Council of Ministers issued resolution 1187-s, which preserved the passport regime, exempting Riga from the USSR Council of Ministers’ decision.⁵¹⁹ This decision was co-authored by future national communist Jānis Kacēns, Council of Ministers Head of Administrative Affairs. This allowed Latvian authorities limited control over registration in Riga and no doubt contributed to the subsequent fall in migrant numbers in 1954-1955. This is evident from the passport regime’s success in those years. In 1954, Riga’s police arrested 15,000 unregistered ‘aliens’ and removed 2,500 from the city. In 1955, the number of removals doubled to approximately 5,000.⁵²⁰ Latvia’s circumvention of Malenkov’s central decision in November 1953 supports my contention (argued in Chapter One) that after Beria’s arrest Latvia retained a measure of decision-making power it did not previously enjoy. The resolution, however, proved incapable of restricting migration in the long term. In 1956, the influx surpassed the six preceding years combined.⁵²¹ Instead, the principle significance of decision 1187-s was that it formed the basis of far-reaching and comprehensive decisions enacted by the Riga *gorkom* and Latvian bureau under Berkļavs’s direction between 1956 and 1959, which significantly restricted registration in Riga.

Riga, along with most major post-war Soviet cities, experienced chronic housing shortages. The waiting times for apartments were years; many people lived in poor conditions in places not intended as living spaces. In the immediate post-war years, there was little housing construction. Latvians blamed Russians for the housing shortage. At a Party meeting at VEF, engineer Andrianova said ‘workers complained that many Russians came to Latvia and now there are not enough apartments’.⁵²² Riekstiņš claims that apartments were preferentially given

⁵¹⁸ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.439, lp.158. Pis’mo v Latsis, ‘Po voprosu o propiske v gorod Rige lits priezhzhaiushchikh iz sel’skoi mestnosti’, nachal’nik pravovoi gruppy Soveta Ministrov LSSR P. Audrin, 12 iulia 1949.

⁵¹⁹ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.855, lp.129-30. Reshenie 1187-s ‘O meropriiatiakh po propuske grazhdan v gorodakh i naseleennykh Latviiskoi SSR’, zamestitel’ predsedatelia LSSR Soveta Ministrov Matiss Pludon i Ia. Kacen, 18 noiabria 1953.

⁵²⁰ Eric Le Bourhis, ‘Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh vlastei: Zhil’e, kontrol’ za migratsiei i gradostroitelstvo v Rige (1955-1959 gg.)’, *Soviet History Discussion Papers*, 2 (2013), 10.

⁵²¹ See Appendix A, Table 2.

⁵²² RGANI f.5, op.31, d.54, l.170. O provedenii partiinykh sobranii po zakrytomu pis’mu TsK KPSS ‘Ob itogakh obsuzhdeniia reshenii 20-go s’ezda KPSS i xode vypolneniia reshenii s’ezda’.

to newcomers because municipal housing departments were largely staffed by new Russian arrivals, who prioritised other Russians for housing.⁵²³ Even if Riekstiņš's claims are exaggerated, the rapid increase in Latvia's urban population undoubtedly strained the housing stock. Between 1950 and 1955, the urban population increased by 68,100. Over the wider post-war period, Widmer estimates 500,000 migrants arrived in Latvia between 1945 and 1956 with 360,000 settling in urban areas. In total, between 1940 and 1965 the urban population skyrocketed by almost one million people. In 1959, 73% of Russians in Latvia lived in urban areas and comprised 48% of the urban population. By contrast, 75% of the rural populace were Latvians.⁵²⁴ By the late 1950s, Latvia was splitting into two, a Russian-dominated urban Latvia and a Latvian-dominated rural Latvia. Under these circumstances, the national communists tackled both the housing crisis and migration. They knew restricting residency and thus slowing population growth would allow for better resource distribution in Riga. Furthermore, such initiatives would have a dual purpose, helping to maintain Riga's Latvian character and improving the citizenry's lives through better living conditions including improved housing and municipal services.

Aware of the aforementioned statistics, Berklavs feared that if something was not done to reduce the flow of Slavic migrants, Latvians would become a minority in their own republic and this would deprive Latvians of the benefits of being a titular nationality of a Soviet republic. Prigge goes further and states that 'demographic Russification troubled the Latvian people most because it threatened the survival of the nationality itself'.⁵²⁵ In his memoirs, Berklavs describes the overcrowding he saw in Riga: 'Shops, hairdressing salons, clinics and bathhouses - lines everywhere became increasingly longer. Trams, buses, trolleybuses, people were crushed like herring in barrels'.⁵²⁶ According to the 'Protest Letter', about 20,000-25,000 migrants registered in Riga annually.⁵²⁷ Berklavs decided to use the Soviet system's controls on population movement, in conjunction with his language policy efforts, to his advantage. Between January 1956 and May 1958, as Riga *gorkom* First Secretary (effectively the city's mayor), Riga was

⁵²³ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 177.

⁵²⁴ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 464, 466-67, 505, 509.

⁵²⁵ William Prigge, 'Russification: The Case Study of Latvia 1939-1996', (University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire M.A. dissertation, 1997), 30.

⁵²⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 96.

⁵²⁷ http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm.

Berkļavs's fiefdom. The capital was nine times larger than Daugavpils and eight times greater than Liepāja. Riga accounted for half Latvia's urban population, almost a third of the workforce and two-thirds of industrial output.⁵²⁸ Therefore, Berkļavs held one of the LCP's most powerful posts and was in a position to take radical action to block further immigration by refusing to consider applications for residency permits.

Prigge judges the economic policies of the national communists as 'localist' and their motives for implementing the passport regime as 'nationalistic' but avoids characterising them as 'nationalist'.⁵²⁹ Prigge concedes that while the policy applied to all migrants, including Latvians from the countryside, its intended targets were non-Latvians.⁵³⁰ The deliberate attempt to prevent migration based on nationality must surely be a 'nationalist' policy. Berkļavs argued residency restrictions were 'perfectly in keeping with Lenin's nationality policies and the idea of friendship of nations because Riga could not secure the necessary conditions for incoming immigrants'.⁵³¹ One seriously doubts such measures would have had Lenin's approval. Furthermore, Berkļavs manipulated the passport regime into a form of protectionism. In Berkļavs's passport regime and his economic policy, he tried to shield Latvia from All-Union concerns. In his memoirs, Berkļavs recounted a factory visit. He was making a speech about prioritising housing for native Rigans to loud applause. A Russian woman interrupted and told Berkļavs in tears that she was an honest worker with two children but had nowhere to live. 'What am I to do?' she asked Berkļavs.

Berkļavs: 'Were you offered work in this factory?'

Woman: 'I came myself'.

Berkļavs: 'When? How long have you worked in this factory?'

Woman: 'About two months ago. I've worked [here] for over a month'.

Berkļavs asked the audience to raise their hands if they had worked in the factory for over five years and lived in Riga for over 10 years but still did not have an apartment or had very poor living conditions. There was a forest of hands in reply. 'I think you have the answer to your

⁵²⁸ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 468.

⁵²⁹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 110.

⁵³⁰ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 217-18.

⁵³¹ Berkļavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 96-97.

question. If your life in Riga is worse than where you came from, go back! We didn't promise you anything. And we can't promise you anything now', Berklavs said to cheers.⁵³² Berklavs, the controversial populist, was ready to play the nationality card.

2.5.1 The passport regime in action

From June 1956, Berklavs resorted to drastic measures to restrict migration to Riga by using Party statutes. He recognised that most hostility would come from Russian department heads and second secretaries of Riga's *gorkom* and *raikomy*, placed there deliberately to prevent parochial actions by first secretaries. Berklavs worked in conjunction with the Justice Ministry, Riga *gorispolkom* Chairman Vilhelm Lecis, his deputies Victor Kreituss and Aleksandr Timerev and Riga's Police Chief Mecheslav Matsulevich (all national communists) to find an interpretation of the law, which would restrict migration. He investigated the legality of making *propiska* more difficult to obtain by complicating stipulations for registration and expanding the list of categories of persons not to be registered. Citizens would be denied permission to settle in Riga upon their attempt to register as required by Soviet law when arriving to reside in a new city.⁵³³ Berklavs used the housing shortage as a pretext to claim that Riga could not house more migrants until more living space became available. Resolutions stipulated 9m² as the 'sanitary norm' (the fixed dwelling space minimum) for apartments and 4.5m² for hostels to prevent overcrowding by non-residents.⁵³⁴ Therefore, by increasing the number of those ineligible to live in Riga, enforcing their removal by the police, and preventing new migrants from arriving, there would be less demand on housing. Berklavs further argued that Riga had an ample workforce and that there was even slight unemployment.⁵³⁵

To overcome resistance to proposals from Russian officials, Berklavs sought to protect new regulations with permission from Moscow. Berklavs prepared a letter, which Lācis signed, asking Moscow to clarify whether Berklavs's powers as Riga *gorkom* First Secretary extended to population regulation. A positive response was received confirming the matter fell within the

⁵³² Ibid., 103.

⁵³³ Ibid., 96-97.

⁵³⁴ LVA f.1400 (Rizhskaia gorispolkom), apr.4, l.732, lp.192-194. Reshenie 281, 'O merakh po ukrepleniui pasportnogo rezhima v Rige', predsedatel' gorispolkoma V. Lecis i sekretar' gorispolkoma A. Serdant, 17 maia 1957.

⁵³⁵ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 56.

local government's jurisdiction.⁵³⁶ This was characteristic of the Thaw period, in which the Kremlin was more accommodating towards local initiatives. Moscow was not alarmed by Berklavs's proposals in 1956 and 1957 because of Khrushchev's attempts to decentralise the system. At the meeting between Latvia's leaders and Khrushchev in December 1956, he agreed to reduce the flow of migrants.⁵³⁷ Moreover, in Krūmiņš's memoirs he attests that in conversation with the Soviet Premier, 'Khrushchev expressed the need for such a passport regime in Latvia' in summer 1958.⁵³⁸ The unprecedented conditions created by the 20th Party Congress offered considerable decision-making latitude to the republics. Berklavs saw his opportunity and seized it. When the time came to inform Riga's district secretaries, the Justice and Interior Ministers of his plans, Berklavs cited Moscow's approval and his legal ability to do so in the city statutes. The disgruntled Russian secretaries were powerless to oppose.

The adoption and implementation of decisions on the passport regime required close coordination between Riga's *gorkom*, *gorispolkom* and police. Cooperation among the leaders of these organisations was on an informal and personnel level, the way the national communists preferred to operate. A folder of the *gorkom*'s secret correspondence for 1957 contains messages between Matsulevich and Berklavs about the execution of city authorities' decisions on the passport regime.⁵³⁹ Berklavs placed Matsulevich's police department in charge of the registration process rather than the district police, whom Berklavs did not necessarily control. Together with Matsulevich, they concocted ways to avoid registering migrants. Berklavs and Matsulevich composed the text of the *gorispolkom*'s original decision about registration on 27th June 1956. He wrote, 'we agreed to register only those who not registering would violate existing All-Union directives. Refuse everyone else'. Matsulevich or one of his deputies were the only officials allowed to register citizens. Every Monday Berklavs met Matsulevich to inspect the registration application. Each Monday there was nothing to report. Berklavs noted that 'part of the time more migrants departed than arrived'.⁵⁴⁰ With Riga restricted, this meant

⁵³⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 96-97.

⁵³⁷ Kalpiņš, '1959. gads', 31st August 1988, 3.

⁵³⁸ Krūmiņš, 'Atmiņas un pārdomas', 93.

⁵³⁹ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 14.

⁵⁴⁰ Berklavs, 'Visiem, kam', 16; Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 96-97.

27.7% of the republic's population and 49.4% of the urban population were covered by the restrictions.⁵⁴¹

There were numerous amendments and attempts to gain further concessions from Moscow in order to extend the passport regime. In December 1956, emboldened by their success in passing the language law, the national communists requested the Council of Ministers allow the expansion of restrictions to include those attempting return to Riga who had left to reside elsewhere.⁵⁴² In January 1957, on Berkļavs's behalf, Kalnbērziņš and Lācis asked Moscow to extend the passport regime to Liepāja, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Ventspils, and Riga's satellite districts of Ogre and Sigulda. This was because those denied residency in Riga were trying to settle in those areas. Those exempt from the restrictions were elderly and sick parents migrating to live with their children, the parents of children, students, and a spouse if the partner was a permanent resident. Berkļavs also pushed for stiffer punishments for passport regime violators. None of these requests were approved, though Riga's existing passport regime was unaffected. Taking advantage of Moscow's lenience, the national communists implemented many of their requests unilaterally.⁵⁴³

In late 1956 and early 1957, the passport regime faced resistance from within the Party on the legal basis of restricting migration, as Berkļavs expected. Council of Ministers' legal group Chairman S.G. Skobkina, alleged that the 27th June 1956 *gorispolkom* decision contained illegal provisions giving secret instructions prohibiting registration on Riga's coast and that neither the Council of Ministers nor city soviets had the powers to freely interpret passport regulations.⁵⁴⁴ *Gorispolkom* Chairman Lecis justified the *gorispolkom*'s actions by explaining that the decision was modelled after witnessing a similar decision by the Leningrad soviet

⁵⁴¹ Buckley, 'Myth of Managed Migration', 907.

⁵⁴² LVA f.270, 1-s, l.1101, lp.93-94. Obschestva kul'turnoi sviazi s zagranitsej. Pis'mo ot Lesis v Pludon i Kalnberzin, 28 dekabria 1956.

⁵⁴³ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1132, lp.19-20. Sovmestnye postanovleniia TsK KPL i Soveta Ministrov LSSR za 1957. Pis'mo ot Kalnberzin i Latsis v Khrushchevu i Bulganinu, 11 ianvaria 1957.

⁵⁴⁴ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1176, lp.3-4. Zakliuchenie zamestitel' predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov Skobkinu, 7 fevralia 1957; LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1176, lp.11-12. Zakliuchenie zamestitel' predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov Litvinovu, 10 marta 1957.

during an exchange visit.⁵⁴⁵ According to Eric Le Bourhis, by invoking the Leningrad example, Riga's authorities considered Riga comparable to Leningrad, with the same rights.⁵⁴⁶

The passport regime's operation involved considerable challenges. In 1957, the *gorispolkom* complained that many citizens without residence permits remained in Riga. Work by the police and the prosecutor's office to remove them was described as 'insufficient'. Many factory managers were circumventing the restrictions by employing workers without permits. Housing administrations and superintendents were accused of allocating living space without verifying with neighbourhood residential management (*raizhilupravleny*) that citizens possessed residence permits and falsely certifying the size and number of tenants in dwellings. Riga's *ispolkomy* ignored these 'gross violations' and 'lost control' over permit issuance. The *gorispolkom* responded with stricter measures. Police officers faced severe punishments for mistakes in matters of registration and persons whose residency was voided who failed to leave Riga were to be charged with a criminal offence.⁵⁴⁷ Further decisions followed in March and May 1957 and in August 1958, all of which tightened the rules. A May 1957 order denied registration to those arriving in Riga for medical treatment or to study on short-term courses.⁵⁴⁸ In August 1958, the *gorispolkom* decreed that Riga's satellite towns could only allot living space with the local *raiispolkom*'s permission. Employment in a range of fields both professional and vocational, and the attendant allotment of living space was subject to the *gorispolkom*'s prior approval. This included government work, including in the *sovnarkhoz*, schools, hospitals, nurseries, sanatoriums and nursing homes. The allocation of land for individual construction was prohibited. Educational institutions were required to inform the police if those with study permits ceased their education in Riga.⁵⁴⁹

2.5.2 The Soviet military and Jūrmala

To achieve their aim of prioritising Latvians in housing distribution, the national communists worked to reduce retired Soviet officers and demobilised soldiers settling in Riga. This followed

⁵⁴⁵ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1176, lp.6. Pis'mo Lecisa k predsdateliu Sovmina Latsisu, 28 ianvaria 1957.

⁵⁴⁶ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 15.

⁵⁴⁷ LVA f.1400, apr.4, l.690, lp.127-128. Reshenie Rizhskogo gorispolkoma, 'O merakh po ukrepleniiu pasportnogo rezhima Rige', zamestitel' predsdatelia Aleksandr Timerev.

⁵⁴⁸ LVA f.1400, apr.4, l.732, lp.192-94.

⁵⁴⁹ LVA f.1400, apr.4, l.822, l.182. Gorispolkom materialy, avgusta 1958. Reshenie 490, 'O merakh po dal'neishemu ukrepleniiu pasportnogo rezhima i propiski grazhdan v Rige', zamestitel' predsdatelia Rizhskogo gorkoma Kreitus i A. Serdant, 20 avgusta 1958.

a wave of demobilisations within the Soviet Army in autumn 1955. In connection with demobilisation, local *gorispolkom* and *raispolkom* were obliged to provide officers with jobs and housing with their families. In 1955, 2,700 officers arrived in Riga seeking employment, while there were 700 housing applications.⁵⁵⁰ To ensure their needs were met, the LSSR military commissar requested that 10% of all newly constructed housing be reserved for demobilised officers.⁵⁵¹ About one-third of the 308 officers demobilised and requiring accommodation in autumn 1955 had not previously lived in Riga.⁵⁵²

By spring 1956, of 16,000 families in the housing queue, 2,007 were demobilised officers' families. At Berklavs's urging, Latvian authorities sent a letter to USSR Council of Ministers Chairman Nikolai Bulganin and Khrushchev, explaining that Riga's population had doubled since 1945 but available housing only increased by 5% in that period. They requested limits on the numbers of demobilised or retired officers, because the USSR Ministry of Defence called for the provision of 50,000m² of dwelling space but only 5,500m² was available in 1956. Knowing many officers had not resided in Riga before but that those who did might have some familiarity with Latvia, Berklavs asked that the right to choose Riga as their permanent place of residence be granted only to those officers who had lived in Riga before their military service or were demobilised from Riga garrison units.⁵⁵³ A second similar request was sent in January 1957 but both received negative responses.⁵⁵⁴

To Riga's authorities, the influx of discharged officers with priority entitlements to housing was depriving local families of access to residential accommodation.⁵⁵⁵ With Moscow unsympathetic, Berklavs decided to act himself. In early 1957, the *gorispolkom* and the bureau tried to prevent the registration and employment of demobilised soldiers and officers in Riga.⁵⁵⁶ Berklavs's ally, *gorispolkom* Deputy Chairman Victor Kreituss did not support the LCP CC and Council of Ministers' plan to preferentially allocate dwelling space to officers and enlisted servicemen in the Soviet armed forces. In 1957 alone, they requested 20,000m² of living

⁵⁵⁰ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 5, 7.

⁵⁵¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.76, lp.5. Spravka voennogo kommissara LSSR v TsK KPL, 6 ianvaria 1956.

⁵⁵² LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.76, lp.128. Pis'mo Goskontrol LSSR v TsK KPL, 30 dekabria 1955.

⁵⁵³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.76, lp.108-109. Pis'mo ot Latsis i Kalnberzin v Bulganinu i Khrushchevu, 'O neobkhodimosti ogranichit' otpravku demobilizovannykh ofitserov v Rigu', avgusta 1956.

⁵⁵⁴ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1132, 15-19.

⁵⁵⁵ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 5.

⁵⁵⁶ LVA f.1400, apr.4, l.732.

space.⁵⁵⁷ Berklavs's passport regime clashed with the effects of Khrushchev's 1957 decision to reduce the Soviet military's size, which encouraged a flood of demobilised officers to attempt to settle in Riga where they confronted Berklavs's restrictions, causing considerable discontent.⁵⁵⁸

It appears Berklavs enjoyed some limited success in reducing the flow of retired military personnel, further earning the enmity of the Baltic Military District (BMD) headquartered in Riga. There were numerous cases where military personnel were refused registration in Riga. At the July 1959 plenum, Pigalev reported that the BMD repeatedly asked the Riga *gorkom* and *gorispolkom* to register 200 demobilised military builders who were living in barracks and dormitories. Despite Kalnbērziņš and Lācis's agreement in principle, residency was denied because it was prohibited to register demobilised servicemen in Riga, even if they had arranged accommodation.⁵⁵⁹ Of 1,210 retired officers who required housing on 1st February 1958, near the apogee of national communist power, 369 were still waiting by the year's end.⁵⁶⁰ In contrast, after the national communists' removal, provisions for officers considerably improved. In the first eight months of 1960, 1,312 officers were registered in Riga, 723 received jobs and 780 received apartments. A further 350-400 flats were reserved for distribution in 1960 but this was deemed insufficient. Acting BMD commander General Baukov requested the sanitary norm's reduction to assist in the allocation of accommodation.⁵⁶¹ Yet, these figures mask the reality that most military personnel attempted to retire to Jūrmala, Latvia's seaside resort town, which gained city status in November 1959 and was not counted in these figures. In 1960, a wave of officers retired to Latvia. In total, 2,874 officers arrived in 1960 with all but 242 housed by 1961.⁵⁶²

During the national communists' tenure, Berklavs successfully stymied the Soviet military's aims in Jūrmala. Berklavs resisted pressure from All-Union tourist organisations that wanted to establish a large tourist centre in Jūrmala. He denied permission for the construction

⁵⁵⁷ LVA-PA, f.101, apr.21, l.82, lp.17-18.

⁵⁵⁸ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 397.

⁵⁵⁹ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 83.

⁵⁶⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.82, lp.3, 59. 'Perepiska po voprosam raskvartirovaniia i drugie khoziaistvennykh voprosov'.

⁵⁶¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.23, l.141, lp.81-82. Proshenie general-leitenanta Baukov uluchshit' okazaniia kvartir dliq ofitserov, 21 sentiabria 1960.

⁵⁶² Plakans, *Experiencing Totalitarianism*, 229-30. Report from Latvia's Commissar of War I. Časa, 'On guaranteeing living conditions to demobilised officers', 31st March 1961.

of All-Union holiday establishments, rest homes and sanatoriums on the beach.⁵⁶³ In his memoirs, Berklavs derided these supposed ‘honours’, believing their real intentions were to facilitate Russification by encouraging more tourists, sports camps and competitions to be held in Latvia, which he believed would result in people permanently residing in Latvia.⁵⁶⁴ The 1972 ‘Protest Letter’ explains that after the national communists’ defeat, a large number of All-Union recreational facilities were built in Jūrmala and therefore ‘the local population was flooded with masses of Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians. Riga’s seashore has been converted into an All-Union resort, almost no local inhabitants remain there’.⁵⁶⁵ The relative wealth and prosperity of Riga and nearby Jūrmala made these communities popular retirement destinations for military officers. Berklavs claims that the national communists successfully reduced the disproportionately large share of dachas held by non-Latvians and military officers.⁵⁶⁶ From 1957, newly arrived citizens were barred from purchasing dachas at Jūrmala.⁵⁶⁷ The conflict with the military over settlement to Jūrmala and Riga embittered the military towards the national communists. From 1957, they joined forces with Pelše to engineer their downfall.

2.5.3 Evaluation and conclusion

Interestingly, the literature deems the *propiska* system in the USSR a failure in its aim to ‘attempt to regulate patterns of population movement and urban growth... So long as motivations for migration persisted, even the strictest passport regime did not help’. According to Cynthia Buckley, macro analyses of population trends indicate that passport restrictions exerted only a slight influence on aggregate urbanisation patterns and migration flows.⁵⁶⁸ Basil Kerblay’s contention that the *propiska* system constituted a system ‘which was highly unpopular without proving a real obstacle to migration’ is generally accepted by Western scholars.⁵⁶⁹ It appears, however, that these studies overlooked the national communists’ passport

⁵⁶³ Berklavs, ‘Visiem, kam’, 16.

⁵⁶⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 116.

⁵⁶⁵ http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm.

⁵⁶⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 215-16.

⁵⁶⁷ LVA f.1400, apr.4, l.690, lp.129.

⁵⁶⁸ Buckley, ‘Myth of Managed Migration’, 896, 910.

⁵⁶⁹ Basil Kerblay, *Modern Soviet Society*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 233. Other studies that conclude the *propiska* system was unsuccessful include: R.A. Lewis and R.H. Rowlands, *Population Redistribution in the USSR: Its Impact on Society, 1897-1977*, (New York: Praeger, 1979); Peter Grandstaff, *Interregional Migration in the USSR: Economic Aspects, 1959-1970*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1980).

regime in Latvia, which enjoyed considerable success.

Ascertaining the degree of success is difficult because of the unknown number of potential Russians arrivals if it had not been in force. Berklavs claimed at the July 1959 plenum that according to the Communal and Public Services Department, 200,000 people attempted to register with the police in Riga between 1958 and mid-1959, though this seems a suspiciously high figure.⁵⁷⁰ According to Buckley, passport regimes' circumvention was facilitated by labour shortages throughout the USSR, which made employment easy to find. In Latvia, the national communists were aware of this. They reduced labour shortages by curtailing production and thus cut demand for labour. Buckley also cites bribes to officials in passport offices as another popular path for bypassing controls.⁵⁷¹ This is why in Latvia Berklavs controlled the process through his allies Kreituss and Matsulevich, who shared his convictions. This maybe the key to the passport regime's success in Latvia: the carefully selected national communist officials responsible for managing it were highly motivated.

We can measure the regime's remarkable results in the restrictions' enforcement. Within the first month, January 1957, Riga registered only 1,500 new residents and shortly thereafter, a ten-fold reduction was achieved.⁵⁷² The residency balance (the number of registered persons in the city in relation to the number of permits issued) reveals a striking decline. The balance rose by 12,700 in 1955 before the implementation of the passport regime. In contrast, in 1956, the balance *decreased* by 700 people, and in 1957, it plummeted by 10,500 persons.⁵⁷³ Berklavs triumphantly claims that in one particular month only four people were registered.⁵⁷⁴ Prior to restriction operations, Riga saw a net gain of 1,000-2,000 new arrivals per month. Within just a few months, there were periods when there was a net loss in population as departures exceeded arrivals.⁵⁷⁵ Prigge concurs, writing 'migration to Riga virtually ceased during Berklavs's tenure, and continued to be almost non-existent under his successor, Straujums'.⁵⁷⁶ From the many individual cases quoted by officials opposed to the restrictions,

⁵⁷⁰ LVA-PA f.101, op.22, d.15, l.32.

⁵⁷¹ Buckley, 'Myth of Managed Migration', 905, 909.

⁵⁷² Bleiere, 'Kā nīdēja nacionālkomunistus'.

⁵⁷³ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 14.

⁵⁷⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 97.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁷⁶ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 217-18.

the system appeared to be functioning effectively. Pigalev complained at the July 1959 plenum that specialists were refused residency. He cited the 1957 case of Romashin, who, after graduating from Moscow State University (MGU) was sent to work in Latvia's hydrometeorology office. His registration however, was progressively reduced, first for one year, then extended for six months, then for three months, and in January 1959, his residence permit was denied. Romashin was fined twice for remaining in Riga.⁵⁷⁷ Khrushchev himself attacked the migration restrictions at the June 1959 CPSU CC plenum. Khrushchev described an encounter with a tearful Russian woman during his visit to Latvia in early June 1959. She and her husband were not permitted to register in Riga. Khrushchev replied that he was unaware of the law (which contradicts Kalpiņš's assertion that Khrushchev agreed to limits on migration in December 1956) and would enquire. Latvian officials reputedly told him they were not registered because there were no apartments available, though the woman told Khrushchev her family had purchased a home, which led Khrushchev to conclude that they were not registered 'because they were Russian'.⁵⁷⁸

The establishment of Berklavs's passport regime caused considerable conflict with various regional authorities and agencies, the military and factory managers, and led to criticism of the Latvian leadership from the State Committee for Control, the Council of Ministers Administration Department and the prosecutor's office. This friction was a product of the extraordinary decision-making freedom, representative of the Thaw, with which Berklavs's alliance of city authorities operated. They decided the criteria of the passport regime and determined independently how it would function.⁵⁷⁹

The passport regime was not an unmitigated success. King believes that it was only partially effective, citing evidence that migrants continued to arrive without proper documentation and live in Riga illegally.⁵⁸⁰ In April 1959, 20,000 people in Riga were living without a residence permit. Reputedly, police officers subjected them to fines and repeatedly warned them to leave Latvia.⁵⁸¹ That figure was higher than the 15,000 unregistered people

⁵⁷⁷ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 83.

⁵⁷⁸ RGANI f.2 (TsK KPSS plenumov), op.1, d.374, l.143.

⁵⁷⁹ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 12.

⁵⁸⁰ King, *Economic Policies*, 51; Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 106.

⁵⁸¹ LVA-PA f.101, op.22, d.15, l.12.

known to be in Riga in 1954.⁵⁸² Latvia's Gosplan set maximum labour limits for all of Riga's industries. *Cina* reported, however, that factory managers attempted to circumvent this, nothing that 'some people publicly agree with the notion of productivity increase but almost immediately run to Gosplan for permission to increase the numbers of workers'.⁵⁸³

Ultimately, however, the passport regime in Latvia appeared to buck the trend and operate successfully. Gross migration (see Appendix A, Table 1) fell sharply once the national communists became politically dominant. In a repeat of the uncertainty following Stalin's death, the insecurities of the mid to late 1950s temporarily stymied Russian settlement in Latvia. The combination of a nationalist revival spurred by the national communists' rise, the return of thousands of deportees, the Hungarian Uprising's effects and the impact of Berklavs's passport regime, ensured tens of thousands of Slavs returned to their homelands between 1956 and 1959.⁵⁸⁴ For a brief period, the outflow of exceeded the inflow once the passport regime was enforced.⁵⁸⁵ This period was too short-lived, however, to make a dent in the 400,000 Russians and 100,000 other Slavs who migrated to Latvia by 1959, amounting to 25% of the pre-war population.⁵⁸⁶ After the national communists' defeat, net migration to Latvia surged and was, on average, over 5,000 a year higher than under the national communists.⁵⁸⁷ Furthermore, the centre fought back and rescinded the republics' rights to interfere with population migration.⁵⁸⁸

In this chapter, we have seen how the national communist movement evolved from 1953, developing dramatically following the 20th Party Congress, which acted as a catalyst for national communist ambitions. The improved political position and cohesiveness of the national communists by late 1956 allowed them to enact their most controversial and radical policies, ultimately with mixed results. They were also able to launch a cultural revival and harness the power of public opinion. Yet, other national communist initiatives on the economy, cadres, education and the environment could not be launched until they became the dominant political force in Latvia. In Chapter Three, we shall explore how the national communists achieved

⁵⁸² Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 10.

⁵⁸³ Dreifelds, 'Latvian National Demands' 142.

⁵⁸⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 112.

⁵⁸⁵ See Appendix A, Tables 1, 2 and 3.

⁵⁸⁶ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 112.

⁵⁸⁷ See Appendix A, Tables 1, 2 and 3.

⁵⁸⁸ Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh gorodskikh', 12.

dominion and exploited it. Finally, the struggle between Kalpiņš and Pelše had greater significance. It was an attempt by the national communists to 'Latvinise' the republic's culture. Victories in culture struck directly at Pelše and the Stalinists. After the cultural struggles, conflict between Berklavs's national communists and Pelše's Stalinists could no longer be disguised as disagreements within the leadership.

Chapter Three: The Zenith of the National Communists, January 1958 - March 1959

3.1 The Rise of the National Communists

The defining moment in the Latvian national communists' political history came in January 1958. From 1953, the national communists began to climb the LCP's ranks, and by 1956, they had made sufficient progress to enact legislation in pursuit of their goals. So, how did the national communists come to dominate Latvian politics? They lacked, however, control over the LCP, a firmly Russian-majority party. To continue their course and enforce the laws they created, such as the language requirement, the national communists needed control of the Party leadership. They required possession of the LCP CC bureau. The bureau was the executive organ of each republic's Communist Party CC. Jerry Hough summarises its role as follows:

In the period between plenary sessions of the committee, [the bureau] leads all the activity of the Party organisations; it secures the execution of the directives of the higher-standing Party organs; it gives instructions on the most important economic, cultural, and Party questions; it selects and confirms a defined circle of officials; and it examines and decides cases concerning the personal behaviour of communists.⁵⁸⁹

Prigge describes the Latvian bureau in the 1950s as 'an example of true collective leadership and Soviet democracy' and states that 'all bureau decisions were reached democratically with actual votes'.⁵⁹⁰ Therefore, a majority in the Latvian bureau was vital for the national communists to be able to push through their radical agenda. The bureau consisted of between 10-14 full members and 1-5 candidate members (who could not vote but were able to join and shape the debate). In 1957, the national communists held four full seats and one candidate seat on the bureau. Their opponents, grouped around Pelše, held three seats and a candidate. The

⁵⁸⁹ Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision-making*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 13-14.

⁵⁹⁰ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 309.

other five members were neutral. Those who would become national communists numbered approximately one-third of the bureau from the early 1950s.⁵⁹¹

In 1958, the national communists strove to take control of the bureau by removing their opposition and replacing them with other national communists. This would have allowed the national communists to install increasing numbers of national communists in key positions throughout the Latvian Party and state. Thus, they sought to impose their pro-Latvian programme on a Party in which non-Latvians represented 63.4% of membership in 1958.⁵⁹² The principal bureau positions included the Council of Ministers Chairman (effectively the Prime Minister), the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Chairman (the nominal head of state) and the Riga *gorkom* First Secretary. Nominally, the most important position on the bureau was the First Secretary, the republic's most significant Party representative and invariably of the titular nationality. In many ways, however, the Second Secretary surpassed the First. Selected by Moscow and nominally approved by the republic's CC, the Second Secretary played an important role on the centre's behalf, keeping a check on the Union Republic's First Secretary, as an advisor, mediator, and interpreter of Moscow's guidelines. Until 1958, with the exception of Krūmiņš between June 1953 and January 1956, the Second Secretary in post-war Latvia was a Russian, and in the case of Ivan Lebedev and Fedor Titov, a Stalinist hardliner. From January 1956, Moscow returned to the practice of appointing a Russian as Second Secretary in Latvia.⁵⁹³ Krūmiņš's successor, Fillip Kashnikov, was a typical apparatchik: previously he served as Third Secretary in post-war Moldavia, Second Secretary of the Buriat-Mongol *obkom* and as a CPSU CC inspector.

With the national communists' rise, the bureau became increasingly polarised, and especially after Berklavs's entry in 1956, there was no consensus. The Party divided along factional lines. Kalnbērziņš maintained neutrality but leaned towards opposing the national communists. Lācis also performed a balancing act but favoured the national communists with whom he was connected by marriage (his wife Velta was Kalpiņš's sister). Pelše could rely on the support of Aleksandr Gorbатов, the Russian general representing the BMD, one or two

⁵⁹¹ See Appendices E, F and G for details.

⁵⁹² See Appendix A, Table 4.

⁵⁹³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.12, lp.2-3. Stenogramma 1-i TsK KPL plenuma, 20 ianvaria 1956.

candidate members, and Kashnikov. In January 1958, the national communists controlled only two of the senior positions through Berklavs and Presidium Chairman Ozoliņš.

3.1.1 The fall of Phillip Kashnikov

In January 1958, conditions were favourable for the national communists, who received positive signals from Khrushchev after the Anti-Party purges. The national communists made an ambitious attempt to replace Kashnikov with one of their own and challenge the existing order. Usually a Congress rubberstamped the election of a new CC, but this was not the case at the 15th LCP Congress. In a stunning display of Party democracy in action, on 25th January, Pelše and Kashnikov received an unprecedentedly high number of ‘no’ votes for their election to the 91-person CC. Of 653 delegates, Pelše received 67 ‘no’ votes with his allies tallying similar numbers, for example, Augusts Voss’s ‘no’ votes totalled 62. The real shock was Kashnikov’s ‘rejection’: 223 ‘no’ votes, some 34.1% of delegates.⁵⁹⁴ This was highly irregular; normally ‘no’ votes for a candidate did not exceed 10-12. By comparison, Berklavs himself received 31 ‘no’ votes as did Krūmiņš, and other national communists only a handful. Despite the sizeable opposition, Pelše and Kashnikov still received a majority of the Congress’s votes and were duly elected. It is worth noting that there was no real alternative in the Soviet system as there were 91 candidates for 91 seats. Yet, this was an extraordinary vote of no confidence in Pelše’s conservative hardliners. According to Berklavs, Pelše received numerous ‘no’ votes at the January Congress because of his negative attitude towards Latvia’s cultural heritage and traditions and his well-known servility to Moscow; it was well-documented that he was a ‘man of the bureau’ who rarely made visits to factories, let alone rural areas.⁵⁹⁵ Some of the LCP’s wider leadership became receptive to the national communists’ ideas, emboldened by the atmosphere of Khrushchev’s Thaw.

With Kashnikov’s authority undermined, the national communists seized the opportunity to exploit his weakness at the January CC plenum immediately following the 15th Congress, thus testing the Party’s rules on democratic centralism for the second time that week. Once the Congress elected the CC, the first order of business was the election of CC secretaries.

⁵⁹⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.2, lp.242-44. Stenogramma zasedanii 15-i s’ezda KPL, 23-25 ianvaria 1958.

⁵⁹⁵ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 109.

Then Moscow confirmed the appointments to senior positions such as first and second secretaries. As usual, Kalnbērziņš was re-elected First Secretary unopposed and unanimously.

The election continued:

Kalnbērziņš: 'We need to elect the remaining CC secretaries. In spite of the circumstances, I believe that it is necessary to elect Comrade Kashnikov as Second Secretary. What is the committee's opinion?'

Nikolai Shalaev (Aizpute District Secretary): 'I believe Kashnikov might not be completely comfortable with his own nomination, instead of Kashnikov I would recommend Comrade Berklavs for Second Secretary'.

Surprised by the suggestion, Kalnbērziņš answered frankly: 'What are the opinions on this question? We have a large stratum [*prosloika*] of Russian communists, if a Russian comrade is not elected, is it acceptable?' Attempting to divert his own question, Kalnbērziņš suggested further consideration as to whether this was correct.

Pēteris Plēsums (KPK Chairman): 'I suggest Comrade Shalaev. He is a Russian comrade; he has long worked for the Party and fully deserves to be elected Secretary of the Communist Party. He deserves this'.

Kalnbērziņš then attempted to postpone the vote but the Central Committee demanded an answer.

Kalnbērziņš: 'Maybe because we have difficulties in this regard, we should delay resolution of this issue'.

From the audience: 'We need to vote'.

Again, Kalnbērziņš proposed Kashnikov's candidacy.

Kalnbērziņš: 'Who is for Kashnikov's election as Second Secretary? Please vote. Who is against? Very few. Abstaining? A few'.

With under a third of the CC members' hands up in favour, members shouted that the votes needed counting. Kalnbērziņš was forced to ask for a proper count and conceded that there was no majority.

Kalnērziņš: ‘Very well. Comrade El’vikh counts the right side, and Comrade Strautmanis the left side. Who is in favour of electing Kashnikov Second Secretary, please raise your hand’.

Twenty-seven votes were recorded in favour of Kashnikov and 31 against. In the circumstances of this highly unorthodox vote, 33 members chose to remain neutral and abstain. Kalnērziņš was then forced to offer Berklavs as a candidate. Berklavs received 32 votes for, 12 votes against, and 47 abstentions from wary members. Despite Berklavs receiving more votes than Kashnikov, Kalnērziņš yet again tried to delay the Second Secretary’s selection, presumably because he feared Moscow’s reaction to the preordained candidate’s rejection. ‘Comrades’, he said, ‘Let’s elect the [other] secretaries, and then the Second Secretary’. Finally, Lācis intervened and proposed that the plenum leave the question of electing a Second Secretary open and the CC agreed.⁵⁹⁶ The CC did not endorse Kashnikov. Flustered, Kalnērziņš declared ‘meeting adjourned’ and was the first out of the hall. This was the most extraordinary plenum since June 1953. In an unparalleled move, the CC used the Party’s rules to prevent the reinstallation of Moscow’s nominee. The significance of this was enormous: as Berklavs put it, ‘nothing like that had ever happened in Latvia or elsewhere’.⁵⁹⁷

Stunned by their victory, Berklavs and some of his colleagues, including Pinksis, Krūmiņš, Kacens and Pizāns, left the meeting last and walked the streets. In his memoirs, Berklavs claimed that he had a reputation in Moscow as a troublemaker and believed that Moscow and the Latvian Stalinists would never tolerate his elevation to Second Secretary.⁵⁹⁸ Prigge believes archival evidence supports Berklavs’s self-portrayal as ‘an uncompromising maverick’. He points to Berklavs’s speech to the 14th LCP Congress in January 1956 in which he openly lambasted the Party for skewing statistics in reports and demanded to know why.⁵⁹⁹ This portrait of Berklavs suited his interpretation of his own dismissal in 1959 and in the post-Soviet period helped him distance himself from allegations of collaboration. Despite his controversial policies, Berklavs was exaggerating his rebelliousness. There is evidence to

⁵⁹⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.11, lp.1-3. Stenogramma zasedaniia plenuma TsK KPL, 25 ianvaria 1958.

⁵⁹⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 110.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 137 fn.6.

suggest that in 1958 Berklavs did not actually have a reputation as a renegade. At 20th June 1959 bureau meeting, Kalnbērziņš revealed that Berklavs was marked to join the CC apparatus in the Soviet capital in the future.⁶⁰⁰ Furthermore, the ailing Lācis designated his Deputy Berklavs as heir apparent for the post of Council of Ministers Chairman.⁶⁰¹ This suggests that, contrary to Berklavs's assumptions, his foray into national communism had not damaged his reputation and the Soviet upper echelons regarded him highly until early 1959.

Rather than endorsing himself, Berklavs suggested Krūmiņš as a compromise candidate. The question was if Moscow would accept the offer. Krūmiņš was a more tactful and able negotiator than Berklavs. Kalnbērziņš and Moscow's representative agreed.⁶⁰² According to Krūmiņš, when the Department for Union Republics' Baltic Sector learned of Kashnikov's removal, it turned to Khrushchev for guidance. Responding to Kashnikov's being 'rolled over' (*prokatili*) Khrushchev said that it was not necessary to send anyone to Riga, but to let the Latvians decide for themselves whom to nominate.⁶⁰³ This reaction should be interpreted as a display of trust, as evidence that Khrushchev considered the Latvians responsible. At the April 1958 plenum, Krūmiņš was elected Second Secretary (the post was vacant for almost four months), reclaiming the position he lost in January 1956.⁶⁰⁴ Kashnikov's dismissal and Krūmiņš's return to the post demonstrated that the Latvians had won leverage in their relationship with Moscow.

Kashnikov's unpopularity partially explains why the CC ousted him. According to Krūmiņš, Kashnikov could not cope with his responsibilities. *Raikomy* secretaries nicknamed him 'porridge'.⁶⁰⁵ Many of the votes against Kashnikov can be attributed to these *raikom* and *gorkom* level secretaries from outside the bureau and secretariat. Even Kashnikov's original election at the 14th LCP Congress in January 1956 was not unanimous. From 575 delegates, there were 44 dissenting votes.⁶⁰⁶ With his political career in tatters, Kashnikov left Latvia to become Director of the All-Union Agricultural Institute of Correspondence Education. The

⁶⁰⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.102.

⁶⁰¹ Zirnis, 'Latviskā sociālisma gals'.

⁶⁰² Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 110.

⁶⁰³ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 86.

⁶⁰⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.14, lp.103. 2-i plenuma TsK KPL, 15-16 aprēlī 1958.

⁶⁰⁵ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 86.

⁶⁰⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.19, l.2, lp.264-65. Stenogramma 14-i s'ezda KPL, 17-19 ianvarī 1956.

significance of Kashnikov's rejection went far beyond the removal of an incompetent apparatchik. This was a rebuff to Moscow and the imposition of a Second Secretary with no connection to Latvia. Berklavs believed Kashnikov was ousted because he 'did not know the Latvian land, its people, its language, culture or tradition'.⁶⁰⁷ Yet, it is inconceivable that such a rebellious vote was a spontaneous rejection. Instead, as we saw in Chapter Two, leading national communists covertly campaigned among CC members for this outcome.

3.1.2 The aftermath

Kashnikov's ouster was not, however, an absolute victory for the national communists. Pelše, Kashnikov and Kalnbērziņš wanted some 'compensation', as Berklavs put it, for conceding that the Second Secretary would be a non-Russian.⁶⁰⁸ Pelše and Kalnbērziņš had already attempted to depose Berklavs as Riga *gorkom* First Secretary in 1957 in the hopes that his language and residency efforts would be curtailed without him.⁶⁰⁹ Berklavs was summoned to Moscow and pressured into accepting a deal where he would leave the *gorkom* and take up Krūmiņš's vacant Council of Ministers Deputy Chairmanship (the precise position Berklavs left in February 1955 for the *gorkom* leadership and effectively a demotion). In his new role, Berklavs oversaw 22 different ministries, including the Education and Culture Ministries and the Academy of Sciences, all institutions that subsequently fell under national communist control.⁶¹⁰ Crucially, Berklavs managed to negotiate that he remain on the bureau. This was unusual because normally only the Chairman (Lācis) and First Deputy (Plūdonis) sat on the bureau. Berklavs retained supervision over the Riga *gorispolkom* (an oversight on Pelše's part as this allowed Berklavs to keep his residency restrictions in place), and he selected his successor. He chose the young national communist Aleksandrs Straujums to replace him as Riga *gorkom* First Secretary. Furthermore, Berklavs was aware of Lācis's poor health and admits in his memoirs that he aspired to eventually succeed him as Council of Ministers Chairman.⁶¹¹

Widmer believed that the rejection of Moscow's candidate crossed a firm line, that if 'one event can be singled out, that was the one that opened the floodgates for the events to

⁶⁰⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 109.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

follow'.⁶¹² At the April plenum, which elected Krūmiņš, he was the only candidate and as such, Pelše left the plenum with a 'very unpleasant impression'.⁶¹³ Pelše survived the January Congress but his sizeable number of 'no' votes and the loss of Kashnikov weakened him. Furthermore, despite being twenty years Krūmiņš's senior, a CC secretary, and bureau member since 1941, Pelše was leapfrogged by Krūmiņš for the second time. It is clear Khrushchev did not favour Pelše because he was passed over for a younger and less experienced bureau member. The younger generation, embodied by the national communists, surpassed Pelše in both official positions and real influence, writes Prigge.⁶¹⁴ In May 1958, Aleksei Kirichenko, Presidium member responsible for cadres, reassured Krūmiņš upon his election as Second Secretary that his return to the Latvian CC was a long-term appointment. 'Kalnbērziņš is supposedly often sick,' he explained 'and the chief ideologue [Pelše] was not at the Twentieth Congress, so you will have a lot to take on'.⁶¹⁵ Khrushchev had ignored Pelše for at least two years by 1958, from his snub to Pelše by not inviting him to the Congress to the fall of Kashnikov. This embittered Pelše and intensified the now open struggle between the two factions within the leadership.

After the confrontations of early 1958, the national communists consolidated their triumph by making key personnel changes during spring and summer 1958. They brought about radical change in the composition of the LCP's upper echelons, reflecting the leadership's 'Latvianisation'. Krūmiņš's position as Second Secretary offered considerable power, this time with strong national communist bureau support. As Second Secretary, he led congresses, plenums and bureau sessions along with the First Secretary and wielded a considerable amount of decision-making power especially in the crucial area of cadres' placement. Krūmiņš also had greater direct access to Khrushchev and the Kremlin.⁶¹⁶ In 1958, the national communists gained a majority on the LCP CC by replacing members with their own. This amounted to a one-third turnover from the 14th Congress in January 1956.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹² Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism in Latvia', 110.

⁶¹³ Vilis Krūmiņš and Visvaldis Vallis, Interview with Andrejs Krauliņš, 'Arvīds Janovičs: Dažas līnijas portretā', *Literatūra un Māksla*, 11th March 1989, 10.

⁶¹⁴ Prigge, 'Latvian Purges', 222.

⁶¹⁵ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 86.

⁶¹⁶ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 308-309.

⁶¹⁷ Levits, 'Latvija padomju varā', 53; Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 244.

Within the bureau, there were major changes that gave the national communists a majority. At the April plenum, along with Krūmiņš's ascension, Elmārs Bēmanis was promoted to the All-Union Komsomol administration and replaced as Komsomol secretary by national communist Vladislavs Ruskulis. In July, Straujums was co-opted into the bureau as a candidate and Berklavs engineered Agriculture Minister Nikonov's return to the bureau.⁶¹⁸ In August 1958, Indriķis Pinksis replaced the Russian Kārlis Voltmanis as Trade Union Council Chairman and received a candidate seat. Additionally, in 1958, national communists were installed as heads of CC departments. In April, Pelše's acolyte Vitālijs Rubenis was displaced as CC Agricultural Department Head and replaced by Anton Luriņš, in August Jānis Kacens became Administration, Trade and Finance Department Head, and in December Herberts Valters became Deputy Head in Pelše's own preserve, *Agitprop*. In July 1958, the most significant change that summer, symbolic of the political shift in favour of the national communists, took place. General Gorbatov, BMD Commander, was made Inspector General at the USSR Ministry of Defence and transferred from Latvia. His replacement, General Pavel Batov, did not receive a bureau seat, which until then was *ex officio*.⁶¹⁹ This left the national communists with a majority on the bureau with a total of five full members and three candidates. Pelše was isolated as the sole full member (along with his Russian ally, candidate member Nikolai Saleev) openly hostile towards the national communists.⁶²⁰ Indigenous Latvians overwhelmingly dominated the bureau. Only Pelše and Plūdonis had resided in the Soviet Union during the entire interwar period. In August, Pelše's acolytes Pavel Litvinov and A.J. Vīndedze lost their Council of Ministers Deputy Chairmanships. In summer 1958, the Pelše faction reached its lowest ebb in the struggle with the national communists.

3.2 The Pļaviņas Hydroelectric Dam Affair

Perhaps the greatest expression of the fledgling civil society under development in Soviet Latvia during the national communist period was the unusual wave of protest aroused by the

⁶¹⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un Neizmirst*, 105.

⁶¹⁹ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 371.

⁶²⁰ See Appendices E to H for details.

proposed construction of a 40-metre high hydroelectric power plant on the River Daugava at Pļaviņas in 1958. Endangering a particularly scenic valley, the project aroused opposition principally among intellectuals including eminent scientists, writers, educators, and members of the cultural and artistic community. It caused an unprecedented outpouring of popular support from the general public. In the circumstances of the Latvian Thaw, the Pļaviņas affair was particularly significant as the first instance of a genuinely broad public debate in post-war Latvia.

National communist Vēra Kacena, Kalpiņš's wife, initiated the debate and championed Latvian opposition to the project. In an article published in *Literatūra un Māksla* in March 1958 entitled 'We must not be hasty!' Kacena described the plan as 'a hasty, ill-considered project'.⁶²¹ In her article, Kacena openly promoted Latvian interests above Soviet ones. Kacena's aim was to encourage a public debate because 'only local considerations and collective opinion are a good judge and the safest guarantee against possible errors'. She said 'to hear out the ideas of the nation was more than necessary'. Kacena did not fail to note the successful Lithuanian precedent (whose ability to exercise a considerable amount of independent political will was emulated by the Latvians in the 1950s). Activists persuaded the Nemunas River power plant designers of the threat to the Birštonas spas and some architectural monuments. Plans were amended accordingly so that the site was not flooded.

The most striking aspect of Kacena's article is the juxtaposition of nationalist imagery against the plans of an uncaring All-Union organisation (the Design Institute's *Hidroenerģoprojekts*) interested only in profitability. She wrote: 'The beauty and natural wealth [of] historic sites are values that are not calculated in the millions'. Kacena implicitly criticised the Soviet government by mentioning the 'inheritance' of the 'wrongly placed' superphosphate plant, another environmentally damaging project that affected the popular Mežaparks forest.⁶²² Her argument was twofold, appealing first to evoke national sentiment among the public for support, and then providing an economic rationale against the dam's construction. Kacena

⁶²¹ Vēra Kacena, 'Nedrīkstam pārsteigties', *Literatūra un Māksla*, 22nd March 1958, 3.

⁶²² Ibid. A commission that studied Riga's atmospheric purity made proposals to protect Riga's air from contamination. Consequently, the superphosphate factory closed and plans to fell Mežaparks for pine were halted, Stradiņš, *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmija*, 223-24.

described the area surrounding the proposed dam as ‘the most beautiful place in our republic’ and explained that because of attendant flooding, a scenic gorge with rare plants and natural features known the Staburags (the apex of which was two metres below sea level) would be destroyed along with the Pērses ravine and its waterfall. Furthermore, the higher water level in the Daugava would damage the 13th century ruins of Koknese castle, which featured in Latvian folklore. The dam would also significantly increase the danger of flooding in Jēkabpils District. From a historical and archaeological perspective, Kacena explained that the Daugava valley contained many protected natural monuments such as ‘the oldest mounds which tells the story of times long before our era’ and emphasised the ‘deep significance of the area for our people’.⁶²³ According to Dreifelds, the core of Kacena’s argument was the rhetoric of archaeology and history, rather than environmentalism, because of the environmental movement’s embryonic state in other industrialised societies.⁶²⁴ Nevertheless, this was the first grassroots movement in Soviet Latvia and was implicitly based on environmental concerns.

Kacena admitted that at first glance the Pļaviņas location seemed advantageous. Recognising the need for a practical and economic argument to dissuade designers and planners from constructing the dam at Pļaviņas, Kacena systematically explained that the dam would be a waste of money because of the long-term consequences associated with the dam’s construction. Kacena listed the economic problems the dam would create such as bogs that would threaten the surrounding urban areas; difficulties for shipping requiring extensive engineering to surmount a 40m high dam; the fishing industry would suffer, and finally the dam would render the Pļaviņas dolomite quarry inaccessible. Recent investment expanded and mechanised the quarry. Dolomite was widely used in road and construction projects as well as for molten metal in the *Krasnyi Metalurgs* factory. Geologists confirmed there were no other high-quality dolomite concentrations in Latvia. Kacena also argued against the creation of an inland sea, which might necessitate future costly land reclamation projects.

Kacena acknowledged Latvia’s shortage of electricity and the necessity of a project to improve the electrical supply. She implored those officials and designers working on the project

⁶²³ Kacena, ‘Nedrīkstam pārsteigties’, 3.

⁶²⁴ Juris Dreifelds, ‘Two Latvian Dams: Two Confrontations’, *Baltic Forum*, 6 (1989) 11-24.

to re-examine the case for an alternative variation that would see the dam located downriver, arguably causing less damage to the scenery and environment and preserving the primeval Daugava river valley rather than creating a large reservoir. This alternative plan was the result of a comprehensive study by local specialists. Representatives from across Latvian society publicly associated themselves with the study's conclusions. Kacena admitted that this variation was estimated to cost 10% more to build but countered that higher prices for electricity were worth the cost of preserving the valley.⁶²⁵ According to Riga *gorkom* Second Secretary Ivan Biniatian, the alternative proposal was estimated to cost an additional several hundred million rubles. Furthermore, the alternative proposal involving a reduction in the dam's height by 10m would produce 25% less power.⁶²⁶

Kacena concluded her article by directly warning dam designers that the Council of Ministers' decision designating the Daugava River valley as an important natural monument requiring protection 'must be respected'.⁶²⁷ Adolfs Šilde describes Kacena's article as 'her own protest against the devastation of Latvian natural splendour. It was romantic, her idea of protest was a form of passive resistance'.⁶²⁸ Šilde raises an interesting point about the campaign and the first exercise of peaceful resistance in Soviet Latvia that set the tone for the subsequent three decades of minimum outward compliance to Soviet rule among a large part of the population following the purge.

The article ignited debate. Further articles by *Literatūra un Māksla's* editorial staff followed. *Zvaigzne* highlighted issues linked to Latvian national consciousness in an article about the Staburags's beauty, which ended with the words: 'The German fascist invaders tried to destroy the Staburags, but it did not work', implying the Soviet attempt would likewise fail.⁶²⁹ These articles moved many inhabitants of Latvia to write letters supporting the safeguarding of Latvia's cultural monuments. Many visible personalities from the intelligentsia signed a petition. Kacena published in *Literatūra un Māksla* because she was a contributor to the journal and the Party press did not oppose the dam's construction. *Cīņa* bemoaned 'non-

⁶²⁵ Kacena, 'Nedrīkstam pārsteigties', 3.

⁶²⁶ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 4 (1989), 97.

⁶²⁷ Kacena, 'Nedrīkstam pārsteigties', 3.

⁶²⁸ Adolfs Šilde, *Bez tiesībām un brīvības. Latvijas sovjetizācija: 1944-1965*, (Copenhagen: Imanta, 1965), 58.

⁶²⁹ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 4 (1989), 97.

specialists' discussing the project, claiming that 'biased and emotional articles by non-specialists have created an unnecessary uproar'.⁶³⁰ Shortly, after this rebuke all public discussion of the plan ended.⁶³¹ The newspapers, however, did not control the republic, it was the national communists in the bureau who did. They were approaching the pinnacle and keenly listened to public opinion.

The project proved divisive for the leadership. Latvia's energy sector specialists were largely in favour and their opinion carried weight. From 1956, Dzērve repeatedly espoused the need to expand Latvia's power output through the construction a hydroelectric dam, though by 1959 he was in favour of a thermal power station.⁶³² Retrospectively, Berklavs alleged that Latvia had an ample electricity supply but that the dam was built to bring construction workers from the RSFSR. Consequently, the new town of Stučka (now Aizkraukle) was created nearby.⁶³³ The Council of Ministers debated the project's viability and according to Mārtiņš Mintauris, the very fact that a discussion took place, which offered recommendations, infuriated Moscow's Institute of Design representatives who were unused to local interference in All-Union infrastructure projects.⁶³⁴ Within the leadership, only Kacena's husband Kalpiņš was vociferously against the project (possibly the capricious Krūmiņš was also opposed). Swayed by public opinion, the bureau shelved plans for the Pļaviņas hydroelectric dam. During Khrushchev's visit to Latvia, at a meeting on 12th June, he upheld the national communists' decision not to construct the dam, a position in accordance with national communist economic policy.⁶³⁵

The national communists', or rather Latvian public's victory, over the Pļaviņas dam was a triumph for peripheral interests over the centre. It had a lasting effect; the Latvian Society for the Protection of Nature and Historical Monuments was founded in 1959. The campaign

⁶³⁰ Nīls Muižnieks, 'The daugavpils hydro station and "Glasnost" in Latvia', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 18 (1987), 63.

⁶³¹ David Galbreath and Daunis Auers, 'Green, Black and Brown: Uncovering Latvia's Environmental Politics', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 40 (2009), 336-37.

⁶³² Pauls Dzērve, 'Komunistiskās celtniecības septiņgade', *Karogs*, 1 (1959), 105; Pauls Dzērve, 'Padomju Latvijas tautas saimniecības attīstība', *Karogs*, 7 (1956).

⁶³³ http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm

⁶³⁴ Mārtiņš Mintauris, 'Ieskats Pļaviņu hidroelektrostacijas tapšanas vesture', in Jānis Ivars Padedzis, Mārtiņš Mintauris (eds.), *Atmiņu Daugava*, (Rīga: Koknesei, 2013), 50-106.

⁶³⁵ Voldemārs Kalpiņš, '1959. gads Toreiz apsūdzētā liecība', *Cīņa*, 4th September 1988, 3; 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 4 (1989), 97.

demonstrated Latvians' capacity to mobilise in an effort to preserve national cultural values.⁶³⁶ As such, the affair should be viewed as a precursor (emboldening the national communists with public support) to Latvia's struggles against Khrushchev's 1958 education reform and curtailment of the production of large All-Union industrial enterprises, which the national communists blamed for the inflow of workers, the housing shortage, pollution, the worsening food supply.⁶³⁷

The Pļaviņas affair played a role in the purge. After the campaign, KGB Chairman Vēvers announced that he kept in his safe a list of all the protesters and those who signed petitions.⁶³⁸ Immediately after defeating the national communists, Pelše wasted no time in endorsing the Pļaviņas dam. Construction began in 1961 with the first turbine activated in December 1965; a concrete reminder of the priority his new government afforded All-Union concerns over national sensibilities. The Pļaviņas affair during the Latvian Thaw in the 1950s paralleled the 1980s Latvian 'Awakening'. Twenty-eight years after defiance among the intelligentsia halted the Pļaviņas dam's construction, Latvia's path to independence began with grassroots environmental activism against the Daugavpils hydroelectric dam's proposed construction in 1986. In the context of the Glasnost era, this activism and opposition developed rapidly into the Popular Front, which championed Latvia's independence movement.

3.3 Cadres Policy

A major aim of national communist policy was transferring Party control to ethnic Latvians. The national communists considered it a form of Russification to have primarily non-Latvian cadres in leadership positions in the Party and state apparatus. National communist cadres policy was most fully elaborated at the 1st-2nd October 1958 plenums, considerably later than initiatives on language and residency. This was Krūmiņš's jurisdiction as Second Secretary, with responsibility for cadres. His speech to the plenum was carefully worded in order to avoid provocation. The wary Krūmiņš first obtained permission from Presidium member Aleksei

⁶³⁶ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 190.

⁶³⁷ Kalpiņš, '1959. gads', 31st August 1988, 3.

⁶³⁸ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 71.

Kirichenko to unveil a new cadres policy. He told Kirichenko it was based on the decisions of the June 1953 plenum, to which Kirichenko agreed it was necessary to 'finish the work and leave no ambiguities'.⁶³⁹ According to Krūmiņš, CPSU CC apparatchiks participated in the plenum's preparation including Baltic Sector Chief Gavrilov, who awarded the work 'high praise'.⁶⁴⁰

In his keynote speech, Krūmiņš revealed that Latvians comprised only 44% of *nomenklatura* personnel in October 1958. Only 70 directors of 314 of the largest enterprises were Latvians. Krūmiņš noted that 'it cannot be considered a normal situation, when those working in leadership positions in enterprises and organisations are of only one nationality'. Krūmiņš qualified his position, 'It would be a serious mistake to assume that in Latvia only Latvians should be in leadership positions. Cadres selection and placement cannot be implemented, subject only to national identity... it should be primarily by Leninist principles'.⁶⁴¹ The plenum's resolution, entitled 'On the situation of working with cadres and measures for improvement', asked *gorkomy* and *raikomy* 'to take steps to strengthen and partially update senior management', code for promoting Latvians. Senior enterprise managers were to take into account the 'collective ethnic composition', again Soviet government speak for promoting more Latvians.⁶⁴² Lācis too called for 'local cadres to be boldly promoted to leadership positions in government, economic and other organisations'.⁶⁴³ Krūmiņš later wrote that Latvian cadres promotion was one aspect in the process of turning the LCP into a party of the Latvian people.⁶⁴⁴ In his speech, *Cīņa* editor Pavel Pizāns urged that the Party take greater notice of Latvia's eastern province of Latgale. He complained that in the early post-war years, many Party, soviet and economic personnel raised in Latgale were sent to other Latvian regions. In turn, those directed to Latgale were unfamiliar with local conditions there, including the

⁶³⁹ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 86.

⁶⁴⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 133.

⁶⁴¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.38-39.

⁶⁴² 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 103.

⁶⁴³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.61.

⁶⁴⁴ Vilis Krūmiņš, 'Otbirat' v partiiu luchshikh, dostoineishikh', *Sovetskaia Latvija*, 20th December 1959, 2.

Latgalian language.⁶⁴⁵ In essence, Pizāns called for cadres' selection to be based to a degree on regional peculiarities.

Crucially, Krūmiņš avoided making the plenum overtly controversial. Therefore, the 1956 language law's two-year requirement for competency in both languages was omitted. Krūmiņš did pass judgement on the law though. He explained that it performed extremely poorly because it was badly organised by the bureau and there 'must be a business-like organisation and implementation of this important resolution'.⁶⁴⁶ Krūmiņš formulated the resolution's wording to reflect a more implicit interpretation: 'Knowledge of Latvian and Russian is considered an important quality when nominating personnel'.⁶⁴⁷ Perhaps it was because Krūmiņš toned down the rhetoric that the plenum's resolution was acceptable to Moscow. A diplomatic character, Krūmiņš was adept at bridging the gap between the national communists and Moscow. This was also the reason the national communists selected Krūmiņš, rather than Berklavs, as their candidate for Second Secretary. In practice, the resolution still required all cadres working with the public to know the local customs and both languages. Krūmiņš reported that the number of officials who spoke Latvian had increased but more progress was required. Krūmiņš cited the Jelgava flax mill as an example of the work to be done, where a majority of workers were Latvians (60%), but where the director, chief engineer, Party organisation secretary and factory committee chairman did not know Latvian. 'Because of a poor knowledge of local conditions and the Latvian language, significant portions of our cadres are unable to work efficiently to establish close connections with the masses'. He concluded by declaring that 'the most important task of leading cadres is to stubbornly and persistently study Russian and Latvian'.⁶⁴⁸

On the surface, the share of Latvian cadres in almost all sectors of the economy and culture increased every year under the national communists.⁶⁴⁹ Yet, Latvian historians disagree over whether there was significant cadre replacement during the national communist period. According to Riekstiņš, the policy enjoyed limited success. The resolution on Latvian-speaking

⁶⁴⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.112-13.

⁶⁴⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.40.

⁶⁴⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 86.

⁶⁴⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.38-39.

⁶⁴⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.11.

cadres was implemented in many instances, and the number of Latvians in positions of responsibility increased slightly.⁶⁵⁰ The national communists' cadres policy was directed against the placement of a small number of personnel (usually very experienced Russians) from the centre in key positions in the local administration. An 8th June 1959 CPSU CC commission report revealed that between 1956 and 1959, half of *gorkomy*, *raikomy* and *raispolkomy* first secretaries were replaced along with almost all *gorkomy* and *raikomy* second secretaries (roles customarily occupied by Russians).⁶⁵¹ This was significant because it undermined the centre's efforts to counter regionalism through staffing policies.⁶⁵²

The turnover in cadres however, did not necessarily translate into increased Latvian representation. Despite the removal of 35% of enterprise directors and 31% of chief engineers between May 1957 and mid-1959, at the 20th June 1959 bureau meeting, Berklavs explained that only 36.6% of enterprise directors were Latvians.⁶⁵³ At the local level, cadre replacement figures for the mid to late 1950s are significant, suggesting an overhaul of local government favouring the national communists. More than 50% of regional Party secretaries and 60% of *kolkhoz* chairmen (over 200 managers) were replaced in this period.⁶⁵⁴ Some of these statistics, however, are misleading. There were mergers of *kolkhozy* during this period, which significantly reduced the number of farm managers, partially accounting for the decrease. In April 1949, there were 2,999 *kolkhozy* but only 1,105 in 1960.⁶⁵⁵ Bleiere writes: 'The forcing out of non-Latvians from the *nomenklatura* did not occur in theory nor in practice. The low proportion of Latvians in the LCP was the Achilles heel for attempts to promote the language because only Party members could be appointed to leading positions, and too few knew Latvian'.⁶⁵⁶ Krūmiņš's revelations in June 1959 lend weight to Bleiere's argument. He noted that in 1950, over 80% of cadres in enterprises were non-Latvians. Yet, in 1958, in VEF, little

⁶⁵⁰ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 185.

⁶⁵¹ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 224.

⁶⁵² J. Miller, 'Nomenklatura: Check on Localism?', in T. H. Rigby and B. Harasymiv (eds.), *Leadership Selection and Patron-Client Relations in the USSR and Yugoslavia*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 90.

⁶⁵³ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 224; LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48, lp.136.

⁶⁵⁴ Bērziņš, *Unpunished Crime*, 34; Pabriks and Purs, 'Challenges of Change', 34; Krūmiņš, 'Atminas un pardomas', 81.

⁶⁵⁵ Swain, 'Deciding to Collectivise' 41; Pabriks and Purs, 'Challenges of Change', 38.

⁶⁵⁶ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 398.

seemed to have changed, the director was not Latvian, and its engineering and technical personnel were 80% non-Latvian.⁶⁵⁷

3.3.1 Cadres retention

In Moscow and Latvia's struggle over cadres placement, the national communists sought to amend the policy chiefly responsible for the drain on Latvian cadres. At the October 1958 plenum, Krūmiņš explained the detrimental effect of existing cadres policy, causing distrust because nothing changed in the 15 post-war years. Thousands of Latvian cadres were trained but the practice of hiring newcomer non-Latvians, often demobilised officers without a specialist education, continued.⁶⁵⁸ In 1957, there was a shortage of some 3,000 specialists across the Latvian economy with 55-70% of all engineering and technical posts filled by persons with practical experience but no special education. Considerable difficulties arose because most textbooks used in specialised higher education courses were in Russian.⁶⁵⁹ Such conditions in education contributed to the situation where in 1957, Riga's railway carriage factory employed only 11 Latvian engineers out of 101 and only 15 of 123 engineers at Riga's electro-machine building factory were Latvians. In the Riga *gorkom nomenklatura* (including managers of industrial enterprises), Latvians filled 73 of 291 positions and of 212 chief engineers only 39 were Latvians. In construction, Latvian representation among leading cadres was even lower. From 43 construction organisation heads, just five were Latvians, and from 43 chief engineers only six were Latvians.⁶⁶⁰ Many trained Latvian specialists were sent to work in other republics, explicitly by the USSR Education Ministry. This was due to the Soviet practice of *rabota po raspredeleniiu* (literally 'job by distribution'). New graduates were sent to work in another region of the USSR for three years. Similar to the practice of avoiding stationing soldiers in their native republic during military service, it aimed to promote an internationalist outlook and weaken ties between the youth and their homeland. Between 1952 and 1956, over 38% of all graduates from the technical faculties of LSU were sent to work elsewhere.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.104, 106, 114, 118.

⁶⁵⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.18, lp.38-40.

⁶⁵⁹ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 187.

⁶⁶⁰ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1132, lp.15.

⁶⁶¹ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1132, lp.16. Sovmestnye Postanovleniia TsK KPL i Soveta Ministrov LSSR za 1957 god. Pis'mo v Khrushchevy, Bulganinu ot Kalnberzin i Latsis, 11 ianvaria 1957.

Surreptitious national communist policies were connected to correcting this situation. In education, the national communists aimed not only to roll back immigration and improve fluency in Latvian, but also to restrict Russian-language streams and cap their numbers at education institutions. The national communists wanted to build their own Latvian cadre of functionaries to run the republic without the need for Russian staffers. Berklavs changed the practice of sending Latvian graduates to other republics and then importing graduates of other nationalities at, for example, the LSU Technical Management Faculty. In a speech at a Party meeting at LSU, Berklavs reputedly said: ‘Non-Latvian comrades should not take offence [to the new cadres policy]. We thank you for helping to nurture [our] cadres, but now they will take charge’.⁶⁶² In order to improve the training of Latvian cadres across a wider range of fields, a joint CC and Council of Ministers resolution took radical action against central administration. The resolution forced the All-Union Gosplan and Education Ministry to consult the Latvian Council of Ministers on ‘all matters of admission’ including the ability to set quotas on specialties in higher educational institutions and technical schools. Crucially, the resolution included a requirement ensuring the Council of Ministers was consulted about graduate distribution. LSU was ordered to devise textbooks for secondary schools and colleges in Latvian. Finally, the Health Ministry, the USSR Trade Ministry and the USSR MVD were instructed ‘in their work on the advancement of specialists to achieve a significant increase in local cadre numbers in their respective Latvian institutions and enterprises’.⁶⁶³

There was a gradual improvement in the ratio of Latvians to Russians. The number of Latvian students admitted to various educational establishments, such as the Liepāja Naval School, overtook the number of Russian students. More Latvian specialists began to teach in trade schools.⁶⁶⁴ The situation in agriculture was persistently problematic. Pinksis wrote in *Cīņa* in June 1957, ‘Although LSU produces a reasonable number of engineering cadres, we do not have enough of them because nearly half of graduates are sent to work in other republics and districts’.⁶⁶⁵ Krūmiņš discussed the problem of finding employment for Latvian agricultural

⁶⁶² Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 231.

⁶⁶³ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1132, lp.16-17.

⁶⁶⁴ Riekstiņš, ‘Latvian National Communists’, 188.

⁶⁶⁵ Bērziņš, *Unpunished Crime*, 190.

specialists with Khrushchev during his June 1959 visit.⁶⁶⁶ According to King, the national communists resorted to encouraging non-Latvians to volunteer for Khrushchev's Virgin Lands agricultural project in Kazakhstan.⁶⁶⁷

3.4 The Education Reform

I have demonstrated on several occasions that national communist relations with Khrushchev remained convivial after 1956. Khrushchev accepted, or at least did not obstruct, the national communists' initiatives, considering them to be in the spirit of the 20th Party Congress's decisions. These cordial relations were severely strained by national communist opposition to Khrushchev's flagship education reform. Khrushchev unveiled the so-called Thesis 19 to the CPSU CC on 12th November 1958 as a component of the general restructuring of secondary and higher education. The reform was debated at the USSR Supreme Soviet in December 1958. Khrushchev's reform was designed to modernise and standardise the USSR's education system, with an increased emphasis on practical work experience. One component of the reform related to language instruction. The bone of contention in Thesis 19 was the proposal to allow parents to decide whether a student in the Soviet Republics (excluding the Russian Republic) studied the local nationality's language or not. Under Stalin, it was mandatory for all students in the Soviet Republics to study three languages: Russian, the titular nationality's language and one foreign language. Introducing parental choice, the theses stated, would 'be more democratic and would eliminate excessive overburdening of pupils studying languages'.⁶⁶⁸ This was essentially, however, an attack on the primary status of the titular language in each republic.

The rationale behind instituting optional secondary language training was to reduce the course load on students in the republics already overburdened by the additional course requirements imposed by the reform. Across their education, students studied Latvian for 2-3 hours a week totalling 700 hours of study (the equivalent of almost a school year).⁶⁶⁹ Supporters

⁶⁶⁶ Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovičs', 10; Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 135.

⁶⁶⁷ King, 'Management of the Economy'.

⁶⁶⁸ 'Par skolas sakaru nostiprināšanu ar dzīvi un par tautas izglītības sistēmas attīstību mūsu zemē. PSKP CK un PSRS Ministru Padomes tēzes', *Cīņa*, 16th November 1958.

⁶⁶⁹ LVA f.290 (Prezidium Verkhovnogo Soveta), apr.1, l.3673, lp.9. 3-i sessii Verkhovnogo soveta Latvii, stenogramma pervogo zasedaniia, 6 iulija 1956.

of the policy welcomed it as a democratic reform; parents could choose the language in which their children would be taught.⁶⁷⁰ While greater choice in the education system would ordinarily have received public support, Thesis 19 instead provoked vehement opposition among the non-Russian republics' titular nationalities. These non-Russian nationalities feared that Russian students' parents would prevent their children learning the local language. In theory, studying the Russian language also became voluntary. Yet, as the USSR's *lingua franca*, knowledge of Russian was necessary for career advancement. Fluency in Russian was a requirement for attendance at universities and practically a prerequisite for professional development. Widmer notes that even if some non-Russian schools took advantage of their option not to offer Russian, many parents decided to send their children to Russian schools.⁶⁷¹ Therefore, students of all Soviet nationalities had no realistic option but to study Russian.

The provisions of Thesis 19 triggered widespread opposition across the USSR but the most virulent resistance came from Latvia and Azerbaijan. The struggle between Moscow and Latvia over Thesis 19's implementation represented the most concerted attempt by any republic to test and redraw the limits of the republics' authority vis-à-vis the centre in the new era ushered in by the 20th Party Congress. This conflict had been brewing for several years as pressure built for a universal education system that reflected the Russian language's dominance. The issue was brought up as early as October 1956 at the Inter-republic Academic Conference on 'Questions of Improving Russian Language Instruction in National Schools'.

In 1958, knowledge of Latvian among the younger Russian generation was dismal. That year Russian language schools, attended mainly by Russian children, introduced a Latvian language exam. On 3rd July, *Skolotāju Avīze* (Teacher's Newspaper) evaluated the results of this examination and determined low comprehension levels in grammar and reading. A significant number of Russian students were unable to name historical Latvian figures.⁶⁷² The national communists enacted the 1956 language law to combat ignorance of Latvian, but the education reform threatened to undermine their work just as the two-year deadline set by the law for gaining competency in both Russian and Latvian was approaching. In defiance of Thesis 19, the

⁶⁷⁰ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 313.

⁶⁷¹ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 539.

⁶⁷² Šilde, *Bez tiesībām un brīvības*, 194-95.

national communists requested the Latvian school curriculum be revised to allow more hours to study Latvia's geography, history, language and literature.⁶⁷³ After the influx of so many Slavs, the national communists were sensitive to Latvians' perception of Soviet rule, because they wanted to improve the Party's image in order to increase the proportion of Latvian membership. Thesis 19 threatened this aim because it was tantamount to extending further privileges to Russians at the expense of the Latvian language's status. As Prigge puts it, 'if the local language was not mandatory, then it almost certainly would be marginalised'.⁶⁷⁴ Fearful of greater local resentment, the national communists were hesitant to enact the reform. The national communists considered Thesis 19 a display of cavalier Russian chauvinism, evidence of Russians' unwillingness to learn indigenous languages, an attempt by Moscow to undermine local languages, and ultimately linguistic Russification because, in practice, Latvians still had to learn Russian.⁶⁷⁵

There was another reason the national communists preferred the status quo. After the incorporation of the Baltic Republics into the USSR, titular schools in the Baltics preserved the tradition of an extra year of schooling, unlike Russian schools. This meant that Latvians and Estonians were generally better educated than local Russians, and consequently, often had access to superior employment.⁶⁷⁶ The national communists had defended 11-year schooling long before Thesis 19. In July 1956, Education Minister Vilis Samsons reinforced the national communists' commitment to Latvia's school system in a speech to the Latvian Supreme Soviet. He declared that if Latvia were to transition to 10-year schooling it would 'be a step backwards'.⁶⁷⁷ Yet, Thesis 19 envisioned a universal 10-year education system throughout the USSR.

⁶⁷³ V. Stanley Vardys, 'Soviet Colonialism in the Baltic States: A Note on the Nature of Modern Colonialism', *Lituanus*, 10 (1964).

⁶⁷⁴ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 314.

⁶⁷⁵ Yaroslav Bilinsky, 'The Soviet Education Laws', *Soviet Studies*, 14 (1962), 146.

⁶⁷⁶ Jeremy Smith, 'Republican Authority and Khrushchev's Education Reform in Estonia and Latvia 1958-1959', in Olaf Mertelsmann, *The Sovietisation of the Baltic States 1940-1956*, (Estonia: Kleio Publishers, Tartu University, 2003), 239.

⁶⁷⁷ LVA f.290, apr.1, l.3673, lp.9. 3-i sessii Verkhovnogo soveta Latvii, stenogramma pervogo zasedaniia, 6 iulija 1956.

3.4.1 The debate in Latvia

At a meeting of the Riga Party *aktiv* (activists' organisation) on 22nd November 1958, the normally neutral Lācis took the lead in challenging the implementation of Thesis 19 and ignited the debate on the subject. He questioned the logic of making second language study optional because 'knowledge of both Russian and the republics' languages was necessary for working in Latvia and other Soviet Republics', and for the continuation of one's education outside the RSFSR. Therefore, the law was 'somewhat difficult to realise practically'. Lācis found that the termination of compulsory language study would 'hardly promote the strengthening of peoples' friendship' and that it was 'advisable to hear the opinion of teachers and the general public on this issue', encouraging them to join the debate and to 'speak out'.⁶⁷⁸ Over the next month, the Party press were inundated with letters criticising Thesis 19 and supporting Latvian proposals for extended schooling and continued obligatory Russian and Latvian courses.

Prigge believes the national communists encouraged a wide public debate on the education reform, again harnessing the power of public opinion, in order to galvanise support for their resistance to Thesis 19. 'The Latvian public', he wrote, 'which for over a year had become accustomed to being consulted, was mobilised by Lācis's call'.⁶⁷⁹ In his article on the education reform Yaroslav Bilinsky supports this notion. According to Bilinsky, the education reform did not follow the usual pattern of universal endorsements from a spectrum of parents, teachers, school administrators and Party officials, officially sanctioned rallying of public opinion, a controlled discussion, and the 'Supreme Soviets affixing their rubber stamps after a brief and perfunctory debate'. Instead, there was a 'comparatively free expression of real differences of opinion among party officials, educators and parents. [...] The most striking challenge to the central government, however, was provided by Latvia'.⁶⁸⁰ According to Smith, the reason for the extraordinarily unrestrained debate on Thesis 19 stemmed from Khrushchev's activist regime, which 'sought reform in a number of areas, and called publicly for regional input into policy-making as well as implementation of policy'.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ LVA, f.102, apr.16, l.9, lp.205, 208-209. Protokoly zasedanii Riga partiia aktiv, stenogramma zasedaniia 22 noiabria.

⁶⁷⁹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 91.

⁶⁸⁰ Bilinsky, 'Education Laws', 138, 146.

⁶⁸¹ Smith, 'Republican Authority', 237-38.

While spokesmen from the Baltic Republics and the Caucasus advocated continuance of the status quo, they understood that this might put the republics' school graduates at a disadvantage against Russian school graduates in the RSFSR. In those schools, only two languages were required (Russian and one foreign language) compared to three in the Union Republics.⁶⁸² Therefore, as a solution, Lācis and the national communists proposed a further year of schooling (12 years in total) to ensure that students were not overburdened. In addition to Russian and Latvian language study, Samsons wrote in December 1958 that 'it is necessary to provide at least basic information on the history, literature and geography of Latvia, and traditional subjects of our republic (e.g. singing)'. Samsons estimated that the assimilation of all this knowledge required over 900 hours, totalling almost another school year. Consequently, Samsons suggested some primary education could be transferred to secondary education to reduce the load on younger students.⁶⁸³ Ivan Kairov, President of the USSR Pedagogical Sciences Academy, opposed extending obligatory education by two years because it would strain resources, which were already fully exhausted by the suggested one-year extension, and would delay entrance into the workforce and higher education.⁶⁸⁴

The impassioned responses of the Latvian public to the law were matched only by the extraordinary frankness of the debate. Discussions ranged from workers' meetings at factories and *kolkhozy* to Party cells, open Party meetings, meetings of teachers, parents' conferences in schools, and especially the press. This was because in the context of the Thaw, Moscow initially encouraged a genuine discussion in the republics and the presentation of realistic proposals.⁶⁸⁵ The national communists recognised this. Samsons wrote in *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii* 'the CPSU CC is not afraid to disregard the usual views on education, looking for creative new ways for its further development in consultation with the broad masses of the people'.⁶⁸⁶ The national communists used such leniency to their advantage by appealing for public support to provide them with greater leverage to amend the law.

⁶⁸² Bilinsky, 'Education Laws', 144-45.

⁶⁸³ Vilis Samsons, 'O dal'neishem sovershenstvovanii sistemy narodnogo obrazovaniia', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 12 (1958), 13. Lācis elaborated upon some of these proposals during his speech at the Riga *gorkom*, LVA, f.102, apr.16, l.9, lp.205.

⁶⁸⁴ R. Schlesinger, 'The Educational Reform', *Soviet Studies*, 10 (1959), 435.

⁶⁸⁵ Daina Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā un 1959. gada Latvijas PSR izglītības likums', *Latvijas vēstures institūta žurnāls*, (2004), 129.

⁶⁸⁶ Samsons, 'O dal'neishem sovershenstvovanii'. 10.

At the 22nd November meeting, others echoed Lācis's sentiments. Erna Purvinska, the Deputy Education Minister, insisted that 'the unburdening of pupils should not be at the expense of language'. Purvinska viewed competency in Russian and Latvian as equal.

Can I refuse to allow the study of Russian in Latvian schools, the language, which is a powerful means of international communication and familiarises people with the riches of Russian culture? - I think no! Can Russian schools abandon the study of Latvian to children who in the future will live and work in Latvia, who will continue to study at universities in Latvia? - Just the same, I do not think so!⁶⁸⁷

National communist Milda Vernere, Director of Riga's 49th School, followed Purvinska's speech, pouring scorn on the reform's voluntary principle in language study.

I join the teachers and great majority of parents who think that democracy in relation to language learning in school is irrelevant... If we do not establish a strict order in language learning, then there will be irresponsible parents who want their children to learn only one language... I believe that every citizen should know both languages, because otherwise we will have a situation where no one can talk in institutions without an interpreter.

Vernere went on to blame the situation of overburdened students 'borrowing the programme of Russian Republic schools instead of aligning [our curriculum] with [Latvia's] peculiarities'. She went so far so to urge Latvia's leaders to suggest to Moscow that Thesis 19 should be abandoned.⁶⁸⁸ Her zeal in opposing Thesis 19 must have played a part in her dismissal in 1962 during the purge. At a teachers' meeting at the Academy of Sciences on 1st December, there was a lively debate between members of the school parents' committee. Riga's 22nd school Director Mokrinska announced that there was a consensus among teachers after consultation on the reform that 11-year schooling should continue because Russians needed to learn Latvian and

⁶⁸⁷ LVA, f.102, apr.16, l.9, lp.222-24.

⁶⁸⁸ LVA, f.102, apr.16, l.9, lp.233-34.

after school many graduates remained in Latvia or attended the republics' higher education institutions.⁶⁸⁹

In the press, there was a flood of articles supporting Lācis and Samsons in their proposals to extend schooling to 12 years in order to retain instruction in three languages. Some articles were from concerned officials in the republics' education departments. M. Kalnin, Head of Liepāja's Education Board wrote in *Sovetskaia Latviiā* that 'the question of the length of secondary education in our republic should be solved on the basis of local conditions. Eight-year training is insufficient. I believe that our republic requires nine-year compulsory [secondary] school'.⁶⁹⁰ On 19th December, national communist Jānis Gibietis, Riga City Education Department Head wrote to *Trud* (Labour) in support of an extra secondary school year. A survey of readers' letters published in *Sovetskaia Latviiā* indicated that most respondents favoured a continuation of the existing arrangement for compulsory second language study.⁶⁹¹ A significant portion of the discussion was devoted to the necessity for children to acquire knowledge of Latvian history and geography. In 1958, the Education Ministry developed its own curriculum, focusing on Latvian history and other subjects related to Latvia.⁶⁹²

The other side of the education debate, however, was ignored. Bleiere noted that the republic's press gave a one-sided presentation of the discussion. Yet, there was support for the All-Union law in Latvia. At a meeting of teachers and education staff on 1st December, spokeswoman for parents of Russian school students Stogova argued that there was considerable turnover in migration to Latvia, arguing that it was unnecessary for children to learn Latvian if they would be leaving Latvia for the RSFSR or another republic in a few

⁶⁸⁹ 'Vairākuma viedoklis. Pilsētas skolotāju aktīva sanāksme' *Sovetskaia molodezh*, 2nd December 1958.

⁶⁹⁰ M. Kalnin, *Sovetskaia Latviiā*, 4th December 1958, 2. See other articles in support of the national communists' line: K. Sondors, Riga *gorkom* Komsomol Secretary and E. Danne, Madona *raiišpolkom* Deputy Chairman, *Sovetskaia Latviiā*, 2nd December 1958, 2; Madona District No.1. School Director A. Treiča, 'Par krievu valodas un svešvalodu mācīšanu', *Cīņa*, 30th November 1958; Annas Brodeles, 'Republika diskusijā', *Cīņa*, 5th December 1958.

⁶⁹¹ *Sovetskaia Latviiā*, 13th December 1958, 2.

⁶⁹² Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 128.

years.⁶⁹³ Doctoral candidate P. Kuņin from LSU's theoretical physics department complained in *Sovetskaia molodezh* that 12-year schooling would be 'contrary to national interests'.⁶⁹⁴

3.4.2 The Supreme Soviet

Between 22nd and 25th December 1958, the USSR Supreme Soviet in Moscow debated the education reform. Representatives from all three Baltic Republics insisted that non-Russian languages remain a required subject in all schools.⁶⁹⁵ On 24th December, it was the Latvian representatives' turn to speak and they took the lead in opposing the reform. Berklavs made an impassioned speech in defence of 11-year schooling and the need to preserve mandatory Russian and Latvian language learning. He was characteristically outspoken and uncompromising, declaring that 'our republic's eight-grade [primary] school absolutely requires the continuation of traditional classes in three languages - Latvian, Russian, and one foreign language'. He argued that 'to solve the problem of overburdening students, without lowering the level of knowledge, seems hardly possible to us'. Berklavs then demanded that it was 'necessary to study the peculiarities of each republic and to grant the republics' Supreme Soviets the right to prolong the education period by one year'.⁶⁹⁶ This was a call for greater decision-making for the republics in the sensitive educational sphere, which was crucial for the Soviet government in inculcating the country's youth with Soviet values.

One of the most striking aspects of the struggle between the national communists and Moscow over the education reform was that Pelše (outwardly at least) supported the national communists. He presented a united front with his archenemy Berklavs in opposition to Thesis 19 when he spoke at the Supreme Soviet. It is unclear why Pelše supported the national communists on this occasion, especially because defying Moscow was anathema to him. Certainly, Pelše did not actually oppose Thesis 19. He used Berklavs's opposition to the reform as a charge against him during the purge in July 1959 but deftly sidestepped accusations of his own opposition. Furthermore, after Berklavs's removal it took only one month to bring Latvia into line with All-Union legislation thereby demonstrating Pelše's willingness to implement the

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ P. Kuņin, 'Mūs gaida grūts un nopietns, taču cildens darbs', *Sovetskaia molodezh*, 21st November 1958.

⁶⁹⁵ Bilinsky, 'Education Laws', 144.

⁶⁹⁶ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkommunisms Latvijā', 138-42.

reform. The explanation for Pelše's unlikely support at the Supreme Soviet was probably due to his political weakness at the time. The Pelše faction was at its nadir in late 1958. Once again facing political oblivion, Pelše may have considered it prudent to temporarily support the national communists on this issue to avoid a confrontation on a Latvian bureau that was dominated by the national communists while he was unable to draw Moscow's attention to the national communists' agenda. Prigge believes strong public support for the Latvian government's position may also have affected Pelše's decision.⁶⁹⁷

In his speech, Pelše focused on the popularity of the current system amongst the public and specifically referenced the debate on the reform in Latvia. 'Latvia's working people', he declared, 'at parents' meetings, have unanimously spoken in favour of the need to preserve the study of Latvian and Russian in our schools... It would be inadvisable to abolish this fine tradition'. Pelše aped national communist rhetoric in his speech, stating: 'Each national republic has its own historically formed peculiarities which are taken into account by the Party and Union government... It is necessary to consider these peculiarities in the school reform's execution'. Furthermore, he echoed Berklavs in his comment that the republics should retain the authority to amend the draft law before its ratification. He protected himself by adding that 'the knowledge of both languages helps to strengthen the historical friendship between the Latvian and Russian peoples. In our day, Russian is a powerful instrument of communication among all Soviet peoples; it offers access to the wealth of Russian and world culture'. On the subject of students' workload, Pelše noted that the study of three languages, Latvian and Russian literature, Latvian history and geography, would place them under more pressure than students in the RSFSR, who studied only two languages. Under the circumstances Pelše believed it was 'extremely advisable' to have schools with an extra year in Latvia but 'for pedagogical and political considerations' *both* Latvian and Russian schools should have an extra year, which would eliminate the existing bias in favour of Latvians.⁶⁹⁸

In the draft memorandum on the education reform circulated on 21st September 1958, Khrushchev preferred standardised schooling, though proposed that the extra year be left to the

⁶⁹⁷ Prigge, 'Power, Public Opinion', 314-15.

⁶⁹⁸ Pelše's speech to the USSR Supreme Soviet's second session, *Sovetskaia Latvīa*, 27th December 1958.

discretion of each republic. In the law proposed at the Supreme Soviet in December, however, ten-year standardised schooling was taken for granted.⁶⁹⁹ According to Krūmiņš, during the Supreme Soviet session, Presidium member Otto Kuusinen informed him that contrary to the CPSU CC leadership's views, including Khrushchev, Ukrainian deputies announced they would vote against the draft law because of the provision shortening schooling from 11 to 10 years of study. Other republics, including Latvia, supported Ukraine.⁷⁰⁰ Due largely to Latvian obstinacy, the Supreme Soviet was unable to make Thesis 19 All-Union law. The central authorities compromised and permitted each republic to decide whether to pass or reject the proposal, as Berklavs had suggested.⁷⁰¹

3.4.3 The rebel republic

Ultimately, due to widespread resistance, the skeleton education law passed by the USSR Supreme Soviet on 24th December 1958 contained no regulations pertaining to the language issue. This law provided only a general framework and offered the republics the possibility of different approaches to its implementation through republic level legislation and administration. Moscow, however, was unsatisfied and individually pressured each republic's leadership into accepting the law's original provisions outlined in November 1958. In March and April 1959, 12 Soviet Republics' Supreme Soviets ratified statutes that contained the regulations of Thesis 19 essentially unrevised. Azerbaijan and Latvia were the only recalcitrant republics to pass their education laws with no regulations pertaining to the language issue.⁷⁰²

The Latvian Supreme Soviet convened on 16th-17th March 1959 to debate the education law and draft appropriate legislation. Berklavs gave the keynote speech, announcing that Latvia's draft law took into account Latvia's conditions, including the special requirements and traditions of Latvian schools. He stated in unequivocal terms that 'it was absolutely necessary to continue the tradition of schooling in three languages'. Numerous speakers reinforced this, among them Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman Brodelis who made it clear that Latvia's peculiarities included knowledge of Latvian, which was necessary for working in Latvia. In his

⁶⁹⁹ Schlesinger, 'Educational Reform', 434.

⁷⁰⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Atmiņas un pārdomas', 89 fn.4.

⁷⁰¹ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 543.

⁷⁰² Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 247-48.

defence of an extra year of schooling, Berklavs said that it would ‘prepare students mentally and physically to be more mature young people who will be better prepared to immediately join the workforce’. He went further by pledging to provide free textbooks for grades 1-8 from 1962. Berklavs conceded that learning three languages this would inevitably lead to an overburdening of students in comparison to those in other republics learning only two languages. To reduce the burden, Berklavs announced that Russian and foreign language teaching was to be streamlined to focus on the practical use of the language, developing students’ speaking ability over grammar. This was inline with the National Congress of Teachers’ March 1957 recommendations, which suggested a major overhaul of the curriculum. Furthermore, Samsons’s speech reaffirmed that the curriculum for some subjects would be reduced and transferred to the secondary school stage to lighten the load. As Pelše suggested, both Latvian and Russian schools would include the extra year of study, ‘because the curriculum will be one and the same’.⁷⁰³ Here the national communists had an ulterior motive. They wanted to expand the time in Russian schools devoted to studying Latvian subjects. As late as 12th March, the national communists maintained the need for 12-year schooling allowing for the continued study of three languages. This was the most significant aspect of the law, yet, in and Berklavs’s speech there was a conspicuous absence of any mention of Thesis 19. Widmer believes that the national communists avoided dealing with Thesis 19 by ignoring it altogether.⁷⁰⁴ According to Bilinsky, as far as Berklavs was concerned, the republics received the right to decide on the reform’s implementation and Latvia alone chose not to include Thesis 19 in its legislation. ‘Latvian government leaders declared in no uncertain terms that Thesis 19 had been weighed and found wanting’, wrote Bilinsky.⁷⁰⁵ In the law passed on 17th March, however, the national communists agreed to the limitations of a further year of study; Latvia preserved its 11-year programme but would not transition to the 10-year system in the RSFSR. The national communists hoped that Moscow would be satisfied with this partial concession.

⁷⁰³ LVA f.290, apr.1, l.5169, lp.43, 48-51, 54, 91, 122. Zasedaniia Verkhovnogo Soveta Latviiskoi SSR. Stenogramm pervaiia sessiia 16-17 marta 1959, ‘Ob usidenii podkliuchenie shkoly s zhizn’iu i o dal’neishem razvitii sistemy narodnogo obrazovaniia v Latviiskoi SSR’.

⁷⁰⁴ Widmer, ‘Nationalism and Communism’, 543-45.

⁷⁰⁵ Bilinsky, ‘Education Laws’, 146.

The national communists felt that they had done enough by meeting the letter of Khrushchev's proposals and nominally introducing parental choice.⁷⁰⁶ Yet, Smith notes that the Latvians brazenly insisted that this meant nothing in practice because they intended to obfuscate the law and perpetuate the existing system.⁷⁰⁷ The national communists realised that outright subversion would incur Moscow's wrath and so they preferred to tacitly accept the reform and then, as other republics did (in the style of centre-republic relations during the Brezhnev era), quietly fail to implement it.

3.4.4 Consequences

The March 1959 education law passed in Latvia was unacceptable to Moscow. After vacillating, Moscow finally rejected Latvia's proposals for an extra year of schooling on 17th March, the day the Latvian law was ratified but the Latvian Supreme Soviet session continued. Bleiere believes that the national communists still hoped it would be possible to extend the study period in secondary school by one year, so the clause remained in the law to test Moscow's reaction and the limits of republics' authority.⁷⁰⁸ According to Bleiere, Moscow only made a final decision in late March or April, as Estonia's Education Act was adopted on 23rd April and the Estonians abandoned all previous proposals including mandatory three-language teaching and 12-year education.⁷⁰⁹ Once Moscow made its decision, the national communists encountered sustained pressure to bring their law inline with All-Union legislation. On 12th May, the Latvian leadership was forced to make changes to the law in determining the period of study.⁷¹⁰

Smith describes the national communists' resistance to the education law as merely a 'relatively mild show of defiance', though he suggests their brazenness provoked further reaction from the centre.⁷¹¹ In May 1959, a commission from Moscow investigated charges of nationalism against leading Latvian national communists. Demands for 12-year education and free Latvian textbooks were among the accusations in the commission's report, and Pelše

⁷⁰⁶ State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii) GARF f.7523 (Prezidium Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR), op.78, d.786, l.33. 'Ob izmenenii shkoly'.

⁷⁰⁷ Smith, 'Republican Authority', 249-50.

⁷⁰⁸ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 129.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 143-44.

⁷¹¹ Smith, 'Republican Authority', 250-51.

reiterated them when he orchestrated Berkļavs's dismissal between June and July 1959.⁷¹² In his defence, Berkļavs explained that there was ubiquitous support for 12-year schooling amongst the Latvian leadership including Pelše, and widespread backing from the populace.⁷¹³ On 20th June, Pelše capitalised on the disarray among the national communists after Khrushchev's visit and reported to Moscow that he had prepared amendments to the law, which eliminated all remaining discrepancies with the All-Union law.⁷¹⁴ Pelše waited to enact the new law until after the purge began and he was the clear victor. Keen to distance himself from his defeated national communist colleagues, Ozoliņš signed the law 'Concerning some issues in the Latvian SSR's Educational System' on 11th August 1959. The new law gave parents the right to decide the language of instruction for their child at school, and crucially, repealed the March 1959 law's clauses about compulsory education in both languages. Finally, the new law abolished the extra school year, bringing Latvia into line with the 10-year system observed elsewhere.⁷¹⁵

At a CPSU CC plenum on 24th-29th June 1959, Khrushchev demonstrated his frustration over Azerbaijani and Latvian defiance. He spoke out against Latvia's eight-year primary education law with its provision of free textbooks because there were 'insufficient material conditions to do it across the whole country' and opined that it could not be a case of one rule for one republic and another for the rest.⁷¹⁶ Both Smith and Widmer postulate that one major cause of the purge was Latvia's rejection of Khrushchev's education law. Widmer remarks, 'the Latvian leadership's position on this issue must have been an important factor which prompted Moscow to purge the Berkļavs group'.⁷¹⁷ Bilinsky agrees, noting that 'Moscow promptly took up the challenge from Baku and Riga' and that 'both Latvia and Azerbaijan were finally brought into line after far-reaching changes in their leadership'.⁷¹⁸ Understandably, these historians assumed Khrushchev already determined to cleanse Latvia's leadership of the national communists and used the education reform as a pretext. According to Simon, the education law

⁷¹² Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 229; LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.237-38.

⁷¹³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.237-38.

⁷¹⁴ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 145-46.

⁷¹⁵ LVA f.290, apr.1, l.5352, lp.7-12. 'O nekotorykh voprosakh narodnogo obrazovaniia v LSSR', Predsedatel' Prezidiuma Karlis Ozolin, 11 avgusta 1959.

⁷¹⁶ RGANI f.2, op.1, d.374, l.132.

⁷¹⁷ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 545.

⁷¹⁸ Bilinsky, 'Education Laws', 138, 146.

‘signalled a change in the overall thrust of nationalities policy’ and resulted in the rapid spread of purges to nearly all Union Republics.⁷¹⁹

In the mid 1950s, as in Latvia, Azerbaijan’s indigenous leaders attempted to improve the status of the local language, Azerbaijani. After the 20th Party Congress, First Secretary Imam Mustafayev and Presidium Chairman Mirza Ibrahimov amended Azerbaijan’s constitution to make Azerbaijani an official language in addition to Russian. Azerbaijan was the only other republic to challenge Thesis 19. As in Latvia, Baku received a CPSU CC investigation team, led by Department for Union Republics First Deputy Chairman Yosif Shikin. Ibrahimov was dismissed shortly afterwards in March 1959. Both at the CPSU CC June 1959 plenum and at 1st July Presidium meeting, Khrushchev criticised Azerbaijan’s leaders. A joint Azerbaijani CC and Council of Ministers resolution brought Azerbaijan back in line in June: parents would decide if their children learned Azerbaijani. A purge of the Azerbaijani government’s upper echelon was the price of Baku’s disobedience.⁷²⁰ In July 1959, at a simultaneous plenum to the Latvian one in Riga denouncing Berklavs, Azerbaijani bureau members were reprimanded for tolerating ‘confusion in the perfectly clear language question’ and Mustafayev was sacked.⁷²¹ The Council of Ministers Chairman was charged with ‘artificially differentiating between native and non-local officials’.⁷²² In August 1959, presumably to restore order, Department for Union Republics Chairman Vladimir Semichastnyi was dispatched to Azerbaijan to become the Azerbaijani Communist Party’s Second Secretary.

Despite the education reform’s role in the Azerbaijani and possibly other purges, Widmer, Bilinsky and Smith exaggerate its contribution as a root cause of the Latvian purge. The national communists’ amendments to their education law in May 1959 were a tactical retreat in the face of intense scrutiny designed to placate Moscow. Nevertheless, the education reform featured heavily among the charges levelled at the national communists. The 4th July bureau meeting recorded that ‘individual senior leaders are inclined towards national isolation on the issues of school reorganisation. Latvia decided on [an extra year of] schooling and free

⁷¹⁹ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 248.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ Bilinsky, ‘Education Laws’ 147, 156 fn.58.

⁷²² Robert Conquest, *Russia After Khrushchev*, (New York: Praeger, 1965), 208.

textbooks, which privileges Latvia's students compared to other republics. Contrary to the All-Union law, some leaders demanded a 12-year education period'.⁷²³ Under pressure, many national communists abandoned their convictions. Agricultural Academy Rector Jānis Vanags said he had spoken to Samsons during the July plenum, but he was now '[hiding] in the "bushes", disavowing [his former position on 12-year education]'.⁷²⁴ Resistance towards the implementation of Thesis 19 played an important role in Pelše's portrayal of the national communists as nationalists. In September 1959, Pelše wrote in *Kommunist Sovetskoj Latvii*, 'Some people who began to howl that by studying the Russian language and culture, young Latvians would forget the national particularities of their own culture, traditions and customs. Such reasoning can only harm Latvian young people. Such a view is nothing but a manifestation of bourgeois nationalism'.⁷²⁵ Though it undoubtedly contributed to the Latvian purge by unsettling Moscow and facilitating the national communists' depiction as nationalists, the education reform was overshadowed by numerous other developments in Latvia, which gave Moscow greater cause for concern. The experience of the education reform demonstrated that Khrushchev's call for input from the republics in the formulation of the education law was an impractical half-measure because the inflexible Soviet system could not consider local conditions without decentralising real political power to the republics, which the Soviet leadership was unwilling to do.

The long-term effects of the education reform proved counterproductive. In November 1959, Ilūkste District Secretary Daksh complained that students voluntarily learning Latvian or Russian were failing, but still passed onto the next grade.⁷²⁶ In 1962, nearly 5,000 students in Riga were forced to repeat the school year because of poor Russian.⁷²⁷ After the reform was implemented, the number of hours allotted for teaching Latvian in Russian schools gradually decreased while the teaching hours for Russian in Latvian schools increased. In 1964-1965 in Latvian schools, the total hours per week across all grades in language and literature were 72.5 hours of Latvian language and literature classes and 38.5 hours of Russian classes. This

⁷²³ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 146.

⁷²⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.100.

⁷²⁵ 'Some Questions on International Education' speech by Pelše, *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press*, 12 (1960), 16.

⁷²⁶ RGASPI f.17, op.89, d.507, l.100. Stenogramma TsK KPL plenuma, 25 noiabria 1959.

⁷²⁷ Bilinsky, 'Education Laws', 141.

compares to 79 hours of Russian and just 26 hours of Latvian in Russian schools.⁷²⁸ A ‘language gap’ favouring Russian is evident from the 1970 census results. Some 75.8% of 20-29-year-old Latvians, the generation that grew up with the education reform changes, had knowledge of Russian.⁷²⁹ The introduction of bilingual schools, where parallel classes were taught in Russian and Latvian, was designed to expand the use of Russian and undo the work of the national communists. The number of these schools increased dramatically, even in regions with marginal Russian populations. By July 1963, there were 240 such schools in Latvia.⁷³⁰ According to Bruno Kalnis, this increased Latvian perceptions of Russification.⁷³¹ Bleiere considers the education reform one of Khrushchev’s least popular policies, ‘significantly undermining his prestige at all levels of society’.⁷³²

3.5 Economic Policy under the National Communists

3.5.1 The *sovnarkhoz* reforms

National communist economic policy developed later than their language and residency initiatives. Before 1957, the national communists had little direct control over economic policy. This changed dramatically due to Khrushchev’s economic reforms. In February 1957, Khrushchev abolished many state ministries in Moscow and replaced them with 105 *sovnarkhozy* (Regional Economic Councils). Khrushchev aimed to combat the economic ministries’ centralisation and departmentalism through locally based *sovnarkhozy*, which provided operational and planning management and could much better consider the republics’ geographical, economic and national characteristics. In May 1957, the republics received powers to administer most industries on their territory. The powers of the republics’ Council of Ministers were enhanced in a decree on 29th August 1957. Unlike political power, Khrushchev felt secure enough to distribute economic power to the republics, in an extraordinary decentralisation project that was integral Thaw. The *sovnarkhoz* reforms decentralised considerable decision-making power to the USSR’s regions and republics. This created the

⁷²⁸ Dreifelds, ‘Latvian National Demands’, 139-40.

⁷²⁹ See Appendix A, Table 10.

⁷³⁰ Widmer, ‘Nationalism and Communism’, 567.

⁷³¹ Bruno Kalnis, ‘The Position of Minorities in the Soviet Union’, *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 8 (1971), 7.

⁷³² Bleiere, ‘Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā’, 130.

conditions and opportunity for the national communists to decide much of Latvia's economic development. An examination of the *sovnarkhoz* reforms will help us determine to what extent the Soviet Union was centralised.

The *sovnarkhoz* reforms complemented national communist political ambitions, creating an environment conducive for increased economic decision-making in Latvia at a time when the national communists were gaining control of the levers of power. Widmer considers that the national communists desired that Latvia become more autonomous, with greater authority vested in themselves as the republic's leaders, and that this underpinned their economic objectives.⁷³³ This was precisely why some members of the Anti-Party group opposed the *sovnarkhoz* reform (before their downfall), because they claimed it increased the likelihood of nationalist deviation.⁷³⁴ Their concerns were valid. Kemp noted that national communist tendencies were at the very heart of the *sovnarkhoz* reforms: as he put it, 'when taken to its logical end, this domesticism or localism becomes national communism'.⁷³⁵ This became another case of tug-of-war between centre and periphery. The periphery, in this case personified by Latvia, converted the authority granted by Khrushchev's decentralisation into greater sovereignty. As Alexander Motyl notes, however, 'in fulfilling the centre's mandate [and] acting in this manner, the periphery begins to undermine the centre's position of political and economic dominance vis-à-vis itself'.⁷³⁶ In this section, we will examine the question of how much autonomy Latvia had.

One of Latvia's chains of subservience to the USSR lay in economics. Any serious attempt to redress this dependence needed to take account of these economic ties. According to King, the major handicap to using resources effectively was excessive ties to other Soviet economic regions.⁷³⁷ Previously, most of Latvia's industrial enterprises took their orders from the central ministries in Moscow. Central control limited Latvian ministers' ability to influence output decisions. In 1956, before the *sovnarkhoz* reforms, only 24.7% of Latvian industrial

⁷³³ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 491.

⁷³⁴ Grey Hodnett, 'The Debate over Soviet Federalism', *Soviet Studies*, 18 (1967), 458.

⁷³⁵ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 165.

⁷³⁶ Alexander Motyl, *Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality: Coming to Grips with Nationalism in the USSR*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 96; Ottorino Cappelli, 'Changing Leadership Perspectives on Centre-Periphery Relations', in David Lane (ed.), *Elites and Political Power in the USSR*, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), 245.

⁷³⁷ King, 'Management of the Economy',

output was produced by the republics' enterprises, joint republic-union enterprises were responsible for 58.2%, and All-Union ministries accounted for 17.1% of industrial production. After the reforms, the *sovnarkhoz* and other republic organisations controlled almost 98% of Latvian industrial output, a radical shift.⁷³⁸ Through the *sovnarkhoz* reforms, Latvian leaders had more latitude to make the republic's economic decisions. The detailed planning of production and distribution in the republics' industries was left to their respective governments, which also received permission to use a certain portion of raw materials produced over the amount planned for the republic as a whole for increased consumer goods production, a central pledge by the national communists.⁷³⁹

As the national communists rose to prominence, they were able to gain effective control of the *sovnarkhoz*. The Latvian *sovnarkhoz* operated under the general command of the Council of Ministers. The Council's Deputy Chairman for industry was a role shared between Berklavs and the elderly (and neutral) Latvian *sovnarkhoz* Chairman Matiss Plūdonis. The economy's reorganisation gave the national communists patronage. Most *sovnarkhoz* positions went to Latvian regional economic specialists. They were in great demand because a host of enterprises were transferred to the *sovnarkhoz*'s jurisdiction. Preference was given to those who could speak Latvian.⁷⁴⁰ There were only two Russian *sovnarkhoz* department heads. Along with the chairman, the three deputy chairmen and eight department heads were Latvians.⁷⁴¹ The *sovnarkhoz* was progressively 'Latvianised' during national communist economic hegemony. By July 1959, Latvians comprised 74.3% of *sovnarkhoz* ministers and deputy ministers, and 62% of *sovnarkhoz* department heads and their deputies, with Russians holding only 30% of these posts.⁷⁴²

In Kalnbērziņš's speech to the USSR Supreme Soviet during the debate formally approving the reform in May 1957, he highlighted the new system's advantages. Kalnbērziņš pointed out that previously 82 of the largest enterprises in Latvia were subordinated to 26 different ministries in Moscow. Local organs played an insignificant role in the management of

⁷³⁸ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 475.

⁷³⁹ Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, (New York: Praeger, 1967), 124.

⁷⁴⁰ Vilis Krūmiņš, *Cīņa*, 8th October 1958, 2.

⁷⁴¹ King, 'Management of the Economy'.

⁷⁴² LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.11.

these factories, yet their operation was inseparable from the republic's economy. Decisions about matters such as electricity supply, local construction materials, housing and services for the workers could only be solved on the ground.⁷⁴³ The existence of numerous ministries had created departmental barriers, which smothered questions about many economic tasks, the specialisation and cooperation of enterprises, the introduction of new initiatives and technology, and the efficient utilisation of natural resources and local manpower. The purpose of the *sovmarkhozy* was to end this state of affairs by facilitating better coordination between various regions' economic activities. Soviet leaders were aware that this could encourage republics to prioritise local needs over the Union. Therefore, Kalnbērziņš tactfully concluded his speech by warning that localism would not be tolerated.⁷⁴⁴

3.5.2 Pauls Dzērve

Dzērve was the ideologue, theoretician and publicly the most popular member of the national communists. He graduated from LSU in record time and when he defended his doctoral thesis in Leningrad, he greatly impressed the examiners - to the extent that they recommended he be given a higher doctoral degree instead of the usual PhD equivalent (*kandidat nauk*).⁷⁴⁵ Yet, Dzērve was a controversial character, outspoken and bold, attracting more hostility and criticism than any other national communist (except Berklavs). In one of Khrushchev's visits to Latvia, Krūmiņš introduced him to Dzērve. They discussed economic policy, and afterwards an excitable Khrushchev declared Dzērve 'the new star of our sciences!'⁷⁴⁶ Jānis Stradiņš compared Dzērve's ideological convictions to the 1970s and 1980s phenomenon of 'Eurocommunism', when Western European communist parties asserted greater political independence from the USSR.⁷⁴⁷ There is some merit to Stradiņš's comparison. Dzērve frequently made inflammatory statements questioning Soviet economic progress. In his book *The Latvian SSR*, published in 1959, Dzērve wrote about 'undue haste' in the establishment of

⁷⁴³ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 475.

⁷⁴⁴ Jānis Kalnbērziņš, *Sovetskaia Latvija*, 10th May 1957, 2.

⁷⁴⁵ Robert Wellington Campbell, *A Biobibliographical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Economists*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 87.

⁷⁴⁶ Vilis Krūmiņš, Interview with Irina Litvinova, 'Ruki razviazany: razviazan li uzel?', *Sovetskaia Molodezh'*, 24th September 1988, 2.

⁷⁴⁷ Jānis Stradiņš, 'Latvijas tautsaimniecības aktualitātes un Pauls Dzērve', *Zinātnes Vēstnesis*, 12th October 1998, 2.

Latvian *kolkhozy*.⁷⁴⁸ As late as June 1959 Dzērve wrote frankly in the press about life in Latvia: ‘Our achievements are great. But our life is not without flaws... You cannot be satisfied by the fact that sometimes there is still inadequate and irrational use of socialist construction in our republic’s natural resources’.⁷⁴⁹

Dzērve became Deputy Director of the Academy of Sciences’ Economics Institute in 1953 and was promoted to director in January 1958 near the height of national communist power.⁷⁵⁰ Berklavs was behind Dzērve’s rise and had greater plans for him that were never realised. Berklavs intended to promote Dzērve to Education Minister, and then to Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman or possibly Third Secretary, a post nominally held by Pelše.⁷⁵¹ Under Dzērve, the Economics Institute became the ideological citadel of national communism, greatly exceeding its normal operations to become the centre of economic planning in Latvia. National communist opponents, Head of the CC Department for Science, Schools and Culture Leontina Lapiņa and her Deputy Nikolai Muravev criticised this ‘distortion’ of the institute’s function. ‘The Economics Institute’s work should not substitute for Gosplan,’ they wrote, ‘but assist Gosplan in finding solutions to complicated methodological questions for the creation of a long-term plan and for providing theoretical constructs to aid the nation’s economic development’.⁷⁵² Dzērve’s opponents worked tirelessly to obstruct his implementation of national communist economic policy and to remove him from the helm of the Economics Institute.

3.5.3 The Seven-Year Plan

The national communists believed Latvia faced a migration crisis. In comparison to 1935 (the last census year), by 1958 there were an additional 388,000 Russians, 35,000 Belarusians and 30,000 Ukrainians in Latvia, but 170,000 fewer Latvians.⁷⁵³ The national communists designed a strategy to combat migration by undercutting the rationale for importing labour from outside

⁷⁴⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.33, lp.33-35. Zasedaniia biuro TsK KPL 30 noiabriia 1959 - 8 dekabriia 1959, Doklad rukovoditel’ otdela nauki, shkol i kul’tury i zamestitel’ zaveduiushchego v biuro KPL, ‘O ser’eznykh nedostatkakh i oshibkakh v rabote Instituta’ ekonomicheskikh Akademii nauk LSSR’.

⁷⁴⁹ Pauls Dzērve, ‘Saruna par Septiņgadi’, *Liesma*, 6 (1959), 1.

⁷⁵⁰ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.185, lp.42. Pauls Pavelevich Dzērve personnel file.

⁷⁵¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.144-45. LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.185, lp.17. Dzērve had experience in education. He headed the Komsomol’s Department for Schools between 1946 and 1950; Benjamiņš Treijs, Interview with Guntis Rozenburgs, ‘Zaudētais laiks’, *Padomju Jaunatne*, 8th April 1989, 4.

⁷⁵² LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.33, lp.33-35.

⁷⁵³ Bērziņš, *Unpunished Crime*, 35.

Latvia to fuel industrial growth. They wasted no time enacting reform once they dominated Latvian politics from 1958. With Dzērve in place as Economics Institute Chairman, the national communists began altering production plans. Krūmiņš and Berklavs made no secret of their disdain for the expansion of production in Riga's diesel plant and railway carriage factory. Berklavs learned from railway carriage factory Director Eismonts that he intended to achieve the planned 140% increase in output by importing Russian labour. Berklavs and Krūmiņš suggested that the railway carriage factory be relocated to the majority Russian city of Daugavpils, in Eastern Latvia, where there was still surplus labour.⁷⁵⁴ Individual compromises with factories would not prevent industrial expansion. Therefore, the national communists sought to tackle the problem at its root: the Seven-Year Plan for 1959-1965. They devoted a great deal of effort to altering Latvia's Seven-Year Plan targets, first advanced by Khrushchev in late 1958. At a joint bureau and Council of Ministers meeting on 17th October 1958, Berklavs argued for reductions in Seven-Year Plan targets for industrial development. He comprehensively criticised the development of industry in Latvia.⁷⁵⁵ National communist proposals included a reduction or elimination of the production of railway rolling stock, streetcars, diesel engines and oiling equipment for steel mills in favour of specialisation in precision instruments and agricultural implements.⁷⁵⁶ Berklavs wanted to achieve further increases in manufacturing output only through improvements in labour productivity and organisation, along with new equipment and technology. He insisted it was unprofitable to undertake metalworking in Riga because of the logistics of transporting iron and coal over thousands of kilometres and then shipping the majority of finished products back to the RSFSR. Instead, he declared his preference for radio, electrical and household chemical products, produced by skilled workers in Latvia, reducing the need to import large amounts of metal.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 101-102. Berklavs subsequently managed to secure his own choice of diesel factory director, RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.51. Pis'mo v TsK KPSS ot Krumiņsh, 'Ob itogakh obsuzhdeniia resheniia iul'skogo plenuma TsK KPL na raionnykh i gorodskikh partiinykh aktivakh, plenumakh i partiinykh sobraniiah', 27 iulija 1959.

⁷⁵⁵ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 101.

⁷⁵⁶ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 484.

⁷⁵⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 102.

Berklavs actively worked to restrict migration to Latvia from 1956, but at this meeting, he proclaimed that Riga had reached its limit.⁷⁵⁸

In November 1958, the national communists published several articles explaining why they were revising the Seven-Year Plan. Dzērve's Deputy, Benjamiņš Treijs, published an article about the Seven-Year Plan on 22nd November 1958 in *Literatūra un māksla*. Treijs explained the rationale behind capping production at Riga's railway carriage and diesel factories in terms identical to those used by Berklavs. 'These factories', he said, 'import huge quantities of metal. This sector's raw materials base is located thousands of kilometres from the republic and our republic needs only very small amounts of the production'.⁷⁵⁹ Likewise, Dzērve described the situation as 'economic madness. There will be a chain reaction in factories affecting labour and fuel. Inevitably, it will lead to more expensive production costs. We will not be competitive domestically or abroad'.⁷⁶⁰

Further adjustments to the Seven-Year Plan were confirmed in a speech at a meeting of propagandists on 27th March 1959. Dzērve reputedly announced that Latvia was able to 'exert some influence on the correction of our Seven-Year Plan'. The 'correction' of Latvia's economic plans included significant alterations to production targets. Dzērve's critics described this as a revision of the 21st Party Congress's decisions on the plan's control figures.⁷⁶¹ At this meeting, Dzērve cited Khrushchev's slogan to 'catch up and overtake America' in milk production as an example of dogmatism. Dzērve said 'in this republic we already have three times US milk production per capita'. Dzērve made a distinction between the USSR's economy and Latvia's economy, which rankled orthodox communists, who added it to the catalogue of Dzērve's 'transgressions' for later use. In this incident, Dzērve's critics noted that he had 'forgotten that the task of matching and surpassing the USA in milk production was assigned by the Party to all of the USSR, and not to particular republics or regions'.⁷⁶²

Dzērve masterminded the plan to reduce labour demand. The Seven-Year Plan

⁷⁵⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.247.

⁷⁵⁹ Benjamiņš Treijs, 'Komunisma celtniecības plāns', *Literatūra un Māksla*, 22nd November 1958, 1.

⁷⁶⁰ Voldemār Kalpiņš, '1959 gads Toreiz apsūdzētā liecība', *Cīņa*, 26th August 1988, 3.

⁷⁶¹ 'Ekonomičeckui nauku - na sluzhbu narodnomu khoziaistvu', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 1 (1960), 10.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

envisaged a 50% increase in industrial productivity and in agriculture by 55-60%.⁷⁶³ Dzērve intended to achieve the increase in economic output through intensive, productivity-driven growth rather than the traditional Soviet method of extensive labour inputs to achieve growth.⁷⁶⁴ Dzērve's March 1959 revisions to Latvia's Seven-Year Plan included a twofold increase in production at the railway carriage factory, while the diesel plant would expand production by 120%.⁷⁶⁵ The original plan called for a 140% increase in both plants.⁷⁶⁶ While these were cuts to forecast growth, the revised plan still envisaged output to more than double in these factories by 1965. Yet, these were early revisions to the plan, ahead of the finalisation of Dzērve's work on the plan, which could have envisioned further reductions in planned growth. Moreover, it is possible that these still ambitious targets were designed to reassure Moscow, from where there emanated intense pressure to double industrial production.⁷⁶⁷ Prigge describes the national communists' aim of doubling production in seven years based solely on increased efficiency as an 'unrealistic' and 'outlandish solution'.⁷⁶⁸

Arguably, the principle tenet of national communist economic policy was the reduction of external labour inputs. Treijs publicly stated in November 1958 that utilising Latgale's *kolkhozy*, which contained a 'very significant reservoir of unused labour', would solve any supply issues.⁷⁶⁹ The aim was to diversify industrial development to rural areas, where labour resources were more plentiful, rather than in Riga where the manpower supply was already stretched to the limit.⁷⁷⁰ Yet, on 9th January 1959, Treijs and Economics Institute Agricultural Section Head M. Kukainis, submitted a report to the CC Agricultural Department. The report contained labour reserves estimates designed to prove that there was sufficient labour in Latvia to cover the Seven-Year Plan's requirements. The report estimated that by 1965 the agricultural sector would be 29,000 workers *short*.⁷⁷¹ After the national communists' ouster, allegations were made that Treijs's original data indicated a surplus of 16,000 *kolkhoz* labourers for the

⁷⁶³ Dzērve, 'Komunistiskās celtniecības septiņgade', 101, 106.

⁷⁶⁴ Riekstiņš, 'Latvian National Communists', 176.

⁷⁶⁵ Pauls Dzērve, 'Pamatā-Rupniecība', *Literatūra un Māksla*, 12 (1959), 1.

⁷⁶⁶ Berkļavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 102; LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.244.

⁷⁶⁷ William Prigge, 'Latvijas nacionālo komunistu izšķirošais brīdis', *Diena*, 12th June 2004.

⁷⁶⁸ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 109.

⁷⁶⁹ Treijs, 'Komunisma celtniecības plāns', 1.

⁷⁷⁰ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 484.

⁷⁷¹ LVA-PA f.2369 (Ekonomičeskii institut), apr.1 l.119, lp.62-67. Plany i otchety general'noi sektoram ekonomiki za 1959, 'Na vopros trudovykh resursov v sel'skom khoziaistve Latviiskoi SSR', M. Kukainis.

Seven-Year Plan. Supposedly, national communist CC Agricultural Department Head Anton Luriņš, redefined the data to show that the *kolkhoz* sector would instead be short by 28,800 workers, some 45,000 fewer workers over the Plan's duration. At the time, there were a number of cities and regions with sizeable unemployment, such as Daugavpils, Rēzekne and Valmiera.⁷⁷² A December 1959 report by Lapiņa and Muravev criticised this estimate's methodology and stated that 'the Economics Institute was trying to show the impossibility of transferring more *kolkhoz* labour to industry'. Lapiņa and Muravev cite Latvia's Gosplan and Statistical Office, which concluded that 'because of mechanisation in *kolkhoz* production during the Seven-Year Plan more than 45,000 *kolkhoz* workers will be freed, and their labour will need to be placed elsewhere'.⁷⁷³ Plūdonis concurs, noting that the Economics Institute planned for an increase of 76,000 workers, including 10,000 in industry, during the Seven-Year Plan. Yet, Gosplan expected 29,000 extra industrial workers.⁷⁷⁴ Dzērve, Treijs and Luriņš were attempting to both avoid transferring workers to industry, whose production they were attempting to restrict, and prevent the need to hire workers from outside Latvia. Lapiņa and Muravev attacked their logic: 'In their conclusions about the future of the development of the Republic's national economy, Dzērve and Treijs ignore the possibility of importing labour from other economic regions of the USSR'.⁷⁷⁵

In February 1959, Khrushchev admitted that the Seven-Year Plan called for enormous growth in the republics' economies. To achieve this he encouraged specialisation: 'Each republic is to develop primarily those branches of the economy for which natural and economic conditions are most favourable, so as to make more effective use of each republic's resources and to ensure the correct combination of the interests of individual republics and the USSR as a whole'.⁷⁷⁶ Khrushchev's speech emboldened the national communists. Five days later Dzērve published an article in *Cīņa* extolling the virtues of specialisation. He wrote that 'in order to achieve higher productivity we need to improve the specialisation of industrial and agricultural

⁷⁷² LVA-PA f.101, apr.23, l.10. Zasedanii plenuma TsK KPL, 2-i plenum, 26-27 aprēlija 1960.

⁷⁷³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.33, lp.33-35.

⁷⁷⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.145.

⁷⁷⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.33, lp.33-35.

⁷⁷⁶ Grey Hodnett (ed.), *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Volume 4, The Khrushchev Years 1953-1964*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 127. 'Control figures for the development of the USSR's economy in the years 1959-1965', report by Khrushchev, 5th February 1959.

production, prioritising production of products that are natural to the economic conditions of Latvia'.⁷⁷⁷ Khrushchev was not opposed to specialisation, the nature of his *sovnarkhoz* reform indicated as much. There were, however, unspoken limits, and the national communists violated those bounds.

3.5.4 The Economics Institute

Despite Khrushchev's reform, the new *sovnarkhoz*'s managerial authority remained limited. It was primarily concerned with contemporary operations of Latvian industry. Real planning and organisational control lay with the republic's branch of Gosplan. The national communists ensured that Latvia's Gosplan cooperated with their economic plans by appointing Edgars Mūkins Deputy Chairman in August 1958. Even then, Berklavs preferred to divest real decision-making power in Dzērve's Economics Institute. From 46 senior members, only 18 were Party members and most of those scientists had lived in interwar Latvia.⁷⁷⁸ Dzērve consolidated his control over the institute by removing opposition. Senior research fellow Starodubtsev, who was fluent in Latvian but disagreed with Dzērve's policies, was reputedly forced to leave the institute and dispatched to Novosibirsk.⁷⁷⁹ At a joint bureau and Council of Ministers meeting on 21st October 1958, Berklavs proposed increasing the size of Gosplan's leadership. The proposal attached Dzērve and Pinksis to Gosplan, permitting them to attend important meetings.⁷⁸⁰ Plūdonis criticised this decision when the national communists were under investigation at the 20th June bureau meeting: 'We have Mūkins in Gosplan... but he's just a clerk... he does nothing, he just sits and then runs to Krūmiņš and Berklavs. Berklavs already raised the issue that [Gosplan Chairman Augusts] Čulitis cannot cope and that Mūkins should be Gosplan Chairman instead of Čulitis'.⁷⁸¹ As Economics Institute Chairman and a Gosplan member, Dzērve communicated closely with Mūkins, excluding Čulitis from the planning process.⁷⁸² For example, Dzērve forbade the construction of a slaughterhouse in Daugavpils and Mūkins was the first to oppose a proposed chemical plant in Daugavpils.⁷⁸³

⁷⁷⁷ Pauls Dzērve 'Jauna Septiņgade', *Cīņa*, 10th February 1959, 2.

⁷⁷⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.33, lp.33-35.

⁷⁷⁹ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.3768, lp.45.

⁷⁸⁰ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 4 (1989), 90.

⁷⁸¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.146.

⁷⁸² LVA-PA f.2369, apr.1, l.119, lp.126.

⁷⁸³ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.49.

3.5.5 The research programme

In his Ph.D. thesis, Widmer cites an economic programme proposed by Dzērve to the Economics Institute's directors on 6th June 1959. This programme, entitled 'Perspectives of Development of the Economy of the Latvian SSR', represented a concrete plan for economic development under the national communists. Dzērve based his scheme on ideas he had been developing since at least 1958. In January 1959, Dzērve proclaimed that Latvia should develop mechanical engineering and machine-building industries that consume little metal. He stated that 'in this context we should consider whether it is useful to produce... lubrication equipment, ferrous metallurgical enterprises, crane equipment, etc' in Latvia.⁷⁸⁴ With the curtailment of heavy industrial production, the Soviet economy's traditional foundation, there was to a radical expansion of consumer goods and light industrial production. The proposed development of industries, which incorporated local raw materials and labour, and turned out products for local consumption, was reminiscent of pre-Soviet Latvia's economy. Dzērve's aim was to develop Latvia's industrial structure and specialisation. To make this palatable to Moscow, Dzērve argued that rational and economical use of Latvian natural and labour resources would maximise Latvia's contribution to Soviet economic development.⁷⁸⁵

Dzērve's programme proposed splitting planning functions according to demand. It called for Latvian industry's division into a two-tier system, A and B, for planning and production reasons. Group A encompassed predominantly All-Union enterprises with large Russian-speaking workforces, which manufactured goods for export from the republic, mainly to the RSFSR. Group B included factories and plants that used local raw materials and labour for products primarily consumed in Latvia. It was Group B enterprises, most of which were in light and food industrial sectors, that would benefit from a shift in investment away from Group A heavy industrial enterprises (metalworking, metallurgy, chemicals). This programme represented a radical departure from the traditional Marxist-Leninist structure, which divided the economy into (1) production of the means of production, and (2) production of items for consumption. Dzērve legitimated this shift through the rationale that 'the further development of such fields and factories that are based on distantly imported raw materials and do not draw

⁷⁸⁴ Dzērve, 'Komunistiskās celtniecības septiņgade', 103.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

on existing local labour force capacity is unreasonable from an economic perspective'.⁷⁸⁶ The implications were extraordinary. Latvia possessed none of the resources necessary for metalworking industrial development, which played a key role in Latvia's economy. Latvia lacked deposits of ore, coal and oil, and the national communists vetoed the Pļaviņas hydroelectric dam's construction. With external resources severely curtailed, as Dzērve's programme proposed, Latvia's metalworking industry would obviously suffer. A similar fate would befall the equally important Latvian machine-building industry. National communist economic policy evolved to serve the dual purpose of creating a balanced economy specialising in lighter industrial production, more suitable and useful for Latvia, and reducing immigration based on the decline of demand for external labour to supply heavy industrial requirements.

Widmer wrote of the programme's significance in the national communists' fall.

The drafting and circulation of this 'programme' may well have been the incident which triggered Khrushchev's trip to Latvia in mid-June 1959, the visit which set in motion the purges of the Berklavs clique. The timing of Khrushchev's appearance, coming less than a week after the institute's formal acceptance of the 'programme', strongly suggests that there was a connection between the two events.⁷⁸⁷

Widmer's hypothesis is highly unlikely. Khrushchev arrived in Riga on 9th June, just three days after Dzērve's presentation. The USSR's leading statesman did not rush to Riga, furious about a nationalist economic programme. Khrushchev's arrival in Riga in June was merely coincidental and scheduled in advance because he was hosting a state visit from East Germany's leaders Walter Ulbricht and Otto Grotewohl. Nevertheless, Widmer is correct to attribute a key role to Dzērve's research plan in the national communists' demise because these 'autarkic' policies (reduction of imports and exports to other regions of the USSR, migration restrictions, priority investment for local industries) helped to persuade perturbed Soviet central authorities of the national communists' ulterior motives.

⁷⁸⁶ 'Ekonomičeskui nauku', 11.

⁷⁸⁷ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 479.

Prigge casts doubt on the provenance of Dzērve's economic programme, writing that 'Dzērve's "programme" probably did not exist'.⁷⁸⁸ Prigge also disputes Widmer's source because it was published in January 1960, after the purge of the national communists had already begun. Prigge dismissed the anonymous article as a 'fabricated story' designed to damage the national communists.⁷⁸⁹ Furthermore, in the 2003 interview between Prigge and Berklavs, the latter stated that it was a 'fabrication', instead 'emphasising that while the national communists were accused of proposing economic autarky, they would never have openly proposed such a radical agenda. What the national communists were actually promoting was an economy based on agriculture and industry best suited to conditions in Latvia'.⁷⁹⁰ From Berklavs's words, it seems the national communists aimed to achieve some degree of fiscal autonomy or devolution designed to privilege Latvia. Berklavs's insistence that he was not promoting autarky was his interpretation. His superiors in Moscow saw the situation from a different perspective.

The article may have been anonymous, and published in the journal *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii* (whose editor, Karl Tolmadzhev, was hostile towards the national communists) but Latvian archives contain a report about Dzērve's activities and his programme written by Lapiņa and Muravev. This report, dated 15th December 1959, is an unabridged version of the article published in *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, but uses identical language ahead of the January 1960 issue of the journal.⁷⁹¹ The difference between the two documents is that the former was a secret report for the bureau while the latter appeared in the LCP's official journal and was designed to discredit the national communists. Incidentally, the Department of Science, Schools and Culture, which created the report (and most likely the anonymous article) was managed before Lapiņa by Pelše's acolytes Augusts Voss and Victor Krūmiņš (not to be confused with Vilis Krūmiņš) and was one of the few CC departments to remain firmly out of national communist control.

⁷⁸⁸ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 216.

⁷⁸⁹ William Prigge, 'The Strange Death of Latvian National Communism' in David Smith, David Galbreath and Geoffrey Swain (eds.), *From Recognition to Restoration: Latvia's History as a Nation-State*, (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 86.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁹¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.33, lp.33-35.

On its own, the article's basis in a report does not corroborate the existence of Dzērve's comprehensive programme. Prigge found that 'prior to the July plenum, there was never any mention of Dzērve's "programme" in the press; nor is there any trace of it now in the archives'.⁷⁹² This is inaccurate, as Dzērve did in fact create an economic programme. Treijs confirms the programme's veracity in a 1988 interview but maintained that its purpose was to rationalise the economy.⁷⁹³ At a Riga Party *aktiv* meeting, Deputy Gosplan Chairman Shits also confirmed the programme's existence.⁷⁹⁴ Furthermore, in a letter dated 16th December 1958, Berklavs commissioned Dzērve to work for 12-18 months on the research programme. He also suggested that the Institute focus its staff primarily on the development of current problems for the 1959 plan, in other words, on plan revisions.⁷⁹⁵ Twenty-seven scientific staff were seconded to work on Dzērve's programme. In a report by Dzērve he described the programme's work as very urgent because of questions about the republic's economic prospects and noted that the programme was entrusted to him.⁷⁹⁶ Dzērve was tasked to ensure the 'fast and qualitative development' of a project entitled 'Perspectives of Development of the Economy of the Latvian SSR'. Berklavs ordered that relevant departments lend their assistance and awarded the Economics Institute 45,000 rubles to hire professionals outside the Academy of Sciences to work on the project.⁷⁹⁷ Furthermore, the minutes of a meeting of the Economics Institute show Dzērve presented his project to the Institute's Directors on 6th June 1959. This meeting discussed sections of the programme later described in the 'anonymous' article. The meeting's minutes reveal that following Dzērve's presentation, other directors were uncomfortable about the project's implications. Secretary Pēteris Valeskalns noted that the programme 'takes into account the requirements and needs of the republic, especially those... of light industrial products'. Valeskalns, however, wanted to balance the labour force to facilitate increased production (implying that he thought there would be insufficient labour under Dzērve's plan)

⁷⁹² Prigge, 'Strange Death', 86.

⁷⁹³ Treijs, 'Zaudētais laiks', 4.

⁷⁹⁴ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.49.

⁷⁹⁵ Latvian Academy of Sciences Archive (Latvijas zinātņu akadēmija arhīvs) hereafter - LZAA f.1, apr.1, l.722, lp.190. Untitled letter from Berklavs to Academy of Sciences President Jānis Peive and Dzērve, 16th December 1958. LVA-PA f.101, apr.23, l.3, lp.67, 17-i KPL s'ezda, 16-17 fevralia 1960, In April 1960, Pelše stated that Dzērve's programme was compiled without the CC or Council of Ministers' knowledge, which is consistent with national communist operations.

⁷⁹⁶ LZAA f.1, apr.15, l.3333, lp.80. Pauls Dzērve personnel file.

⁷⁹⁷ LVA-PA f.2369, apr.1, l.119, lp.60.

for export to other economic areas and foreign countries. V. Puriņš likewise expressed reservations about the project because it blatantly ignored the needs of other republics. Nevertheless, it was decided that the project report would be distributed to the relevant personnel by 28th June.⁷⁹⁸ Between Khrushchev's visit three days later, the subsequent suspension of national communist activity and the return of the investigation team around 20th June, it is unlikely that the programme was ever distributed.

The 'anonymous' article in *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, mostly likely written by Lapiņa and Muravev, condemned Dzērve's programme. It provided the ammunition to portray the national communists as advocates of autarky and depicted Dzērve as a nationalist and revisionist.⁷⁹⁹ Although Dzērve was not calling for the immediate dismantling of Latvian heavy industry, the article considered that the long-term implications were that Latvia would gradually sever its economic reliance on the Soviet Union.⁸⁰⁰ The 'anonymous' article highlighted the ramifications of this prospect. 'The implementation of the "Research Programme" would have brought great harm to the USSR's economic development as a whole and would have harmed Latvia. It would have violated both Latvia's long-established economic connections with other Soviet regions and the internal proportions of Latvia's economy'.⁸⁰¹ The article aimed to undermine residual public confidence in the national communists. The timing of the article's publication is notable, just one month after Dzērve's dismissal in December 1959.

3.5.6 Agriculture

The national communists' predilection for increased investment in agriculture stemmed from their aim of improving Latvian consumption. Latvian agriculture was in a dire state after Latvia's incorporation into the USSR. Dzērve admitted as much to the public. 'It is no secret' he wrote in *Liesma* (Flame), 'that for many years socialist agricultural opportunities in our republic were used incorrectly. Agriculture has not reached pre-war levels'.⁸⁰² The situation was no

⁷⁹⁸ LVA-PA f.2369, apr.1, l.106, lp.83-85. Protocols of Economics Institute meetings for 1959. Protocol No.6/137, Minutes of the Latvian Academy of Sciences Directors meeting, 'Latvijas PSR tautas saimniecības attīstības perspektīvas diskusija programmas P. Dzērve', 6th June 1959.

⁷⁹⁹ 'Ekonomicheskuii nauku', 10.

⁸⁰⁰ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 481.

⁸⁰¹ 'Ekonomicheskuii nauku', 11.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 13.

better for *kolkhoz* workers; only in 1958 did *kolkhozy* in the Baltic Republics begin to pay money as wages.⁸⁰³

In their memoirs, former national communists were fond of blaming Kalnbērziņš for boasting that ‘Latvian Bolsheviks were always frontline fighters’ and could sow not 100,000 but 200,000 hectares of corn in an attempt to impress a delegate from Moscow during Khrushchev’s corn campaign. This was despite a disastrous corn harvest in 1955, which was partially because corn was unsuitable for Latvia’s climate.⁸⁰⁴ Apparently, this idea was actually foisted upon the compliant Kalnbērziņš by CPSU CC apparatchik P. Vakulenko.⁸⁰⁵ In any case, this resulted in the perennial grass fields’ destruction.⁸⁰⁶ From 1954, national communists held the key agricultural positions with Bissenieks as Agriculture Secretary and Nikonov as Agriculture Minister. By 1956, as the position of the national communists improved following the 20th Party Congress, they began to subvert corn sowing. In 1956, only 29,000 hectares were sown and in 1957 and 1958, only 20,000 hectares were sown each year.⁸⁰⁷ Latvian *kolkhozy* resisted planting corn and received tacit support from the Latvian government. The *kolkhozy* used a variety of tricks to avoid planting corn. Pēteris Strautmanis (Agriculture Secretary between 1960 and 1965) recounted how farmers would plant corn around the edges of fields, but plant other crops such as clover after the first few rows of corn.⁸⁰⁸ Even though Latvia’s environment was ill suited for corn, the republic could not escape Khrushchev’s campaign. Latvia’s refusal to sow the appropriate amount of corn incurred Khrushchev’s wrath. At the December 1958 CPSU CC plenum he accused Latvia of an ‘irresponsible, bureaucratic approach to corn cultivation’. Dismissing local workers’ objections that corn would not grow in Latvia, Khrushchev blamed the cultivation methods used on Latvian farms and the Agriculture Ministry’s ‘advice’.⁸⁰⁹ Yet, the national communists’ intransigence over corn continued, with only a marginal rise to 27,000 hectares sown in 1959. This served to reinforce Moscow’s concerns about national communist

⁸⁰³ Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 149.

⁸⁰⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 105.

⁸⁰⁵ Tannberg, *Politika Moskvā*, 149.

⁸⁰⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 105.

⁸⁰⁷ Widmer, ‘Nationalism and Communism’, 420.

⁸⁰⁸ Pēteris Strautmanis, Interview with Andris Stavro, ‘Pēteris Strautmaņa Intervija’, *Liesma*, 1st April 1989, 5.

⁸⁰⁹ *Pravda*, 13th December 1958, 4.

economic plans in 1959. Following the removal of the national communists there were steep increases in corn cultivation from 1960 until Khrushchev's own downfall.⁸¹⁰

In contrast to the Party's emphasis on grain and corn production, the national communists sought to boost food production by returning to livestock farming, the mainstay of independent Latvia's agrarian economy. Yet, Moscow approved only a minor transfer of investment from grain production to livestock farming. According to King, this lack of materials and investment handicapped food processing.⁸¹¹ In 1956, Latvia's economy shifted towards specialisation in livestock farming, and in March of that year, Nikonov reinforced the move by proclaiming that 'in Latvian conditions clover has always been the fundamental fodder base'.⁸¹²

In another move that presumably irked Moscow, the national communists supported the expansion of the role of private plots in increasing agricultural production. Soviet authorities tolerated private 'garden' plots because of their essential contribution to agricultural production despite their unsavoury ideological nature. Widmer notes that 'Berkļavs and his associates gave signs of viewing it as something to be encouraged in its own right'.⁸¹³ Ultimately, the share of private plots in Latvia's agricultural production dropped during the 1950s, implying that the national communists failed to expand farming on more productive private plots. The share of potatoes, vegetables, meat, milk and eggs production from private plots in 1950 was 74.8%, yet in 1960 private plots accounted for 59.6% of those products' production.⁸¹⁴

3.5.7 The impact of national communist economic policy

It is difficult to assess the effects of national communist economic policy because it was so short-lived and because it took time for tangible results to become observable. It does appear, however, that the effects began to reach the proverbial factory floor in 1958. We can gain some measure of the impact through exploring the 'Jelgava air conditioner affair'. An article entitled 'For the Sake of Local Interests' appeared in *Pravda* in August 1959. It detailed the disastrous state of affairs at the Jelgava agricultural machine factory (*Jelgavselmash*) the previous year

⁸¹⁰ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 420.

⁸¹¹ King, *Economic Policies*, 177.

⁸¹² Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 421.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸¹⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 369.

after repeated production plan alterations. The author, Ilmārs Ivert, was a *Pravda* correspondent and national communist opponent. He indicated that production was disrupted due to repeated changes to the original production plan. This article marked the beginning of the press assault against the national communists and demonstrates the importance of economic policy in initiating the purge.

At some point in 1958, the Latvian *sovnarkhoz* instructed *Jelgavselmash* that the factory should plan to manufacture air conditioners (whose production would mostly be exported to other Soviet regions) in 1959 in addition to agricultural machines. The enterprise's management accordingly prepared detailed production plans. Before the first air conditioner unit reached consumers, a directive from the bureau in Riga ordered the factory to cease manufacture of air conditioners. Subsequently, the *sovnarkhoz* was forced by the bureau to issue three successive variants of 'more precise plans'. These plans contained instructions for manufacturing products other republics had long since mastered in small quantities to satisfy only Latvia's requirements. The new order approved cisterns, door levellers, bulldozer shovels and tractor-trailers, but air conditioners were conspicuously absent. Ivert accused the national communists of terminating the air conditioners' production because of local circumstances. Twice the *sovnarkhoz* recommended that air conditioners be produced in Jelgava and twice the bureau ignored these recommendations. A similar request from the Jelgava *gorkom* was likewise refused. Ivert remarked that the bureau believed the Jelgava factory should manufacture 'only goods which remain on the spot, in the republic'.⁸¹⁵

In summer 1959, the *sovnarkhoz*'s Radio-technical and Metalworking Department Head Jānis Damburg, arrived at the factory with a packet of draft plans purportedly containing further plan modifications for the remainder of 1959 and 1960. Damburg ordered the factory loaded to capacity, turning out ventilators for the Riga railway carriage factory and iron chests for another factory. Harrows and cultivators, which the factory had produced for years, were included in the plan for a time, but later removed. Constant alterations and product replacements severely disrupted production and were symptomatic of the reform's wider consequences. Immediate

⁸¹⁵ Ilmārs Ivert, 'V ugodu mestnym interesam', *Pravda*, 18th August 1959, 2. Ivert became *Cīņa*'s editor, Latvia's largest newspaper, when he replaced the national communist Pavel Pizāns in January 1960.

results were minor because of the lack of clearly defined supply relationships. Coordination and control of shipments between Latvian and All-Union factories remained the biggest problem. Ultimately, alterations to factories' production plans exacerbated the underlying inefficiencies in the Soviet planning system (which the national communists could not amend). The article specified a few other cases of 'unconsidered planning' because of 'localism'. For example, a factory in Riga manufactured kitchen stoves for new buildings throughout the 1950s exporting the majority of stoves to other republics. Supposedly, Construction Minister B. Bezel ordered this enterprise to halt stove production. According to Ivert, other enterprises were obliged to produce gas stoves and water heaters in such small quantities it was unprofitable to do so.⁸¹⁶

In July 1958, *sovnarkhoz* Deputy Chairman Georgijs Gaile, a Russian-Latvian, replaced Plūdonis as Chairman.⁸¹⁷ His promotion, at a time when national communists were at the height of their power, indicates the Pelše faction was still capable of attempting to obstruct national communist initiatives. He challenged the national communists, who in turn rebuked the *sovnarkhoz* for its failure to adequately consider agricultural mechanisation.⁸¹⁸ In the Jelgava factory's case, the *sovnarkhoz* repeatedly attempted to curtail national communist economic plans. Gaile reported that the factory could produce air conditioners with relative ease and issued new production plans only to have them countermanded by the bureau.⁸¹⁹ National communist control of the bureau ensured decisions against the *sovnarkhoz* and Jelgava *gorkom* were upheld. The Party press complained that employees in the *sovnarkhoz*'s central apparatus, many of whom were formerly employed in the ministries, continued to follow the previous system's work patterns and resisted national communist reforms.⁸²⁰ Perhaps this accounts for the high turnover in *sovnarkhoz* management as the national communists tried to weed out uncooperative managers. Between its creation in June 1957 and July 1959, 35% of *sovnarkhoz* directors and 31% of chief engineers were dismissed.⁸²¹ The promotion of national communist Jānis Auškaps to *sovnarkhoz* Deputy Chairman was undoubtedly designed to provide a calculated check on Gaile. Gaile complained at the 16th LCP Congress in January 1959 that

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Gaile received a seat on the bureau in February 1960 after the national communists' defeat.

⁸¹⁸ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 488-89.

⁸¹⁹ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 226.

⁸²⁰ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 488.

⁸²¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.11.

Dzērve did not discuss his plans or proposals with him.⁸²² Though the *sovnarkhoz* reforms made a considerable contribution to economic decentralisation, old ministerial methods proved durable and Gaile's leadership of the *sovnarkhoz* made it obstinate towards national communist initiatives. Therefore, Berklavs emasculated the *sovnarkhoz* because of its intransigence, evidenced in the Jelgava air conditioner affair.

In 1958 and the first half of 1959 the national communists succeeded in modifying, often considerably, the production plans and output of various enterprises. According to Widmer, there is ample evidence documenting the revision of some Seven-Year Plan targets for Latvia under pressure from the national communists and that many factories switched from the manufacture of one product to another.⁸²³ Frequent adjustments to plans indicate that the national communists were uncertain about which factories would produce what products. This suggests that there was no comprehensive plan. Instead, the national communists worked on an ad hoc basis, issuing revised production directives where possible. Dzērve's programme was supposed to provide a framework for these alterations. The programme, however, was only the theoretical construct for a national communist economic policy already in action. It provided a blueprint for the national communists' ultimate aims and large-scale plans for how to achieve them during the Seven-Year Plan. Yet, Dzērve's plan lacked detailed instructions about the role of individual enterprises, how they would convert from heavy to light industrial production, and how they would adapt to new production goals. The national communists appeared confused about how to realise their economic objectives.

In aggregate terms of the growth or decline of industries during the national communist period, we have some measurable data. In line with the national communist focus on food production, growth in the food industry spiked during the national communist period and declined sharply afterwards. Light industrial growth declined even during the national communist period possibly due to the difficulties encountered in converting heavy industrial plants into light industrial enterprises. Following the end of national communism, light industrial growth fell even more precipitously than the food industry. The national communists

⁸²² RGASPI f.17, op.89, d.504, l.137. Stenogramma 16-i KPL s'ezda, 12-13 ianvaria 1959.

⁸²³ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism in Latvia', 113.

failed to curb gross industrial output, which ballooned from 668% of the 1940 level in 1956 to 963% in 1959.⁸²⁴ Yet, there are signs that national communist initiatives did take effect. Heavy industrial growth declined during the national communist period; chemicals production rapidly rebounded during the 1960s.⁸²⁵ We can also assess the other side of the dual national communist economic policy: a reduction in labour inputs. The national communists succeeded in dramatically reducing the labour force's expansion. Between 1955 and 1958, the labour force continued to expand rapidly; compared to the 1940 level it increased by 48% in that period. Yet, between 1958 and 1960, encompassing the period of national communist economic dominance (and some of the period after their expulsion), labour force expansion almost ground to a halt, increasing only 7% over this period. Whereas between 1960 and 1963, once the impediments to migration were removed, growth in the labour force surged by 63%.⁸²⁶

3.5.8 Isolation or rationalisation?

To mobilise popular opinion for their policies, the national communists held public meetings about modifications to the Seven-Year Plan.⁸²⁷ They were fully aware that the Latvian people were unhappy about the priority accorded to heavy industry. By 1958, the metalworking and machine-building industries were 48 times their 1940 production level but light industry only expanded by 6.1 times and the food industry by just 3.4 times.⁸²⁸ National communist economic policy attempted to significantly boost consumer goods and food production (particularly in rural, predominantly Latvian areas) to increase living standards as part of their populist strategy to facilitate a rapprochement between people and Party.⁸²⁹ Bleiere considers that Dzērve believed 'the republic's economy must work first and foremost in the interests of its citizens'.⁸³⁰ According to King, Dzērve and other economists looked to Sweden as a model.⁸³¹ National communist planning included increased funding specifically for agricultural machines and

⁸²⁴ See Appendix A, Table 7. Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 451, Note that food and light industries were still the leading industries in output in Latvia with metalworking and machine-building in third place in 1959.

⁸²⁵ See Appendix A, Table 5.

⁸²⁶ See Appendix A, Table 6.

⁸²⁷ King, 'Management of the Economy'.

⁸²⁸ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 450, 491.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 491.

⁸³⁰ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 397.

⁸³¹ King, 'Management of the Economy'.

urban construction to improve social infrastructure.⁸³² The national communists suggested shipments of additional consumer goods from Latvian factories to local stores. Medical services increased substantially during 1958; the pace of housing construction increased to approximately 70% ahead of original plans. The volume of pension payments doubled during the two-year between 1957 and 1958.⁸³³ In his memoirs, Kalpiņš stressed that national communist economic plans were designed to improve living standards.

It was possible in 1959, without great effort, to put everyday life in the republic on the right track. It was only necessary to plan the development of the economy scientifically, as Nikonov and Dzērve had intended. Then the extent of migration would have been limited to be reasonable. The public would have appreciated improvements in their everyday life, including a better supply of commodities. We would have started to deliver on promises that we were continually making to the people. We were unable to keep those promises. This did not strengthen Soviet power.⁸³⁴

The Hungarian experience of national communism attempted similar economic reforms with analogous results. Like Latvia's national communists, Hungary's Nagy slashed heavy industrial production in favour of increased investment in agriculture and accelerated production of consumer goods and light industry in order to improve living conditions. The national communists and their economic policy suffered a similar fate to Nagy when outmanoeuvred by hard-line Stalinists.

National communist economic policy held a special place in the catalogue of nationalist policies that the Stalinist opposition used to 'expose' and destroy the faction. Pelše, Voss and *Agitprop* repeatedly published details of 'autarkic' national communist plans following their removal. Widmer believes that national communist economic policy was a major factor in their downfall, on a par with the rejection of Khrushchev's education reform.⁸³⁵ Simon agrees that tendencies toward 'localism' and regional autarky were much in evidence in the behaviour of

⁸³² Juris Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 46; King, *Economic Policies*, 195, 200-03.

⁸³³ King, 'Management of the Economy'.

⁸³⁴ Kalpiņš, '1959 gads', 4th September 1988, 3.

⁸³⁵ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 479.

the new *sovmarkhozy*.⁸³⁶ Yet, Prigge considers accusations of autarky were exaggerated. He quotes Dzērve's June 1959 article in *Liesma*. This was Dzeve's last publication before the purge, issued the same month as he presented his research programme to the institute's directors.

In the new Seven-Year Plan all the country's interests will be consistent with the interests of our republic. All-Union interests call for the rapid development of the Latvian radio, electrical, transport, and machine-building industries, as well as the fish, meat and dairy industries. The sectors with the most production will be exported outside of Latvia... Some of the industries and product lines... will be of great importance to all of the USSR. In 1965, our republic will produce 27% of all railway carriages and trams... In the Seven-Year Plan the entire Latvian metalworking and mechanical engineering industry will more than double its production.⁸³⁷

Here Dzērve espouses greater integration within All-Union economic plans for metal-intensive industries. Prigge uses this article as evidence of Dzērve's moderate views and to demonstrate that there was no contradictory research programme.⁸³⁸ Additionally, in his speech to the 16th LCP Congress in January 1959, Dzērve spoke of 'improving inter-republic economic ties'.⁸³⁹ In his memoirs, Krūmiņš defended Dzērve. He stated that 'in no way did Dzērve want national isolation and to ignore Soviet interests. He was for Latvia and the USSR's interests and the maximum reasonable realisation of the entire Soviet nation's interest'.⁸⁴⁰ Yet, we now know a research programme *did* exist and that it did not correlate with Dzērve's article in *Liesma*, published before national communist activities were frozen in June 1959. Widmer suggests that Dzērve hoped to reassure Moscow (and the Stalinists in Latvia) that there would be no major changes to the overall plan.⁸⁴¹ Yet, Widmer's explanation that the national communists preferred not to ring alarm bells in Moscow has its drawbacks. It could only be a short-term solution before Latvia's deviation from planned output would have become apparent. There is

⁸³⁶ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 60.

⁸³⁷ Dzērve, 'Saruna par Septiņgadi', 2-3.

⁸³⁸ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 216.

⁸³⁹ RGASPI f.17, op.89, d.504, l.62.

⁸⁴⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 134.

⁸⁴¹ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 487.

little to suggest that the national communists were hoping to deceive Moscow on a scale akin, for example, to Sharif Rashidov's 'Great Cotton Scandal' in Uzbekistan during the Brezhnev era. Even from a practical standpoint, it was highly unlikely that the national communists could have sustained their economic policy without upsetting Moscow. In this case, there was no alternative and Moscow's position was non-negotiable. In this fundamental misreading of Moscow, the national communists demonstrated the gulf in understanding between themselves and the orthodox opinions of Soviet central authorities.

Through their amendments to the Seven-Year Plan and Dzērve's programme, the national communists began radically and unilaterally to alter the nature of their economic ties with the USSR. Widmer states that this would have ultimately severed Latvia's economic relationship with the USSR. 'In essence,' he wrote 'the Latvian Party leaders were pursuing an autarkical policy by which Latvia's close economic ties with the Soviet Union would be largely broken'.⁸⁴² In his memoirs, Berklavs protested the misrepresentation of his economic policy.

All my thoughts were deliberately distorted. They claimed that I was against the development of industry in Riga and in the event of a new war that factories should be in Russia for bombing. My real proposals were rejected. A plan was adopted that had already been agreed with Moscow. State economic interests were sacrificed in favour of realising the political goal of assimilating Latvians into the great mass of Russians.⁸⁴³

Yet, on the same page of his memoirs Berklavs admits that he decided not to expand production at the diesel factory because its main beneficiary was the BMD. Therefore, as major port city and railway junction, he feared that Riga would be the first city bombed in a war with the West.⁸⁴⁴ Such remarks demonstrate characteristic tactlessness on Berklavs's part.

The two most controversial tenets of national communist economic policy became the focus during the purge. The first was the sharp reduction in the production of exportable goods. For example, Berklavs said that Latvia would not release fridges to other Soviet regions until

⁸⁴² Ibid., 481.

⁸⁴³ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 102.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

domestic Latvian demand was satisfied.⁸⁴⁵ The second was the shift away from heavy industry, reducing requirements for raw materials and labour imported from the RSFSR. The sheer volume of criticism, in both Latvia and Moscow, played an important role in Pelše's arsenal against the national communists. The Pelše faction hoped to persuade Moscow that national communist efforts represented moves towards autarky whereas the national communists claimed they were carrying out an economic rationalisation programme in the spirit of the *sovnarkhoz* reforms.

After the purge began in July 1959, there was vociferous criticism in the press. Pelše targeted Berklavs's 'persistent attempts to turn the development of our republic in the direction of national restrictiveness and seclusion'.⁸⁴⁶ He focused on the national communists' assault on the hallowed Soviet priority of heavy industrial development, claiming that had the national communists been allowed to continue expansion of light industrial production at the expense of heavy industry, 'Latvians would have suffered' because 'an acute shortage of capital funds and all kinds of disproportions would have arisen'.⁸⁴⁷ Further attacks on the national communists included mandatory criticism of their economic policy. Voss echoed Pelše: 'In the economic field', he wrote, 'nationalist plans are manifested in local tendencies, in striving to create a nationally secluded economy under the semblance of the composite economic development of the republic and economic regions'.⁸⁴⁸ Lācis penned similar, though more restrained, accusations, which marked the opening of the media offensive against the national communists. Initially, Lācis defended the economic advantages of the *sovnarkhoz* system. 'The cutting down of unprofitable transportation,' he wrote, 'does not at all mean a weakening of the republic's economic ties with other regions of the country, and especially its isolation'. However, Lācis's prior associations with the national communists required that he disown them publicly. He specifically attacked Berklavs for 'openly speaking out against the Party's general line' in his opposition to heavy industry. He reserved his most damning criticism for Dzērve, saying his

⁸⁴⁵ Vardys, 'Soviet Colonialism'.

⁸⁴⁶ Arvīds Pelše, 'Ob internatsional'nom vospitanii trudiashchikhsia', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 9 (1959), 15.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

⁸⁴⁸ Augusts Voss, 'Vospityvat' trudiashchikhsia v dukhe proletarskogo internatsionalizma i družby narodov', *Sovetskaia Latvija*, 10th June 1960, 2.

economic plan tended ‘towards the crippling path of autarchy, and away from the... robust path of development within the framework of the entire USSR’.⁸⁴⁹

The most controversial aspect, labour planning, became the focal point of criticism. Pelše dismissed the rationale behind restricted production declaring it was ‘without any foundation’.⁸⁵⁰ Jānis Bumbiers, former Economics Institute’s Chairman, emerged from retirement in August 1959 to criticise Dzērve’s programme. Pointing to its migratory implications he described its aim as to transform Latvia into a reserve for ‘purebred Latvians’.⁸⁵¹ The ‘anonymous’ article produced only a weak argument against the sharp reduction of labour inputs implied by Dzērve’s plan. The article admitted that although bringing production closer to raw material sources and accounting for the local labour force were important economic considerations, they were ‘not always decisive’. The article also stated that Dzērve ignored ‘important factors such as the presence of historically well-established centres of industrial production, the need for a more or less uniform distribution of industry for individual republics... and the possibility of movement of workers from one economic region to another’.⁸⁵² The enumeration of these factors, which formed the basis of Latvia’s industrial development under Soviet rule up to 1958, signalled that they would again contribute to Latvian industrialisation after the national communists’ removal.⁸⁵³

The *sovnarkhoz* reforms substantially increased regional authority over the Latvian economy’s management. King, however, believes that the reforms did not go far enough in transferring real power to the regions’ authorities. The *sovnarkhoz* reforms in effect loosened Soviet control over Latvia, but did not grant the Latvians real economic authority. King considers that despite the political risks and practical shortcomings of the national communist’s economic proposals, they constituted a determined attempt to gain local authority over the Latvian economy.⁸⁵⁴ The torrent of criticism that followed demonstrated that the *sovnarkhoz*

⁸⁴⁹ Vilis Lācis, ‘Blagotvornnye preobrazovaniia’, *Partinaiia zhizn’*, 16 (1959), 15.

⁸⁵⁰ Pelše, ‘Ob internatsional’nom vospitanii’, 15.

⁸⁵¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.81, lp.168-70. Perepiska po voprosam partiino-organizatsionnoi komsomol’skoi i profsoiuznoi raboty v 1959. Doklad otdela partiinykh organov k TsK KPSS ‘Ob itogakh obsuzhdeniia resheniia 7-ia plenuma TsK KPL na partaktivakh, plenumakh i raionnykh partsobraniiah LSSR, 19 avgusta 1959.

⁸⁵² ‘Ekonomicheskuiu nauku’, 11.

⁸⁵³ Widmer, ‘Nationalism and Communism’, 494.

⁸⁵⁴ King, ‘Management of the Economy’.

reform was designed not to grant republics the right to alter their economic model, but to smooth existing practices through local management. The experience of the *sovnarkhoz* reforms in Latvia probably contributed to the recentralisation trend that was emphasised at the November 1962 CPSU CC plenum. From March 1963, the republics' *sovnarkhozy* and Gosplan were no longer responsible to only the republics' Council of Ministers but to the USSR Council of Ministers and USSR *sovnarkhoz*.⁸⁵⁵ Khrushchev offered limited economic reform and decision-making powers to republics but this only encouraged the republics to try to wrench further devolution from the centre. When, as in Latvia, fiscal autonomy became linked with nationalistic policies, the centre retracted the proffered decentralisation, judging it too unpredictable to be managed by the Soviet Republics.

3.6 Conclusion - A National Communist Manifesto

According to Berklavs, the national communists had defined aims. In one article from 1993, he lists something of a national communist manifesto:

- 1) A passport regime.
- 2) A law to restore the 'legitimate rights' of the Latvian language.
- 3) An increase in the proportion of Latvian cadres.
- 4) The provision apartments to those who lived in Latvia prior to 1940.
- 5) The prevention of Jūrmala becoming another Soviet resort town like Sochi or Yalta.
- 6) Ultimately, resist All-Union encroachment and oversight and restore a 'Latvian environment'.⁸⁵⁶

Chapters Two and Three analysed the success of the national communists in enacting this 'manifesto' during their rise (1956-1957) and brief dominance of Latvian politics (1958-1959).

Uldis Augskalns believed that national communist reforms 'shook the totalitarian system' because they challenged its basic tenets, namely by putting forward an independent model for economic development; undermining of the system of cadres nomination; protecting

⁸⁵⁵ Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy*, 126-27.

⁸⁵⁶ Berklavs, 'Visiem, kam', 16.

the Latvian language and even through the ‘partial rehabilitation of pre-Soviet national culture, which contributed to the development of national self-confidence’.⁸⁵⁷ In contrast to some historians, such as Gundar King, who believe that the national communists merely gave a ‘Latvian face’ to the Soviet regime, making it more palatable to its citizens, my research indicates the national communists stoked the fires of Latvian national identity, which resulted in an upsurge in overt expressions of nationalism.⁸⁵⁸ Incidents of anti-Soviet activity rose from 117 in 1955 to 217 in 1960. The tearing down of the Latvian SSR flag and its replacement with interwar Latvia’s flag was particularly frequent as was anti-Soviet graffiti and the distribution of anti-Soviet leaflets.⁸⁵⁹ The resurgence of nationalist activity also affected the national communists themselves. In this chapter we saw how as they reached their political apogee, the national communists began to assertively clash with the centre over education, environmental, cadres and economic policies. As we shall see in Chapter Four, this paved the way for the Stalinist opposition to regroup and attempt to engulf Moscow in Latvia’s developing internecine struggle.

⁸⁵⁷ Augskalns, ‘Latvijā totalitārisma kontekstā’, 2.

⁸⁵⁸ King, *Economic Policies*, 195.

⁸⁵⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.24, l.54a, lp.141. Osobaia papka: Postanovlenii biuro i sekretariata TsK KPL v 1961.

Chapter Four: The Beginning of the End: The Origins of the Latvian Party Purge, March - June 1959

This chapter examines the origins of the purge that ended Latvian national communism. Afterwards, Latvia returned to orthodoxy, becoming the most subservient of the Baltic Republics for the remainder of the Soviet period. The period between February and May 1959 marked a pivotal change in how the Latvian leadership interacted with Moscow's officials. This chapter addresses how and why the purge occurred. In Chapters Two and Three, we saw how the national communists developed politically, enacted their policies, reached their zenith by spring 1958 and enjoyed dominance of Latvian politics until March 1959 when they were forced to retreat over the education reform. In Chapters Four and Five, I show how a Stalinist coalition of loyal conservatives in Latvia, the Russian-dominated military headquartered in Riga and a powerful alliance within the Moscow leadership organised the purge of national communists - contrary to Khrushchev's intentions. The Latvian purge, whether centrally directed or internally triggered, brought Latvia's challenge to Soviet central authority to an end and restored the balance of centre-periphery relations to Moscow's favour. The purge of the national communists laid the foundation for Moscow's management of relations between the Soviet government and the republics from 1960 onwards.⁸⁶⁰

The purge receives merely a few lines in virtually all Western literature on Latvian history. Latvian and some Western historians maintain that Khrushchev ordered the purge after his visit to Riga in June 1959 to meet with East German leaders. According to Andrejs Plakans, Khrushchev's visit 'decided the dispute in favour of Pelše and his supporters [who accused] Berklavs of disfiguring Leninist principles concerning nationality'.⁸⁶¹ Adolfs Šilde, Jeremy Smith and Jānis Riekstiņš also subscribe to this contention.⁸⁶² We explored Michael Widmer's

⁸⁶⁰ Jānis Lapsa puts it that 'Latvia unknowingly became something of a test case for future political battles on the All-Union level', Apine and Zandmanis, 'Tas drūmais', 119.

⁸⁶¹ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 159.

⁸⁶² Adolfs Šilde, 'The Role of Russian-Latvians in the Sovietisation of Latvia', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 18 (1987), 196; Smith, *Red Nations*, 214-15; Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 11.

theory on this subject in Chapter Three. Simon also attributes the purge to Khrushchev's intervention: 'Khrushchev visited Riga to remove Berklavs from office and to initiate an extensive purge of the Latvian Party and state apparatus'.⁸⁶³ This is an understandable error, as Khrushchev coincidentally visited Latvia only three weeks before the landmark plenum that ousted Berklavs. Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera also succumb to this misinterpretation in their seminal English language work *The Baltic States: The Years of Dependence*. The consensus reached by these historians explains the purge as the consequence of the Latvian leadership overstepping established, acceptable boundaries with their nationalist programme. In support of the 'Khrushchev conclusion', Smith argues 'Khrushchev's treatment of the Latvians... confirmed his determination to press ahead with policies which amounted to intended Russification and... established an unarticulated doctrine concerning the limits of republican authority, which paralleled the later Brezhnev doctrine concerning the powers of the Soviet satellite states'.⁸⁶⁴ Similarly, Robert Service described the purge as serving as 'a warning to other republics that crypto-nationalist tendencies would not be tolerated'.⁸⁶⁵ This interpretation assumes that Khrushchev was angered by Latvia's departure from the central model for Soviet Republics and felt that defiance might set a dangerous precedent. Consequently, Khrushchev was determined to make an example of Berklavs by using the purge to demarcate previously vague limits on the tolerable degree of the republics' authority. This theory is a fallacy in that it ignores the purge's local origins.

Prigge challenges the traditional explanation for the purge's causes. In his 2004 article 'The Latvian purges of 1959: A revision study', 2010 article 'The Strange Death of Latvian National Communism' and 2015 book *Bearslayers: The rise and fall of the Latvian national communists*, Prigge rejects the notion that Khrushchev organised the purge. He concludes that the purge was the result of a power struggle between the national communists and the pro-Moscow, old guard faction within the leadership grouped around Stalinist ideologue Arvīds Pelše. In conjunction with his allies in the Soviet military in Riga and powerful friends in Moscow, Pelše spearheaded the purge. Prigge claims that Pelše engineered the purge contrary to

⁸⁶³ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 248.

⁸⁶⁴ Smith, 'Republican Authority', 250-51.

⁸⁶⁵ Robert, Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, (London: Penguin, 1998), 367.

Khrushchev's wishes, using the support of the anti-Khrushchev opposition led by the Party's chief ideologue, Presidium member Mikhail Suslov.⁸⁶⁶ Prigge insists Khrushchev's role was that of 'mediator between the two factions' and 'ultimately unsuccessful defender of the younger generation'.⁸⁶⁷

Prigge bases his theory almost entirely on interviews with the 89-year old Berkļavs in 2003 and the memoirs of Vilis Krūmiņš. Yet, some historians remain unconvinced by Prigge's assessment. Geoffrey Swain depicts the purge as the result of Khrushchev's vacillating tolerance rather than being on the warpath. Swain writes: 'Encouraging the national communists in 1956, purging them in 1959, Khrushchev was uncertain how to respond to the challenge of a Latvian road to communism'.⁸⁶⁸ Other historians like Aldis Purs meet Prigge half way, judging the national communists' downfall to be equally due to Khrushchev's heavy-handed threats and revanchists within the LCP. Purs's position is that Pelše's attack and careful portrayal of Berkļavs's policies as counter to Soviet and Leninist principles forced Moscow's hand in purging the national communists.⁸⁶⁹ Though he exaggerates Khrushchev's hostility, Purs's is a more accurate interpretation.

In this chapter, I explore both the 'Khrushchev theory' of the purge advanced by Widmer and others, and Prigge's challenge to this theory. Ultimately, archival sources indicate that Prigge's theory is likely to be correct. Yet, the central tenets of Prigge's argument rely on just two pages of Krūmiņš's memoirs, a source that needs to be treated with greater rigour. For example, in all of his publications, Krūmiņš scrupulously avoids mentioning his own participation at the July 1959 plenum. This is, of course, because Krūmiņš repented his 'sins' at the July plenum, ultimately throwing in his lot with Pelše.⁸⁷⁰ That being said Krūmiņš's memoirs and the recollections of other former national communists, their opponents and Soviet politicians cited in this thesis remain extremely useful, helping us to understand the subtext and processes behind official documents found in the archives. As long as such sources are treated critically, then their revelations of 'behind closed doors' discussions provide us with

⁸⁶⁶ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 214; Prigge, 'Strange Death', 78-79.

⁸⁶⁷ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 215.

⁸⁶⁸ Swain, 'Before National Communism', 1269.

⁸⁶⁹ Purs, *Baltic Facades*, 69-70.

⁸⁷⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.45.

extraordinary insight, something very necessary when dealing with the murky world of Soviet high politics. In Chapters Two and Three, I showed how the implementation of national communist policies provoked widespread condemnation from their opponents. In this chapter, I will explain the origins of the purge, how the national communists' opponents formed an alliance and sought to oust Berklavs and his allies. I will also attempt to answer the question of whether the conflict between loyalists and national communists in Latvia was an aspect of the wider battle between Stalinists and reformers for control of the USSR following Stalin's death.

4.1 'Conversation from the Heart'

On 25th February 1959, Eduards Berklavs published an article entitled 'Conversation from the heart' (*Razgovor po dusham*) in *Rigas Balss* and *Padomju Jaunatne*. The article's controversial nature drew the Department for Union Republics' attention and factored heavily in Moscow's decision to send an investigative team to Latvia, the consequences of which culminated in Berklavs's ouster in July 1959. In his memoirs, Berklavs describes his reasons for writing the article:

I tried to increase the proportion of Latvians occupying positions of responsibility. Knowing that the Party decided all issues, and that the implementation of any of its resolutions depended on the composition of the primary Party organisation, I believed that our goals could be facilitated were the Party to attract honest, intelligent Latvians. Failing to find any better way, I wrote the article... I invited talented and gifted Latvians to join the Party, since persons who were not Party members could not fill positions of responsibility... I believe it appeared too late. Earlier it might have had a positive effect, but by the end of the 1950s, the Party had already been completely taken over by Russians. Consequently, the right moment was missed... It was a weakness, indeed, a desperate step.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁷¹ Berklavs, *Zinat un neaizmirst*, 119-20.

Berklavs obscures his reasoning for composing the article. It was not merely an appeal to Latvians to join the Party, but implicit criticism of the Soviet system.

The Latvian Communist Party was a Latvian party in name only. The national communists may have gained bureau control and installed personnel in key positions across CC departments and government ministries; the Party, however, remained a Russian-dominated organisation even after 15 years of Soviet power. The Party struggled to attract Latvian members. At the Riga carriage factory, only two Latvians joined the Party in 1958. The same situation existed at VEF, *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star), *Kommunar* and *8 marta* (8th March) factories and others.⁸⁷² Even including Russian membership the Party represented only 3.65% of the population in 1959, which was well below the 5% USSR average.⁸⁷³ Bleiere describes the small percentage of Latvians within the Party as the ‘Achilles heel’ of the national communists’ programme.⁸⁷⁴

Irēne Šneidere believes Berklavs was fully aware that his article would draw a negative response from Moscow.⁸⁷⁵ *Cīņa* did not publish the article because of concerns over its content. *Cīņa*’s cautious editor, Berklavs’s ally Pavel Pizāns, advised him not to publish it in *Rīgas Balss*.⁸⁷⁶ It was then, as Berklavs indicates, a rash and belated move initiated by concerns about the insufficient expansion of the Party’s Latvian proportion (those that stood to gain from his policies). Despite Berklavs retrospective claims of his misgivings about Party membership, in the 1950s Berklavs saw collaboration as the only way to improve Latvia’s position. For this Latvians needed to be a majority to control their own Party, which necessitated greater intake of local recruits. In his memoirs, Berklavs thought that on the one hand, the fact that Latvians did not join the Party was gratifying, but on the other hand, he recognised it limited their influence.⁸⁷⁷ Berklavs wrote ‘Conversation from the heart’ because the Party was at a critical

⁸⁷² LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.52, lp.39. Spravki, zaiavleniia, proekty reshenii, stenogrammy i drugie materialy: K protokolam zasedanii biuro TsK KPL, ‘Ob opyte partiino-politicheskoi raboty Liepaiskogo rajkoma partii’, zamestitel’ zaveduiushchego KPL otdela agitprop Herberts Valters, aprēlia 1959.

⁸⁷³ King, *Economic Policies*, 183.

⁸⁷⁴ Bleiere, ‘Kā nīdēja nacionālkomunistus’.

⁸⁷⁵ Irēne Šneidere, ‘Eduarda Berklava Aicinājums Latviešiem Papildināt KPL Rindas: Kāda Raksta Atskaņas’, *Latvijas Vēstures Institutā Žurnals*, 1 (2009), 121.

⁸⁷⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.189.

⁸⁷⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 161.

juncture. If he had not intervened, he feared a backlash from the Russian majority who would act to reverse national communist policies that he believed were in Latvians' best interests.

In the article, Berklavs recounts his encounters with the public in which he asked, 'why are so many of the best, energetic and educated people not in the vanguard; in the Komsomol or Party. Maybe you do not care for our daily life?' He questioned the motivations of those he met, 'Maybe you are afraid of the shortcomings that still exist in our life, or of previous [Stalinist] mistakes? ... Maybe you think that some of us do not meet the requirements of a true Leninist leader?' Berklavs discovered that these issues kept his respondents from joining the Party and Komsomol. Yet, Berklavs implored Latvians to join the Party especially if they wanted to change Latvia:

Who says that we do not have shortcomings? The Party recognises there are shortcomings. Is Soviet power or the Party to blame? The Party tries to fight against these shortcomings and calls upon every honest person! Do you believe that these shortcomings can be eliminated?... But why wait? How long will you watch from the sidelines?... Latvia's development will progress if all the best people, including the best sons and daughters of the Latvian people, are in the vanguard of the struggle - in the Komsomol, the Party. Give me your hand, we are waiting for you.⁸⁷⁸

This inflammatory statement could only draw a negative reaction both in Latvia and in Moscow. In his carefully worded piece, Berklavs implied the Party could be at fault for allowing shortcomings to exist. Furthermore, Berklavs hinted that the Party remained unattractive to Latvia's best and brightest.

The response was swift after the article came to Moscow's attention. On 13th March, Baltic Sector Head Gavrilov and CPSU CC inspector K. Lebedev wrote to Kirichenko. They described Berklavs's article as 'worrying' and noted that 'the very nature of the issues causes varying interpretations, and sows doubt [in Soviet power]'.⁸⁷⁹ This was because Berklavs asked people if they believed in 'Marxist-Leninist ideology, in its noble objectives, its inevitable

⁸⁷⁸ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.38. 'Razgovor po dusham', Eduards Berklavs.

⁸⁷⁹ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.35.

victory' and questioned if they believed in 'justice and the superiority of Soviet power.' Berklavs remarked that there was some hesitation among those members of the public he described meeting, before he received answers which were always 'yes otherwise [they] could not be answered'. In this remark, Berklavs implied that his interlocutors could, but dared not, give an answer other than 'yes', which caused consternation among Department for Union Republics' officials. Berklavs's appeal was criticised for contradicting the 'Party line regarding strict individual selection to the Communist Party' by encouraging an influx of untested Latvians (whose loyalties were suspect) to join the Party, and for insinuating that CPSU membership did not appeal to the 'best people'.⁸⁸⁰

Gavrilov instructed Kalnbērziņš and Krūmiņš to discuss the article at the bureau and Krūmiņš was asked to write a rebuttal article about the growth of Party ranks.⁸⁸¹ This meeting of the bureau occurred on 14th April 1959. CPSU CC inspectors Lebedev and V. Akshinskii (both of whom played a role in the national communists' downfall as part of the team dispatched in May 1959 to investigate charges of nationalism in Latvia) were present at this meeting, presumably to ensure Berklavs was sufficiently rebuked.⁸⁸² The bureau's resolution condemned the article's publication, stating that it should not have appeared in print. This was because 'among some communists it caused different interpretations' and was 'not conducive to a correct understanding' of Party recruitment. In future bureau members would be required to submit articles to the bureau prior to publication.⁸⁸³ In a subsequent informal discussion, Berklavs supposedly challenged Kalnbērziņš, 'the manuscript was with you for three days, and you gave me permission', Berklavs argued, indicating that it was acceptable for publication. Kalnbērziņš made no reply.⁸⁸⁴

Berklavs's article, apparently written without consultation, divided the national communists. Prigge describes the effect of the article as a 'striking admission of the Communist Party's unpopularity among Latvians, which sent a shockwave through the LCP bureau, even

⁸⁸⁰ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.37.

⁸⁸¹ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.36.

⁸⁸² LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.25. lp.123, Zasedanii KPL TsK biuro, 14 aprēlia 1959.

⁸⁸³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.25. lp.125.

⁸⁸⁴ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 134.

among the national communists'.⁸⁸⁵ This was demonstrated by the vote to adopt the bureau decision criticising Berklavs. Nine signatures were recorded in favour of the decision, with only three against. Kalnbērziņš, Pelše, Lācis, Batov, Ozoliņš and Saleev were in favour of the decision. Nikonov, Pizāns and Bissenieks voted against the resolution, while Krūmiņš appears to have abstained.⁸⁸⁶ In an interview in 1988, Krūmiņš admitted that the article was 'generally correct', but referring to Berklavs's character he added, 'its instructive tone led to objections'.⁸⁸⁷ Pigalev considered the matter resolved following this meeting.⁸⁸⁸ Yet, the article was used as a weapon to split the national communists during the purge. At the 4th July 1959 bureau meeting, Saleev berated Bissenieks over his original declaration that 'all opposition to this article is foolishness'.⁸⁸⁹ At the July 1959 plenum, Kalnbērziņš claimed Bissenieks and Nikonov 'fully supported Berklavs' because they refused to condemn the article.⁸⁹⁰ In Pelše's crusade against Berklavs, he presented the article as proof of Berklavs's erroneous views and used it to undermine Kalnbērziņš because he failed to oppose the article directly.⁸⁹¹

4.2 The Letters of Complaint

It is worth noting that the Soviet leadership in Moscow (including Khrushchev) were aware of all major national communist policies. On all sensitive issues the national communists were working on: migration, bilingualism, heavy and light industry, the Latvian Council of Ministers appealed to the USSR Council of Ministers with the response that 'these issues were the republic's responsibility and must be dealt with locally'. The CPSU CC spoke with Kalnbērziņš and Lācis on the language issue between 1957 and 1959 but took no action.⁸⁹² By the spring of 1959, however, the situation had changed and Moscow began to pay increasing attention to events in Latvia. Consequently, the scales tipped in favour of Pelše's conservative faction.

⁸⁸⁵ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 316.

⁸⁸⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.40, lp.89. Resheniia soveshchaniia biuro, 14 aprēļa 1959.

⁸⁸⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 134.

⁸⁸⁸ RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123, l.43. Untitled note by Pigalev, 12th June 1959.

⁸⁸⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, l.252. Stenogramma 4-i iulija zasedaniia TsK KPL biuro.

⁸⁹⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.21.

⁸⁹¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.154-55.

⁸⁹² Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 86.

As early as June 1957, Moscow began to receive complaints about Berklavs. Pigalev examined the first anonymous complaint and recommended it be sent to the CPSU CC.⁸⁹³ By May 1958, Moscow had accumulated 147 such complaints. These letters were addressed to the CPSU CC, USSR Council of Ministers, Prosecutor's Office and Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.⁸⁹⁴ Not all letters focused on Berklavs. Some attacked specific national communists. For example, in July 1958, the CPSU CC received an anonymous complaint against Nikonov. He was accused of removing Russians as *sovkhos* directors and forcing the use of Latvian in office work at the Agriculture Ministry. Bissenieks and the Agriculture Ministry investigated the complaint and absolved Nikonov of any wrongdoing.⁸⁹⁵ The investigation reported that there was an altercation between Nikonov and senior zoologist Červans over the necessity to reply to complaints, applications or claims in the language of the document received, which Červans was unable to do in Latvian. Nikonov warned that such deficiencies were no longer acceptable. Červans remarked to chief inspector Godmaņš that 'we appear to have a "Beriaist" [Agricultural] Ministry'.⁸⁹⁶ Uncomfortable parallels were drawn between the national communists and Beria on several occasions.

In May 1958, Berklavs was in Moscow to discuss his transfer to the Council of Ministers with CPSU CC Cadres Department Head Kiselev. Kiselev asked Berklavs to read one of the letters the CC received. The anonymous letter described Berklavs as the instigator of a revival of bourgeois nationalism in Latvia. The letter accused Berklavs of being envious of Riga's Russians, that he prevented Russians from registering and living in Riga, that he removed Russians from leadership positions and forced them to learn Latvian, threatening that they should reach competency in Latvian within two years or lose their jobs. The letter further stated that without knowledge of Latvian, a Russian could not work in the Riga Medical Institute and that Berklavs and his associates praised and printed bourgeois writers' works and orientated intellectuals towards the West. The letter was signed with the Latvian surnames

⁸⁹³ Jānis Riekstiņš, 'Kā lielkrievu šovinisti "latviešu nacionālistus" apkaroja', *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2nd November 2005.

⁸⁹⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 111.

⁸⁹⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.28, lp.122-23. 'Atbilde uz anonīmo vēstuli, kura no PSKP CK tika saņemta 1958.gada 19 jūlijā', Nikolai Bissenieks, 4th September 1958.

⁸⁹⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.28, lp.130. Pis'mo v LSSR Ministerstvo sel'skogo khoziaistva ot Ministerstva sel'skogo khoziaistva organizatsionnogo sekretaria N. Morozovs, 'sakarā ar A.Ņikonova apsūdzību nacionālismā'.

Ozoliņš, Kārkliņš, Lejiņš, Kalniņš and Bērziņš, but did not have a sender's address. Berklavs told Kiselev that the letter was 'malicious' and asked why Kiselev waited for the 147th letter before addressing the issue. 'If this is true then I should lose my position rather than be promoted to a nominally higher position... but if the letter is slanderous, then [we] need to find the perpetrators', Berklavs told Kiselev. Kiselev replied that the CC 'certainly did not believe the entire letter, but there is no smoke without fire'. Berklavs suspected that his enemies in the Pelše faction, including both Russians and Russified Latvians, composed the letters. 'It was decided to write [letters] until a commission comes from Moscow to verify the letters' accuracy, when the commission arrives... [they would] pretend to be locals [and] confirm that all the letters are accurate'.⁸⁹⁷ This coordinated letter-writing campaign, which had sent nearly a 150 letters to Moscow between mid-1957 and mid-1958, was designed to draw Moscow's attention to growing evidence of nationalism in Latvia.

Due to the increasing effects of national communist policies, Pelše was not short of volunteers willing to complain to Moscow. Military officers wrote many of the complaint letters. After returning from service in Poland, Lieutenant-Colonel Cherviakov and his family were unable to register in Riga despite bringing up the matter with Kalnbērziņš and Lācis, which demonstrates their inability or unwillingness to attempt to circumvent the national communists' law. Frustrated, Cherviakov wrote to Moscow. He included the questions he was asked when he tried to register: 'Why did you come to Latvia, why is it necessary to be here? We did not invite you here'.⁸⁹⁸ Very few of these letters are available for examination so it is difficult to determine the veracity of the correspondence. Yet, from the letters we know about, it is possible to detect a formula. The letters listed dismissals of officials from across the Latvian Party and government, detailed special privileges for Latvian citizens, and then discrimination against Russians based on their nationality. Riekstiņš discovered one such letter in the Latvian archives. I. Stepanov, a retired colonel living in Riga wrote to Mukhitdinov in July 1959. On this occasion, Kalnbērziņš wrote a rejoinder explaining on a point-by-point basis why each official was dismissed and refuted Stepanov's claims, though he did admit to deficiencies in

⁸⁹⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 101, 111-12.

⁸⁹⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.167.

nationality policy and pointed to the July 1959 plenum as evidence that these failings would be resolved.⁸⁹⁹

It appears that until 1959 Moscow did not take the letters very seriously. It seems that in 1957 Berklavs was still being protected. For example, Kalnbērziņš, hoping to avoid charges of nationalism against the Latvian Party, wrote a letter to Pigalev in September 1957 defending Berklavs in response to an anonymous letter Pigalev received in June 1957. Kalnbērziņš declared all accusations that the ‘nationalist group activities were the result of Berklav’s nationalist policy’ were ‘unsubstantiated and fictitious’. He explained that Berklavs was simply implementing Party policy:

Though Berklavs is guilty of a number of shortcomings and errors in the past, this is no reason to raise serious political accusations against him. The CPSU CC was informed in due time about the bourgeois Latvian flag flying from a radio tower on the night of 15th May. The linking of Berklavs with this incident, as the anonymous author does, is a villainous calumny. A nationalist underground revival late last year and earlier this year was the result of events in Hungary.⁹⁰⁰

It is likely that in 1957, Kalnbērziņš did not consider Berklavs’s actions extreme and did not want to attract Moscow’s attention.

4.2.1 The Cherkovskii affair

Another high profile complaint against the national communists, which garnered Moscow’s attention, occurred because of the ‘Cherkovskii affair’ in late 1958. During the national communists’ zenith, Berklavs was concerned about Russification and opposition to his national communist programme from Latvia’s eastern region of Latgale.⁹⁰¹ Prigge describes Daugavpils, Latgale’s administrative centre, as ‘the national communist’s nightmare scenario: a heavily industrialised city in which the population of ethnic Latvians declined to such a small minority

⁸⁹⁹ Jānis Riekstiņš, ‘Kā lielkrievu šovinisti “latviešu nacionālistus” apkaroja’, *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 3rd November 2005.

⁹⁰⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.20, l.94, lp.4. Letter from Kalnbērziņš to Pigalev, ‘par Berklava apsūdzību nacionālismā’, 19th September 1957.

⁹⁰¹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 105.

that its language and culture virtually disappeared'.⁹⁰² The national communists had controlled Latvia's two other major cities, Riga and Liepāja for years, but Daugavpils and its municipal Party resisted national communist initiatives. In 1958, with the national communists secure in their position, Berklavs intended to confront the Daugavpils Party.

The Daugavpils *gorkom* First Secretary, Yuri Rudometov, attempted to appease the national communists, announcing his agreement with the bureau at the October 1958 Daugavpils Party plenum that it was necessary for all public sector workers to learn Latvian.⁹⁰³ Yet, the national communists were unimpressed by these promises and continued to disparage the Daugavpils Party. Using Berklavs's customary tactics, on 26th October and 6th November, two scathing articles were published in *Cīņa* and *Padomju Jaunatne* about the Daugavpils Party. These articles attacked specific Daugavpils Party officials, describing a long history of incompetence, corruption and the failure of the Daugavpils Party to rectify these problems.⁹⁰⁴ The Daugavpils Party refuted the charges made in these articles and accused the authors of slander. According to Berklavs, the allegations made in these articles prompted a full-scale investigation into the Daugavpils Party.⁹⁰⁵ The national communists were keen to promote Latvian cultural life in the region. The opportunity to investigate conditions in Daugavpils presented itself in late 1958. Ahead of the Song Festival and Latgale Cultural Week both due to be held in Latgale, Berklavs dispatched Deputy Culture Minister Pavel Cherkovskii to Daugavpils to report on the situation. Cherkovskii was the ideal emissary as a Belorussian who had assimilated into Latvian culture and because he was from Ludzas District in Latgale. Prigge describes Cherkovskii as the national communists' 'hope for what might eventually become of the non-Latvian portion of Daugavpils: fluent in Latvian and regarding it as the first language of the republic; respectful of and interested in the local culture; and desiring to assimilate'.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰² Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 93.

⁹⁰³ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁴ Z. Mincs, 'Ieverot Latgales ipatnibas', *Cīņa*, 26th October 1958, 2; Luizinska, 'Kad domā par "haltūru"' *Padomju Jaunatne*, 6th November 1958. Mincs was a national communist and *Cīņa*'s Daugavpils correspondent.

⁹⁰⁵ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 105-108.

⁹⁰⁶ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 95.

Latgale had a concentrated Slavic population. In Daugavpils, Latvians comprised just 13% of the population.⁹⁰⁷ The Daugavpils *gorkom* was uninterested in participating in this cultural campaign. This caused a serious conflict between the Daugavpils *gorkom*'s leaders and the bureau in Riga, and later provided a pretence for accusations of nationalism against the national communists.⁹⁰⁸ Cherkovskii reported that cultural activities in the city were in Russian, that Cultural Department cadres did not know Latvian, and were unfamiliar with Latvia's cultural traditions. Cherkovskii noted that in Cultural House No.1 out of 148 cultural events in 1958 only 43 were conducted in Latvian despite Latvians comprising a third of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, Cherkovskii reported that at a meeting of the city's cultural cadres on 30th October 1958 it was suggested that a Latvian musical and theatrical troupe be created at the Daugavpils Russian drama theatre but theatre director Ozerovs refused, declaring there could only be one Russian musical-drama theatre. Cherkovskii reported that Rudometov did not oppose this viewpoint and that he and the Daugavpils Party did not understand how to maintain a real 'friendship between peoples'. Cherkovskii concluded that in Daugavpils, 'Latvians as the indigenous people of this land have been deprived of the opportunity to speak in their mother tongue' in cultural activities and public life. The Daugavpils Party reacted by declaring the report 'incorrect and nationalistic'.⁹⁰⁹

The conflict over Daugavpils was a microcosm of the larger issue between Russians and Latvians. It was important for the national communists to crush the Daugavpils Party's resistance toward reform. If the Daugavpils Party successfully resisted implementing the orders of the LCP bureau, it could have encouraged other regions to exercise more local authority. For this reason, the national communists moved swiftly to implement reforms in Daugavpils. Cherkovskii recommended replacing a large number of employees from cultural institutions in Daugavpils because they did not know Latvian.⁹¹⁰ A large number of experts in Latvian culture were dispatched to carry out the changes in Daugavpils and Latgale. There was to be an infusion of theatre, opera, and choir performances from Riga to Daugavpils. Despite the objections of

⁹⁰⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.182.

⁹⁰⁸ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 400.

⁹⁰⁹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 107.

⁹¹⁰ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 230.

some Daugavpils Party members, several cultural directors were removed, including the Daugavpils Theatre's director.⁹¹¹

Outraged by the report and the Daugavpils Party's subsequent reaction, Berklavs drew Kalnbērziņš into the fray. He wanted Kalnbērziņš to hold the entire Daugavpils leadership responsible. Instead, Kalnbērziņš held a private meeting only with Rudometov. As Berklavs suspected, nothing changed, 'deficiencies were ordered to be remedied', and that was all. Berklavs was furious that the Daugavpils leadership did not have to face the bureau or receive any punishment. Rudometov was forced to accept the accusations made against the Daugavpils Party but Kalnbērziņš allowed him to undertake to correct the problems himself.⁹¹² According to Prigge, what Berklavs actually wanted was 'a top-to-bottom purge of the Daugavpils leadership, not reform'.⁹¹³ Instead, the national communists added to their list of enemies by alienating the Daugavpils Party. Rudometov spoke against Berklavs at the July 1959 plenum.

The national communists attempted to find another way to bring the Daugavpils Party into line. During his visit, Cherkovskii attended meetings of the Daugavpils Party CC, and at one meeting, heard Daugavpils *raikom* MTS Secretary Victor Zhigarkov extol the primacy of Russian. In coarse terms, Zhigarkov ridiculed the sacrosanct Latvian Midsummer celebrations and the traditional Song and Dance Festival, asserting that they had their roots in bourgeois nationalism and were impediments to the establishment of communism. He went so far as to make derisory comments about the Latvian language.⁹¹⁴ Zhigarkov was quoted as saying 'this could only happen because leading Party organs, including the CC were full of nationalists' and that 'a Russian cannot breathe easily' in Latvia. According to Zhigarkov, the only course of action was to banish all nationalists, regardless of their position. At the incensed Cherkovskii's insistence, the Daugavpils *raikom* expelled Zhigarkov on allegations of chauvinism, a decision upheld by the bureau in Riga.⁹¹⁵ Kalpiņš described this decision as one of the 'first events that

⁹¹¹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 95.

⁹¹² Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 108.

⁹¹³ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 96.

⁹¹⁴ Kalpiņš, '1959. gads', 4th September 1988, 3.

⁹¹⁵ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.8529, lp.17. Viktor Sevastianovich Zhigarkov personnel file.

offered hope that times could change', by which he meant that the national communists would respond to Russian chauvinism.⁹¹⁶

Zhigarkov, however, complained to Moscow about his dismissal. The CPSU KPK, the CC's supreme disciplinary body, overturned the Latvian bureau's decision and reinstated Zhigarkov without penalty. Kalpiņš believed this indicated that there were officials in Moscow for whom 'the period of an awakening of the people in Latvia was unacceptable'. In 1959, Indriķis Pinksis maintained that the KPK ruling undermined the authority of the bureau.

If all Russian comrades call us fascists and 'Beriaites', we cannot do anything... Zhigarkov walks around like a hero saying: 'What Central Committee, what secretaries!' And others are watching. This undermines the authority of the CC. If we cannot expel him, at least give Zhigarkov a reprimand, because he was wrong... his speech inflamed nationalist passions. It does not help the proper training of cadres... Now these Russian comrades will be happy but Latvians are dissatisfied.⁹¹⁷

Conversely, because the bureau's decision was revoked, the KPK accused Cherkovskii of incorrect actions for 'creating an unhealthy atmosphere among Party activists in Daugavpils'. In conversation with employees during his visit to Daugavpils theatre, Cherkovskii was alleged to have made non-Party statements, arguing that the Soviet government repeatedly expressed distrust in Latvians and that all Russians workers needed to be replaced by Latvians because their tenure in leadership positions was reminiscent of the Tsarist autocracy or an occupation. Consequently, Miglinieks forced the national communist-controlled bureau was forced to reprimand Cherkovskii, but this was only because the bureau was under pressure. Cherkovskii's behaviour was described as 'wrong only in form', meaning the bureau still supported Cherkovskii's comments on the situation in Daugavpils.⁹¹⁸ Ultimately the national communists lost their battle with the Daugavpils Party. Therefore, as Prigge puts it 'their position was never truly secure as long as the Daugavpils Party remained intact as a seat of opposition'.⁹¹⁹ This

⁹¹⁶ Kalpiņš, '1959. gads', 4th September 1988, 3.

⁹¹⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.180.

⁹¹⁸ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 230.

⁹¹⁹ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 84.

incident did not draw any further attention from Moscow at the time, though it was repeatedly used as evidence against the national communists after the arrival of the investigation commission in May 1959.

4.2.2 Ponomarev's letter

In his memoirs, Krūmiņš describes how the situation, and Moscow's focus, changed in 1959:

The CPSU CC began to receive complaints that this or that official was allegedly removed based on nationality. From a conversation with Semichastnyi and Gavrilov, I knew that these letters did not receive much attention in Moscow. But sometime in March 1959 Semichastnyi asked me to address a letter sent to the CPSU CC by former Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman Ponomarev. He claimed that in Latvia there was a crackdown on Russian personnel, and that in particular, deputy ministers suffer.⁹²⁰

Vladimir Semichastnyi, Department for Union Republics Chairman, played a significant role in the purge of the national communists. Nikolai Ponomarev's letter drew his attention to Latvia in March 1959. Perhaps Semichastnyi had been waiting for such a serious complaint before directly addressing the issue of nationalism in Latvia. The first sign that Moscow was preparing to retaliate against the national communists was the KPK's reversal of the bureau's decision against Zhigarkov.⁹²¹ Moscow tolerated Second Secretary Kashnikov's removal in January 1958 possibly because of his apparent ineptitude, but Zhigarkov's removal on charges of chauvinism by Latvians with a nationalistic agenda proved unacceptable.

Ponomarev was a controversial character. He was removed from his position as a Deputy Chairman during the second wave of Latvianisation following the Secret Speech. Krūmiņš believed he was dissatisfied with his career when he became Minister of Light Industry. He was then charged with speculative activities and misuse of his position, and further demoted.⁹²² Disgruntled, Ponomarev complained to Moscow that he had been demoted because

⁹²⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 86.

⁹²¹ Bleiere, 'Nacionālkommunisms Latvijā', 117.

⁹²² Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 134; LVA-PA f.101, apr.21, l.24, lp.24-25. 'Zacedanii TsK KPL biuro o Ponomarev', 25 ianvaria 1958; LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.8310, lp.27. Nikolai Aleksevich Ponomarev personnel file.

he was Russian.⁹²³ Krūmiņš dismissed the claim that nationality was the issue, as more than half the dismissed Deputy Chairmen were Latvians.⁹²⁴ Before 1959, Moscow attributed the complaint letters to the ‘increasing difficulty of non-Latvians who seek jobs in Riga’.⁹²⁵ Evidently, the Ponomarev affair proved more inflammatory than Semichastnyi’s discussion with Krūmiņš initially indicated. Krūmiņš identifies Ponomarev as someone who attempted to draw Khrushchev’s attention to abuses in nationality policy in 1959. Furthermore, one of the KPK investigators, I. Fursov, referred to the Ponomarev affair at the crucial 20th June bureau meeting.⁹²⁶

The Ponomarev complaint in early 1959 sparked interest at the Presidium in the situation in Latvia and apparently warranted official investigation by the CC. Eleven months after Moscow received the letter that Berklavs read at the CC in May 1958, it was his own article, ‘Conversation from the heart’, that finally spurred the centre to act. A little over a month after its publication, in April 1959, an investigative team was organised to be sent to Latvia. Though Berklavs’s article significantly heightened Moscow’s concern, Ponomarev’s letter provided a compelling pretext for the investigation. The combination of an avalanche of complaint letters, the Cherkovskii affair and conflict with the Daugavpils Party, Ponomarev’s dismissal and Berklavs’s article ensured that by April 1959, Moscow, and Khrushchev in particular, could no longer turn a blind eye to events in Latvia.

4.3 Moscow Investigates Charges of Nationalism - May 1959

The sudden and unexpected arrival of an inspection team in Riga in the second half of May 1959 underscored Moscow’s increased interest in developments in Latvia. Under normal circumstances, the Latvian leadership would have been informed if officials from Moscow arrived in Riga, but this was not the case. These inspectors were from the KPK and the CC.

⁹²³ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.8310, lp.27. In February 1959, Ponomarev’s Party penalty was removed. Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 87, Krūmiņš claims the KPK did this. LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.181, If this is the case, it could be connected to his crucial complaint to Moscow the following month, making him a more respectable victim of discrimination. KPK investigator I. Fursov, however, disagrees and insists Kalnbērziņš decided on Ponomarev’s demotion and that the central authorities were not involved.

⁹²⁴ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 86.

⁹²⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.90-91.

⁹²⁶ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 87; LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.180.

Mukhitdinov cited the complaint letters as the ostensible reason for the dispatch of the inspection team.⁹²⁷ According to Krūmiņš, one inspector told him they were in Latvia because of Berklavs's article.⁹²⁸ In their report, the inspectors stated that they went to Latvia 'for verification of signals received' - in other words, to check the veracity of the letters.⁹²⁹ Berklavs wrote that he had 'no doubt that Pelše, and his associates Bumbiers and Roberts Ķisis used the investigator's arrival to silence dissent'.⁹³⁰ Krūmiņš recalled his short first encounter with the inspectors as an interrogation.

After a ten-minute conversation about neutral topics, one of the inspectors suddenly asked what I had to say about the situation in Latvia. I responded with a question: 'What, we have a particular situation in Latvia?' The inspectors silently looked at one another. I understood that this investigation would be serious. They told us not to order reports, work plans or plenum resolutions. They pointedly refused my help, stressing that they would keep contact with Department for Party Organs Chairman Augusts Voss.⁹³¹

Voss kept a low profile during the late 1950s and managed to retain his position despite calls for his demotion.⁹³² Due to his position, Voss was in close contact with his counterparts Semichastnyi and Pigalev in the Department for Union Republics in Moscow. Krūmiņš believes 'Voss engaged in a dialog with Moscow about sending the investigative team'.⁹³³ This lends credence to the vital role that I argue the Department for Union Republics played in the purge.

In the two weeks the inspectors were in Riga, they did not meet anyone from the Central, Party or District committees.⁹³⁴ Instead, the inspectors met with Pelše and his ardent supporters including Voss, his deputy Aleksandr Aleksandrov, *Sovetskaia Latvija* editor Saleev, KPK Chairman Anton Ozoling, *Agitprop* Department Head Ivan Veselovs and notably,

⁹²⁷ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 86.

⁹²⁸ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 134.

⁹²⁹ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 93 fn.2.

⁹³⁰ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 120.

⁹³¹ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 87.

⁹³² Voss was one of the purge's primary beneficiaries. He was promoted to CC Secretary for Ideology in 1960 before his elevation to First Secretary in 1966.

⁹³³ Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovičs', 10.

⁹³⁴ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 87.

Ponomarev.⁹³⁵ The only national communist they interviewed was Berklavs. Berklavs recalls, ‘I answered all the investigators’ questions: about manifestations of nationalism, on industrial matters, the senior leadership, languages, etc. I told them what we thought, and reminded them of Lenin’s instructions’.⁹³⁶ According to Mukhitdinov, the team interviewed some of the people who sent the complaints and ‘certain facts were confirmed’. The process, however, was far from comprehensive. Mukhitdinov noted that while some plaintiffs were interviewed others were not, but that the team received some new information.⁹³⁷ The investigation team dispatched to Riga was there to gather evidence against the national communists and not to seriously investigate the matter. This was due to the Department for Union Republics’ role in organising the investigation and because Pelše led all the work with the team, with Kalnbērziņš’s blessing.⁹³⁸ This had a profound impact on the investigation’s direction.

After two weeks, the inspectors suddenly departed without meeting with the bureau. Realising the likelihood of a purge, Berklavs tried to persuade Krūmiņš and Ozoliņš to go to Moscow to meet Khrushchev before he received the inspectors’ report. They did not object, but nothing happened. Later, Krūmiņš promised to call CC Secretary Aleksandr Shelepin. Berklavs repeatedly asked Krūmiņš if he had followed through on this promise, but his ‘answer was cagey’.⁹³⁹ This strained Berklavs’s relationship with Krūmiņš. Berklavs feared that Krūmiņš was ‘compromised’. What he meant was that Krūmiņš and other national communists no longer had the confidence that Berklavs could survive the investigation so they began to distance themselves from the principal target. Pinksis provided insight into the atmosphere surrounding the team’s presence: ‘Everyone says there will be a new order. Many comrades came to complain to the investigators... Rumours abounded about the replacement of Krūmiņš, Berklavs and Lācis by Russians’.⁹⁴⁰

The inspectors delivered their report entitled ‘On Shortcomings in Work with Cadres in the Latvian SSR’ to the CPSU CC Secretariat on 8th June. The Department for Union Republics attempted to present the investigation report as an accurate and unbiased account. Semichastnyi

⁹³⁵ Krūmiņš, ‘Atmiņas un pārdomas’, 83.

⁹³⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 120.

⁹³⁷ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 87.

⁹³⁸ Ibid.

⁹³⁹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 120.

⁹⁴⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.176.

included a cover note to the report, voicing his agreement with the inspectors' findings.⁹⁴¹ The report asserted that the team contacted a wide range of personnel, but Krūmiņš's account contradicts this assessment. The report lambasted the LCP CC and called attention to Krūmiņš's support for promoting bilingual cadres into the leadership: 'Under the pretext of nominating workers who know Latvian and Russian, the CC intends to replace non-Latvian cadres with ethnic Latvians but does not take into account that the republic is 38% Slavic'. The report attacked the language law as privileging Latvians because they already knew Russian, 'while other workers needed to learn a second language from scratch'. In his interview with the investigation team, Berklavs defended the language law's enforcement, saying it was 'necessary to notify comrades about [the regulations], so that in two years they would not be offended when asked to leave the workforce. If they had not learned Latvian after two years they'd only have themselves to blame'. The report noted that this attitude created 'nervousness and uncertainty'.⁹⁴²

The report went on to provide further examples reminiscent of the upheavals caused by the language requirements of Beria's 'New Course'. It cited a conversation between *raikom* secretaries in which Straujums stated that 'if an employee fails to converse in Latvian then they should not be interviewed because the *gorkom* will not approve their application'. The report complained that was one of the reasons why many senior positions in Riga were vacant for long periods.⁹⁴³ Indeed, the 'Bolshevik' factory lacked a director for six months because no qualified personnel could speak both Latvian and Russian.⁹⁴⁴ The report noted discrimination towards Russian-Latvians who returned to Latvia after spending the interwar period in the USSR, citing Pelše's difficulties as an example. As co-author of the report, Pelše could air his many grievances. In 1959, Pelše was 60 years old and had been Secretary of Ideology for 19 years. He had watched the rapid rise of the national communists while his own career stagnated. Pelše made sure to specifically link Berklavs to the 'unjust dismissal' of officials based on language discrimination. The report included a list of dismissed officials, which included seven out of

⁹⁴¹ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 231.

⁹⁴² Ibid., 224.

⁹⁴³ Ibid., 225.

⁹⁴⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.205.

nine Russian and Ukrainian surnames, and was intended to prove that the language law targeted Slavs.⁹⁴⁵

The report also linked Berklavs to problematic economic policies. Gaile provided information about Berklavs's economic plans, unsurprisingly finding them 'untenable'.⁹⁴⁶ Other informants, presumably from Pelše's clique, opined that the national communists were following 'Bukharin's path' and favoured light industry and agriculture over heavy industrial development.⁹⁴⁷ Based on these inflammatory statements, it is unsurprising that Moscow took the report seriously. Likening Berklavs's economic policy to Bukharin's staunch support for NEP (the New Economic Policy) portrayed national communism as an ideological affront to Soviet socialism and was a Stalinist tactic to discredit the opposition.

The report attacked the press, specifically *Rigas Balss*, *Cīņa* and *Padomju Jaunatne*, for 'insufficiently fostering a culture of fraternity [among the Soviet peoples]'. The radio committee was criticised for allocating only 20 minutes of daily broadcasting in Russian. Anti-Soviet acts amongst the republic's youth were attributed to the national communists. The report alleged that higher education was closed to those from other republics. The Riga Medical Institute, LSU and Riga Polytechnic Institute were singled out for 'eliminating Russians'. According to the report, in 1956, non-Latvians accounted for 30% of students in higher education. By 1959, this number had dropped to 14%. Connected with the language restrictions the number of practicing doctors in Latvia fell by a quarter. The report likewise attacked Latvia's March 1959 education law because it contained 'serious discrepancies and contradictions with All-Union law'. Particularly egregious was the provision of an extra year and free textbooks that would supposedly give Latvian children an unfair academic advantage. The report listed Russian artists and writers 'forced to leave Latvia' and condemned Lācis for not opposing (and therefore 'silently supporting') the national communists on questions of art and literature. The Cherkovskii affair was an example of disproportionate punishment based on nationality. The report complained that Zhigarkov was 'unfairly removed' by national

⁹⁴⁵ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 225.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁹⁴⁷ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 87.

communist Pavel Cherkovskii. Yet, Cherkovskii only received a rap on the knuckles from the bureau.⁹⁴⁸

Throughout the report, the team chastised the CC and bureau (though Pelše himself was a member) for its failure to condemn the aforementioned transgressions. To explain this, the report mentioned that ‘some comrades taking a principled stand [such as Pelše] do not always receive the support of other members of the bureau’. While Berklavs, Bissenieks and Pizāns ‘advocated unhealthy attitudes and often set the wrong tone’. Lācis, Ozoliņš and Krūmiņš received lesser charges of failing to ‘show integrity, sometimes remaining silent’ when discussing important matters. Berklavs’s support in the bureau was explained away, because ‘some members considered Berklavs the likely successor to Kalnbērziņš or Lācis and did not want to aggravate him’. The bureau apparently did not condemn Berklavs because of ‘misplaced fears of offending his pride’. In their report, the investigators stated that Kalnbērziņš agreed with their observations and blamed himself for the situation but cited the Russian proverb ‘the voice of one man is the voice of no one’, by which he meant he felt isolated and no longer commanded the bureau’s confidence. In the first sign that Kalnbērziņš sensed that he would be unable to weather this crisis, the report revealed that Kalnbērziņš raised the question of his transfer to more ‘relaxed work’ within the CC with the investigators. He further stated that perhaps the next Congress should decide whether he should remain First Secretary and that his opinion should be conveyed to Khrushchev.⁹⁴⁹ The most damning criticism was reserved for Berklavs himself. He was called ‘the standard bearer of bourgeois nationalism’.⁹⁵⁰ Ultimately, the investigation team’s report was simply a catalogue of Russian frustrations with national communist initiatives. On some points, the report gave a fair assessment, but on others, there were exaggerations.

⁹⁴⁸ Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika*, 228-30.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁹⁵⁰ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 87.

4.4 Khrushchev in Riga, 9th-13th June

Khrushchev's visit to Riga in June 1959, one month before the plenum that ousted Berklavs, reinforced the incorrect perception that a Moscow-orchestrated purge was imminent. Historians describe Khrushchev seething over charges of 'nationalism', dispensing judgement on Berklavs and subsequently ordering his removal. Widmer wrote that 'once Khrushchev realised that the Latvian situation was threatening to get out of hand, Khrushchev acted quickly to break up the Berklavs faction. He laid the groundwork in a trip to Latvia in the second week of June 1959'.⁹⁵¹ Widmer inferred that Khrushchev arrived with the aim of reorganising the LCP:

It is not clear when Khrushchev began to appreciate the significance of developments in Latvia. Nevertheless, one can pinpoint the moment when he took the offensive. On 9th June, he travelled to Riga and 'took part in meetings of leading Party workers of the Latvian SSR'. In view of the soon-to-follow developments, there can be little doubt that he was sounding out the views of Latvian Party leaders and arranging for changes in the top-level personnel of the republic's organisation.⁹⁵²

The sources now available show that this interpretation is very likely incorrect. The team reported to the Presidium before Khrushchev left for Riga. The report is dated 8th June. I believe Khrushchev was aware of the report and decided to personally test the Latvian leaderships' loyalty. In light of the inspection team's report, according to Mukhitdinov, Khrushchev amended his plans. He would still come to Riga as planned to meet the East German delegation. The new schedule called for the GDR delegation to leave Riga for Kiev after two days and for Khrushchev to remain in Riga for an extra day 'to discuss the accumulated problems with the members of the LCP bureau'.⁹⁵³ Khrushchev wanted to see for himself if there was a nationalist problem in Latvia.

When Widmer wrote his thesis in the 1960s he could not have known that, for the most part, the visit went smoothly. When Khrushchev arrived in Riga, he convivially invited all the

951 Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 117.

952 Ibid., 209-10.

953 Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 87.

members of the bureau to dine at his dacha in Jūrmala. Assessing Khrushchev's mood, Krūmiņš recalled that 'he was cheerful, good-natured'.⁹⁵⁴ According to Berklavs, the ostensible reason for Khrushchev's visit was to 'familiarise himself with the bureau's membership'.⁹⁵⁵ Unaware that the CC team reported to the Presidium the day before Khrushchev's departure, Krūmiņš misread Khrushchev, stating in his memoirs that 'in nature [Khrushchev] was not a diplomat, and I'm sure that if he knew something about the conclusions of the inspection team, it certainly would be manifested in his behaviour'.⁹⁵⁶

According to Prigge, 'the extra day the premier spent was not to lay the groundwork for a purge, but to conduct a series of meetings that transpired pleasantly'.⁹⁵⁷ The Lithuanian and Estonian first secretaries were invited because Khrushchev wanted to assess the situation in the other Baltic Republics as well. The bureau met at Khrushchev's behest, but discussion focused on Nikonov's negative views about the corn campaign and Latvian *kolkhozy* mergers in opposition to Khrushchev's views. Instead of becoming angry, Khrushchev listened intently and complimented Nikonov's initiative, noting that he wished all the republics had such ministers.⁹⁵⁸ Khrushchev did not comment on the investigation report, underscoring his general lack of concern. At the end of the meeting, the discussion turned to cadres. Krūmiņš complained to Khrushchev that Latvian cadres could not gain employment because uneducated, demobilised army officers received all the cadre postings. He was even so bold as to explain why the bureau felt unable to act: 'We cannot put any [graduates to] work because letters to Moscow would immediately follow, evaluating the decision as an expression of nationalism'.⁹⁵⁹ In the months before Khrushchev's visit, the national communists began to curb their most controversial policies in an attempt to avoid further Russian discontent. This demonstrates that Pelše's letter-writing campaign concerned the national communists who feared its effect upon Moscow and denoted the first signs of hesitation in the national communist camp. Reputedly, Khrushchev 'miraculously' supported Krūmiņš, saying the cadres situation was 'a very important issue' and

954 Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 87.

955 Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 94.

956 Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 87.

957 Prigge, 'Strange Death', 80.

958 Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovič', 10.

959 Ibid.

not unique to the Baltics.⁹⁶⁰ He gave instructions to officially invite Krūmiņš to speak about the issue at the next CPSU CC plenum in Moscow, which was to be held later in June. The subsequent change in circumstances, however, prevented Krūmiņš from delivering that speech. Krūmiņš notes that the usually verbose Pelše remained silent at the meeting with Khrushchev, as did Kalnbērziņš.⁹⁶¹ With the exception of Pelše and Kalnbērziņš, according to Krūmiņš, the bureau was unaware of the contents of the investigation team's report.⁹⁶² Pelše had been expecting an enraged Khrushchev to arrive in Riga after hearing the report's conclusions that nationalism was rampant within the LCP leadership. Khrushchev's relaxed behaviour at the meeting must have unnerved Pelše and contributed to his decision to send a 'delegation' to visit Khrushchev that evening.

Krūmiņš joined Khrushchev and other leaders boating on Lake Baltezers on the afternoon of 12th June. He described Khrushchev as amiable, 'the conversation was normal, friendly and there seemed to be no signs of a thunderstorm'.⁹⁶³ Berklavs enquired about an invitation to Czechoslovakia, asking if Khrushchev would grant him permission to visit. Khrushchev replied that if Berklavs gave him a request the next day, Moscow would issue a permit post-haste.⁹⁶⁴ Berklavs's permit was not granted. On the eve of his departure, Khrushchev and the LCP leaders dined together. Berklavs witnessed the BMD Political Department Chief Major-General Nikita Demin (an old comrade of Khrushchev's from the Battle of Stalingrad) hand Khrushchev's adjutant a folder.⁹⁶⁵ After dinner, a group of officials hostile to the national communists visited Khrushchev once he was alone.⁹⁶⁶ The group was composed of Ponomarev, who had lodged the most vocal complaints against the national communists, accompanied by another unspecified official, possibly Pelše or Saleev.⁹⁶⁷ The third member was General Demin, an ethnic Russian, likely there to vouch for the others with the weight of his military influence. Berklavs claims it was Demin and Saleev who wrote the letter

⁹⁶⁰ Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovič', 10; Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 135.

⁹⁶¹ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 135.

⁹⁶² Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovič', 10.

⁹⁶³ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 88.

⁹⁶⁴ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 95.

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹⁶⁶ Prigge, 'Latvian Purges', 223. Berklavs told Prigge that he 'wanted to tell Khrushchev what was going on in Latvia', but strangely, he was 'talked out of it'.

⁹⁶⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 88; Kalpiņš, '1959. gads', 4th September 1988, 3.

that he read, addressed to the CC in May 1958.⁹⁶⁸ Judging by Khrushchev's reaction the next day, the group must have pressed a stronger case than in their letters or in the investigators' report. It is likely that they gave Khrushchev additional information and probably impressed on him the notion that Berklavs was dishonest and that his nationalist policies represented a genuine threat to Soviet power.

Demin was a formidable foe. He ranked third in command within the BMD and sat on the Riga *gorkom* bureau from September 1952. Demin clashed with Berklavs when he was the *gorkom*'s First Secretary over the residency restrictions and Demin's plan for a military training college (which would have allowed for more soldiers to be sent to Riga). Berklavs refused and Demin complained to BMD Commander General Gorbатов.⁹⁶⁹ At a subsequent bureau meeting, Gorbатов accused Berklavs of treating the Army and its officers with hostility, because he had not 'allocated apartments to the Army [or] registered [officers and soldiers] in Riga', and they were denied dachas. Berklavs retorted that 'the military received 10% of all newly built housing and that officers still had a greater proportion of dachas than the rest of Riga's inhabitants'. Then Berklavs declared: 'If Gorbатов can prove this is not true, then we'll admit we're wrong'. This ended the discussion, but Berklavs admitted that his relationship with the BMD was irreparably damaged.⁹⁷⁰ Berklavs had antagonised a powerful lobby. Consequently, the BMD generals supported Pelše's orthodox communists, hoping to reverse national communist restrictions.

4.4.1 Confrontation at Riga airport

The following morning, 13th June, the Latvian leadership went to the airport to see Khrushchev depart. Kalpiņš described Khrushchev's mood in the waiting hall as 'sulky, uncommunicative and dissatisfied with something'.⁹⁷¹ When he went outside to meet the leadership Khrushchev, was 'unrecognisable... and seething with anger'. A heated exchange then took place between Khrushchev and Berklavs, which is the reason the majority of historical literature cites Khrushchev's visit as the catalyst for the purge. Khrushchev was incensed after his visit from

⁹⁶⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 111.

⁹⁶⁹ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.2170, lp.1. Nikita Stepanovich Demin personnel file; Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 100; Le Bourhis, 'Polnomochiia sovetskikh', 2-3.

⁹⁷⁰ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 101.

⁹⁷¹ Kalpiņš, '1959. gads', 4th September 1988, 3.

the hardliners the previous evening, raging about ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationalists’, and demanding an explanation.⁹⁷² At first, Khrushchev questioned Berklavs’s reliability.

Khrushchev: ‘Who are you - an enemy or an honest man? Look here! If you are an enemy, we’ll wipe you from the face of the earth, but if you’re an honest man, then you still need to prove it’.

[...]

Berklavs: ‘Are you calling me a renegade?’

Khrushchev: ‘I didn’t say that directly about you, but it happens like that... You wanted to fool me about Līgo [the Summer Solstice]. It’s fire worship or some adoration. Devil knows what’.⁹⁷³

Kalpiņš adds that Khrushchev concluded his rant by ordering Berklavs ‘not to push Russian citizens into learning Latvian. They do not want to do this and they will not do it’.⁹⁷⁴ After he harangued Berklavs, Khrushchev then turned his frustration onto Kalnbērziņš. Khrushchev marched up to Kalnbērziņš, wagging his index finger. ‘And you, Jan Eduardovich, an old Bolshevik, you don’t see what is happening right under your nose. So watch it and sort it out! If you do not, I’ll send my men - they’ll investigate’.⁹⁷⁵ Then Khrushchev said that there ‘is only one person among you who is completely faultless, and that is Pelše’.⁹⁷⁶ This incident indicates Khrushchev initially intended that the Latvians deal with their own problems, and that he stayed in Latvia for an extra day to make sure the leadership put their house in order. After the previous evening’s meeting, however, he instead accepted the account of Pelše’s acolytes.

According to Krūmiņš, the BMD commander General Pavel Batov (a Russian) was the only one to maintain his composure after this exchange. Batov spoke to Khrushchev ‘firmly’, saying ‘these [Demin’s report] are all lies, shameless lies. I know what I am talking about

⁹⁷² Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 88.

⁹⁷³ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 122. Berklavs requested Khrushchev’s permission to celebrate Latvia’s upcoming traditional Summer Solstice celebrations (always a source of friction with the Soviet government) on the weekend. Khrushchev agreed to consider the request because the festival was non-religious and popular. His comment at the airport suggests that Khrushchev had changed his mind and been convinced that Berklavs was trying to hold a nationalist festival.

⁹⁷⁴ Kalpiņš, ‘1959. gads’, 4th September 1988, 3.

⁹⁷⁵ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 122. Berklavs, ‘Visiem, kam’, 16. According to Berklavs, Khrushchev asked Kalnbērziņš to find out ‘who [Berklavs] really was’. LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.103. Kalnbērziņš attests Khrushchev asked why he did not report Berklavs’s behaviour earlier.

⁹⁷⁶ Kalpiņš, ‘1959. gads’, 4th September 1988, 3.

because I have been on the bureau for over a year'. Krūmiņš recounts that Batov's words had a calming effect on Khrushchev before his departure.⁹⁷⁷ Unlike his predecessor Gorbato, at this point Batov may not have been wholly hostile towards the national communists. Many in the military resented the national communists, but it appears Demin did not take direct orders from Batov and therefore even the BMD was not a monolithic entity. Following his exchange with Khrushchev, Berklavs noted that all those present were surprised, except perhaps the KGB chief Jānis Vēveris.⁹⁷⁸

Only Bissenieks shook Berklavs's hand and comforted him, saying, 'I understand you, Eduards... Be strong. Maybe everything will somehow work out'. This marked the beginning of Berklavs's isolation from his colleagues. After the clash at the airport, no bureau members visited Berklavs. In his memoirs, Berklavs points to this as the moment he recognised he had 'lost the fight'.⁹⁷⁹ Khrushchev's tirade convinced him of his imminent dismissal. Yet, the stubborn Berklavs had no intention of changing his position or admitting his mistakes. He submitted his resignation two days after Khrushchev's visit on 15th June. He requested that the bureau consider his future tenure as Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman. Pelše quotes Berklavs as saying 'my conscience before the Party and the people is clear. I have been and will always remain an honest Leninist, but in this situation I consider it inappropriate and futile to remain in a leadership position'.⁹⁸⁰ Prigge concedes that the confrontation at the airport damaged Berklavs's situation, and that the Pelše faction capitalised on the argument. They used it 'as a pretext to remove the younger generation of national communists, and they moved against Berklavs'.⁹⁸¹

The 1972 'Protest Letter' co-authored by Berklavs, supports the historical consensus that Khrushchev administered the purges.⁹⁸² The 'Protest Letter' was designed to implicate the

⁹⁷⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 135. LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.168, It seems that Batov was unaware of the crisis in the leadership. He later explained he was new to Latvia and did not attend the bureau much but he had 'great trust' in its work. Any sympathy he displayed at the airport for the national communists evaporated at the 20th-21st June bureau meetings by which time he was fully aware and appalled at the situation.

⁹⁷⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 122.

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.55.

⁹⁸¹ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 214.

⁹⁸² Saunders, *Samizdat*, 436.

Soviet Union in Russifying Latvia and refers to Moscow only in monolithic, imperial terms.⁹⁸³

Yet, Prigge notes that the nature of Berklavs's final encounter with Khrushchev at the airport sullied his opinion of the Soviet First Secretary. He believed that subsequent events were directed by Khrushchev, and was convinced that the investigation team's report came 'from Khrushchev's hands'.⁹⁸⁴ Berklavs was not in Moscow to see Khrushchev's change of heart that July.

4.5 The 'Moscow Faction'

It is necessary to explain Moscow's role in the purge and how Kremlin politics influenced the conflict in Latvia. Prigge reaches the conclusion that Khrushchev was not the power behind the purge. Instead, other forces in Moscow promoted and sanctioned it. Prigge correctly identifies Mikhail Suslov as Pelše's counterpart in Moscow. Suslov opposed Khrushchev's efforts in the Presidium to spare Berklavs while Pelše faced Berklavs in Riga, working in tandem to purge the national communists. This dimension of the purge merits further explanation. The foundation of Prigge's theory, that Pelše and Suslov had a close relationship, is based on their familial bond: their wives were sisters.⁹⁸⁵ Purs reminds us that this was often the case in the Baltic Republics, as 'initial allegiances based on ideological conviction often masked deeper familial bonds and an almost caste-like nature within the ruling elite of the Communist parties'.⁹⁸⁶ We can document such connections within the national communists. Edgars Mūkins's wife was Deputy Editor of *Rīgas Balss*, while Kalpiņš's sister Velta was married to Lācis. Furthermore, in the early years of their careers, we can trace the possible first acquaintance between Suslov and Pelše to the period 1929-1931 when both were students at the Institute of Red Professors in Moscow.⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸³ Prigge, 'Strange Death', 80.

⁹⁸⁴ Berklavs, 'Visiem, kam', 16.

⁹⁸⁵ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 225; Serge Petroff, *The Red Eminence: A Biography of Mikhail A. Suslov*, (New Jersey: The Kingston Press, 1988), 152; Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 32. Pelše married Lidia Aleksandrovna, the sister of Suslov's wife Elizaveta Aleksandrovna, in 1938, Dainis Īvāns, 'Iznirelis. Erudīts un ļoti viltīgs', *Rīgas Laiks*, 11 (2003), 7.

⁹⁸⁶ Purs, *Baltic Facades*, 69.

⁹⁸⁷ Petroff, *Red Eminence*, 27. Mikhail Suslov, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), 3. Suslov was a graduate student in economics at the Institute between summer 1928 and 1931. Pelše studied history at the Red Professoriat between 1929 and 1931. Graduating in 1931, Pelše

Suslov played a central role in the purge. Krūmiņš attested that ‘persecution of the so-called “bourgeois nationalists” was largely due to the fact that “the Latvian case” was placed in Suslov’s hands’.⁹⁸⁸ Mukhitdinov noted that between 1957 and early 1959 ‘Pelše regularly [engaged] in detailed discussions with Suslov’.⁹⁸⁹ From as early as 1957, as the national communists became more powerful, Pelše was in contact with Suslov, biding his time, waiting for an opportunity to strike. After the purge began, Suslov assisted Pelše whenever possible. He lobbied within the Presidium for Pelše to become First Secretary.⁹⁹⁰ In February 1960, Krūmiņš was demoted to Education Minister. Having once held a powerful position, Krūmiņš was purged in two steps. This was approved at a meeting of the CPSU CC Secretariat in Moscow. CC Secretary Pospelov chaired the meeting, warmly introducing Krūmiņš and adding apologetically that his new position was a modest one. Krūmiņš then recalled an unexpectedly cruel remark from Suslov, who said that ‘after all that has happened in Latvia, even the position of Education Minister is too high for Krūmiņš’.⁹⁹¹ Krūmiņš lost his position as a minister the following year. Suslov’s early political career reveals his familiarity with combating nationalism. He served as Stavropol *kraikom* (Regional Party Committee) First Secretary and, in this capacity, was involved in the struggle against Caucasian nationalism and the deportation of the Karachai people for collaboration with the Germans. According to Robert Conquest, his performance was so impressive that he was promoted in 1944 to Chairman of Stalin’s *Orgburo* (Organisational Bureau) for Lithuania. In other words, he became ‘the official responsible for the most ruthless re-imposition of Soviet rule on a country bitterly resisting through a long-drawn-out partisan movement. These are not assignments for a merely ideological type... Success in these foul operations led to Suslov’s recall to responsible work in the CC apparatus in March 1946’.⁹⁹²

Prigge portrays Suslov as Khrushchev’s nemesis in the Presidium, mirroring Pelše’s relationship with Berklavs. This assessment is certainly accurate. As Serge Petroff explains,

remained at the Institute, also as a graduate student until 1933. ‘Arvid Ianovich Pel’she’, *Bol’shaia Sovetskaiia Entsiklopediia*, (Moscow, 1975); *A Biographic Dictionary of 100 Leading Soviet Officials* (Munich: Radio Liberty, 1981), 158-161.

⁹⁸⁸ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

⁹⁸⁹ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 86.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁹¹ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 89.

⁹⁹² Conquest, *Russia After Khrushchev*, 147.

Khrushchev and Suslov emerged from the 21st Party Congress in January 1959, where Suslov refrained from seriously criticising the Anti-Party group, in opposition to one another.

Obsessed with the idea that Suslov was a political rival, Khrushchev had been trying to reduce Suslov's authority and influence since the Moscow International Communist Conference in November 1957. Suslov, on the other hand, was becoming progressively more critical of Khrushchev's theoretical pronouncements, his political intransigence, and his campaign to eliminate what was left of the old Stalinist guard... In the domestic arena, Suslov was opposed to Khrushchev's policy of rapid and uncontrolled de-Stalinisation, his views on economic decentralisation, and [the Thaw].⁹⁹³

While Prigge insists that Suslov was the purge's primary instigator in Moscow, I believe that there was a cabal within the Soviet leadership intent on purging the national communists. Prigge identifies Aleksandr Shelepin's involvement, but underestimates his role.⁹⁹⁴

Shelepin and Berklavs were acquainted during the Second World War.⁹⁹⁵ Shelepin also had prior associations with Pinksis, Berklavs and Krūmiņš from his days in the All-Union Komsomol leadership in the 1940s when Pinksis and Berklavs did their respective terms as Komsomol First Secretary. Between 1948 and 1951, Krūmiņš was Komsomol First Secretary while Shelepin was Second Secretary of the All-Union organisation, thus bringing all four into close contact. Animosity between Shelepin and Berklavs began in May 1958 when Berklavs was in Moscow to discuss his transfer to the Council of Ministers. Initially, Shelepin greeted Berklavs genially, though on the subject of the language law and nationalism in Latvia their discussion quickly degenerated. This meeting followed Berklavs's discussion with Kiselev about the complaint letter sent to Moscow. Shelepin wanted to know that Berklavs was willing to correct the situation in Latvia.

Shelepin: 'I was told that you were with Sector Head Kiselev. So we completely understand each other and agree'.

⁹⁹³ Petroff, *Red Eminence*, 117.

⁹⁹⁴ Prigge, 'Strange Death', 90.

⁹⁹⁵ Prigge, *Bearslayers*, 79.

Berklavs: 'Speaking frankly, to be clear - I cannot say that everything will be fine. I don't understand what conclusions I should make about my work and what mistakes could have been avoided'.

Shelepin changed his tone and reverted to addressing Berklavs in the formal 'vy' (you). 'We have observed nationalist deviations [in Latvia], that you have forced everyone to learn Latvian and to hate Russians.'

Berklavs: 'I do not see any political mistakes in my work'.

Shelepin: 'If you continue to speak to me in such a tone, then I will arrange a conversation with one of the CC secretaries'.

Berklavs: 'I'd be glad to arrange the conversation myself, but at my rank I cannot reach them'.

Shelepin stood without speaking and telephoned Kirichenko, who could not be reached. He then returned.

Shelepin: 'It is a pity. None of the secretaries are free'.

Berklavs: 'I am also sorry. I would gladly tell [them] the truth about what's happening in Latvia'.

Shelepin no longer wanted to argue and tried to smooth things over. 'Go home' he said, 'and come into work tomorrow!' He stood up, suggesting the conversation had ended. At the door, he said, as if suddenly remembering, 'there is a football game this evening, will you come with me? Let's go!' Not ready to make amends, Berklavs quipped: 'No, I believe the game has already been played', and walked out.⁹⁹⁶

This altercation carried significant consequences. Berklavs had snubbed Shelepin or as Krūmiņš described it, Berklavs's sharp character had 'bitten' Shelepin.⁹⁹⁷ In 1962, Krūmiņš met with Shelepin who admitted that he was the one who dispatched the CC investigation team to Riga in May 1959, directly guiding its most important activities.⁹⁹⁸ Krūmiņš speculated that Shelepin acted without Khrushchev's knowledge, but this is unlikely.⁹⁹⁹ Shelepin

⁹⁹⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 113.

⁹⁹⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 136.

⁹⁹⁸ Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovičs', 10; Krūmiņš, 'Atmiņas un pārdomas', 97.

⁹⁹⁹ Vilis Krūmiņš, 'Salna pavasarī... Bet vai tikai?', *Dzimtenes Balss*, 14th July 1990, 5.

retrospectively relayed his impression of his falling out with Berkļavs to Krūmiņš. Berkļavs apparently called Shelepin ‘a Great Russian chauvinist’. Shelepin retorted that Berkļavs was a ‘nationalist’. Shelepin told Krūmiņš that the dispute was so serious that they ‘almost came to blows’. Thereafter, Shelepin could never forgive Berkļavs.¹⁰⁰⁰ Apine accurately describes Shelepin as a very powerful enemy.¹⁰⁰¹ Krūmiņš believed ‘Shelepin’s personal feelings about Berkļavs negatively affected both the process and the results of the [July] plenum’.¹⁰⁰²

Once the purge began, Shelepin supported Peļše in extending it. In autumn 1959 while Peļše was preparing its next phase, Shelepin addressed the situation in Latvia at a USSR Supreme Soviet session. He spoke about Krūmiņš, Pinksis and especially Berkļavs making ‘assessments that were unrestrained and tactlessly disdainful’.¹⁰⁰³ The second victim of the purge, Pinksis, attempted to inform Khrushchev in Moscow of the ‘witch hunt’ going on in Latvia in early 1962. Shelepin intercepted Pinksis but promised to deliver Pinksis’s letter to Khrushchev. Later, he telephoned Pinksis to tell him that Khrushchev was too busy and did not have time to deal with Pinksis’s petition. Pinksis believed his letter never reached Khrushchev.¹⁰⁰⁴

In light of evidence supporting Shelepin’s role in the purge, it seems that Shelepin and Suslov coordinated their actions within a ‘Moscow faction’ of the Soviet leadership. This was a conservative coalition opposed to Khrushchev’s leadership. Shortly after the Anti-Party group’s ouster in 1957, another group of surviving Stalinists coalesced in opposition to Khrushchev’s increasingly erratic behaviour. Suslov was most likely the leader, and held the most senior position within the Presidium. After the Anti-Party group crisis, as Michael Tatu puts it, Suslov became ‘a pole of attraction for possible malcontents’ in the Presidium.¹⁰⁰⁵ Shelepin, however, as KGB Chairman, was in an ideal position to encourage a purge. The Department for Union Republics was the faction’s tool for influencing Soviet Republics. The Department was instrumental in building the case against Berkļavs following the publication of ‘Conversation

¹⁰⁰⁰ Krūmiņš and Vallis, ‘Arvīds Janovičs’, 10.

¹⁰⁰¹ Apine and Zandmanis, ‘Tas drūmais’, 118.

¹⁰⁰² Krūmiņš, ‘Tas drūmais’, 136.

¹⁰⁰³ Krūmiņš, ‘Atmiņas un pārdomas’, 96-97.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Pinksis, ‘Tas drūmais’, 127.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Michael Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin*, (New York: Viking Compass, 1972), 33.

from the heart' in February 1959, and monitored Latvia carefully following the passing of residency and language legislation in 1956. From April 1958, the Department for Union Republics was no longer under the control of Khrushchev's client Gromov, but instead Vladimir Semichastnyi, who acquired the position from his patron Shelepin.¹⁰⁰⁶ Thus, Shelepin continued to control the department he recently vacated. The Department for Union Republics relayed the flood of complaints about the national communists to the CC. The Department for Union Republics played a direct role in the purge through its Deputy Chairman Petr Pigalev who led the crusade against Berklavs's article. He also accompanied the CC team to Latvia in May at Shelepin's behest.¹⁰⁰⁷ The team's report also demonstrates that Pigalev coordinated closely with Pelše during the investigation. Furthermore, Pigalev was not only present, but delivered the keynote speech at the critical July 1959 plenum. Krūmiņš called Suslov 'the second pillar of Stalinist Moscow', implying that Shelepin played the key role in Berklavs's removal.¹⁰⁰⁸

The common denominator between hardliners in Moscow and Riga was that they remained convinced Stalinists. Pelše did not conceal being a 'Molotovite,' and thought Viacheslav Molotov was unfairly punished after the Anti-Party group affair.¹⁰⁰⁹ Krūmiņš believed that the plenum against the 'nationalists' was organised 'by those who have a negative attitude about the 20th Congress', and supported the Anti-Party group in 1957.¹⁰¹⁰ The first complaint letters began to arrive in Moscow shortly after the Anti-Party group's ouster. Pelše and like-minded conservatives in Moscow feared the 20th Party Congress's consequences. These officials were unwilling to relinquish control of the Party to the younger generation who supported the 20th Party Congress's decisions.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Vladimir Semichastnyi, 'Nezabyvaemoe', *Komsomolskaia zhizn'*, 7 (1988), 52. As Shelepin's protégé, Semichastnyi shadowed his rise. He took each position Shelepin left becoming consecutively Komsomol First Secretary, Department for Union Republics Chairman, and KGB chairman. On this he said: 'I was literally in his [Shelepin's] footsteps'.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 86.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Krūmiņš, 'Atmiņas un pārdomas', 100; Bleiere, 'Nacionālkomunisms Latvijā', 116.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Krūmiņš, 'Ruki razvazany', 2; Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovičs', 13; Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 133. After the June 1957 plenum, Pelše openly stated that he would never accept that Molotov was against the Party. Krūmiņš recalled an incident shortly afterwards: After a bureau meeting, an old Bolshevik, Milda Dzērvīte-Birkenfelde, approached Kalnbērziņš. She asked him: 'How long will this "Molotovite" Pelše keep his job?' and suggested he be excluded from the CC. Kalnbērziņš agreed that under the circumstances, he should not retain his post but nothing transpired. As Krūmiņš puts it: 'Kalnbērziņš was undoubtedly a truly authoritative Party worker, though towards Pelše, his hands were too short and his back too hunched'. Subsequently, Pelše had his revenge and in 1960 sacked Dzērvīte-Birkenfelde as Auces *raikom* Secretary during the purge.

¹⁰¹⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Ruki razvazany', 2.

The national communists knew the identities of their opponents in Moscow. Krūmiņš acknowledged that Suslov and Shelepin were ‘known for their chauvinistic attitudes’.¹⁰¹¹ In the early 1960s, the Moscow faction grew to include most of the Presidium in opposition to Khrushchev. Semichastnyi, Suslov and Shelepin were the only senior officials in Moscow I identify with involvement in the Latvian affair. All three played a pivotal role in Khrushchev’s removal in October 1964. This group represented a resurgent Stalinist vanguard in control of powerful sectors such as the KGB, which, in its formative stage, removed the Latvian national communists. Five years later, Khrushchev’s political fate would mirror that of Berklavs. It is possible that since the Moscow faction was only developing in 1959, the Latvian affair ignited the coalition’s conflict with Khrushchev. It is worth noting that this alliance was born out of animosity towards Khrushchev, quickly disintegrating after his ouster. In his memoirs, Shelepin has only scathing words for Suslov because he masterminded Shelepin’s fall from grace in the late 1960s.¹⁰¹²

William Prigge sought to challenge the prevailing historical consensus that Khrushchev masterminded the Latvian purge. He has, however, failed to do so. Since Prigge’s article refuting the conventional ‘Khrushchev conclusion’ was published in 2004, Western and Latvian historians have continued subscribe to this notion. This chapter has attempted to better untangle the complex web of political intrigue in Latvia and Moscow in spring 1959 to provide an alternative explanation. It was an alliance of the Soviet military, the ‘Moscow faction’ and Pelše, rather than Khrushchev, who orchestrated the purge. Chapter Five investigates Khrushchev’s vacillation and the course of the purge itself, arguing Pelše’s divide and conquer strategy and the subsequent political rout of the national communists was instrumental in facilitating the purge.

¹⁰¹¹ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 90.

¹⁰¹² Aleksandr Shelepin, ‘Istoriia - uchitel’ surovii’, *Trud*, 19th March 1991, 4.

Chapter Five: The Death of Socialism with a Latvian Face: Summer 1959 and the Purge of the Latvian National Communists

In this chapter, I argue that a loyalist faction within the LCP, led by Pelše, in conjunction with a conservative faction in Moscow, orchestrated and executed the Latvian purge in summer 1959. This conclusion is based on correspondence from the Department for Union Republics in Moscow, the transcript of the 1st July 1959 Presidium meeting, several published memoirs and interviews with senior national communists, and published interview with Khrushchev's Presidium envoy to Riga, Nuritdin Mukhitdinov.

Despite Khrushchev's hesitancy, he decided that the national communists should retain their positions if they corrected the situation in Latvia. I argue that Khrushchev's leniency was not followed through by concrete instructions. This allowed Pelše to outmanoeuvre the national communists. Using the stenographic record of the crucial bureau meetings in June and July 1959, I argue that the national communists failed to maintain a united front in the face of concerted attacks and accusations of nationalism from the Pelše faction. This caused the collapse of the national communists as they turned on each other in an attempt to save themselves. Finally, this culminated in the dramatic purge of Berklavs at the July 1959 Latvian Party plenum and the end of the Latvian Thaw.

5.1 The 20th and 21st June 1959 Latvian Bureau Meetings

After his visit, Khrushchev knew there were problems in Latvia. The meetings of the Latvian bureau on 20th-21st June 1959 were his test to determine if the Latvians were able to correct themselves. These meetings ultimately decided the fate of the national communists. From 13th June, Berklavs's career appeared finished. Pelše's gamble worked. He successfully aroused Khrushchev's suspicions of a nationalist conspiracy. An irate Khrushchev had challenged

Berkļavs publicly, in front of the other leaders, testing their commitment to national communism. After this meeting, there was no alternative to dismissal for the unrepentant Berkļavs. This need not have been the case for the other national communists. Yet, the national communists failed to legitimise their actions: they did not meet after the confrontation at the airport. Despite the danger, the faction was unable to mount a credible defence during this crucial intervening week.

I do not believe it was because the national communists were disorganised or because they lacked a clear agenda. Pelše and the Department for Union Republics were able to interpret Khrushchev's resolution as it suited them, which allowed them to decide what was and what was not permissible. This facilitated the collapse of the national communists in mid June, which throws into question my treatment of the national communists as a cohesive faction. Yet, the national communists were pragmatic: their fundamental goal was the reconciliation of promoting Latvian interests within the framework of the Party and USSR. Berkļavs's personality was a contributing factor. The incident at the airport compromised Berkļavs in front of his enemies and his friends. Latvian national communism was constructed around its undisputed leader and probably could not have survived him. Berkļavs's characteristic stubbornness must have affected his colleagues when he rashly resigned on 15th June, and later when he spurned Mukhitdinov's offer of a compromise. Pizāns's tirade at Berkļavs during the break in the 20th June bureau meeting demonstrated the national communists' frustration with Berkļavs. Consequently, the national communists considered their cause as hopeless once they realised that they did not have the tacit support of the Moscow apparatus (which they had previously enjoyed from at least 1956) and instead perceived it arrayed against them. Thus, they abandoned Berkļavs, each man scrambled to save himself by jettisoning his ideology and criticising his colleagues for excesses in a wave of self-criticism and accusation because penitence became their only recourse. Furthermore, the national communists' Stalinist opponents perceived them a dangerous faction worthy of Suslov's special attention. Suslov's involvement and intention to come to Latvia himself in mid June 1959 rather than Mukhitdinov shows that conservative hardliners viewed the national communists as a serious threat. Under the weight of such intense scrutiny, it not so surprising that the national communists scattered.

Another reason the national communists failed to maintain a united front at 20th June bureau meeting is that there was genuine disgruntlement with Berklavs within the group. Berklavs's colleagues did not unanimously support his abrasive and uncompromising methods. This is evident from the acrimonious nature of that meeting. As every national communist except Pinksis followed the same course of action, it seems likely they had conferred and decided that compliance with Pelše and Mukhitdinov and the scapegoating of Berklavs was the most sensible course of action if they were to retain their positions, otherwise they would surely have stood by Berklavs.¹⁰¹³

Mukhitdinov's testimony is useful for understanding how the Presidium proceeded. Mukhitdinov's views are those of an important contemporary who was a party to crucial policy decisions on how the relationship between Moscow and Latvia evolved in summer 1959. It appears that either while Khrushchev was in Riga, or on 8th June when the investigation report arrived, the Presidium resolved to send the investigation team back to Latvia. This time they would present their findings to the Latvian bureau and determine if the Latvians could, or would, restore order as Khrushchev hoped. Mukhitdinov informs us that at the Presidium meeting it was decided that Suslov would lead the investigation team. Suslov was reputedly chosen because 'many questions were ideological'. Moreover, he was considered an expert on Baltic affairs because of his service in Lithuania.¹⁰¹⁴ We do not know if Suslov volunteered his involvement or if this decision was made without Khrushchev's consent, but Suslov was subordinate only to Khrushchev himself. According to Mukhitdinov, a few days before his departure Suslov caught a cold and doctors forbade him from flying. Mukhitdinov offered to go instead.¹⁰¹⁵ This shows Suslov's close involvement in the deliberations. The Moscow faction was likely shaping events by originally suggesting Suslov lead the investigation team back to Latvia. Had Suslov been able to question the Latvians personally, and report to the Presidium on the situation, Berklavs's fate would have been sealed immediately.

¹⁰¹³ See the Conclusion section 'Latvia's Baltic Neighbours' for a comparison of why Lithuania's leadership was more cohesive than its Latvian counterpart.

¹⁰¹⁴ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 87-88.

¹⁰¹⁵ Mukhitdinov owed his promotion to the Presidium in December 1957 to Khrushchev. Having supported him in the confrontation with the Anti-Party group, he was Khrushchev's trusted ally and an opponent of Suslov.

The Presidium met again on 13th June. The resolution detailed the team's agenda when they returned to Riga: 'Discuss the issues contained in the inspection report and take action to correct deficiencies in the selection, placement and work of cadres. Instruct Mukhitdinov to participate in bureau discussions and to express Presidium members' opinions on this issue'. Upon his return to Moscow, Khrushchev admitted to Mukhitdinov that there had been a serious discussion in Riga and a 'skirmish' with Berklavs and that he was not satisfied. There were 'good speeches' but, according to Khrushchev, 'our Latvian comrades did not have a strong programme or a specific plan of action'.¹⁰¹⁶ Khrushchev did not trust Berklavs, but he was wedded to the idea that the Latvians could moderate their policies and bring themselves into line without the need for further action.

Mukhitdinov arrived in Riga around 16th June and met with Kalnbērziņš, Krūmiņš, Lācis and Ozoliņš. A surprisingly nervous Pelše, who feared he might yet lose this confrontation (possibly because Mukhitdinov, not Suslov, came to Riga), accompanied the group everywhere. Immediately after his arrival, Mukhitdinov asked Kalnbērziņš what decisions he was going to make and if he had a plan. Kalnbērziņš replied he had not thought about it.¹⁰¹⁷ This surprised Mukhitdinov, and understandably so. The bureau had not met since Khrushchev's departure. This prevented the Latvians from making a decision because Kalnbērziņš tried to defer to the centre to mediate this dispute. This benefitted the Moscow faction, which could argue for decisive action against a growing nationalist threat. Mukhitdinov most likely reported Kalnbērziņš's dithering to Khrushchev, which contributed towards his decision to scapegoat the aged First Secretary rather than Berklavs. Mukhitdinov had lengthy conversations with Pelše and Kalnbērziņš. He asked them pointed questions, particularly about why they had not drafted a resolution to solve the problems mentioned in the report. He admonished them for their indecisiveness and that of the LCP as a whole: 'For two and a half years, you have deliberated and many plenums have already passed. You have all the

¹⁰¹⁶ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 87, 93 fn.6.

¹⁰¹⁷ Ibid., 88.

documents with you, and you have talked with Khrushchev and Suslov. So, now you are going to meet, discuss, argue and disagree?’¹⁰¹⁸

Mukhitdinov attests to meeting with Berklavs on 19th June. He tried to convince Berklavs of his incorrect ideological interpretations. Mukhitdinov asked Berklavs to accept that his actions were contrary to Lenin’s teachings and directed against the friendship of peoples. If Berklavs recognised and publicly recanted, then Moscow would acknowledge that they had scolded Berklavs ‘a little, and everything would stay the same’. Berklavs categorically refused the offer and Mukhitdinov retorted that Berklavs would regret his unwise decision.¹⁰¹⁹ On Khrushchev’s orders, but to no avail, Mukhitdinov first attempted to defuse the affair quietly and with considerable lenience towards Berklavs.

Ahead of the decisive bureau meeting, Mukhitdinov visited Krūmiņš. Mukhitdinov explained that Khrushchev wanted Krūmiņš to criticise Kalnbērziņš at the upcoming plenum. This decision was reinforced by Kalnbērziņš’s poor performance when he met the investigation team. Krūmiņš reputedly answered that he could only criticise Kalnbērziņš’s character, and that he shared responsibility for developments in Latvia. Mukhitdinov telephoned Khrushchev, returned to Krūmiņš and said this news upset Khrushchev, who had responded by shouting ‘Do what you want!’ before hanging up.¹⁰²⁰ From this exchange, it is clear Khrushchev wanted to use Kalnbērziņš as a scapegoat for the proliferation of nationalism. It appears at this meeting in Krūmiņš’s office, Mukhitdinov told Krūmiņš that Khrushchev was considering him to replace the ‘tired and old’ Kalnbērziņš. Krūmiņš claims that he was asked to criticise *both* Kalnbērziņš and Berklavs, but refused to do so.¹⁰²¹ Krūmiņš’s denunciation of Kalnbērziņš and Berklavs would have distanced him from the national communists, allowing for his promotion. This would explain Khrushchev’s irritation at Krūmiņš’s refusal to blame Kalnbērziņš for permitting the explosion of nationalism.

This is another point where we must approach Krūmiņš’s testimony with caution. It is unlikely Krūmiņš would offer to shoulder responsibility for ‘nationalist mistakes’ attributed to

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 123.

¹⁰²⁰ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 88.

¹⁰²¹ Krūmiņš, ‘Tas drūmais’, 136.

Kalnbērziņš. He readily abandoned his friend Berklavs at the bureau meeting on 20th June and again, publicly, at the July plenum. At these meetings, Krūmiņš displayed his readiness to admit to mistakes in order to remain Second Secretary. Thus, it seems unlikely that he would decline the opportunity to become First Secretary. Berklavs recognised that this was Krūmiņš's ambition.¹⁰²² Khrushchev's consideration of Krūmiņš's candidacy further suggests his aversion to a purge. Krūmiņš was a young and energetic, centrist candidate, in stark contrast to the pliable Kalnbērziņš.

Latvia and its indigenous leadership enjoyed a certain special confidence from Khrushchev. I believe this in part explains his reluctance to purge the leadership, alongside his wish to preserve this young cohort of cadres that supported de-Stalinisation. Krūmiņš stresses that Khrushchev found nothing out of the ordinary during his visits to Latvia in 1957 and 1958. In one episode, on a visit to the border between Lithuania and Latvia in 1958, Khrushchev castigated Lithuanian First Secretary Sniečkus and extolled Latvian economic management.¹⁰²³ At the 1st July Presidium meeting, Khrushchev recounted a scene from his June 1959 visit, which demonstrated his implicit trust in the Latvians. Before his speech to factory workers, Lācis asked Khrushchev if he should make his speech in Latvian or Russian, as he had prepared speeches in both languages (an indication of the absence of a clear language policy). Khrushchev told the expanded Presidium: 'I answered of course it's better to make it in Latvian'. Khrushchev expressed his confidence in the Latvians: 'I applauded Lācis in advance, though I still do not know what he was talking about; I applauded just because of trust in him - Lācis won't say anything against the Party'. Khrushchev ended his reverie by noting that for the benefit of those who did not know Latvian, headphones should have been mounted in the hall and simultaneous translation should have been organised.¹⁰²⁴ We can interpret Khrushchev's sentiments for the Latvians as tacit support for continued national communist leadership.

The first of the crucial meetings began on 20th June. K. Lebedev, CPSU CC instructor, read out the report of his investigation team from May.¹⁰²⁵ This was the first time bureau

¹⁰²² Berklavs, *Zināt un neizmirst*, 160.

¹⁰²³ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 90.

¹⁰²⁴ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremļa*, 376.

¹⁰²⁵ Prigge mistakenly identifies K. Lebedev as Ivan Konovich Lebedev, former LCP Second Secretary between 1944 and 1949 and an 'old foe of Berklavs', present at the meeting to 'help seal his fate'. Ivan

members, excluding Pelše and Kalnbērziņš, learned the investigation's conclusions. The report summarised national communist transgressions, though it differed from the initial report, submitted to the Presidium. This unabridged version was more detailed. It specifically criticised the national communists' 'liberal' attitude towards the creative intelligentsia's political education, and questions of literary and cultural heritage. Lebedev concluded by blaming Kalnbērziņš for failing to address Latvia's shortcomings despite being warned repeatedly.¹⁰²⁶ Kalnbērziņš nervously and immediately accepted all the reproaches. He admitted that the leadership began to emphasise Latvian distinctiveness after the national communists' rise. 'From 1956, we began to inflate the features of the Latvian people, stressing our differences', he said. Concluding his speech, Kalnbērziņš seemed to be aware that the Latvian Party itself might be in danger. Kalnbērziņš stressed that the situation was a 'very serious test for the Party... we need to survive it'.¹⁰²⁷

Lebedev's report was not universally accepted. Berklavs, Krūmiņš and others took issue with its accuracy. Mukhitdinov admitted that the meeting did not go smoothly because the Latvians were unprepared to accept complete culpability and 'raised objections about certain aspects' of the report.¹⁰²⁸ Krūmiņš opposed the report, explaining the necessity of national cadres, his flagship policy as Second Secretary. He also argued that not all of the complaint letters were accurate. He said Ponomarev's complaint about ethnic discrimination was unwarranted because after the downsizing of ministerial posts (including Ponomarev's position), only 30% of ministers were Latvians.¹⁰²⁹

These meetings represented the collapse of the national communists as a faction. In successive speeches, most national communists quickly surrendered their positions, abandoning Berklavs. This was their opportunity, within the bureau's confines, to demonstrate their loyalty in front of Moscow's representative. Berklavs became the main scapegoat. By sacrificing him, the others hoped that by submitting to Moscow's pressure, they would be able to preserve the

Lebedev was Stavropol *kraikom* First Secretary at this time, Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 221.

¹⁰²⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.93, 95.

¹⁰²⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.96, 98, 102.

¹⁰²⁸ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 89.

¹⁰²⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.112-14.

status quo.¹⁰³⁰ Krūmiņš demonstrated this in his speech. He lashed out at Pizāns for allowing *Cīņa* to print unacceptable articles. He tried to avoid admitting his own culpability, explaining that ‘there was an impression that you could not criticise Berklavs, that he was in a special situation... I think Berklavs held inappropriate and completely wrong viewpoints.’¹⁰³¹ Krūmiņš’s speech impressed Mukhitdinov. He recounted that ‘Krūmiņš’s presentation on personnel issues and ideological work contained a deeper analysis of the facts’ than his previous comments.¹⁰³² Unsurprisingly, Krūmiņš avoids mentioning the meetings on 20th and 21st June in his memoirs.

Lācis displayed some self-criticism in his speech but did not admit wrongdoing on several issues, and noted that the Latvians themselves needed to come to terms with the current situation. He continued to defend decisions promoting the training and placement of Latvian cadres. Lācis claimed there were too few Latvian cadres, especially within the militia. Crucially, he said the Latvians had Khrushchev’s support on the matter. He agreed with Krūmiņš and thought the report contained ‘some inaccuracies and some incorrect sources’.¹⁰³³ In his report, Lebedev criticised Latvia’s deviation from the All-Union education law and reprimanded the Latvians for privileging the Latvian language by pledging to offer free textbooks. He remarked that despite ‘the sovereignty in each republic in matters of public education... a republic cannot be in a special position compared to the others’.¹⁰³⁴ Lācis had broken rank and championed the measures in 1958. In a move that may have ended his own career, at the 20th June meeting, Lācis did not give his opinion on 12-year education in Latvia and downplayed accusations of nationalism.¹⁰³⁵ Berklavs believed Lācis would defend him. Lācis had requested Berklavs as his deputy and therefore he shared some measure of responsibility.¹⁰³⁶ Ultimately, however, Lācis behaved as Mukhitdinov expected and conceded Berklavs’s actions had been ‘wrong, dangerous and harmful’.¹⁰³⁷

Lebedev used his final words to discredit Berklavs. He explained that he received a note about ‘misconduct’ in Berklavs’s admission to the Party, but that at the time the CPSU CC

¹⁰³⁰ Bleiere, *History of Latvia*, 402.

¹⁰³¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.110-11, 114.

¹⁰³² Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 88.

¹⁰³³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.120, 122.

¹⁰³⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.89.

¹⁰³⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.126-27.

¹⁰³⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 132.

¹⁰³⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.124.

decided not to pursue the issue.¹⁰³⁸ When Berklavs began his speech, he had lost much of his characteristic confidence. Initially, he admitted to mistakes but repeatedly asserted that decisions were made collectively and refuted accusations that he made any serious transgressions: ‘It is very bad’, he conceded, ‘if [I] caused some damage in the relationship between comrades from Russia and Latvia. Today, however, I cannot see political mistakes or anti-party views in my work’.¹⁰³⁹ Lebedev repeatedly lambasted Berklavs’s signature policy, the language requirement, claiming it ‘introduced uncertainty and nervousness among a large part of the cadres’. Lebedev provided examples, such as the decision to reject 500 applications to Riga’s universities because the applicants did not know Latvian. Lebedev also mentioned a controversial September 1958 Riga *gorkom* stipulation, which tightened the language law specifically to require that all doctors and nurses in Riga’s City Health Department learn to speak Russian and Latvian within one year.¹⁰⁴⁰ Berklavs acknowledged that ‘maybe it was not necessary to specify a period of time for learning the language’. Then Berklavs contested the validity of information in the inspection report declaring that he never opposed the placement of Soviet troops in Latvia or heavy industrial development. He also testified that he never made remarks about the ‘Russian influx’ at LSU, and claimed there were six hours of daily Russian radio broadcasting, rather than the 20 minutes referenced in the report.¹⁰⁴¹ Lebedev took issue with the replacement of non-Latvian cadres, deploring a decision on 24th May 1959 by Riga’s Moscow *raikom* to replace senior officials, engineers and technicians in the rail and road transport enterprises with Latvian specialists, especially because Latvians already occupied 41.8% of these leadership positions despite non-Latvians comprising 58.6% of the workforce.¹⁰⁴² Lebedev implied persecution of Russians was designed to promote Latvian domination of industry. Berklavs denied there was a plan to systematically replace Russians and that there was ‘no reason to replace non-Latvians with Latvians’. Berklavs was obviously conflicted. Suddenly, he had chosen to disavow core national communist policies. As the pressure, mounted Berklavs contradicted himself. ‘We need to address the issues of improving

¹⁰³⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.93, 95.

¹⁰³⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.128-29, 130, 133.

¹⁰⁴⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.83-84, 87.

¹⁰⁴¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.130-31, 133.

¹⁰⁴² LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.84.

living conditions', he said, 'therefore we should not forcibly increase the number of workers to boost industrial development'.¹⁰⁴³

On the second day, Mukhitdinov spoke briefly about Berklavs. On this occasion, he demonstrated less patience towards Berklavs, berating him for creating a situation 'where, essentially, the Latvian border was closed' to Soviet citizens who could not speak Latvian. He joined Lebedev in criticising Latvia's education amendment and accused Berklavs of overstepping his role. 'Why have you allowed yourself to promise free textbooks only to Latvian students at public expense?' Mukhitdinov asked. 'You are not the head of state, you do not represent the Party... Why are you so contemptuous of other people?' Berklavs evaded the question, maintaining that the policy was harmless.¹⁰⁴⁴ In Berklavs's 'rebellion against heavy industry', Mukhitdinov accused him of 'Right deviation' and compared him to Stalin's 1930s opponent Nikolai Bukharin, as the report did.¹⁰⁴⁵ According to Berklavs and Krūmiņš, Mukhitdinov supposedly compared Berklavs to Beria and inferred he might share the same fate.¹⁰⁴⁶ If Mukhitdinov said this, it indicates that he believed Berklavs was a force to contend with, and therefore the threat of physical violence could be induced. This likely had an effect on Berklavs's wavering allies. At this point, Mukhitdinov gave up trying to force Berklavs's capitulation. Berklavs reflected: 'I had a gun barrel at my temple. Of course, the Muscovites, Kalnbērziņš and Pelše would be very happy if I confessed my guilt and condemned my previous activities. But I did not think that the Muscovites were still hoping for my capitulation'.¹⁰⁴⁷ Mukhitdinov shifted his focus to Berklavs's colleagues. As Prigge says, 'the threat of losing one's post, perhaps even one's life, was undoubtedly implicit and explicit'.¹⁰⁴⁸ Though Prigge exaggerates about the potential for executions, he makes a valid point. Pavel Pizāns, Berklavs's friend, came to see him during a break in the proceedings. In hysterics, he demanded Berklavs recognise that the faction was defeated:

Pizāns: 'Comrade Berklavs, admit it, admit it! You heard what they are saying'.

Berklavs: 'Do you want me to slander myself? All of us? Our lives?'

¹⁰⁴³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.134, 136.

¹⁰⁴⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.140, 142-43.

¹⁰⁴⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.231.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 132; Krūmiņš 'Tas drūmais', 136.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 132.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 223.

Pizāns: 'It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter, we didn't win!'

Berklavs: 'Get the hell out of here, coward!'¹⁰⁴⁹

After the break, Pizāns regained his composure and denounced Berklavs.

During the speeches, both Lebedev and Pelše mentioned several points that Khrushchev later repeated. This indicates that through the investigation process and report, Pelše influenced Khrushchev's opinions. Pelše likened Berklavs's policies to those of independent Latvia's President Kārlis Ulmanis with his slogan 'Latvia for the Latvians'. He claimed that in the press the former Latvian Social-Democratic Party leader Fricis Menders praised Berklavs's 'endeavours for the Latvians'.¹⁰⁵⁰ Pelše aired his long-standing grievances about Berklavs for interfering in CC affairs, and attacked him for errors in cadres and national policies when he was Riga *gorkom* First Secretary. Pelše also began to position himself to succeed Kalnbērziņš. Mukhitdinov recalled that Pelše 'spoke sharply about Kalnbērziņš, saying that he didn't have a firm hand and didn't lead the struggle against shortcomings'. Pelše blamed Kalnbērziņš for the leadership's inability to correct their policies to satisfy Moscow. While Mukhitdinov was keen to prevent the discussion descending into a squabble across bitter factional divides, Pelše undermined the First Secretary, claiming that 'Kalnbērziņš cannot cope with the situation, he is soft and lacks principles. Therefore, he must be released from his work'.¹⁰⁵¹

Humility and *samokritika*, the Soviet formula whereby communists were obliged to engage in self-criticism by ritual recantation, for the collective mistakes of the bureau was expected. Pelše, however, displayed only a minimum of self-criticism. This did not satisfy subsequent speakers, particularly because of his vociferous criticism of others. Pelše only admitted collective guilt, saying that all bureau members were at fault because they 'did not promptly correct Berklavs. We were sometimes conciliatory, tolerant and showed liberalism'.¹⁰⁵² Pelše strategically deflected blame for his personal inaction by admitting to minimal mistakes, then launching attacks on other bureau members. Nikolai Saleev, Pelše's only firm bureau ally, completely agreed with the investigation report. In his speech, he was

¹⁰⁴⁹ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 132.

¹⁰⁵⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.152.

¹⁰⁵¹ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 88-89.

¹⁰⁵² LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.154.

even more critical than Pelše, perhaps confident knowing that his position was secure as the bureau's only Russian. Saleev described Berklavs, Pizāns, Pinksis and Bissenieks as a conspiratorial group bent on taking over Latvia. Saleev similarly attacked Kalnbērziņš for his weak resolve. Saleev, however, also criticised Pelše: 'you're guilty as well', Saleev told him. 'Today you are correct and principled... You're an experienced worker and theorist, you know the republic perfectly well, but in addressing questions you are timid. It's your serious drawback. I believe that in ideological questions you committed a grave mistake'.¹⁰⁵³ It is likely that this 'soft criticism' was planned. It ensured Pelše shared blame without having to endure a serious attack. Secretary for Industry Ādolfs Miglinieks complained that the national communists portrayed Latvia's membership in the USSR as 'the Russian occupation of Latvia'. Miglinieks was a prime example of a Russified Latvian. He provoked Mukhitdinov's scorn because he had not learned the Latvian language or culture, despite living there for 15 years. He added that the 'nationalists' viewed the 'strengthening of political, economic and cultural ties with the Russian people as Russification'.¹⁰⁵⁴

National communists Krūmiņš, Bissenieks, Pizāns, Straujums, Nikonov and Ozoliņš, along with Plūdonis and Miglinieks, all spoke against Berklavs. Straujums abandoned Berklavs, saying that he did not understand why Berklavs did not admit his mistakes. Nikonov agreed that 'Berklavs had done a lot of stupid things'.¹⁰⁵⁵ Bissenieks blamed Pinksis and Berklavs for their 'wrong decisions', which led to 'strained relations between the bureau and some Russian comrades'. 'Berklavs' Bissenieks said, 'divided communists along national lines. When he worked in the Riga *gorkom*, he always had a pocket full of different references, different statistics; he juggled with these figures'.¹⁰⁵⁶

Only Pinksis remained loyal to Berklavs. He defended his position as Trade Union Chief. 'There are enterprises' he explained, 'in which the majority of workers are Latvians but the management, Komsomol and trade union leadership does not know Latvian and that does not strengthen the friendship between peoples'. Pinksis referenced VEF, where 70-80% of Party

¹⁰⁵³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.193, 195-98.

¹⁰⁵⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.223, 227.

¹⁰⁵⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.210, 217.

¹⁰⁵⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.162.

organisation secretaries were Russians who could not speak Latvian. Latvian workers who did not acquire sufficient Russian language skills were unable to participate in Party events at the factory because they were held in Russian, which kept them from active participation in the Party. This, Pinksis added provocatively, meant that ‘Latvian workers did not join the Party’.¹⁰⁵⁷

At the meeting’s conclusion, Berklavs spoke again, though his demeanour was even more subdued. He was meek, compliant and resigned to his fate. He admitted there were manifestations of nationalism in Latvia and that he was to blame.

In some cases, obviously, I was not clever. I was tactless and wrong. I must admit and recognise that my harshness, my lack of thought caused resentment and dissatisfaction. I undoubtedly harmed the important cause of peoples’ friendship. I’m sorry about this. I love the Latvian and Russian people equally... Wherever I happen to be I will always try to serve the Party and the people. Believe me.¹⁰⁵⁸

Berklavs’s uncharacteristic speech showed the effect of the meetings’ assault. Unsurprisingly, the desertion of his friends had a significant impact upon him.

Mukhitdinov accepted the criticisms about Berklavs but complained about Pelše’s lack of self-criticism. Pelše, not Mukhitdinov, proposed that Berklavs be stripped of his bureau seat.¹⁰⁵⁹ Mukhitdinov noted that ‘this idea resonated amongst the bureau’s members’.¹⁰⁶⁰ Underscoring Khrushchev’s preference for an internal solution, Mukhitdinov stressed that Latvians needed to agree on specific measures to correct their position. Thus far, the Latvians were unable to meet this expectation. But when the meeting ended, Berklavs’s dismissal was not a foregone conclusion. Kalnbērziņš proposed a commission to solve the ‘nationalist problem’ or lack thereof. Crucially, Pelše was selected as its chairman.¹⁰⁶¹ This put Pelše in charge of the only mechanism in Latvia that could prevent a purge. The formulation of a detailed proposal outlining how the Latvian bureau would rectify its nationality policy problems could have prevented outside interference. Mukhitdinov was anxious because the Latvians did

¹⁰⁵⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.170, 175.

¹⁰⁵⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.230-31.

¹⁰⁵⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.155.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 89.

¹⁰⁶¹ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 89.

‘not propose or agree upon specific measures to correct their position’, which was the rationale behind his mission to Latvia.¹⁰⁶²

Later that evening, 21st June, Lācis summoned Berklavs to his office. Kalnbērziņš, Pelše and the CPSU CC team joined them. They telephoned Khrushchev, asking permission to arrest Berklavs. Khrushchev, demonstrating he was against a purge, declined to have Berklavs arrested because a trial would generate too much ‘noise’.¹⁰⁶³ Khrushchev repeatedly stated his concern about the potential public relations fallout a purge could generate and wished to minimise the impact of the whole affair. Furthermore, Khrushchev wished to avoid presenting the Latvian émigré community with a propaganda opportunity. Berklavs then spoke with Khrushchev. Presumably, Khrushchev wanted to avoid dismissing Berklavs and asked him to accept that he made mistakes in order to keep his position. Berklavs refused, and knowing he had lost, reiterated his position to the others. According to Pelše, Khrushchev told Berklavs that his immigration policy was misguided and needed to stop. Berklavs adamantly objected.¹⁰⁶⁴ Berklavs’s refusal to atone complicated the situation because other Latvian leaders had admitted wrongdoing. At this point, Berklavs’s position was apparently hopeless. Yet, Khrushchev repeatedly declined to move against Berklavs.

Following his return from Latvia, Mukhitdinov reported to the Presidium on 22nd June. The protocol notes that at the meeting ‘there were critical statements about Kalnbērziņš. Lācis is well respected but he is ill [and will likely retire soon]. Krumiņš and Berklavs are [effectively] in charge’. Mukhitdinov believed that the national communists had taken over the leadership. He was not wrong. In many ways, because the national communists formulated and shaped policy, this was the case from April 1958, when Krūmiņš became Second Secretary and Berklavs returned to the Council of Ministers. By this point, Khrushchev had made his decision. The Presidium chose to ‘kick’ Kalnbērziņš upstairs to the nominal head of state position of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and ‘elect Pelše as First Secretary. Conduct a Presidium meeting during the 24th-29th June CPSU CC plenum and exchange opinions’.¹⁰⁶⁵ This

¹⁰⁶² Ibid.

¹⁰⁶³ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 132-33.

¹⁰⁶⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.153.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremļa*, 355.

was the first indication that the Presidium intended to replace Kalnbērziņš with Pelše, most likely to restore order. Even before Khrushchev relaxed in his attitude towards Berklavs, there was no mention of his removal. This is because Berklavs's removal and Pelše's promotion were two separate decisions. At this point Khrushchev hoped only the latter was necessary.

5.2 The 24th-29th June CPSU CC Plenum

Latvia's senior most leaders were in Moscow to attend the CPSU CC plenum between 24th and 29th June. The bureau did not meet during this period, which played into Pelše's hands. Back in Riga, he surely preferred decisive intervention from Moscow (and his allies), rather than squabbling on the bureau where he was an unlikely candidate to replace Kalnbērziņš. At the end of June, Pelše phoned Suslov and said that 'the commission could not develop a draft resolution' despite having two investigators at his disposal.¹⁰⁶⁶ As commission chairman, Pelše decided whether there would be a decision. In ensuring no resolution was made, Pelše tried to force Moscow to make the decision where the Suslov-Shelepin faction would suggest punitive measures. That Pelše directly telephoned Suslov further demonstrates their close relationship and reveals that Suslov was responsible with the Presidium for resolving the Latvian crisis. The Presidium met again, probably on 28th June. Suslov emphasised the Latvian government's incompetence, 'the Latvians cannot even prepare a draft', he said, and alerted the Presidium to Pelše's wish for the Presidium to discuss the Latvians' cadres and nationality policy problems (where Suslov could shape events).¹⁰⁶⁷ Mukhitdinov claims that he opposed this proposal. He thought the Latvians could resolve their problems without deferring to the Presidium, and he knew that given the opportunity Suslov would propose intervention. 'I said that this should not be done', Mukhitdinov recounted. 'These questions should be decided through the Council of Ministers, especially because we've already held bureau discussions... So let them decide - it is a strong organisation of highly cultured people'.¹⁰⁶⁸

¹⁰⁶⁶ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 90.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ibid.

It appears that Khrushchev wavered at this Presidium meeting. His actions demonstrated his oscillating feelings about the Latvian situation, not least because the Latvians (in reality Pelše) failed to commit to concrete measures. Khrushchev later admitted that at first, he ‘felt the need to make an organisational intervention’.¹⁰⁶⁹ Mukhitdinov’s suggestion, to allow the Latvians to resolve the issue, won out and the Presidium decided to meet with Latvia’s leaders on 1st July.

Despite not revealing it to the bureau, Khrushchev had grown more concerned by what he learnt during his visit to Latvia. After considering what to do with Berklavs, Khrushchev publicly declared his decision on 29th June as he concluded the CPSU CC plenum. At this point Khrushchev was still undecided about an overhaul of the Latvian leadership. Regarding industrial development, Khrushchev questioned the national communists’ motivations for avoiding machine-building development. ‘They don’t have coal or metal, so they think they don’t need it. They think: We have few workers, and if we develop [heavy industry], we’ll need Russians, Belarusians etc. Consequently, the percentage of Latvians will change’. Khrushchev pointed out (as Pelše had) that Ulmanis promoted a similar policy, the current situation being ‘only slightly veiled in nationalist powder. What is it good for?’ Khrushchev also reversed his initial decision to allow the Latvians to hold the *Līgo* Midsummer festival.¹⁰⁷⁰ Yet, in his final remarks Khrushchev relented. He wanted to inform the wider Party that these mistakes were uncovered, but decided to allow the responsible persons (several of them were in the audience) to rectify them on their own.

Khrushchev: ‘All of these are very serious questions. Maybe sometime we will put them to a plenum and discuss it, but now we should not pass a resolution. Initially, when we discussed the question on Latvia at the Presidium, we wanted to adopt a resolution. If it were passed, then you probably would have supported us. However, after thinking it over I decided it should not be done, because if we pass such a resolution now, some will say the Latvians almost rebelled against Soviet power. In Latvia, as I said, we’ve got three or four black

¹⁰⁶⁹ Fursenko, *Arkhivv Kremliā*, 380.

¹⁰⁷⁰ RGANI f.2, op.1, d.374, l.143-45.

sheep who want to muddy the waters. Perhaps these worked up individuals will spoil the whole wonderful picture of the commonwealth of nations of our great Soviet Union’.

From the audience: ‘Right!’

Khrushchev: ‘We cannot [allow] that. I think that the Latvians themselves can cope with this matter’.¹⁰⁷¹

Khrushchev remained conflicted about how to solve the problems in Latvia. In this speech, he was thinking aloud about his reservations.

5.3 The 1st July Presidium Meeting

Khrushchev’s speech at the CPSU CC plenum ended on a conciliatory note, but he evidently remained concerned about the situation in Latvia. Latvia’s leaders remained in Moscow as requested for an expanded Presidium meeting on 1st July. The four highest-ranking Latvian leaders: Kalnbērziņš, Lācis, Krūmiņš and Ozoliņš, attended. The Presidium discussed the situation in Latvia and Azerbaijan, the other recalcitrant republic that failed to implement Khrushchev’s education reform.

This meeting brought matters to a head. While it was not a trial, it resembled one. Krūmiņš described the Latvians sitting a little way ahead, on ‘a kind of bench of the accused’.¹⁰⁷² In November 1959, Kalnbērziņš, Lācis, Ozoliņš (and Krūmiņš in February 1960) lost their positions directly because of this meeting. Despite his reconsideration at the conclusion of the plenum two days previously, the volatile Khrushchev was still upset when the meeting began. Krūmiņš remarked later that ‘it seemed as if there were two Khrushchevs. The first - impulsive to the extreme - ready to smash everything’, the other placated.¹⁰⁷³ Khrushchev reprimanded the Latvian leaders complaining, as Pelše did at the 21st June meeting, about former Social-Democratic Party leader Fricis Mendērs’s newspaper article ‘praising incorrect opinions about the national question. Mendērs conducts policy, he has Berklavs in the

¹⁰⁷¹ RGANI f.2, op.1, d.374, l.152-53.

¹⁰⁷² Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 88.

¹⁰⁷³ Krūmiņš, ‘Atmiņas un pārdomas’, 96.

government'.¹⁰⁷⁴ In his characteristically belligerent bluster, Khrushchev declared that 'the Latvian Party can be dissolved, we have enough power'.¹⁰⁷⁵ By this extraordinary remark, he meant that he could remove the Latvian leadership rather than actually dissolving the Party. Khrushchev then interrogated the Latvians. In his crude manner, Khrushchev questioned Kalnbērziņš about the national communist initiative of restricting non-Latvian speaking Russian medics from working in Latvian hospitals, one of the points in Demin and Saleev's complaint letters.

Khrushchev: 'Will Russian hospital attendants be accepted in Latvian hospitals now?'

Kalnbērziņš: 'Yes, this was reported to me today. We have also fixed the problem about registration'.

Khrushchev: 'If a Latvian goes to hospital, a Russian can give him an enema?'

Kalnbērziņš: 'He can'.¹⁰⁷⁶

Kalnbērziņš and Lācis confirmed that national communist policies were reversed even before the purge began with the repeal of residency restrictions.¹⁰⁷⁷ This law was officially cancelled on 15th July; the week after the purge commenced.¹⁰⁷⁸ This suggests that Pelše exploited the national communists' paralysis after the episode at the airport on 13th June to begin dismantling national communist initiatives even before he emerged victorious from the struggle.

Khrushchev wanted Kalnbērziņš to explain how the nationalist affair had been allowed to happen. Kalnbērziņš admitted his failings.

I'm very guilty personally, more than other comrades. I depended on them to correct me in proper time. I have not found an excuse to explain why we failed in national policy... What I should do next? I think I can implement the Party line and can meet [your] demands. But I failed to justify the Party's hopes.

Therefore, I deserve the most severe punishment of the Party.¹⁰⁷⁹

¹⁰⁷⁴ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 357.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 88.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 373.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁰⁷⁸ LVA f.270, apr.1-s, l.1253, lp.45-66, 97-113.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 371.

Kalnbērziņš was a spent force. He tried to shift the blame to the national communists, stating that everything was fine before 1956. He blamed Berklavs and Krūmiņš for misleading him: ‘The national problem in Latvia is not solved. They came to my office and started to step on us old people, to press us about the fact that Latvian is not widely spoken and that few Latvians are promoted’. Khrushchev was unsympathetic, ‘It’s your fault you let the young people go crazy, he retorted’.¹⁰⁸⁰ Finally, Kalnbērziņš suggested purging the national communists and recommended that Russians fill their positions.

My mistake was that I didn’t realise the anti-Party nature of the subject. I realised that only after your criticism while you were leaving Riga. I realised where that was going and what it could lead to. After this discussion, I think it is necessary to remove the unstable ones, give them lower positions and let them grow up. It is necessary to introduce some strength into the bureau, Russian comrades in particular, and we have the staff. They used to work in the CC. We have Comrade Litvinov.¹⁰⁸¹

Krūmiņš explains that ‘this subterfuge did not help’, and Kalnbērziņš’s penitence ‘only threw branches onto the fire’, presumably because it emphasised his own inadequacies.¹⁰⁸²

On the subject of language, Khrushchev criticised Kalnbērziņš, as he did throughout the meeting. During Khrushchev’s visit, they stopped at a factory where Kalnbērziņš made a speech in Russian. At the Presidium, Khrushchev told Kalnbērziņš that he should have spoken in Latvian. Khrushchev displayed a more conciliatory attitude towards the language question at this meeting. ‘I believe that for you Latvian is the official language’, he said. Krūmiņš joined the attack on Kalnbērziņš by mentioning the pervasive rumours that Kalnbērziņš would soon be retiring. Krūmiņš said ‘Kalnbērziņš won’t work for long because he’s old and young ones have to come. I heard that many times’.¹⁰⁸³ Khrushchev then decided Kalnbērziņš’s fate.

Kalnbērziņš is the guiltiest... He’s an absolutely flawless communist. [But] he is not the core of the leadership. I thought that, [but] maybe not now,

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid., 372, 377.

¹⁰⁸¹ Ibid., 373. At the height of his power, Berklavs had a freer hand to remove opposition, particularly Russians. One such official was Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman for Construction Pavel Litvinov. In July 1958, he was removed from his position, which he had held since April 1952.

¹⁰⁸² Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 88.

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid., 376, 378.

Kalnbērziņš should be relieved of his duties. He cannot be a Secretary because nowadays another approach is required... Frankly, there is no real First Secretary in Latvia now. Kalnbērziņš is not a Secretary, he does not organise people and he does not try to do this.¹⁰⁸⁴

Kalnbērziņš made no objections. Though Khrushchev intended to use Kalnbērziņš as the scapegoat, Khrushchev did not want Kalnbērziņš to be retired in disgrace. This contradicts Prigge's assertion that 'Khrushchev had nothing but contempt for Kalnbērziņš'.¹⁰⁸⁵ Khrushchev valued Kalnbērziņš, calling him 'brother' and repeatedly asking if he was offended. 'In my opinion' Khrushchev said, 'Kalnbērziņš is and always has been perfect. The matter of his mistakes is not ideological but because of his age. However, we believe that Kalnbērziņš is worthy of our support'.¹⁰⁸⁶ After the meeting, Khrushchev instructed Kalnbērziņš to 'work quietly, correct your position, but consider everything that was said'.¹⁰⁸⁷ Khrushchev did not want to replace Kalnbērziņš until the dust settled over the affair, which is why Kalnbērziņš kept his position for another five months. Ultimately, Kalnbērziņš received Ozoliņš's position as Presidium Chairman exactly as the 22nd June Presidium protocol recommended. He also retained his CPSU CC Presidium candidate membership until October 1961 and his seat on the Latvian bureau until 1970.

Lācis also admitted his guilt. 'I'm ready to take any punishment inflicted on me,' he said. 'I will consider it the right one. I will meet expectations and will not make mistakes again'. In a rambling and contradictory statement, Ozoliņš timidly attempted to pretend all was well.

Ozoliņš: 'I must say that there is no national question in Latvia and there is no national question among the people'.

Khrushchev: 'That's incorrect, there certainly is'.

Ozoliņš: 'There is one among some groups at the top. Among the general public there is no such problem like there is in the leadership. One cannot say there is a national question in the factories. Some of the population have

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid., 380-81.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 218.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Fursenko, *Arkhiy Kremlia*, 371, 381-82.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 91.

nationalist moods and our biggest flaw is that it we supported them with silence. That's our political blindness but we can cure the blindness and become sighted. We should get what we deserve for our mistakes, the bureau must be reorganised... Will we be able to fix the situation? Yes. If we can't then it's necessary to find people who will'.¹⁰⁸⁸

Ozoliņš believed a purge was unavoidable. In light of Khrushchev's statements about the elderly Kalnbērziņš, Ozoliņš intended to use this opportunity to prove to Khrushchev that he was trustworthy and capable.

When it was Krūmiņš's turn, he justified the leadership's policies, stating Latvian youth were fluent in Russian and at MGU they tested better in Russian than those from other republics. He explained that without knowing Latvian it was impossible to build Soviet power in Latvia. According to Krūmiņš, Khrushchev appeared to accept this and his attitude suddenly changed. Krūmiņš rationally explained the Latvian perspective: that the root of the affair was the language question. Krūmiņš insisted his words made sense because in his previous visits to Latvia, Khrushchev 'did not find manifestations of "bourgeois nationalism"'.¹⁰⁸⁹ Afterwards, Khrushchev pronounced his judgement:

[Berklavs] was in the Komsomol, he's a good man. Now he repents. He's not an enemy... He snapped at me [at the airport] and said 'I was in the underground, I looked death in the eye'. You [Kalnbērziņš and Lācis] are to blame for giving your young people the opportunity to go crazy. I do not consider him an enemy. We have to heal, and not destroy... The Latvians themselves need to find "home remedies" as the treatment. I'm against arbitrary punishment. We can return them [to Latvia] to strengthen the Party's position. If you fight [against us], then we would not stop before dissolving the Latvian Communist Party... No one thinks, [however], that should be done; it would be

¹⁰⁸⁸ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremliā*, 375, 378-79.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 88; Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 135.

foolish to exaggerate the power of our enemies. I think that the Latvians themselves can cope with this situation and straighten it out.¹⁰⁹⁰

Mukhitdinov agreed, and expressed the opinion that the Latvians could correct the situation themselves and take the right decisions.¹⁰⁹¹ Krūmiņš probably overstates his part in this decision, but it appears Khrushchev rethought his position: he returned to his initial understanding of the processes in Latvia: as acceptable *korenizatsiia*, not nationalism, though his interpretation was malleable. In any case, the change in Khrushchev's mood was palpable. During the subsequent break, some Presidium members joined Krūmiņš now that he was no longer a pariah. Krūmiņš saw that Khrushchev stood 'in the doorway and watched our circle with apparent approval'.¹⁰⁹²

After the break, Khrushchev recalled his visit to Latvia in a wholly different light. '[On the last day] I was in Riga', he said, 'I felt the urge to dismiss left and right and then I flew to Moscow, I had a think, I calmed down'.¹⁰⁹³ Khrushchev mentioned his exchange with Berklavs at the airport. 'I gave him a healthy scolding', he explained, 'but later on the plane I thought - you know, this guy is straightforward and honest... but stubborn as a bull'.¹⁰⁹⁴ Reflecting the more relaxed atmosphere and illustrating his confidence and trust in the Latvians, Khrushchev said that the result of the meeting was that they had emerged 'from the sauna clean, and with our pores open to breathe normally'.¹⁰⁹⁵ Khrushchev's initial irritation faded and he decided against dismissing Berklavs. It is noteworthy that Suslov was absent for this meeting. He was on a trip to France.¹⁰⁹⁶ The other Presidium members were Khrushchev's clients and held no particular animosity towards the national communists. Had Suslov been at the table, we can surmise that it would have been more difficult for the Latvians to appease Khrushchev.

Khrushchev had nonetheless decided on a new First Secretary, according to the 22nd June protocol. He wanted to probe the others' reaction to Pelše's potential candidacy.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Fursenko, *Arkhiy Kremlia*, 377.

¹⁰⁹¹ Mukhitdinov, '1959 god v Latvii', 90.

¹⁰⁹² Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 88.

¹⁰⁹³ Fursenko, *Arkhiy Kremlia*, 382.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 88.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Fursenko, *Arkhiy Kremlia*, 382.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Petroff, *Red Eminence*, 118.

We must think about the First Secretary. There are some worthy cadres among the Latvians. But not now. They [referring to Suslov's recommendation] told me about Pelše. I don't know him personally. If he's really good then we can appoint him. I have been told he's a flawless man; he has always taken a principled position. But you need to think about this yourselves.¹⁰⁹⁷

None of the others responded, so Khrushchev concluded the meeting, reiterating his decision.

Khrushchev: 'Maybe no dismissals are necessary and the whole leadership can remain the same. Let the people who have made mistakes take part in fixing them'.

Anastas Mikoian: 'And if they do not fix things, we will dismiss them'.

Khrushchev: 'Yes. These people are the best of the best Latvian cadres. I think this will be the better way'.

Voices: 'Right'.

Khrushchev: 'Enemies abroad could make use of a purge so it should not be done... We would humiliate ourselves if we show that we have let this situation happen in Latvia. We should not give our enemies a gift with speeches about some crisis and problems in national policy... We should fix things by bringing other nationalities into the leadership. So I think we should let the Latvians decide for themselves'.¹⁰⁹⁸

Here Khrushchev again emphasised his preoccupation with preventing the affair from becoming public because it could be exploited in the West.

Subsequently, as First Secretary, Pelše did as Khrushchev suggested and by February 1960, two more Russians were on the Latvian bureau. According to Prigge, Khrushchev's decision to retain Berklavs and the national communists was a practical decision. 'Ignoring the obvious nationalism of the Berklavs faction', Khrushchev emphasised his desire to retain 'these dynamic communists'. Prigge is correct in that Khrushchev wished to preserve this young,

¹⁰⁹⁷ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremli*, 381.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 380-82.

energetic generation.¹⁰⁹⁹ Khrushchev desperately needed younger cadres. In 1940, 57% of CPSU CC secretaries were under 35 but in 1959, only 13.7% were under 40.¹¹⁰⁰ During the meeting, Khrushchev explained ‘these people are young. If we throw them out now, we will harm them’.¹¹⁰¹

Both Krūmiņš and Mukhitdinov cite the Presidium’s resolution as evidence that a purge was not forthcoming. There was not a single sentence referring to nationalism, no order to swiftly organise a plenum for the following week; only one instruction ‘to entrust the Latvian CC, taking into account the views expressed at the Presidium, to make necessary corrective measures in their work’.¹¹⁰² Mukhitdinov agrees that ‘the Presidium made no decision to intervene, which showed great confidence in the Latvian Party’. Mukhitdinov insists there was no intention within the Presidium to intervene because all letters and complaints to Moscow were supposedly transferred to the LCP CC, though few survive in the Latvian archives.¹¹⁰³ It is plausible that most were removed under Pelše’s instructions because many of the authors were his associates in the military and Party using pseudonyms. In light of the Presidium meeting, Krūmiņš was convinced that Khrushchev did not order the purge, because ‘after all, almost every summer Khrushchev holidayed in Latvia, how could he miss these supposed “nationalist tendencies?”’¹¹⁰⁴ In his memoirs, Krūmiņš remarked that Khrushchev could not have imagined that within two days of the Presidium meeting, the real ‘hunt for wreckers’ would begin.¹¹⁰⁵ Pelše used the free hand the Latvians were granted to organise a plenum to oust Berklavs.

When Latvia’s leaders returned to Riga, they assumed that Khrushchev’s decision not to purge the national communists would end the affair, so long as they brought their Party into line. Yet, the outcome of the Presidium meeting was far from certain. Regardless, Pelše had begun plans to purge Berklavs three weeks previously, following the airport incident. Krūmiņš recalled when he returned from Moscow Pelše came unexpectedly to his dacha that evening, wanting to know the details of the meeting. According to Krūmiņš, Pelše had already written

¹⁰⁹⁹ Prigge, ‘Latvian purges’, 218-19, 227.

¹¹⁰⁰ Oleg Khlevniuk, ‘Sistema Tsent-Regiony v 1930-1950-e gody: Predposylki politizatsii nomenklatury’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 44 (2003), 265.

¹¹⁰¹ Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremli*, 380.

¹¹⁰² Fursenko, *Arkhivy Kremli*, 1056, fn.2; Krūmiņš, ‘Ruki razviazany’, 2.

¹¹⁰³ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 91.

¹¹⁰⁴ Krūmiņš, ‘Ruki razviazany’, 2.

¹¹⁰⁵ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 88.

the report to be delivered on 4th July by Kalnbērziņš, which denounced Berklavs and announced a plenum to remove him.¹¹⁰⁶ Pelše wanted to know the general tenor in Moscow. Krūmiņš told him that the meeting ‘started out poorly but was better by the end’. Pelše then disingenuously repeated some words Krūmiņš said earlier: ‘Don’t worry, these are just a few Russians who are angry. You know - they’re like Spanish bulls, they only see the red kerchief - nationalism’. Pelše continued his preparations, and a few days later, as Krūmiņš put it, ‘diligently played the role of furious internationalist’ at the plenum.¹¹⁰⁷

5.4 The Presidium in Deadlock

It appears that after returning to Latvia, Kalnbērziņš concluded he no longer had the leadership’s confidence and therefore could not solve Latvia’s problems and unify the bureau. He informed Frol Kozlov, CPSU CC Secretary for Cadres. There was a final Presidium meeting on the subject on 2nd or 3rd July. This was the Presidium’s sixth meeting about Latvia between 8th June and 4th July. Khrushchev wanted a further discussion about Kalnbērziņš’s replacement, although the meetings on 22nd June and 1st July indicated Pelše was the preordained candidate. Mukhitdinov supported Krūmiņš and suggested his candidacy at the meeting. Privately, Khrushchev appears to have preferred Krūmiņš. Mukhitdinov described his ‘good impression of the Second Secretary. He has ideas on how to improve the situation; he is a respected comrade; he acted with restraint and consideration [during the crisis]. Krūmiņš even praised Berklavs: he says, he was an able Komsomol worker, he made a mistake and must now correct it’.¹¹⁰⁸

In Soviet politics, purges rarely offered the opportunity of survival, there were only victors and vanquished. Prigge notes that ‘Krūmiņš had always been, at least publicly, more moderate and appealing to Moscow; thus, he abandoned his friend because he probably hoped (or was told by the Pelše faction) that in doing so, his own position would remain secure, and the purge would be limited’.¹¹⁰⁹ Yet, according to Mukhitdinov, there was a distinct possibility that Krūmiņš could have survived and emerged victorious because he was Khrushchev’s

¹¹⁰⁶ Krūmiņš and Vallis, ‘Arvīds Janovič’, 11.

¹¹⁰⁷ Krūmiņš, ‘Dolgaia doroga’, 88-89.

¹¹⁰⁸ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 91.

¹¹⁰⁹ Prigge, ‘Strange Death’, 84.

apparent preference. Perhaps he was too tainted by national communism to keep his position, and Pelše possessed more powerful friends than Mukhitdinov. At the Presidium meeting on 2nd or 3rd July, Suslov recommended Pelše because he was ‘the most active in the leadership’. Suslov highlighted Pelše’s role in providing information to, and discussing critical issues with, the investigation team. The Presidium meeting concluded with a decision ‘to study this question, but not to force it; to let comrades in Latvia decide’.¹¹¹⁰

This was the third Presidium meeting in five days related to this issue. It demonstrates the tug-of-war between Khrushchev and Suslov over the Latvian leadership. Furthermore, it shows Khrushchev unwillingly became embroiled in this internal conflict between different Latvian factions. The Presidium was deadlocked over a course of action, caught in a cycle in which the Latvian bureau repeatedly deferred to the Presidium, which attempted to delegate the decision to the Latvians. Ultimately, the Presidium thrust the decision back to the Latvian bureau in early July. The standoff within the Presidium broadcast contradictory signals. Sergei Kruk found that this allowed the Latvian leadership to decide ‘their own internal struggle for the favour of the “King”. Pelše seemed able to interpret what was happening in his favour’.¹¹¹¹ Pelše worked diligently throughout June to engineer support for Berklavs’s removal. From 21st June, the Latvian bureau was paralysed. Many leaders were in Moscow and Berklavs was resigned to his fate. Pelše gambled everything on organising a plenum to criticise the national communists and Kalnbērziņš, relying on Suslov’s support in Moscow to champion his candidacy for First Secretary. This was a risky strategy that Khrushchev could have overruled at any time, hence Pelše’s nervousness when Mukhitdinov visited and when Krūmiņš returned from Moscow. Pelše succeeded because he broke the national communist alliance, sowing discord within the faction, which was under immense pressure from Moscow. This caused its disintegration as individuals attempted to save themselves. If they had presented a united opposition at the crucial 20th and 21st June meetings, focussing on Pelše’s culpability or refuting the charges instead of bickering, Pelše’s plans might have come to naught. Bleiere agrees that the national communists did not know how to interpret the signals from the 1st July Presidium

¹¹¹⁰ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 91.

¹¹¹¹ Round Table: ‘Nacionāļkomunisti 1959. gada’, 164.

meeting. They missed the opportunity to use Khrushchev's conciliatory tone and statement that the 'Latvians will be able to solve their own problems' using 'home remedies' as an argument, complacently assuming that was the end of the affair. Moreover, their failure to manipulate the issue of nationalism, allowed Pelše to seize the initiative using what Bleiere termed 'police tactics'.¹¹¹²

It is unclear whether Pelše specifically offered to spare individual national communists from dismissal or disgrace if they recanted, but if so it was a hollow promise. In any case, Kalnbērziņš's weakness was decisive. The affair broke him and forced the decision on the appointment of a future replacement *ahead* of the plenum, empowering Pelše. Moscow insisted on vetting First Secretaries. With Suslov angling for Pelše in the Presidium and the only other candidate, Krūmiņš, tainted by nationalist affiliation, Pelše's candidacy was assured and a wider purge of the 'nationalists' could be pursued. With authority in Riga effectively concentrated in Pelše's hands, he exploited the situation, mobilising his allies while the national communists descended into an acrimonious rabble. Thus, Pelše was able to swiftly arrange the plenum, filling the rostrum with his cronies.

5.5 The 4th July Latvian Bureau Meeting

On 4th July, the Latvian bureau met for the first time since 21st June. Pelše's aim was to have his commission report (which he created before the 1st July Presidium meeting) ratified. This would allow the 7th plenum to criticise the national communists. Critically, Khrushchev's leniency on 1st July did not translate into concrete orders, the decision was merely returned to the Latvians. At the meeting, Berklavs was completely abandoned and vociferously criticised by the other national communists. Bissenieks conceded that his vote in defence of Berklavs's 'Conversation from the heart' article was incorrect. He admitted that the registration law was discriminatory, but pointed out that it also prevented Latvians from registering. He tried to distance himself from Berklavs, claiming most of his policies were enacted when Berklavs was Riga *gorkom*

¹¹¹² Ibid., 165.

First Secretary and they had little contact. He concluded that he did not think he was alone in his opinions.¹¹¹³

The meeting was characterised by Krūmiņš's brief, yet radical reversal. Flushed with confidence in the belief that Khrushchev's decision was final and the national communists would be spared, he balanced his criticism of Berklavs. He maintained that he agreed with the residency restrictions in principle because it halted the population influx. He also agreed, however, that it caused ethnic problems. Both Krūmiņš and Berklavs reiterated Pelše's agreement to these measures in the bureau. What Krūmiņš failed to understand was that Khrushchev only ordered the Latvians to sort out their 'deficiencies' themselves. He made no personal intervention on behalf of the irredeemable Berklavs. The other bureau members rallied behind Pelše. Plūdonis and Miglinieks expressed their surprise at Krūmiņš volte-face.¹¹¹⁴

Saleev led the charge at this meeting. He claimed that the CPSU CC and Khrushchev agreed that 'Berklavs took an openly nationalistic line'. Krūmiņš challenged Saleev to explain this. He declined, replying 'it is written and we cannot change that. Now we go to the plenum and we have to go as a united front and present a united position', which is what Pelše required. Saleev criticised Krūmiņš for 'twisting' and 'softening' the commission report. Krūmiņš retorted that Saleev was 'scared of his own shadow'. Later, however, Krūmiņš recognised his precariousness and backed down, agreeing that Berklavs was out of line. Krūmiņš was in Moscow while Pelše's commission drafted the report proposing a plenum. He was anxious because Khrushchev had not intervened. 'I'm just surprised', he said dejectedly, 'how this can be after the meeting with Khrushchev'.¹¹¹⁵

In his defence at his final bureau meeting, Berklavs took issue with Pelše's report. Berklavs claimed he had not spoken against the Party line and that the language policies were not directed against any one particular group.¹¹¹⁶ With Krūmiņš's assent, the bureau discussed whose names should be included for criticism in the commission report and therefore, at the plenum. Saleev conceded that Bissenieks need not be included, but the bureau agreed to criticise

¹¹¹³ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.235. Stenogramma zasedaniia biuro TsK KPL, 4 iiulia 1959.

¹¹¹⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.243-44, 246.

¹¹¹⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.251, 253-54.

¹¹¹⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.237-39.

Pizāns and Pinksis. Finally, the members voted to adopt the commission report. Berklavs refused to vote, and because of the accusations in Pelše's commission report withdrew his resignation from 15th June in protest, saying he would 'take it back with pleasure'. The meeting concluded with bureau deciding to use Pelše's report to brief the *raikom* and *gorkom* secretaries, thus establishing it as the plenum's foundation.¹¹¹⁷ Pelše successfully ensured that the bureau resolved to correct the mistakes in Latvia according to the investigation team's report and deflected Krūmiņš's attempt to convince the bureau otherwise.

5.6 The 7th LCP CC Plenum, 7th-8th July 1959

The plenum on 7th-8th July represented the culmination of Pelše's efforts to discredit Berklavs. In effect, the plenum resembled a trial, and the national communists who recanted at 20th June bureau meeting acted as witnesses against Berklavs. The day before the plenum, the CC convened. The CC was briefed and, according to Berklavs, received instructions to 'be ready to energetically and ruthlessly combat any nationalist manifestations'.¹¹¹⁸ Berklavs described the plenum as following a 'thoroughly developed plan. A well-coordinated choir joined in my condemnation'.¹¹¹⁹ Pelše had quietly organised the plenum from around 20th June, once he was certain that Berklavs's position was untenable. He worked vigorously to find suitable speakers, though hasty open preparations only began around 4th July. Every aspect of the July plenum was stage-managed to isolate the national communists and prevent them from using the structures of power to save themselves. The plenum nominated Voss as Chairman of the editing commission that drafted the plenum's decision, and Saleev his deputy. Krūmiņš notes that this was unusual, as the Second Secretary normally drafted the plenum's decision.¹¹²⁰ Pelše further isolated Krūmiņš from the proceedings by declining to show him his keynote speech, which ignored protocol. Krūmiņš attests he was prevented from participating in organisational work for the plenum even though it was his duty as Second Secretary.¹¹²¹ At this stage, Pelše had not been confirmed as Kalnbērziņš's replacement. Therefore, by ensuring Krūmiņš received a stern

¹¹¹⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.257-59.

¹¹¹⁸ Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 133.

¹¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145, 149.

¹¹²⁰ Krūmiņš and Vallis, 'Arvīds Janovičs', 10.

¹¹²¹ Krūmiņš, 'Ruki razviazany', 7.

rebuke at the plenum, Pelše avoided taking responsibility for bureau decisions and sidelined his main rival.

Pelše decided to interpret the Presidium's decision that the Latvians correct their own affairs as necessitating Berklavs's political annihilation. To circumvent the Presidium's leniency, Pelše relied on the inspectors' report that he co-authored. This deliberately permitted a vague interpretation of the Presidium's decision. He presented the report to the plenum as evidence that the Presidium trusted the LCP to rectify its own mistakes. LSU Rector Jānis Yurgens insisted that Berklavs was the one who misinterpreted the Presidium decision.¹¹²² Pelše's strategy was to justify Berklavs's dismissal as the sacrifice designed to reassure Khrushchev and repentant national communists that no expanded purge was forthcoming. By focusing the plenum on denouncing and dismissing Berklavs (and not the larger corps of national communists), Pelše appeared to spare those who articulated their own and Berklavs's guilt. The plenum would establish, however, the link between Berklavs and the surviving, contrite national communists, which provided Pelše the opportunity to subsequently expand the purge.

Speakers at the plenum made for an odd composite. Of 28 speakers, eight were national communist bureau members, five of whom spoke against Berklavs. Two *raikom* secretaries (Pēteris Strautmanis and Bogdanov) spoke, while others were from Gosplan (Augusts Čulitis and Vitālijs Rubenis), the Public Utilities Ministry (Roberts Ķisis) and even pensioners from the Council of Ministers Party organisation (Jānis Ostrovs). Time at the rostrum was distributed between low-ranking anti-national communists who would be catapulted into the leadership void once the purges began. Pelše choreographed the plenum to publicly isolate the national communists. By stacking the roster with his allies, Pelše drowned out any national communist resistance.

Kalnbērziņš opened the plenum. Krūmiņš claims that Pelše wrote Kalnbērziņš's speech. While this is unsubstantiated, it bears mentioning that Kalnbērziņš's speech was a more detailed version of the investigation report. It contained the same statistics and methodically explained

¹¹²² 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 5 (1989), 99.

each national communist transgression in the same terminology as the report.¹¹²³ Kalnbērziņš began by lambasting national communist policies. He insinuated that the real goal of Berklavs's language law was to force out cadres of other nationalities, referencing the criterion that they did not know Latvian. Similarly, he claimed Riga's residency restrictions aimed to exclude non-Latvian residents of Latvia. He noted that the national communists forbade the phrase 'bourgeois nationalism' in Party documents and in print. Kalnbērziņš held the national communists accountable for ideological failures, despite ideology falling under Pelše's jurisdiction, implying that he hoped to heap these concerns upon the embattled national communists. Kalnbērziņš accused them of failing to rebuff émigré propaganda efforts in radio broadcasting and hostile literature, and paying insufficient attention to the Russians' exemplary role in the October Revolution and in liberating Latvia from Nazi occupation. Kalnbērziņš charged the national communists with having 'an addiction to the national question' at the expense of promoting friendship among peoples, Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism.¹¹²⁴

Kalnbērziņš provided a flimsy explanation of the bureau's failure to correct Berklavs's actions. Despite being fully aware of his 'nationalist policy', he said the bureau supported Berklavs because they held him in high regard.¹¹²⁵ Similarly, Lācis claimed that Berklavs's stubborn and abrupt personality helped him push through 'small' policies that went unnoticed.¹¹²⁶ Lācis excused his own actions by pointing to his extensive ailments and his absence for much of the period in the ceremonial position of Soviet of Nationalities Chairman in Moscow. Lācis, like Kalnbērziņš, struggled to explain how his deputy Berklavs created major policies at the bureau unchallenged. Until the crisis began in May 1959, both leaders favoured a neutral management style, remaining above the struggle between the Berklavs and Pelše factions. With neutrality no longer possible, at the July plenum, Lācis finally withdrew his support for an extra year of schooling in Latvia and threw in his lot with the Pelše faction.¹¹²⁷

¹¹²³ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 133.

¹¹²⁴ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.8, 18-19.

¹¹²⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.19.

¹¹²⁶ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.28.

¹¹²⁷ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.28.

The July plenum symbolised the shift in power that was to come. Once the dust settled, it was apparent that Pelše had taken the reins and would create and shape an entirely new generation of leaders for Latvia. After the 1st July Presidium meeting, Kalnbērziņš recognised he would be replaced once the crisis subsided. Accepting his fate, he declared that he ‘deserved the most severe punishment for such a liberal attitude towards the wrong formulation of questions’.¹¹²⁸ Though Lācis’s fate was not decided at the 1st July Presidium, the 22nd June Presidium protocol acknowledged he was infirm. At the July plenum, similar to Kalnbērziņš, Lācis admitted that the day of his retirement had likely come.

Even Pelše’s bureau wing, including Miglinieks (who had joined Pelše’s cause) and Saleev, received a mild reproach from Kalnbērziņš. They primarily held the correct position, but did not act against the majority decision.¹¹²⁹ Certainly, Pelše and his allies adopted a wait-and-see attitude during the phase of national communist bureau control; in this, they were little different from neutral members criticised for passivity. There is an explanation for Pelše’s inaction. In his speech, Pelše accepted Kalnbērziņš’s criticism and admitted that as *Agitprop* Secretary he had not fought nationalism effectively. Yet, Pelše still triumphantly denounced Berklavs as the ‘standard bearer of nationalism’ to shouts from the audience of ‘right! That’s right!’¹¹³⁰ With Berklavs’s defeat assured, Pelše was able to direct criticism towards Kalnbērziņš. He began to do this at the 20th June meeting while manoeuvring himself to take Kalnbērziņš’s position. Pelše ridiculed Kalnbērziņš’s leadership style, describing him as kowtowing to the hardliners and the national communists for ‘peace at any cost’.¹¹³¹ It was clear to the Party that Pelše had emerged victorious from the internecine struggle. Even Ķīsis, who was no friend of Pelše’s, recognised this and denounced the national communists, performing a volte-face from his speech in 1953 (in which he condemned the repression of Latvian culture.) This ensured there would be no general support for the national communists from the CC.¹¹³²

Krūmiņš, Nikonov, Bissenieks, Pizāns and Ozoliņš likewise recognised the inevitable. The plenum was characterised by the denunciation of Berklavs not by his enemies but by his

¹¹²⁸ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.20.

¹¹²⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.20.

¹¹³⁰ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.53.

¹¹³¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.51.

¹¹³² Krūmiņš and Vallis, ‘Arvīds Janovičs’, 11.

friends. At the 20th June meeting, these men had abandoned Berklavs in a closed bureau session. At the July plenum, they were required to apologise for their actions and distance themselves from Berklavs in front of the wider Party leadership. Krūmiņš denounced the language law and apologised for his errors in cadres policy, especially his support for native cadres' promotion at the October 1958 plenum. Typically, he attempted to justify himself. He did not admit complete blame and added that no bureau member ever challenged his decisions. Krūmiņš and the other repentant national communists repeated their disparaging remarks from the 20th June meeting in an attempt to further distance themselves from Berklavs. Interestingly, most speakers accepted Krūmiņš's repentance and agreed that if he permanently broke ties with Berklavs, he could correct his mistakes. Yet, seven months later, despite his submission, Pelše stripped Krūmiņš of his post and bureau seat.

The plenum's choreographed nature is evident from the pattern followed by most speakers. They criticised penitent national communists for being too close to Berklavs but concluding their speeches, stated that those individuals could fix their errors. Likewise, repentant national communists went through the motions of admitting to mistakes. Sometimes they rejected particular criticism but always focused the blame on Berklavs, ultimately and promised that they and the Party could correct themselves. Hardliners and apologetic national communists alike attacked Kalnbērziņš for failing to prevent the crisis. Generally, the national communists concluded their speeches by proclaiming that they were 'all equally guilty', spreading culpability evenly across the leadership. Notably, national communists who repented and included criticism of Berklavs in their speeches received applause. The only speeches not applauded at the plenum were by Bissenieks, Pinksis, Pizāns and Straujums, who were singled out for particular criticism alongside Berklavs. Berklavs was angered by the charges against him and decided that rather than resign quietly he would use this opportunity to address the CC for a final time.

Berklavs, however, was alone. The plenum symbolised his gradual isolation, beginning with his confrontation with Khrushchev at the airport and completed at the July plenum. Not a single speaker defended Berklavs's actions. Only Pinksis and Straujums remained personally loyal to Berklavs. They avoided rebuking him, although they admitted there had been general

mistakes in national communist policies. At the plenum's conclusion, Pinksis pleaded ignorance about the residency law and restrictions on university attendance in an attempt to save himself.¹¹³³ Nevertheless, Pelše did not have *carte blanche* at the plenum. Krūmiņš and Nikonov, as well as ordinary speakers who reproached Berklavs also made derisory comments about Pelše. Bissenieks blamed Berklavs *and* Pelše for the situation. He said Berklavs had split the Party along ethnic lines, but accused Pelše of failing in his position as *Agitprop* Secretary.¹¹³⁴ Most of the complaints about Pelše focussed on his passivity while the bureau embarked on a national communist agenda. The enmity Berklavs received from friend and foe alike reached a fever pitch at the plenum. Pigalev's presence underscored the Moscow faction's supervision. Delivering the keynote address, Pigalev declared the speakers' accusations correct. He did not descend into the fratricidal struggle, but represented the centre's (though not Khrushchev's) encouragement for the CC to remove Berklavs.

The plenum's resolution formally revoked all national communist legislation. It dismissed the June 1953 plenum decisions as 'imposed by Beria'. The decision repealed the language law in favour of the Leninist principle of voluntarism in language learning. The plenum reversed Krūmiņš's explicitly nativist cadres policy. It reverted to the original Seven-Year Plan predating the national communists' modifications. The resolution instructed enterprises to hire without discrimination and ordered the correction of ideological errors with a focus on promoting proletarian internationalism.¹¹³⁵

At this stage, most national communists had sufficiently publicly repented to avoid the purge's first wave. The plenary decision included formal rebukes and punishments for some leaders. The decision warned Bissenieks to correct his work, accusing him of acting unscrupulously. All national communists were charged with actively supporting Berklavs's incorrect actions. Pizāns received a formal warning for the 'manifestation of instability on many politically sensitive issues and publishing ideologically perverse materials in *Cīņa*'.¹¹³⁶ Pinksis was blamed for the 'manifestation of instability on the Party's national policy and a politically

¹¹³³ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 95.

¹¹³⁴ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 4 (1989), 81.

¹¹³⁵ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.48a, lp.25-27.

¹¹³⁶ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.3753, lp.19. Pavel Aleksevich Pizāns personnel file.

incorrect speech' on 20th June. Pinksis lost his bureau candidacy. Besides Berklavs, he was the only person to lose his seat at the plenum.¹¹³⁷ The plenum decision also asked the bureau to consider sacking Dzērve, Cherkovsky, Kalpiņš and Pinksis because of their nationalist tendencies.¹¹³⁸ This set the stage for their future dismissal.

Pelše acknowledged Krūmiņš's split with Berklavs, and this saved him from reprimand in the plenary decision.¹¹³⁹ After several audience members spoke out against the formal rebukes of other leaders, none were included in the original decision.¹¹⁴⁰ Yet, subsequent amendments to the resolution included minor criticism of Straujums, Nikonov, Krūmiņš, Ozoliņš, Lācis and Kalnbērziņš. The amended resolution deemed Straujums responsible for perverting Leninist nationality policy in the Riga *gorkom* and breaching Party principles in cadres selection and placement. Ozoliņš and Lācis, because of their association with the national communists, received reprimands for their silence and passive behaviour on the bureau.¹¹⁴¹ These amendments appeared as part of Pelše's strategy to expose the mistakes of those who avoided persecution in the original resolution. Between November 1959 and February 1960, each of these men lost their bureau seats and Kalnbērziņš was demoted.

Berklavs was the plenum's ultimate casualty. A unanimous vote stripped him of his Deputy Chairmanship and bureau seat. Ķīsis and Pelše favoured expelling him from the Party altogether. The plenary decision concluded that 'if Berklavs does not change his anti-party views then his Party affiliation would be revisited'.¹¹⁴² With Berklavs's removal, the purge could begin in earnest. According to Krūmiņš, the plenum's consequences were so far-reaching that they accounted for the upheavals of the late 1980s because the plenum heralded three more decades of forced industrialisation, Slavic migration and Latvian linguistic and cultural marginalisation.¹¹⁴³ The July plenum represented the abrogation of the 20th CPSU Congress decisions, the end of the Latvian Thaw, and signalled the early onset of Brezhnevite conservatism in Latvia.

¹¹³⁷ LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.3768, lp.46.

¹¹³⁸ 'Stenogramma 7-ia plenuma', 6 (1989), 96.

¹¹³⁹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.15, lp.57.

¹¹⁴⁰ 'Stenogramma 7th plenuma', 6 (1989), 96.

¹¹⁴¹ LVA-PA f.101, apr.22, l.54, lp.24, 27. 'O ser'eznykh nedostatkakh i oshibkakh v rabote s kadrami i v provedenii natsional'noi politiki v respublike'.

¹¹⁴² LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2, l.74, lp.36. Eduards Karlovich Berklavs personnel file.

¹¹⁴³ Krūmiņš, 'Tas drūmais', 131.

5.7 Conclusion

The Soviet military played an important role in ousting Berklavs. This was eclipsed, however, by Pelše's seizure of the initiative following Khrushchev's visit and unilateral organisation of the July plenum based on his interpretation of the signals emanating from Moscow. General Demin, likely chosen because of his association with Khrushchev, stoked the flames as a member of the anti-Berklavs group that visited Khrushchev the night before the Premier left Riga. The Soviet military carried great influence in the post-war USSR and national communist policies rankled many BMD generals. Berklavs told Prigge he believed that Khrushchev had to consider the Russian military in the republics.¹¹⁴⁴ Non-Latvians in the Soviet military stationed in Riga perceived the language and immigration laws as an affront that hampered their privileges. He stepped on the toes of military personnel. For example, Admiral Arsenii Golovko recalled that Berklavs told him 'We cannot allow a soldier's boots to trample on Riga'.¹¹⁴⁵ The Pelše faction used these comments to turn moderate officers like General Batov against the national communists. King concurs with this change of heart after 20th June bureau meeting, and reveals that Batov reportedly felt that 'by July 1959 anti-Russian sentiment in Latvia was endangering Soviet authority there'.¹¹⁴⁶ Consequently, Berklavs was widely despised within the BMD.

The purge's circumstances were shrouded in mystery. Even in 1960 within the Presidium, USSR Culture Minister Yekaterina Furtseva told Krūmiņš 'what actually happened in Latvia we have yet to grasp'.¹¹⁴⁷ In his 1990 interview, Mukhitdinov dismissed the notion that the purge of the national communists originated in Moscow. Instead, he claimed the Latvian leadership pursued the purge of its own accord, though he admitted it was surprising. Mukhitdinov could not have known how the Shelepin-Suslov faction influenced events. Instead, Pelše was responsible for the purge's organisation, giving the appearance that the conflict was internally resolved without intervention from Moscow. Yet, Pigalev played a key role in personally

¹¹⁴⁴ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 225.

¹¹⁴⁵ LVA-PA f.100, apr.22, l.48a, l.181.

¹¹⁴⁶ King, *Economic Policies*, 183.

¹¹⁴⁷ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 89.

directing the course of the investigation and the plenum within Latvia.¹¹⁴⁸ Unaware of these factors, into his old age Berklavs remained convinced that Khrushchev personally dismissed him. Berklavs stated: ‘In 1959, after Khrushchev read these letters of accusation, not checking any facts, he made conclusions as to whether I was honest or an enemy. He sent his people, decided I was an enemy, and that I should be deported from the republic’.¹¹⁴⁹ Pelše’s actions demonstrate that he preferred central arbitration to solve the matter. Deadlock within the Presidium, however, coupled with Khrushchev’s unwillingness to personally intervene, prevented Suslov and Shelepin from taking decisive action against the national communists. Therefore, it appears Pelše was reacting to events with no grand plan apart from ringing alarm bells about nationalism, which would account for his nervousness throughout June.

Though concerned about the potential problems Berklavs’s removal might create, ultimately Khrushchev did not expend political capital to save the irredeemable Berklavs. Unlike Imre Nagy in Hungary in 1956, Berklavs’s removal did not bring the Latvian people out onto the streets demanding his reinstatement. Publicly, the only mention of Berklavs’s removal was a three-line notice that he was relieved of his duties as of 15th July in *Sovetskaia Latvija* and *Cīņa*.¹¹⁵⁰ Prigge concludes that ‘Khrushchev could do little to save Berklavs once the process began’ and questions the extent of his power over the republics. While Prigge correctly challenges Latvian historiography and the notion of a monolithic Moscow, my research indicates that Khrushchev gave Berklavs numerous chances to repent, and when he repeatedly refused to do so, there was little more Khrushchev could do.¹¹⁵¹ Therefore, direct intervention in July 1959 was out of the question. Both Prigge and Krūmiņš assert that Khrushchev’s failure to prevent a purge in July 1959 marked the beginning of his own downfall, but this is too bold.¹¹⁵² Khrushchev did not rely on Latvia’s national communists for support in the way he relied on his Ukrainian powerbase. Generally considered the zenith of Khrushchev’s power after the defeat of the Anti-Party group, the period between 1959 and 1961 was the high point in Khrushchev’s tenure before the Cuban Missile Crisis and the disastrous bifurcation of the Party apparatus in

¹¹⁴⁸ Mukhitdinov, ‘1959 god v Latvii’, 93 fn.11.

¹¹⁴⁹ Prigge, ‘Latvian purges’, 218.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Cīņa*, 16th July 1959, 3.

¹¹⁵¹ Prigge, ‘Latvian purges’, 228; Prigge, ‘Strange Death’, 89.

¹¹⁵² Krūmiņš, ‘Salna pavasarī’, 5; Prigge, ‘Strange Death’, 93.

1962. It was not a question of Khrushchev's weakness and inability to help Berklavs; rather, Berklavs's intransigent refusal to recant left no other option than his removal.

Historians should interpret the purge of the national communists as the Stalinist reaction (both inside and outside Latvia) to the 20th Party Congress. The national communists capitalised on the atmosphere fostered by the Congress to facilitate their agenda, but the Anti-Party group's defeat in 1957 threatened Stalinists everywhere by ending the balance of power in Moscow, forcing them into a battle for survival.¹¹⁵³ In conversation with Khrushchev, Krūmiņš recalled the Soviet leader reflecting on his perplexing situation: 'So you remember the courage of the Twentieth Congress. But do you think it's easier for me now?' Krūmiņš explains that Khrushchev felt 'the Stalinists did not give up, and were only hiding'. Krūmiņš recognised the significance of this: 'I realised how dangerous this was for him, of course, but above all - for the country'.¹¹⁵⁴ In Latvia, the Berklavs faction was 'in constant conflict with the older generation of Stalinists as long as both held power'.¹¹⁵⁵ Thus, the end of de-Stalinisation in Latvia under Pelše was a precursor to the post-Khrushchev era and re-Stalinisation under Leonid Brezhnev.

¹¹⁵³ Apine and Zandmanis, 'Tas drūmais', 118.

¹¹⁵⁴ Krūmiņš, 'Ruki razvazany', 2.

¹¹⁵⁵ Prigge, 'Latvian purges', 215.

Conclusion

In Soviet Latvia between 1953 and 1959, nationalism coexisted uneasily with Soviet socialism. The fusion of the two, attempted by the national communists, proved to be impossible. National communism failed to bring about a rapprochement between the people and the Party. The population after 1953 were no longer hostile to Soviet rule by force of arms; after the failed Hungarian Uprising they realised that the Soviet Union would endure. They adopted a realistic attitude, cooperating with the authorities to a limited degree, but shunned enthusiastic participation in the Party and believed the system unreformable after the failure of national communism. Despite Prigge's assertions, public opinion in the USSR was not decisive as a catalyst for change.¹¹⁵⁶ After all, the Soviet Union under Khrushchev remained a one-party state.

The national communists did not succeed in creating a viable and enduring variant of socialism in Latvia that prioritised Latvian conditions, culture, traditions, language and economic characteristics. Though the national communists were committed to incorporating such an identity into the existing political structure of Khrushchev's USSR, after their early reforms, the nature of their programme led to conflict between incompatible Latvian and Soviet interests. The national communists' aim to redress the balance of centre-periphery relations was at the core of their resistance to central initiatives such as the education reform. They unleashed a nationalist programme that became too bold, and pushed beyond the ill-defined limits of Khrushchev's Thaw. This continued only until an alliance of those who had the most to lose under national communist policies coalesced and successfully pigeonholed the national communists as nationalists intent on a path of autarky and seclusion. This culminated in the purge that ended Latvian national communism by rooting out and removing its representatives across Latvian state and society.

After Berklavs's removal and the onset of the purge, national communist policies were swiftly reversed: Riga's residency and language laws were scrapped and native Latvians were

¹¹⁵⁶ Prigge, 'Power, Popular Opinion', 315.

barred from the leadership, in favour of Russian-Latvians and Russians. Berklavs recognised the failure of national communism, 13 years after his defeat, in the 1972 'Protest Letter', when he revealed the extent of Russification in Latvia.¹¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is still important to acknowledge that Latvian national communism briefly gained measurable traction and significantly contributed to de-Stalinisation in Latvia, and for this reason the national communists' opponents considered them a serious threat.

My thesis on Soviet Latvia offers two unique contributions to our understanding of Soviet politics in the 1950s. Firstly, I investigate the evolution, struggles and downfall of an identifiable faction concerned primarily with national interests inside the CPSU. I demonstrate how nationalism was a force for popular mobilisation in Khrushchev's USSR and how it briefly existed at the helm of a Soviet republic. In terms of adding to our understanding of Latvian history and the history of national communism, my argument provides fresh insight into the workings, structure and policies of this faction and evaluates the historiography on the subject in three languages. I also assess the impact of external events in Eastern Europe and Moscow to show how they shaped developments within the republic.

Secondly, I show how the national communists sought a renegotiation of centre-periphery relations throughout their period of influence upon Latvian politics. Centre-periphery relations in the 1950s were at their most fragile since the 1920s. I analyse how the centre-periphery relationship functioned and deteriorated in relation to Latvia. I demonstrate precisely what was, and what was not, permissible for the republics' leaderships in the Khrushchev era. Unlike the only other contemporary work on this topic, my thesis does not present a unilateral analysis of the relations between Moscow and Riga. Instead, it complements the examination of the national communists with an analysis of Moscow's reaction to national communism and its distinctive hesitation in how to respond to such a challenge. I provide a view from both inside and outside of Latvia. The detailed analysis of the power struggle between national communists and the conservative 'old guard' in the Latvian republic's leadership paralleled the struggle in the Kremlin, offering a case study in the processes of de-Stalinisation. Additionally, I explain how Khrushchev's mishandled reforms by either provoking the republics (for example the

¹¹⁵⁷ http://www.letton.ch/lvx_17com.htm.

education reform) or inadvertently transferring more powers than intended (as in the case of the *sovnarkhoz* reforms) and led to the rise of conservatives within the Soviet leadership, who purged the Latvian national communists, and eventually deposed Khrushchev himself.

i. Latvia's Baltic Neighbours

The Latvian experience of national communism, its causes and consequences, can inform our understanding of why other republics in the USSR did not have strong national communist movements. Latvia was extraordinary in that it had an organised reformist faction within its local Party, but it was not the first or last instance of national communism. Though Latvian historians are fond of highlighting the large number of Russians who arrived in Latvia, there was more pronounced and rapid post-war Slavic migration to other republics. In 1959, Latvia had the third highest percentage of Slavs living in the republic at 31%. Yet, Slavs in Kirghizia comprised 37%, almost outnumbering the Kirgiz; and in Kazakhstan, Slavs were the majority at 52.4%, dwarfing native Kazakhs at 30%.¹¹⁵⁸ Demographically, Latvia was not an exception, but it was politically. In this context, Latvia's comparison to its Baltic neighbours is relevant.

In 1931, Russian inhabitants in Lithuania constituted 2.4% of the population. By 1960, they totalled 8.5%. Yet, the balance of Lithuanian inhabitants decreased only minutely from 80.6% to 79%.¹¹⁵⁹ Lithuania had greater success in resisting Russian migration for several reasons. Firstly, within the Russian Empire, Riga's port and railway network made it an attractive area for industrialisation. In comparison, Lithuania remained an agrarian region.¹¹⁶⁰ For the same imperatives, the Soviets invested in Latvian industrial reconstruction, which required large labour inputs. In comparison to Latvia, Lithuania received just a fraction of migrant workers from Russia. Secondly, the Lithuanian fertility rate remained higher and family sizes larger than in Latvia, generating a sufficiently large surplus of rural labour.¹¹⁶¹ Thirdly, the Lithuanian leadership was not riven by intra-Party feuding as in Latvia. This is partially because

¹¹⁵⁸ Russian State Archive of the Economy (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki) hereafter RGAE f.1562, op.36, d.1566a, 'Raspredlenie naseleniia po natsional'nosti i rodnomy iazyku'.

¹¹⁵⁹ Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 119.

¹¹⁶⁰ Ole Norgaard and Lars Johannsen, *The Baltic States After Independence*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 38-39.

¹¹⁶¹ Kasekamp, *Baltic States*, 155.

the leadership was far more homogenous but also because of First Secretary Antanas Sniečkus, who saw himself as the defender of Lithuania's cultural and economic interests against some central policies.¹¹⁶² Sniečkus benefitted from these favourable historical and economic circumstances. The Lithuanian case supports the argument that migration to Latvia contained no clandestine motive in Moscow but was primarily a consequence of economic necessity; otherwise, recalcitrant Lithuania would have been a more imperative area to secure by colonisation than Latvia.

The leadership of Sniečkus is a major reason Lithuania avoided sharing Latvia's fate. Lithuania experienced considerable nationalist activity. The fiercest resistance during the armed insurrection in the Baltic between 1945 and 1953 was in Lithuania (this also discouraged Russian migration). Later, on the eve of the Latvian purge, at the Presidium meeting on 1st July 1959, Khrushchev remarked that 'Comrade Sniečkus has a situation which is not better than Latvia. And the situation in Estonia is not better as well'.¹¹⁶³ On several occasions, the Kremlin vented its frustrations and attempted to remove Sniečkus. Yet, Sniečkus endured. This was because the local apparatus was loyal to the titular Party over the CPSU. When Moscow's inspectors visited, the leadership displayed a united front and defended Sniečkus.¹¹⁶⁴ The Lithuanian leadership proved cohesive, unlike the national communists who fell apart under Moscow's sustained pressure. Yet, Sniečkus had a reputation for carrying out Moscow's orders to the letter. He supervised the burning of history books and was allegedly responsible for the destruction of a national monument in Kaunas.¹¹⁶⁵ Sniečkus also had powerful friends in Moscow. From his time on the Lithuanian *Orgburo*, Suslov was acquainted with Sniečkus and could vouch for him in the Presidium, unlike the national communists in Latvia, who Suslov

¹¹⁶² Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals*, (London: John Murray Publishers, 2000), 290-91.

¹¹⁶³ Fursenko, *Arkhiy Kremlia*, 357. During Khrushchev's retreat from nativisation in 1959, he criticised Sniečkus for dismissing non-Lithuanian officials who could only be replaced by indigenous cadres because knowledge of Lithuanian was a virtual prerequisite for government service. The national communists brought about a similar situation under their leadership but it was used against them to engineer the Latvian purge. Yet, in Lithuania only a few high-profile ministers and the rector of Vilnius University were sacrificed. Incredibly, Sniečkus was able to continue the policy and even resisted the new cadre exchange policy outlined in the 1961 Party Programme, Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 163.

¹¹⁶⁴ In July 1959, the Lithuanian leadership successfully challenged the claims of the investigation, Berklavs, *Zināt un neaizmirst*, 119.

¹¹⁶⁵ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 160.

deeply mistrusted.¹¹⁶⁶ As such, Sniečkus enjoyed Moscow's confidence, which the national communists never achieved. Therefore, he was permitted a degree of flexibility to pursue his increasingly independent policies.¹¹⁶⁷ This was similar to the situation in Estonia with its First Secretary Johannes Kābin (even though he was a so-called *Yestonian*, a Russian-Estonian).¹¹⁶⁸ The reasons that the Estonian and Lithuanian communist parties were better able to protect their republics' interests was because they were not dominated by Russians or Russified Balts who had spent the interwar period in the USSR, unlike their counterparts in Latvia. In 1959, Lithuanians constituted 55.7% of their Party, Estonians 47.5% of the Estonian Party, while Latvians comprised just 37.4% of the Latvian Party.¹¹⁶⁹ Krūmiņš comes to the same conclusion, arguing that after the national communists' removal, the Latvian Party slavishly attempted to please Moscow at the expense of national interests. 'After all, we did not have their Sniečkus who largely managed to defend the interests of his people. But our leaders - Pelše and Voss - took a conciliatory, opportunistic position', wrote Krūmiņš.¹¹⁷⁰ The differing composition of the Lithuanian and Estonian parties and their leaderships coupled with a greater willingness and ability to successfully balance national interests and the wishes of Moscow offers a stark contrast with the Latvian Party. For example, one only has to look at the top three Latvian leaders during the period covered by this thesis - the pliant Kalnbērziņš, the Russified and obsequious Pelše and the maverick Berklavs. Sniečkus and Kābin knew how to play all these roles at once.

ii. Consequences of the Latvian Purge

Though he did not support a purge in Latvia, the Latvian affair stretched the irascible Khrushchev's patience beyond its limit. He was convinced that his acquiescence was encouraging other republics to act independently and that the republics could not be trusted with the powers decentralised to them. An article in *Voprosy Filosofii* (Questions of Philosophy)

¹¹⁶⁶ Lieven, *Russian Empire*, 290-91.

¹¹⁶⁷ Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism*, 160.

¹¹⁶⁸ Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 149.

¹¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 360; See Appendix A, Table 4.

¹¹⁷⁰ Krūmiņš, 'Dolgaia doroga', 91.

from June 1963, after the Latvian purge's completion, listed three main elements discovered in recent years in a number of republics and sternly condemned by the Party as marking the causes of recent local resistance. These were: 'opposition to the expansion of the non-titular population; to the exchange of cadres; and to the voluntary principle in the study of national languages'.¹¹⁷¹ These transgressions were all applicable to Latvia. Over fears of spreading nationalism, Moscow decided to rein in the republics. In December 1958, First Secretary Sukhan Babaev was dismissed in Turkmenia. Limited purges, which swiftly removed high-ranking cadres, occurred in a string of republics, notably Azerbaijan in summer 1959; some ministers were removed in Lithuania in August 1959, in Kazakhstan in October 1959 and in Moldavia in September 1959 with Moldavian First Secretary Zinovie Serdiuk replaced by Ivan Bodiul in May 1961.¹¹⁷² This wave of dismissals and expulsions of leading Party functionaries continued in the republics with interruptions until 1961. In December 1960, Jacov Zarobian supplanted Suren Tovmasian in Armenia. The Uzbek leader Sobir Kamalov was sacked in March 1959 and his replacement Sharif Rashidov purged the Uzbek Party; in Kirghizia Turdakun Usubaliev replaced Iskhakh Razzakov in purges between 1959 and 1960; in April 1961, Tajik leader Tursun Uldzhabaev was dismissed. In all, ten republics were affected, including all six Muslim republics. The remaining non-Russian republics, Georgia and Estonia, had already suffered purges in the Mingrelian Affair of 1951-1952, and in 1950-1951 respectively; notably only the three Slavic Republics, Ukraine, Belorussia and the Russian Federation did not experience purges.

The other purges in the USSR between 1958 and 1961 were different to Latvia. In Latvia, the purge emanated from inside the republic and forced Moscow's approval not the other way around. That they were small, limited and upper echelon 'precision scalps' (whereas in Latvia the purge went far deeper) suggests that they originated in Moscow. My limited research on the other purges only allows me to determine that this was the case for Azerbaijan. If these purges were centrally manufactured, Swain argues that the success of the Latvian purge allowed Suslov to set the parameters for other purges in the run up to the 1961 Party

¹¹⁷¹ Conquest, *Russia After Khrushchev*, 207.

¹¹⁷² Prigge, 'Strange Death', 91.

Programme.¹¹⁷³ Yet, the purges began as early as December 1958. Therefore, it seems that the Thaw in the republics was already drawing to a close and the Latvian and Azerbaijani leaderships were swimming against the current and ultimately only hastened the end of Khrushchev's reforms by proving themselves to be disruptive in the eyes of reformers and conservatives alike. The purges demonstrated that the period of concessions was over and Moscow was reasserting central control to recentralise the country following the failure of decentralisation, evidenced by the transfer of an unsettling amount of decision-making control to the republics through the *sovnarkhoz* and resistance to the education reform.. How directly Khrushchev was involved is unclear and necessitates studies on these individual purges. The Latvian affair played a significant role in changing Khrushchev's attitude. As a consequence of these peripheral purges, Khrushchev lost the support he had cultivated in the national republics from 1956.¹¹⁷⁴ The Latvian purge also directly assisted the Moscow faction (the driving force in the purge of the Azerbaijani Communist Party and probably others) in their struggle against Khrushchev, demonstrating that his acquiescence in the republics permitted the growth of nationalism.

When the Thaw in nationalities policy ended, two of its architects in the Presidium lost their positions at the centre of power: Aleksei Kirichenko and Nuritdin Mukhitdinov. Both were associated with events in Latvia. Khrushchev's protégé, Kirichenko supported the national communists. Like the national communists, he was a beneficiary of Beria's nationality policy, becoming the indigenous First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party in 1953. In his speech to the 21st Party Congress in February 1959, he advocated self-government for the Soviet republics.¹¹⁷⁵ As the Presidium member responsible for cadres, he permitted Krūmiņš's October 1958 plenum on cadres policy, which emphasised the need for Latvian-speaking cadres and revived the June 1953 plenum decisions. It is plausible that Kirichenko's fall, beginning with the stripping of his duties in November 1959, was due at least in part to his support for the national communists. Conquest agrees that alleged softness on nationalism might explain

¹¹⁷³ In conversation with Geoffrey Swain, 6th November 2015.

¹¹⁷⁴ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 251-54.

¹¹⁷⁵ Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin*, 34.

Kirichenko's sudden removal in May 1960.¹¹⁷⁶ The loss of Khrushchev's heir presumptive within the Presidium weakened the Premier and made Suslov the effective Second Secretary. In the following years, Suslov established a trend of successfully removing Khrushchev's allies on the Presidium, increasing his isolation. Mukhitdinov was one of these casualties. Khrushchev's stalwart ally, he lost his responsibilities on the Presidium at the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961. It is possible this was connected with his failure to resolve the Latvian crisis peaceably. According to Smith, the Latvian purges contributed to a slowdown in the promotion of non-Russians in the central leadership after Kirichenko's dismissal.¹¹⁷⁷

iii. The 1961 Party Programme

The Party Programme adopted at the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961 was a comprehensive rebuff to local aspirations, especially those personified by the national communists. It represented diminishing tolerance in the centre towards localism. The Programme asserted that the Soviet republics would gradually dissolve: 'Full-scale Communist construction constitutes a new stage in the development of national relations in the USSR in which the nations will draw still closer together until complete unity is achieved'. The Programme specifically refuted initiatives that the national communists instituted in Latvia. It called for the acceptance of population shifts: 'The appearance of new industrial centres. The growth of transport increases the mobility of the population and promotes greater intercourse between the peoples of the Soviet Union. The boundaries between the Union Republics are increasingly losing their significance'. The Programme reversed previous policy on the importance of indigenous cadres, calling for 'the continuous exchange of trained personnel among nations. Manifestations of national aloofness in the education and employment of workers of different nationalities in the Soviet Republics are impermissible'. This implied the further denationalisation of local Party and State leaderships and a reaffirmation of the role of the Russians as reliable Soviet citizens at the apex of the Soviet system. Finally, the Programme reaffirmed the Party's commitment to the 'free development of the languages of the peoples of the USSR and the complete freedom for

¹¹⁷⁶ Conquest, *Russia After Khrushchev*, 210.

¹¹⁷⁷ Smith, *Red Nations*, 213-14.

every citizen of the USSR to speak and to bring up and educate his children, in any language'. This implied it was a citizens' right to decide whether or not to learn a language, the so-called 'voluntary principle'. The Programme also boldly asserted the place of the Russian language as 'the common medium of interaction and cooperation between all the peoples of the USSR'.¹¹⁷⁸ The Programme enshrined policies the Latvian national communists had struggled against. It seems likely that the shift in Moscow's relationship with the republics, evidenced by the new Programme, was influenced by events in Latvia. Although the centre was reasserting itself, the Programme sought to avoid outright provocations and toned down the threat posed to non-Russian languages. As Alexander Titov puts it, 'a shaky balance was maintained between the proclaimed ideal of a single internationalist culture in the distant future, a single Soviet people in the immediate future and the need to take into account the concerns of the non-Russian nationalities for the present'.¹¹⁷⁹

It is likely that the national communist debacle contributed towards the Presidium's decision to begin recentralisation of the economy in the 1960s. In May 1961, the country was divided into 19 large regions with coordinating councils for long-term planning and integrated economic development. The Western Economic Region was comprised of the Baltic Republics. Indirectly referring to the national communist episode, Voldemārs Leiņš, the Latvian CC Secretary for Industry explained the purpose of the new system as follows: 'The closer the interaction between republics and the greater the understanding of state tasks, the more successfully manifestations of localism and national egoism are overcome'.¹¹⁸⁰ Perhaps Moscow learned some lessons from the centre-periphery challenge posed by the national communists, implicitly recognising the new Party Programme as ideological bluster rather than something to be brought about through concrete policies. This was the wider impact of the experience of Latvian national communism on Soviet politics.

¹¹⁷⁸ Conquest, *Russia After Khrushchev*, 208-09.

¹¹⁷⁹ Alexander Titov, 'The 1961 Party Programme and the fate of Khrushchev's reforms', in Melanie Ilic and Jeremy Smith (eds.), *Soviet State and Society Under Khrushchev*, (Oxon: Routledge/BASEES, 2009), 15.

¹¹⁸⁰ Voldemārs Leiņš, 'Sovetskaia pribaltika - Edinyi krupnyi ekonomicheskii raion strany', *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, 10 (1961), 30-31.

Appendix A. Tables

Table 1.¹¹⁸¹ A labour balance analysis of gross migration to Latvia produced by the Economics Institute in 1963 (in thousands).

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Gross migration	29	24	21	39	19	4.5	11.6	18.4	15.3	16.5

Table 2.¹¹⁸² Net migration to Latvia between 1950 and 1965.

Year	Net migration into Latvia
1950	1,100
1951	10,200
1952	-1,500
1953	7,600
1954	2,200
1955	1,700
1956	26,800
1957	7,400
1958	-200
1959	7,400
1960	16,800
1961	15,900

¹¹⁸¹ LVA f.693, apr.1-s, d.486, l.20. Doklad Instituta ekonomiki na balance trudovykh resursov v Latvii, 8 iunija 1963.

¹¹⁸² Dreifelds, 'Latvian National Demands', 148.

1962	12,500
1963	17,900
1964	15,200
1965	16,600

Table 3.¹¹⁸³ Latvian SSR Central Statistical Administration report on average net migration by five-year periods.

Migration averages over five-year periods	Number of migrants
1950-54	3,900
1955-59	7,900
1960-64	13,900

¹¹⁸³ LVA f.270, apr.1-s l.1905, lp.13, 'Materialy o razmeshchenii naseleniia i trudovykh resursov v LSSR v poslevoennyi period i v blizhaishuiu perspektivu, vypolnenii narodnokhoziaistvennogo plana 1968', Zamestitel' predsedatelia LSSR Tsentral'nogo statisticheskogo administratsii, Ia. Rudzatis, 11 apreliia 1968.

Table 4.¹¹⁸⁴ Latvian Communist Party size and ethnic Latvian membership 1957-1963.

Year (1 st January)	Total size	Percentage growth during that year	Number of Latvians	Percentage Latvian	Candidates recruited during the year
1957	53,948	11.1%	18,922	35.1%	3,988
1958	57,305	6.2%	20,971	36.6%	4,600
1959	61,414	7.2%	23,009	37.4%	5,095
1960	65,947	7.4%	25,252	38.3%	4,744
1961	72,519	10%	27,604	38.1%	5,039
1962	78,219	7.9%	29,667	37.9%	4,330
1963	81,986	4.8%	31,416	38.3%	5,952

Table 5.¹¹⁸⁵ Percentage of the total number of industrial workers employed in different categories of work.

Branch of Industry:	1940	1958	1960	1965
Machine-building and metalworking	14.5%	25.7%	25.6%	31.1%
Light	24.3%	24.3%	24.5%	21.5%
Food	17.6%	13.4%	13.8%	13.5%
Timber, woodworking and pulp and paper	28.3%	19.7%	18.8%	15.4%*

* Figure for 1964.

¹¹⁸⁴ RGANI f.77 (Otdela organizatsionno-partiinoi raboty), op.1, d.10, l.41, 100, 166; d.11, l.35, 93, 172; d.12, l.35, 'Svodnye statisticheskie otchety: O sostave KPSS seti mestnykh partiinykh organov otchetakh i vyborakh za 1957-1963'; Šilde, *Bez tiesībām un brīvības*, 39. Within the historiography, there are significant discrepancies in the figures given for LCP membership and the number of Latvians within the Party. This is due to a lack of access to archival materials. Consequently, general figures are used and include Latvians in the RSFSR. This is the case for Trāpans, 'Latvian Communist Party Membership', 31, and King, *Economic Policies*, 180-83. For further reliable figures on Party size and ethnic composition see: Misiunas and Taagepera, *Years of Dependence*, 359-60 and Thomas Remeikis, 'Berücksichtigung der nationalen und verwaltungsmässigen Interessen der Unionsrepublik im Rahmen des zentralistischen Sowjetsystems, dargestellt am Beispiel Litauens', *Acta Baltica*, 10 (1970), 121-56.

¹¹⁸⁵ Dreifelds, 'Latvian National Demands', 143; Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 452.

Table 6.¹¹⁸⁶ Size of the labour force in Latvia in comparison to the 1940 level.

Year	Percentage of 1940 level
1945	65%
1950	149%
1955	186%
1958	234%
1960	241%
1963	304%

Table 7.¹¹⁸⁷ Gross industrial production in Latvia as a percentage of the 1940 level.

Year	Percentage
1945	47
1946	85
1947	303
1950	586
1956	668
1957	773
1958	870
1959	963
1960	1099
1961	1191
1962	1301
1963	1414
1964	1564
1965	1739

¹¹⁸⁶ Stephen Dunn, *Cultural Processes in the Baltic Area under Soviet Rule*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1966), 36.

¹¹⁸⁷ Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 446.

Table 8.¹¹⁸⁸ Average annual growth rate percentage of gross production by industrial branches over five-year periods.

Industry	1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965
Machine-building and metalworking	20	18	18
Chemicals	25	21	26
Construction materials	18	13	11
Food	11	15	8
Light	15	11	4

Table 9.¹¹⁸⁹ Interwar Latvian census and Soviet census data. Numbers and percentage share of population by major nationalities.

Ethnic group	1935		1959			1970	
	Number	%	Number	%	% considering their ethnic language to be their mother tongue	Number	%
Latvians	1,472,612	75.5%	1,297,881	62%	98.3%	1,341,805	56.8%
Russians	206,499	10.6%	556,448	26.6%	98.4%	704,599	29.8%
Belarusians	26,867	1.4%	61,587	2.9%	42.6%	94,898	4%
Poles	48,949	2.5%	59,774	2.9%	55.3%	63,045	2.7%
Ukrainians	1,844	0.1%	29,440	1.4%	42.8%	53,461	2.3%
Lithuanians	22,913	1.2%	32,383	1.6%	76.5%	40,589	1.7%
Jews	93,479	4.8%	36,592	1.8%	47.9%	36,680	1.6%
Soviet Slavic total	235,210	12.1%	647,475	30.9%		852,958	36.1%

¹¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 450.

¹¹⁸⁹ 1935 - Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism', 575; 1959 - RGAE f.1562, op.36, d.3, l.8; 1970 - RGAE f.1562, op.36, d.3998, table 7; Šilde, *Bez tiesībām un brīvības*, 398. For Riga: In 1939 the city was 68% Latvian, in 1959 45% Latvian, and in 1970 40% Latvian, Riekstiņš, *Against Russification*, 433; LVA f.102, apr.17, l.12, lp.175.

Total	1,950,502		2,093,458			2,364,127	
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Table 10. Percentage of Latvians claiming Russian as their first or second language in the 1970 Soviet census.¹¹⁹⁰ Lithuanian and Estonian figures included for comparison.

Age Group	Latvians	Lithuanians	Estonians
0-10	12.02%	3.42%	3.94%
11-15	38.44%	23.87%	13.51%
16-19	67%	61.12%	41.74%
20-29	75.76%	71.26%	60.06%
30-39	68.78%	56.70%	46.51%
40-40	52.34%	40.74%	28.06%
50-59	39.18%	25.07%	16.45%
Over 60s	40.33%	20.79%	22.24%
Total	47.19%	35.01%	28.29%

¹¹⁹⁰ Dreifelds, 'Latvian National Demands', 139.

Appendix B. The Latvian National Communists

Name	Primary position	Other posts held	Date of Birth	Age in 1959 ¹¹⁹¹
Eduards Berklavs	First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Komsomol First Secretary	1914	1914
Vilis Krūmiņš	Second Secretary	Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Komsomol First Secretary, First Secretary of the Riga <i>obkom</i> , Minister of Education	1919	40
Kārlis Ozoliņš	Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet	Deputy Chairman of the Presidium, Editor of <i>Cīņa</i>	1905	54
Aleksandr Straujums	First Secretary Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Secretary of Molotov and Kirov <i>raikomy</i>	1917	42
Indriķis Pinksis	Chairman of the Council of Trade Unions	Komsomol First Secretary, First Secretary of the Liepāja <i>obkom</i> , First Secretary of the Liepāja <i>gorkom</i>	1910	49
Nikolai Bissenieks	CC Secretary for Agriculture	Chairman of the Party Organs Department	1906	53
Aleksandr Nikonov	Minister of Agriculture	Third Secretary	1918	41
Pauls Dzērve	Head of the Economics Institute	Deputy head of the Economics Institute, head of Komsomol Department for Schools	1918	41
Pavel Pizāns	Editor of <i>Cīņā</i>	Editor of <i>Kommunist</i>	1918	41
Edgars Mūkins	Deputy Chairman Gosplan	Secretary on the Daugavpils <i>gorkom</i>	1915	44
Pavel Cherkovsky	Deputy Minister of Culture	Deputy Head of the Komsomol Department for Schools	1919	40
Voldemārs Kalpiņš	Minister of Culture	Minister of Foreign Affairs	1916	43
Oswalds Darbiņš	Editor of <i>Rigas Balss</i>		1905	54
Benjamiņš Treijs	Deputy Head of the Economics Institute		1914	45
Visvaldis Vallis	Deputy Minister of Agriculture	Chairman of the Bauska <i>raispolkom</i>		
Herberts Valters	Deputy Head of the CC <i>Agitprop</i> Department	Second Secretary of the Komsomol?	1927	32
Rafael Blūms	Editor of <i>Zvaigzne</i>	Editor of <i>Padomju Jaunatne</i> (1944-1952)	1929	30
I. Brencis	Second Secretary Komsomol			
Jānis Prombergs	Deputy Minister for Health		1927	32
Vilis Samsons	Minister of Education		1920	39

¹¹⁹¹ Year in which open conflict with the orthodox communists begins. Average age of known national communists with available data (38 persons) in 1959 - 46.7 years old.

Jānis Kacens	Head of the CC Department for Administration, Trade and Finance		1909	50
E. Liberts	Minister of Transport		1909	50
Jānis Auškāps	Deputy Head of the <i>sovmarkhoz</i>	Minister for Construction	1894	64
Vilhelm Lecis	Head of Riga <i>gorispolkom</i> (1952-1957)	Manager of State Bank	1898	61
Victor Kreituss	First Deputy Head of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	Head of the CC Department for <i>Cīņa</i>	1913	46
Aleksandr Timerev	Deputy Head of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>		1905	54
Ēriks Baumanis	Head of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i> (1958-1962)			
Arnolds Zandmanis	Council of Ministers Party Organisation Secretary for Cadres		1905	54
Vladislavs Ruskulis	Komsomol First Secretary		1929	30
Pēteris Plēsums	Chairman of the Party-State Control Commission	Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet	1895	64
Eduards Baško	Deputy Head of the CC Department for Administrative Organs			
Rekšna	Deputy Head of the CC Department for Agriculture			
Kokān	First Assistant Secretary of the CC			
Emma Ērenštreite	Senior advisor for the Council of Ministers		1912	47
Jānis Gibietis	Head of the Education Department of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	Riga <i>gorkom</i> member		
Milda Vernere	Director of 49 th School, Riga		1918	41
Marta Duskina	Head of the Education Department of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i> (1945-1951)	Director of 3 rd School, Riga	1901	58
Albert Tseplis	Head of the Department for the Riga <i>gorkom</i>		1915	44
Anton Luriņš	Head of the CC Department for Agriculture		1911	48
Skrabo	First Secretary of the Skrunda <i>raikom</i>			
Pavlovsky	First Secretary of the Jelgava <i>raikom</i>			
Mecheslav Matsulevich	Chief of the Riga City Militia Administration		1916	43
Emīlija Veinberga	Deputy Minister of Justice		1896	63
Juris Sprogis	Deputy Prosecutor	Head of the Justice Department of the Presidium of the Latvian Supreme Soviet	1919	40

Vēra Kacena	Contributor to <i>Literatūra un Māksla</i>		1912	47
Kristaps Kaugurs	Editor of <i>Padomju Jaunatne</i> (1953?-1959)			
Fricis Deglavs	Head of Gosplan	Head of the Economics Institute	1898	Died in 1957
Z. Mincs	Daugavpils correspondent for <i>Cīņa</i>			
Arnolds Deglavs	Deputy Chairman of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	Chairman of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	1904	55
J. Jansons	Minister for Trade			
Ella Ankupe	Head of the CC Department for work with Women		1908	51

National communists known to have been born in Latvia

National communists known to have been born outside Latvia (place of birth in brackets)

Non-Latvian national communists

Berkļavs

Treijs (Samara guberniia)

Nikonov (Russian)

Krūmiņš

Blūms (Karlsruhe, Baden-Wurtemberg)

Matsulevich (Belarusian)

Dzērve

Kalpiņš (Smolensk)

Cherkovsky (Belarusian)

Ozoliņš

Nikonov (Pskov)

Blūms (Jewish)

Pizāns

Tseplis (Yaroslavl)

Z. Mincs (Jewish)

Pinksis

Zandmanis (Bashkiria)

Favišs Frīdmans (Jewish)

Bissenieks

Darbiņš (Jewish)

Mūkins

Cherkovsky

Plēsums

Ruskulis

Erenštreites

Prombergs

Matsulevich

Appendix C. The Opponents of Latvian National Communism

Name	Primary position	Other posts held	Date of Birth	Age in 1959 ¹¹⁹²
Arvīds Pelše	First Secretary	Secretary for Ideology	1899	60
Augusts Voss	Chairman of the CC Department of Party Organs	Secretary for Ideology, First Secretary	1916 (or 1919)	40 (or 43)
Pēteris Strautmanis	Minister of Agriculture	Head of the CC Department for Agriculture, Chairman of the Council of Ministers	1919	40
Jānis Bumbiers	Head of the Economics Institute	Head of <i>Agitprop</i> , Editor of <i>Bolshevik Sovetskaia Latvija</i>		
Nikolai Saleev	Editor, <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i>		1914	45
Major-General Nikolai Demin	Head of the Political Department of the BMD		1910	49
General Aleksandr Gorbatov	Commander, BMD		1891	68
General Pavel Batov	Commander, BMD		1897	62
Nikolai Ponomarev	Minister of Light Industry	Minister for the Food Industry	1908	51
Aleksandr Aleksandrov	Deputy Chairman of the Department for Party Organs		1918	41
Ivan Veselovs	Head of <i>Agitprop</i>		1915	44
Fedor Titov	Second Secretary		1910	49
Augusts Čulītis	Chairman of Gosplan		1900	59
Yuri Rudometov	First Secretary of Daugavpils <i>gorkom</i>	Head of the CC Department for Heavy Industry, First Secretary of the Liepāja <i>gorkom</i>	1918	41
Victor Zhigarkov	Daugavpils <i>gorkom</i> member		1919	40
Ivan Lebedev	Second Secretary		1907	52
Antons Ozolings	Chairman of the State Control Committee	Minister for State Control	1904	55
Karl M. Tolmadzhev	Editor, <i>Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii</i> journal		1914	45
Jānis Fritzevič Vanags	Minister for Agriculture	Rector of the Agricultural Academy, Deputy Head of Gosplan, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet	1907	52

¹¹⁹² Average age: From available data for 43 persons - 49.3 years. Pelše promoted many young cadres not involved with the national communists. Including neutral bureau members, the average age of non-national communists rises to 50.6 years.

Aleksandr Tikhonovich Drozdov	Head of the CC Department for Administration, Trade and Finance	Komsomol Head of Sector for Party Cadres		
Vladislavs Azāns	First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Head of Latvia's DOSAAF		
Jānis Vēvers	Chairman of the KGB		1899	60
Jānis Ostrovs	Minister of Culture	Minister of Foreign Affairs	1896	63
Roberts Ķīsis	Minister for Public Utilities	Chairman of the Party Control Commission	1896	63
Georgijs Gaile	Head of the <i>sovnarkhoz</i>	Director of VEF	1905	54
Elmārs Bēmanis	Komsomol First Secretary	Chairman of the Party-State Control Committee, Chairman of the Department for Party Organs	1926	33
Vitalijs Rubenis	Head of the CC Department for Agriculture	Chairman of the Council of Ministers	1914	45
Nikolai Muravevs	Head of the CC Department for Science and Culture	Deputy Head of the CC Department for Science and Culture	1909	50
Ivan Biniatian	Head of the CC Department for the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Deputy Chairman of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i> , Second Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	1915	44
Leontina Lapina	Head of the Department for Science and Culture		1916	43
Fillip Kashnikov	Second Secretary	Deputy Chairman of the Party Organs Department	1904	55
Ādolfs Miglinieks	CC Secretary for Industry	Head of the CC Department for Heavy Industry	1903	56
Kārlis Voltmanis	Chairman of the Council of Trade Unions		1898	51
Pavel Litvinov	Minister for Public Utilities	Chairman of the Department for Party Organs, Head of the Department for Construction	1900	59
I.A. Davydov	Editor, <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i>			
Longins Avdiukevich	Chairman of the Department for Party Organs		1916	43
Augusts Zitmanis	Komsomol First Secretary		1929	30
Voldemārs Leiņš	CC Secretary for Industry	Second Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	1920	39
Victor M. Krūmiņš	Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Head of the Department for Science and Culture	1923	36
Ilmārs Ivert	Editor, <i>Cīņa</i>	Correspondent for <i>Pravda</i>	1924	35
Iosif Gusakovskiy	Commander, BMD		1904	55
Nikolai Shatalin	Head of the <i>Orgbureau</i> for Latvia		1904	55

Vasilii F. Riazanov	Head of the <i>Orgbureau</i> for Latvia		1904	55
Pēteris Valeskalns	Academician-Secretary of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR	Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Chairman of the Union of workers in higher education and research institutions	1899	60
Jānis Jurgens	Rector of Riga State University	Third Secretary	1900	59
Mikhail Gribkov	Second Secretary		1909	50
Viktors Bliūms	Chairman of the Council of Trade Unions		1923	36

Neutrals

Name	Primary position	Other posts held	Date of Birth	Age in 1959
Jānis Kalnbērziņš	First Secretary	Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet	1893	66
Vilis Lācis	Chairman of the Council of Ministers		1904	55
Jānis Peive	President of the Academy of Sciences	Chairman of the Council of Ministers	1906	53
Matiss Plūdonis	First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	CC Secretary for Industry, Head of the <i>sovnarkhoz</i>	1892	67

Opposition outside the Latvian SSR

Name	Primary position	Other posts held
Mikhail Polekhin	Head of the Baltic Sector of the CC Department for Soviet Republics	Secretary for Primorskii <i>kraikom</i>
Mikhail Gavrilov	Head of the Baltic Sector of the CC Department for Soviet Republics	Secretary for Kursk <i>obkom</i>
Petr Pigalev	Deputy Head of the CC Department for Soviet Republics	Second Secretary for Molotov (Perm) oblast, CPSU CC Inspector, Head of sector for the Department for Soviet Republics
Aleksandr Shelepin	Chairman of the KGB	First Secretary of the CPSU CC Komsomol, Head of the CC Department for Soviet Republics
Vladimir Semichastnyi	Chairman of the CC Department for Soviet Republics	First Secretary of the CPSU CC Komsomol, Chairman of the KGB
Mikhail Suslov	CPSU CC Presidium member	Chief ideologue of the CPSU

Appendix D. Phases of the Purge of the National Communists

Colour code for dismissals to illustrate phases of the purge - 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963

National Communist	Position before purge	Date of dismissal	New position (and date of removal)	Further demotion (if applicable)
Eduards Berklavs	Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	8 th July 1959	Chief of the regional film rentals office of Vladimir, RSFSR, 1968	Worker in an electronics factory, Riga
Vilis Krūmiņš	Second Secretary	17 th February 1960	Minister of Education, 19 th December 1961	Director of the Natural History Museum
Pauls Dzērve	Head of the Economics Institute	15 th December 1959	Correspondent of the Academy of Sciences, 13 th June 1960; posted to an electro-technical factory (Died 21 st December 1961)	
Indriķis Pinksis	Chairman of the Council of Trade Unions	11 th August 1959	Chief of a road construction unit for Madona District	
Pavel Pizāns	Editor of <i>Ciņā</i>	17 th February 1960	Minister for Religious Affairs, May 1961	Director of the Central Bookstore in Riga
Nikolai Bissenieks	Secretary for Agriculture	17 th February 1960	Chief of administration for collective farm construction, 8 th December 1962	Manager of office supplies for the research institution 'Latvnauchsna'
Aleksandr Nikonovs	Minister of Agriculture	Removed from the bureau but retained position 17 th February 1960	Removed as Minister of Agriculture, 24 th February 1961	Director of the Stavropol Agricultural Research Institute, RSFSR
Kārlis Ozoliņš	Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet	25 th November 1959	Deputy Chairman of the Presidium, Pensioned off 27 th February 1961	
Edgars Mūkins	Deputy Chairman Gosplan	18 th August 1959	Director of the Liepāja Pedagogical Institute, September 1960	Director of Liepāja woodworking combine
Voldemārs Kalpiņš	Minister of Culture (and Foreign Affairs)	Reprimanded in October 1959. Removed 4 th December 1961	Director of Raiņa Literary Museum	
Pavel Cherkovsky	Deputy Minister of Culture	28 th July 1959	Editor of the Latvian agricultural encyclopaedia at the Latvian State	

			Publishing House	
Aleksandr Straujums	First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	17 th February 1960	Chairman of the Moscow (region of Riga) <i>raii</i> spolkom, 25 th April 1961	Supervisor in Riga's financial sector
Benjamiņš Treijs	Deputy Head of the Economics Institute	December 1959	Head of the agricultural sector of the Economics Institute	
Oswalds Darbiņš	Editor of <i>Rigas Balss</i>	Reprimanded in August 1959. Removed 22 nd September 1959	Television studio manager	
Pēteris Plēsums	Chairman of the Party-State Control Commission	19 th April 1960	Pensioned off	
Vilis Samsons	Minister of Education	17 th February 1960	Chief scientific Secretary at the Academy of Sciences	
Rafael Blūms	Editor of <i>Zvaigzne</i> (Star) magazine	22 nd September 1959	Literary collaborator for the magazine <i>Dadzis</i> (Thistle).	
I. Brencis	Second Secretary Komsomol	22 nd September 1959		
Jānis Prombergs	Deputy Minister for Health	18 th August 1959	Worked in the Riga City Health Department	
Anton Luriņš	Head of the CC Department for Agriculture	28 th April 1960	Manager for the Academy of Sciences at a citric acid factory	
Jānis Kacens	Head of the CC Department for Administration, Trade and Finance	April 1960		
E. Liberts	Minister of Transport	6 th September 1961		
Jānis Auškāps	Deputy Head of the <i>sovnarkhoz</i>	June 1960	Pensioned off	
Vilhelm Lecis	Manager of the State Bank	1972		
Victor Kreituss	First Deputy Head of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	September 1959	On the design bureau of 'Krasnaia zvezda' factory	
Ēriks Baumanis	Head of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	1962	Director of Riga Diesel Factory	
Arnolds Zandmanis	Council of Ministers Party Organisation	1960	Director of J. Misiņa library and pensioner	

	Secretary for Cadres			
Vladislavs Ruskulis	Komsomol First Secretary	22 nd September 1959	Deputy head of the Bauska <i>raispolkom</i> , February 1963	
Visvaldis Vallis	Deputy Minister of Agriculture	October 1959	Chairman of the Bauska <i>raispolkom</i> , late 1960	Factory; Riga road construction administration
Kristaps Kaugurs	Editor of <i>Padomju Jaunatne</i>	22 nd September 1959	Sent to Bauska District, Latvia	
Arnolds Deglavs	Deputy Chairman of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	April 1960	Chairman of the Jūrmala <i>gorispolkom</i>	
Mecheslav Matsulevich	Chief of the Riga City militia administration	Died 12 th April 1961		
Herberts Valters	Deputy Head of <i>Agitprop</i>	January 1960	Deputy Chief of film rentals office	
Albert Tseplis	Head of the CC Department for the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	6 th April 1960		
Emīlia Veinberga	Deputy Minister of Justice	1959		
Juris Sprogis	Deputy Prosecutor	1962		
Emma Ērenštreite	Senior advisor for the Council of Ministers	1959?		
Milda Vernere	Director of Riga's 49 th School	1962		

Purge of the Interim Leadership 1962-1963

Loyalist/ Neutral	Position before purge	Date of dismissal	New position (and removal)	Further demotion
Jānis Kalnbērziņš	First Secretary	25 th November 1959	Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet until 5 th May 1970	
Vilis Lācis	Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Released on 'health grounds', 25 th November 1959		
Jānis Peive	Chairman of the Council of Ministers	23 rd April 1962	Remained Chairman of the USSR Soviet of Nationalities until 1966	
Mikhail Gribkov	Second Secretary	27 th March 1963	Transferred out of Latvia	
Ivan Veselovs	Head of <i>Agitprop</i>	November 1961	Director of the Latvian Telegraph Agency	
Georgijs	Bureau member	3 rd August	Possibly remained	Member of the

Gaile	and Chairman of the <i>Sovnarkhoz</i>	1962	Chairman of the <i>sovnarkhoz</i> until 20 th October 1965	bureau for industry
Matiss Plūdonis	Bureau member and First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Demoted on 31 st March 1962	Removed from the bureau on 7 th December 1962	Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Member of the Bureau for Industry. Died 13 th December 1963
Ilmārs Ivert	Candidate bureau member and Editor of <i>Cīņa</i>	Removed from the bureau on 7 th December 1962	Remained editor of <i>Cīņa</i> until 1972	
Vladislavs Azāns	Bureau member and First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Removed from the bureau on 23 rd April 1962	Remained First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i> until 3 rd June 1963	Member of the Bureau for Industry
Nikolai Saleev	Candidate bureau member and editor of <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i>	Removed from the bureau in late 1962	Remained editor of <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i> until 1984	
Anton Ozoling	Minister of State Control	20 th December 1962		
Jānis Jurgens	Rector of Latvia State University	9 th January 1962	Head of the Department of Political Economy at Riga State University until 7 th July 1964	
Aleksandr Aleksandrov	Deputy Chairman of the Department for Party Organs	7 th May 1963 (sacked for bribery and drinking)		
Ādolfs Miglinieks	Bureau member and Secretary for Industry	30 th March 1961	Brought out of retirement to be Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (1964-1967)	
Leontina R. Lapina	Head of the CC Department for Schools, Science and Culture	December 1962		
Karl M. Tolmadzhev	Editor of <i>Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii</i>	1961		
Jānis Vevēris	Chairman of the KGB	29 th January 1963	Chairman of the Committee for the Press	
Jānis Vanags	Minister for Agriculture and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet	4 th April 1962	Remained Chairman of the Supreme Soviet until 20 th March 1963	Professor at the Latvian Agricultural Academy (1962-1966)

Appendix E. Bureau Candidate Membership 1944-1952 (non-voting)

Seat	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952
Chairman of the Council of Trade	Kārlis Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis
Minister of Internal Affairs	Augusts Eglītis	Eglītis	Eglītis	Eglītis	Eglītis	Eglītis	Eglītis	N/A	N/A
First Secretary of the Komsomol	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Vilis Krūmiņš (from January?)	Krūmiņš	N/A	Elmārs Bēmanis (from September)
Chairman of the Department for Party Organs	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Nikolai Bissenieks (from 29/03/49)	Bissenieks	Bissenieks (until 17/04/51)	N/A
Editor of <i>Cīņa</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Pavel Pizāns (from 13/11/51)
Total	2	2	2	2	2	4	4	1	2
Grand Total (full and candidates)	15	16	16	16	15	17	17	16	13
Total of non-Latvian members	6	7	7	7	6	6	6	5	4
National Communist or supporter	2	2	2	3	3	3+2	3+2	5	3+1

Key - Allegiances

Yellow - National communist/supporter

Green - Moscow loyalist/Stalinist

Blue - Neutral

White - Unknown

Note: A position is only included in the tally if it was occupied for a minimum of six months in any given year

Seat	Bureau Candidate Membership 1953-1963 (non-voting)										
	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Chairman of the Council of Trade Unions	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Voltmanis	Indriķis Pinksis (from July)	Pinksis (until 05/08/59)	Victor Bliūms (from 17/02/60)	Bliūms	Bliūms	Bliūms
First Secretary of the Komsomol	Bēmanis	Bēmanis	Bēmanis	Bēmanis	Bēmanis (until 24/04/58)	Position abolished		Position restored	Augusts Zītmanis (from 28/9/61)	Zītmanis	L. Bartkevich
Chairman of the Party Organs Department	Bissenieks (from 05/05/53)	Bissenieks (until 29/05/54)	Position abolished				Position reinstated	Elmārs Bēmanis (from 17/02/60)	Bēmanis	Bēmanis (until 07/12/62)	Augusts Zītmanis
Chairman of the Party-State Control Commission	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Elmārs Bēmanis (from 07/12/62)
Editor of <i>Cīņa</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Pavel Pizāns (from 20/1/56)	Pizāns	Pizāns	Pizāns	Ilmārs Ivert (from 17/02/60)	Ivert	Ivert (until 07/12/62)	?
Editor of <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Position reinstated as candidate	Nikolai Saleev (from 25/01/58)	Saleev	Saleev	Saleev	Saleev (until late 1962)	?
First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Aleksandrs Straujums (from July)	Straujums	Position restored to full 17/02/60			
Total	3	2	2	3	2	4	4	4	4	5	4
Grand Total (full and candidates)	14	14	13	14	13	15	14	15	16	17	14
Total of non-Latvian members	3	3	2	3	3	1	1	3	3	3	3
National communist or supporter	5+1	5	5	4+1	4+1	5+3	5+3	0	0	0	0

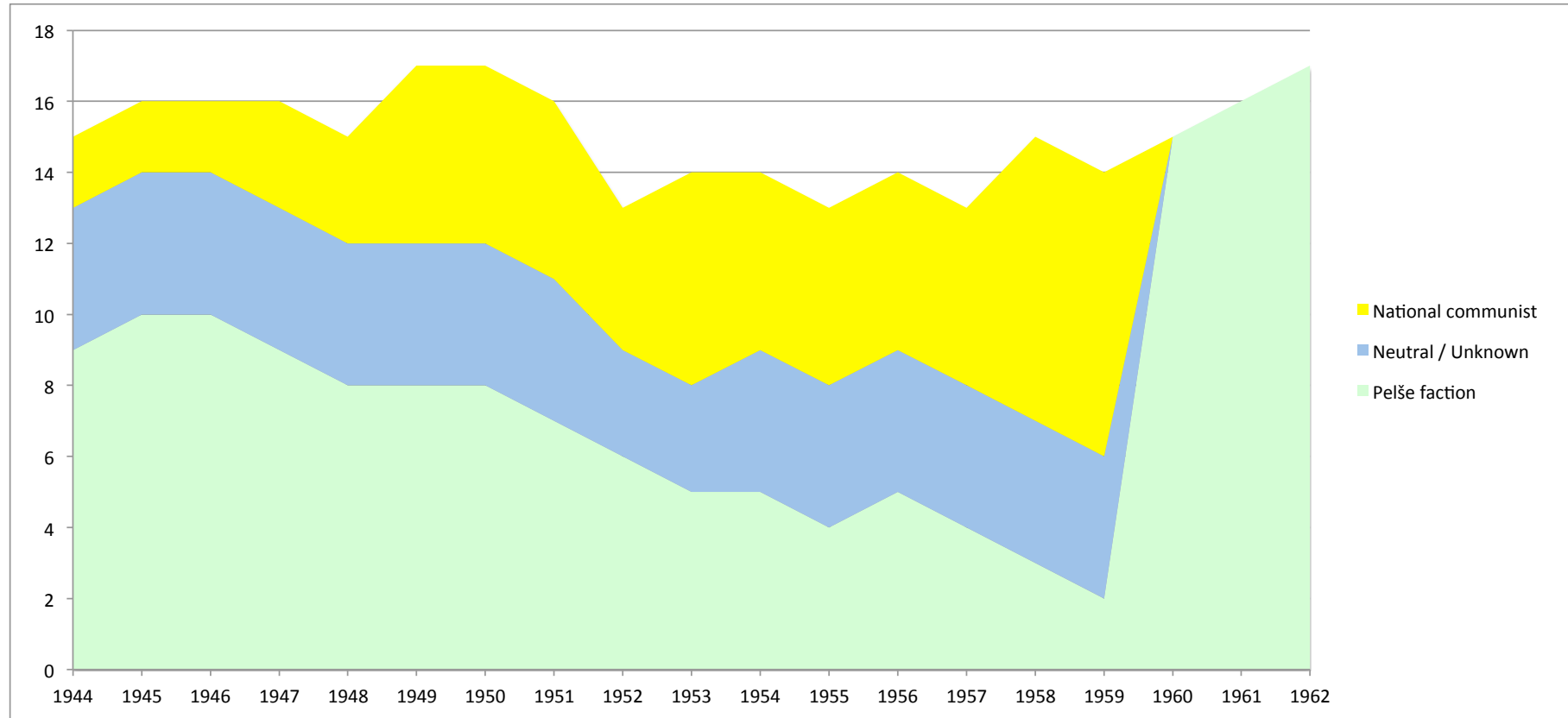
Appendix F. Full Bureau Membership 1944-1963

Seat	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951
First Secretary Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Jānis Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš
	Vilis Lācis	Lācis	Lācis	Lācis	Lācis	Lācis	Lācis	Lācis
Second Secretary	Ivan Lebedev	Lebedev	Lebedev	Lebedev	Lebedev	Fedor Titov (from January)	Titov	Titov
Chairman of the Presidium	Augusts Kirhenšteins	Kirchenšteins	Kirchenšteins	Kirchenšteins	Kirchenšteins	Kirchenšteins	Kirchenšteins	Kirchenšteins
First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Jānis Kalnbērziņš (concurrently)	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Nikolai Bissenieks (from 17/04/51)
Third Secretary	Jānis Jurgens	Jurgens	Jurgens (until September)	Aleksandr Nikonov	Nikonov	Nikonov	Nikonov	Vilis Krūmiņš (from 22/09/51)
Secretary for Ideology/ <i>Agitprop</i>	Arvīds Peļše	Peļše	Peļše	Peļše	Peļše	Peļše	Peļše	Peļše
Secretary for Cadres	Fedor Titov	Titov	Titov	Titov	Titov	Pavel Litvinov	Litvinov	Litvinov, position abolished April
MVD/Police Representative	Alfons Noviks	Noviks	Noviks	Noviks	Noviks	Noviks	Noviks	Noviks
Secretary (6th)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A.P. Chernushev, position abolished April 1952
Minister of Agriculture	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Aleksandr Nikonov (from January)
Editor of <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i>	Ivan Davydov	Davydov	Davydov	Davydov	Davydov	Davydov	Davydov	Davydov
Editor of <i>Cīņa</i>	Karlis Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš (until 13/11/51)
Commander of the Baltic Military District	Ivan Bagramian	Bagramian	Bagramian	Bagramian	Bagramian	Bagramian	Bagramian	Bagramian
Chairman of Gosplan	Fritzis Deglavs	Deglavs	Deglavs	Deglavs	Deglavs	Deglavs	Deglavs	Deglavs, position abolished September 1952
VKP(b) CC Orgburo for Latvia	Nikolai Shatalin	Shatalin	V.F. Riazanov (from February)	Riazanov	Position abolished 24/03/47			
Second Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	N/A	K.A. Novikov (from 07/03/45)	Novikov	Novikov	Novikov	Novikov	Novikov	Position abolished January
Total	13	14	14	14	13	13	13	15 (including Krūmiņš when counting 4 months of 1952)

Seat	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958
First Secretary Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Kalnbērziņš Lācis	Kalnbērziņš Lācis	Kalnbērziņš Lācis	Kalnbērziņš Lācis	Kalnbērziņš Lācis	Kalnbērziņš Lācis	Kalnbērziņš Lācis
Second Secretary	Valentin Yershov (from 26/08/52)	Vilis Krūmiņš (from 23/06/53)	Krūmiņš	Krūmiņš	Fillip Kashnikov (from 20/01/56)	Kashnikov	VACANT (20/01/58 - 16/04/58), Vilis Krūmiņš (from 16/04/58)
Chairman of the Presidium	Karlis Ozoliņš (from 11/04/52)	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš	Ozoliņš
First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Edgars Apinis (from 01/03/52)	Apinis	Apinis	Apinis	Eduards Berkļavs (from 20/01/56)	Berkļavs	Berkļavs (until 16/04/58)
Third Secretary	Krūmiņš (until April)	N/A	Arvīds Pelše (merged with Secretary for Ideology, 11/02/54)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Secretary for Ideology/ <i>Agitprop</i>	Pelše	Pelše	Pelše	Pelše	Pelše	Pelše	Pelše
Secretary for Agriculture	N/A	N/A	Nikolai Bissenieks (from 17/05/54)	Bissenieks	Bissenieks	Bissenieks	Bissenieks
Secretary for Industry	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Ādolfs Miglinieks (from 20/01/56)	Miglinieks	Miglinieks
First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Culture)	N/A	N/A	Matiss Plūdonis	Plūdonis	Plūdonis	Plūdonis	Plūdonis
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Vilis Krūmiņš (from 20/01/56)	Krūmiņš	Berkļavs (from 16/04/58)
MVD/Police Representative	Noviks	Police representative off bureau, March 1953	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Minister of Agriculture	Nikonov	Nikonov	Nikonov	Nikonov	Position abolished 20/01/56		Nikonov (from July)
Editor of <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i>	Davydov	Davydov	Davydov	Position abolished 02/03/55			
Editor of <i>Cīņa</i>	Pavel Pizāns (from 22/07/52)	Pizāns	Pizāns	Pizāns	Position reduced to candidate 20/01/56		
Chairman of the <i>sovmarkhoz</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Matiss Plūdonis (concurrently from 04/05/57)	Plūdonis (concurrently), (until 08/07/58)
Commander of the Baltic Military District	Bagramian	Bagramian	Aleksandr Gorbatov (from 05/05/54)	Gorbatov	Gorbatov	Gorbatov	Gorbatov (until July 1958)
Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences	Fritzis Degļavs (from September 1952)	Degļavs	Position abolished February				
Total	11	11	12	11	11	11	11

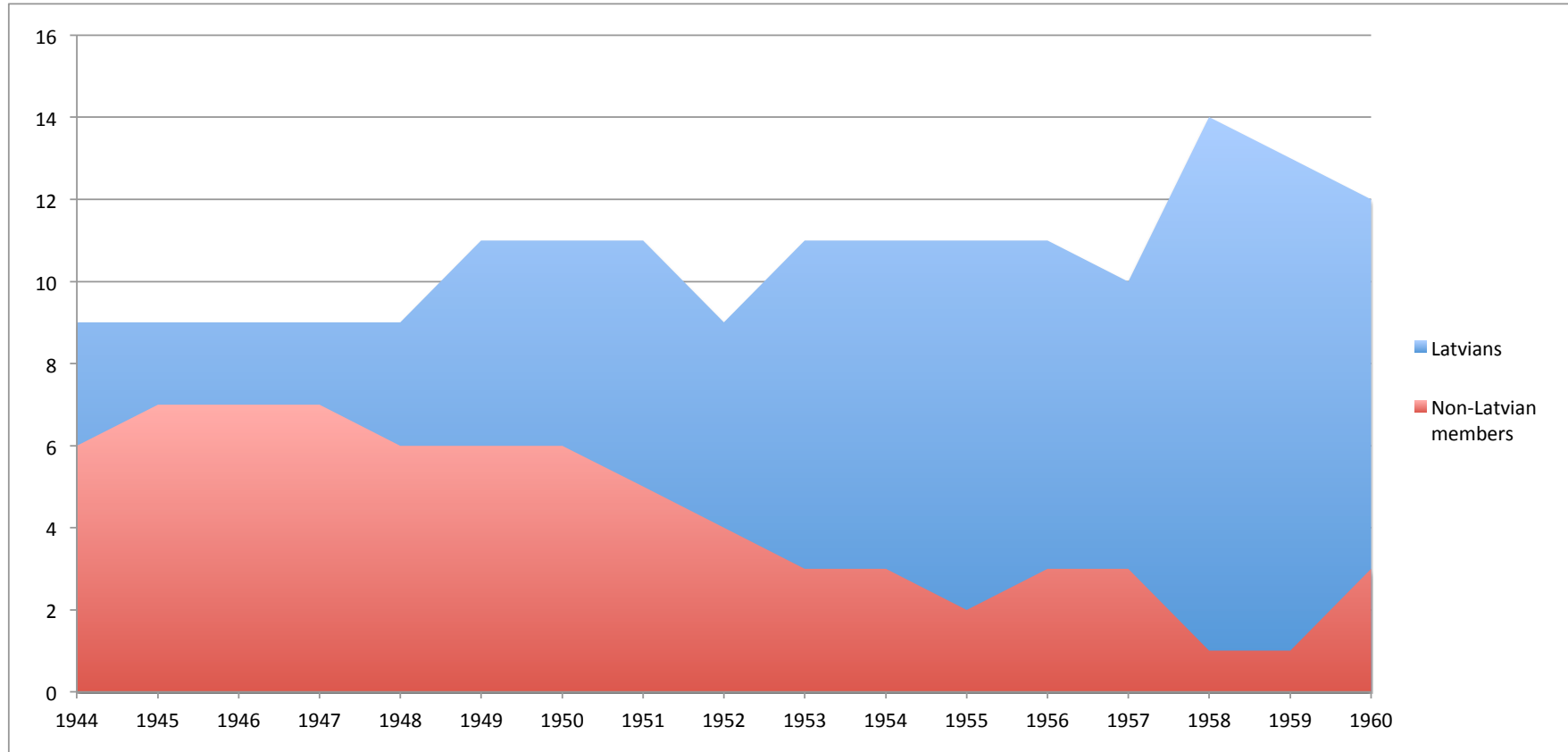
Seat	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
First Secretary	Kalnbērziņš (until 27/11/59)	Arvīds Peļše	Pelše	Pelše	Pelše
Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Lācis (until 27/11/59)	Jānis Peive	Peive	Vitaljs Rubenis (from 23/4/62)	Rubenis
Second Secretary	Krūmiņš	Mikhail Gribkov (from 17/02/60)	Gribkov	Gribkov	Nikolai Belukha (from March)
Chairman of the Presidium	Ozoliņš (until 27/11/59)	Jānis Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš	Kalnbērziņš
First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Position reduced to candidate, 16/04/58 - 17/02/60	Vladislavs Azāns (from 17/02/60)	Azāns	Azāns (until 23/04/62)	?
Secretary for Ideology/ <i>Agitprop</i>	Pelše	Augusts Voss (from 17/02/60)	Voss	Voss	Voss
Secretary for Agriculture	Bissenieks	Pēteris Strautmanis (from 17/02/60)	Strautmanis	Strautmanis	Strautmanis
Secretary for Industry	Miglinieks	Miglinieks	Voldemārs Leiņš (concurrently from 30/03/61)	Leiņš (concurrently)	Leiņš (concurrently)
First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Plūdonis	Plūdonis	Plūdonis	Plūdonis (until 07/12/62)	?
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Culture)	Berkļavs (until 15/07/59)	N/A	Vitaljs Rubenis (from 30/03/61)	Rubenis (until 23/04/62)	?
Minister of Agriculture	Nikonov	Position merged with Secretary for Agriculture			
Chairman of the <i>sovnarkhoz</i>	N/A	Georgijs Gaile (17/02/60)	Gaile	Gaile (until 03/08/62)	?
Commander of the Baltic Military District	VACANT / Pavel Batov?	Iosif Guskovskiy (from 17/02/60)	Guskovskiy	Guskovskiy	Georgii Khetagurov (from March)
Second Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>		Position restored	Voldemārs Leiņš (from 30/03/61)	Leiņš	Leiņš
Total	10	11	12	12	10

Appendix G. Bureau Composition Chart 1944 - 1962



	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Pelše faction	9	10	10	9	8	8	8	7	6	5	5	4	5	4	3	2	15	16	17
Neutral / Unknown	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	0	0	0
National communist	2	2	2	3	3	5	5	5	4	6	5	5	5	5	8	8	0	0	0
Total	15	16	16	16	15	17	17	16	13	14	14	13	14	13	15	14	15	16	17

Appendix H. Ethnic Composition of the Bureau



	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
Latvians	9	9	9	9	9	11	11	11	9	11	11	11	11	10	14	13	12
Non-Latvian members	6	7	7	7	6	6	6	5	4	3	3	2	3	3	1	1	3
Total	15	16	16	16	15	17	17	16	13	14	14	13	14	13	15	14	15

Appendix I. The *Nomenklatura* and Leadership of the Latvian SSR 1944-1962

First Secretary	Jānis Kalnbērziņš 1940 - 27/11/59	Arvīds Pelše 27/11/59 - 15/04/66	Augusts Voss 15/04/66 - 14/04/84						
Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Vilis Lācis 1940 - 27/11/59	Jānis Peive 27/11/59 - 23/04/62	Vitalijs Rubenis 23/04/62 - 1970						
Second Secretary	Ivan Lebedev April 1944 - Jan 1949	Fedor Titov 1949 - 26/08-52	Valentin Yershov 26/08/52 - 23/06/53	Vilis Krūmiņš 23/06/53 - Jan 1956	Fillip Kashnikov 20/01/56 - 25/01/58	VACANT 20/01/58 - 16/04/58*	Krūmiņš 16/04/58 - 11/02/60	Mikhail Gribkov 17/02/60 - 27/03/63	Nikolai Belukha 19/03/63 - 1978
Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet	Augusts Kirhenšteins 25/08/40 - 10/03/52	Kārlis Ozoliņš 10/03/52 - 27/11/59	Jānis Kalnbērziņš 27/11/59 - 05/05/70	Vitalijs Rubenis 1970-1974	Pēteris Strautmanis 20/08/74 - 22/07/85				
Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet	Pēteris Plēsums August 1940 - 14/03/47	Kārlis Ozoliņš 13/11/51 - 15/04/52	R. Varkaina (1959)	Ozoliņš 27/11/59 - 27/12/61	Ādolfs Miglinieks 25/02/64 - 23/05/67				
First Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Jānis Kalnbērziņš 1940-1951	Nikolai Bissenieks 17/04/51 - 08/04/52	Edgars Apinis 15/03/52 - Jan 1956	Eduards Berklavs 20/01/56 - 22/05/58	Aleksandrs Straujums 22/05/58 - 23/02/60	Vladislavs Azāns 17/02/60 - 03/06/63			
Second Secretary of the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	K. Novikov 07/03/45 - April 1951	Sokolov	Ivan Biniatian 1956-1960	Voldemārs Leiņš 30/03/61 - ?					
Chairman of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	Arnolds Deglavs 1940-1951	Edgars Apinis 1951-1952	Vilhelms Lecis 1952-1957	Aleksandrs Straujums 04/03/58 - 22/05/58	Ēriks Baumanis 1958 - 1962	Jānis Pakalns 1962 - 1967			
Deputy Chairmen of the Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	R. Ansons (1945)	Aleksandr Timerev 1945 - 1957	(First Deputy) Viktor Kreituss 1954 - September 1959	Arnolds Deglavs May 1958 - April 1960	Ivan Biniatian 1960 - ?				
Third Secretary	Jānis Jurgens 1944 - July 1946	Aleksandr Nikonov September 1946 - 1951	Vilis Krūmiņš 27/09/51 - 08/04/52	Arvīds Pelše 11/02/54 - 27/11/59?					

CC Secretary for Ideology/ <i>Agitprop</i>	Arvīds Pelše Jan 1941 - 27/11/59	Augusts Voss 27/11/59 - 15/04/1966			
CC Secretary for Cadres	Fedor Titov August 1944 - 1949	Position abolished			
CC Secretary for Agriculture	Nikolai Bissenieks May 1954 - 17/02/60	Pēteris Strautmanis 17/02/60 - 18/02/65			
CC Secretary for Industry	Ādolfs Miglinieks 20/01/56 - 30/03/61	Voldemārs Leiņš 30/03/61 - 15/01/70			
Chairman of the Supreme Soviet	Aleksandrs Mazetis 14/03/47 - 14/10/48	Pēteris Zvaigzne 14/10/48 - 1953	Edgars Apinis 1953 or 27/02/55 - 1957	Jānis Vanags 05/06/57 - 20/03/63	Pēteris Valeskalns 20/03/63 - 07/07/71
First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	S.G. Skobkin 22/11/53 - 1955	Matiss Plūdonis 1955 - 21/05/62	V.G. Stroganov 21/05/62 - 19/02/65		
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers	Jānis Ostrovs 13/03/47 - 02/02/55?				
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Agriculture)	V.G. Stroganov 04/05/55 - 28/03/61	Vitalijs Rubenis 28/03/61 - 23/04/62	Stroganov 21/05/62 - 19/02/65		
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Culture)	I.I. Ozolin ? - 02/02/55	Eduards Berklavs 02/02/55 - 20/07/56	Vilis Krūmiņš 20/01/56 - 13/05/58	Berklavs 13/05/58 - 15/07/59	
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Construction)	Konstantin Novikov 17/04/51 - 15/04/52	Pavel Litvinov April 1952 - 30/07/58			
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Economy)	Matiss Plūdonis 13/02/48 - 13/12/63				

Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Trade)	A.I. Vīdedz until 04/09/58				
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Control)	Elmārs Bēmanis 20/12/62 - 20/12/65				
Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Industry)	S.G. Skobkina 22/11/53 - 05/09/57				
Administrative Director of the Council of Ministers	Jānis Kļaviņš 1946 - ?	Victors Krastiņš 1958-1971			
Editor of <i>Rīgas Balss</i> (Voice of Riga)	Oswalds Darbiņš 01/10/57 - 22/09/59	(Deputy) Anna Mūkina 1957? - Sept 1959			
Editor <i>Zvaigzne</i> (Star)	Rafael Blūms 01/11/55 - 22/09/59	(Deputy) Velta Lācis		Hugo Rukšāns	
Editor of <i>Padomju Jaunatne</i> (Soviet Youth)	Rafael Blūms 30/08/44 - 19/08/52	Kristaps Kaugurs November 1953? - 22/09/59		M.J. Kārkliņa 1959? - June 1963	
Editor of (<i>Bolshevik</i>) <i>Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii</i>	Jānis Bumbiers August 1946 - 27/01/53	Karl M. Tolmadzhev 1953-1961		V. Karaluņš 1961-1966?	
Editor of <i>Sovetskaia Latvija</i> (Soviet Latvia)	Ivan Davydov 1948 - 02/03/55	A.P. Shaposhnikov 02/03/55 - Jan 1956	Nikolai Saleev 1954 or Jan 1956 - 1984	A.E. Vasilenok 1984 - ?	
Editor of <i>Cīņa</i> (<i>Struggle</i>)	Kārlis Ozoliņš 1940 - 1944	Pavel Pizāns August 1944 - February 1945	Ozoliņš 1945 - 1951	Pizāns July 1951 - 17/02/60	Ilmārs Ivert 17/02/60 - 15/06/1972
Editor of <i>Literatūra un Māksla</i> (Literature and Art)	Valdis Luks 1945-1947	Voldemārs Kalpiņš 1949-1952, 1954-58			
Editor of <i>Kommunist</i>	Pavel Pizāns August 1946 - July 1951				

Chairman of the Council of Trade Unions	Kārlis Voltmanis 1944 - 24/05/58	Indriķis Pīnķis 24/05/58 - 11/08/59	Victors Blīums 11/08/1959 - 1973				
First Secretary of the Komsomol	Indriķis Pīnķis March 1944 - May 1946	Eduards Berkļavs May 1946 - 22/06/48	Vilis Krūmiņš 10/06/48 - 28/04/51	Elmārs Bēmanis 28/04/51 - 24/04/58	Vladislavs Ruskulis 05/05/58 - 22/09/59	Augusts Zitmanis 22/09/59 - July 1963	L. Bartkevich July 1963 - ?
Second Secretary of the Komsomol	I. Brencis ? - 22/09/59	N.A. Karpov 22/09/59 - ?					
Komsomol Department for Schools	Pauls Dzērve 16/05/46 - 14/07/50	(Deputy) Pavel Cherkovsky 02/09/52 - 03/03/53					
Chairman of the Department for Party Organs/Department for Party, Trade Union and Komsomol Organs	Pavel Litvinov 1944 - 1949	Nikolai Bissenieks 29/03/49 - 17/04/51	Longins Avdiukevich 17/04/51 - 05/05/53	Bissenieks 05/05/53 - 29/05/54	Augusts Voss 29/05/54 - 27/01/60	Elmārs Bēmanis 27/01/60 - 20/12/62	Augusts Zitmanis 20/12/62
Deputy Chairman of the Department for Party Organs	Pēteris Plēsums 06/01/53 - 02/06/53	Aleksandr Aleksandrov 18/05/54 - 07/05/63					
Minister of Agriculture	Jānis F. Vanags 1940 - 1951	Aleksandr Nikonov 22/09/52 - 24/02/61	Vanags 22/03/61 - 04/04/62				
Deputy Minister of Agriculture	Nikolai Bissenieks March 1947 - 25/03/47	Jānis F. Vanags 1951 - 1953	Pēteris Strautmanis 1957-1958	Visvaldis Vallis 1958? - October 1959			
Minister of Public Utilities/Communal Services	Roberts Ķīsis December 1944 - 19/04/60 or 04/10/60						
Head of the CC Department for <i>Agitprop</i>	Jānis Avotiņš 1940-1944; 05/05/53 - 22/02/57	Ivan Veselovs 27/04/60 - Nov 1961	I.A. Anderson March 1962 - December 1962				

Deputy Head of the CC Department for <i>Agitprop</i>	Jānis Bumbiers 03/03/46 - Aug 1946	Jānis Ostrovs 1944 - 1947	Herberts Valters December 1958 - January 1960			
Head of the CC Department for the Riga <i>gorkom</i>	Ivan Biniatian 1948 - 1954?	Albert Tseplis 24/06/53 - 06/04/60				
Head of the CC Department for Heavy Industry/Transport and Industry	Shamult	Ādolfs Miglinieks 08/07/52 - 20/01/56	P.I. Sokolov 20/01/56 - 27/04/60	E.K. Peterson 27/04/60 - 02/08/60	Yuri Rudometov 02/08/60 - 30/03/62	I.P. Berzin 30/03/62 - April 1970
Head of the CC Department for Science, Schools and Culture	Augusts Voss August 1953 - May 1954	Victors Krūmiņš 11/05/54 - Nov 1956/57	Nikolai Muravev Nov 1956/57 - 25/01/58	Leontina Lapiņa 25/01/58 - Dec 1962		
Deputy Head of the CC Department for Science, Schools and Culture	Victors Krūmiņš 1952 - 1954	Nikolai Muravev 1958 - 1961?				
Head of the CC Department for Administration, Trade and Finance	Aleksandr Drozdov (1955) - August 1958	Jānis Kacens August 1958 - April 1960	F.F Sokurenko April 1960 - December 1963			
Head of the CC Department for Agriculture	V.G. Stroganov ? - 04/05/55	Pēteris Strautmanis 04/05/55 - 17/11/56	Vitalijs Rubenis 17/11/56 - 16/04/58	Antons Luriņš 16/04/58 - 28/04/60	Rubenis 28/04/60 - 28/03/61	R.O. Verro 31/03/61 - 17/02/65
Deputy Head of the CC Department for Agriculture	Vitalijs Rubenis 30/03/53 - 26/01/54	Pēteris Strautmanis (1955)	Vitalijs Rubenis 10/05/55 - 08/10/56			
Head of the Education Department of Riga <i>gorispolkom</i>	Marta Duskina 1945 - 1951	Jānis Gibeitis				
Chairman of the Party Control Commission	Pēteris Plēsums 02/06/53 - 19/04/60	Roberts Ķisis 19/04/60 - 1973?				
Chairman of the Committee for State Construction	Jānis Auškāps 20/10/55 - 05/06/57	A.M. Trelib 04/04/58 - 19/09/63				

Minister of Building Materials	Jānis Auškāps ? - 20/10/55	K.O. Egor 20/10/55 - 05/06/57	
Minister of Urban and Rural Construction	B.F. Bezel ? - 26/08/63	E. Peterson 28/08/63 - 04/10/67	
Minister of Trade	Aleksandrs Kukainis ? - 07/07/56	Ivans Jansons 01/09/56 - 04/02/63	Roberts Praude Feb 1963 - ?
Minister of Finance	Arnolds Tabaks 15/03/47? - 30/03/51?	Vilhelms Lecis 30/03/51? - ?	Fyodor Manoilo 1959? - 24/03/61
Minister of Transport and Highways	Eduards Liberts 1951 - 06/09/61	A.F. Vonda 06/09/61 - 27/08/69	K.G. Tolmadzhev 24/03/61 - ?
Minister of State Control (Chairman of the Commission for Soviet Control of the CM LSSR)	Antons Ozolings 1953 - 20/12/62	Merged with Party/State Control Committee in 1963	Elmārs Bēmanis 1963 - ?
Minister of Light Industry/Consumer Goods	Nikolai Ponomarev 20/04/53 - 05/06/57	Position abolished	
Minister of Health	A.A. Krauss ? - 30/12/58	Vladimirs Ozoliņš 17/03/59 - 18/12/62	Vilhelms Kaņeps 18/12/62 - ?
Deputy Minister of Health	Ernest Yavnaists 1948 - 1958	Jānis Prombergs 08/04/59 - 13/08/59	
Minister of Meat and Dairy Industry	Aleksandrs Grāvītis 15/03/47? - 05/06/57	Position abolished	
Prosecutor	Aleksandr Mishutin 1944 - 1950	Deputy Prosecutor: Juris Sprogis 1955 - 1962	

Minister of Justice	Andrejs Jablonskis 1940 - 1951					
Deputy Ministers of Justice	Emīlija Veinberga 1945 - 1959	Boleslaw Azan 1954 - 1956				
Minister of Culture	Jānis Ostrovs April 1953 - 04/11/58	Voldemārs Kalpiņš 04/11/58 - 04/12/61	Vladimir Kaupužs 16/01/62 - 1986			
First Deputy Minister of Culture	Jānis Avotiņš 14/02/44 - 14/07/47	Voldemārs Kalpiņš 21/04/53 - 21/10/58	Pavel Cherkovskiy 02/12/58 - 28/07/59 Voldemārs			
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Pēteris Valeskalns 1944 - 1950	Jānis Ostrovs 23/05/55 - 14/04/59	Kalpiņš 14/04/59 - 04/12/61	Andrei El'vikh 06/04/62 - 13/04/67	Victors Krūmiņš 1967 - 1985	
Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Personnel	Pavel Litvinov	Valentin Yershov 30/09/52 - 23/06/53	Ādolfs Miglinieks 31/01/56 - 30/03/61	Vilis Krūmiņš? ? - 31/01/56		
Minister of Education	Kārlis Stradiņš 15/03/47? - 1950	V.P. Samsons 1950 - 17/02/60	Vilis Krūmiņš 17/02/60 - 19/12/61	A.A. El'vikh 13/01/62 - 23/05/69		
Manager of the State Bank	Vilhelms Lecis 25/01/58 - 1972					
Chairman of Gosplan	Fritzis Deglavs August 1940 - April 1951	Jānis Veldke 1955? - 02/10/57	Augusts Čulītis 02/10/57 - 28/04/65			
Deputy Chairman of Gosplan	R. Ansons 1950 - 1953	Jānis Vanags 1953 - 1954	Edgars Mūkins 10/06/58 - 18/08/59	A.J. Vīndedze		
Director of the Economics Institute	Jānis Bumbiers Feb 1946 - August 1947	Nikolai Kovalevskiy 1947 - 1952	Bumbiers 27/03/52 - 09/07/57	Fritzis Deglavs 09/07/57 - 02/01/58	Pauls Dzērve 02/01/58 - 15/12/59	Jānis Turchins 1960 - 1974
Deputy Director of the Economics Institute	Fritzis Deglavs April 1951 - 03/03/53?	Pauls Dzērve 03/03/53 - 31/12/57	Benjamiņš Treijs 31/12/57 - 15/12/59			

Chairman of the <i>sovmarkhoz</i>	Matiss Plūdonis 04/05/57 - 08/07/58	Georgijs Gaile 08/07/58 - 20/10/65				
Deputy Chairman of the <i>sovmarkhoz</i>	Matiss Plūdonis 10/05/45 - February 1948	Georgijs Gaile 1957 - July 1958	Jānis Auškāps July 1958 - June 1960			
Director of the State Electro-technical Factory (VEF)	Georgijs Gaile 1944 - 1957	N.I. Alekseev				
Rector of Latvia State University	Jānis Jurgens 1949 - 09/01/62	Valentīns Šteinbergs 1962 - 1970				
Rector of the Agricultural Academy	Jānis Peive 1944 - 1950	Jānis F. Vanags 1954 - 1961	Amalie Cekuliņš 1950 - 1954	Pāvils Zarins 1961 - 1966		
President of the Academy of Sciences	Paulus Leiņš 1946 - 1951	Jānis Peive 17/04/51 - 23/11/59	Karl Plaude 1960 - 1970			
Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences	Fritzis Deglavs April 1951 - 14/04/52	Augusts Kirhenšteins 14/04/52 - December 1958				
VKP(b) CC Orgburo for Latvia	Nikolai Shatalin 1944 - February 1946	V.F. Riazanov February 1946 - March 1947	Orgburo abolished March 1947			
Commander of the Baltic Military District	Ivan Bagramian July 1945 - May 1954	Aleksandr Gorbatov May 1954 - April/July 1958	Pavel Batov April/July 1958 - November 1959	Iosif Gusakovsky November 1959 - 01/03/63	Georgii Khetagurov March 1963 - June 1971	
Minister for State Security (MGB/KGB)	Alfons Noviks 30/11/43 - 03/03/53	Nikolai Kovalchuk 14/02/53 - 16/03/53	Jānis Vēveris 01/04/54 - 29/01/63	Longins Avdiukevich 30/01/63 - 1980		
Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD)	Alfons Noviks 25/08/40 - 31/07/41	Augusts Eglitis 24/03/44 - 17/01/51	Albert Sieks 17/01/51 - 16/03/53	Nikolai Kovalchuk 16/03/53 - 23/05/53	Ivan Zujāns 23/05/53 - 31/01/63	Vladimirs Sēja Jan 1963 - ?

Deputy Ministers of Internal Affairs	Albert Sieks 1944 - 1951	Aleksei Koshelev 1944 - 1951	Jānis Piesis 1946 - 1948	Deputy Minister for Police: Ivan Ivanov 16/03/51 - April 1953
MVD Police Chief	Jānis Piesis 1948 - 1955?	Mecheslav Matsulevich 10/05/55 - 12/04/61		
Riga <i>obkom</i> Secretary	Vilis Krūmiņš 15/04/52 - 25/04/53	Second Secretary: K. Novikov 15/04/52 - 25/04/53	Position abolished 25/04/53	
Liepāja <i>obkom</i> Secretary	Indriķis Pinksis 15/04/52 - May 1953	Position abolished 25/04/53		
First Secretary of the Liepāja <i>gorkom</i>	Yuri Rudometov 1945? - 1952	Ivan Desmitnieks 1952 - 27/05/53	Indriķis Pinksis 27/05/53 - 15/05/58	
Daugavpils <i>obkom</i> Secretary	Nikolai Bissenieks April 1952 - June 1953	On <i>Obkom</i> : Edgars Mūkins 18/04/52 - 02/06/53		
First Secretary of the Daugavpils <i>gorkom</i>	Feotistkov	Edgars Mūkins 02/06/55 - 31/08/55	Yuri Rudometov Sept 1955 - 1960	B.I. Bikov
Daugavpils <i>gorispolkom</i> Secretary	Jānis Pakalns 1953 - 1961			

* Between January and April 1958 the Second Secretary position remained vacant. The duties of the position were fulfilled by Kalnbērziņš.

Sources for all charts include Widmer, 'Nationalism and Communism'; LVA-PA fonds 101 and 15500; Grey Hodnett and Val Ogareff, *Leadership in the Soviet Republics 1955-1972*, (Canberra: Australia National University, 1973), 209-37.

Key: Allegiances

Yellow - National communist/supporter
Green - Moscow loyalist/Stalinist
Blue - Neutral
White - Unknown

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LVA-PA f.15500, apr.2

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LZAA f.1, apr.15

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RGANI f.5, op.31, d.123

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