

Frank Gordon

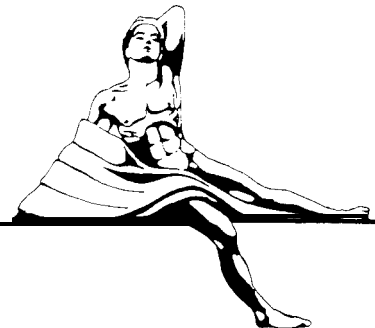
“Your Goat, My Pig ...”

Latvians and Jews between Germany and Russia

Translated by Vaiva Puķīte and Jānis Straubergs

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Židiņ, manu nāburdziņ, kur mēs mīļi dzīvojam!
Tava kaza, mana cūka, tie to ķildu izdarīja.
Dursim cūku, kausim kazu, atkal mīļi dzīvosim!

Dear Jew, my neighbor, we used to get along so well!
Your goat, my pig, they started the row.
Let's butcher the pig, let's slaughter the goat, and be good friends again!

—From Latvian folklore

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A Preliminary Note

This book is about Latvia, a relatively small country of 66,000 square kilometers, or 25,000 square miles, on the eastern shore of the Baltic sea, with a population of over two million.

One can give the history of this country in a nutshell. In the thirteenth century the Latvian tribes were subjugated by the Teutonic knights, whose successors, the so-called Baltic barons, were economically and socially the ruling class in the area for 700 years. In the middle of the sixteenth century the knights' state, Livonia, which encompassed the territory of present-day Latvia and neighboring Estonia, disintegrated, and the area was divided between Poland and Sweden. In the eighteenth century Latvia's territory was taken over by Russia, under which it remained until 1918. At the end of World War I, the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed. In the summer of 1940 Latvia was occupied by the Soviet army, and a year later, by the German army. At the end of World War II, Latvia again fell under Soviet domination. Since 1987 a popular independence movement has been growing, whose leaders demand that Latvian rights to self-determination be realized.

Introduction

In 1936, my father, who lived in the capital of independent Latvia, received a letter from Chicago. It was addressed to RIGA, RUSSIA. Sixteen years had passed since Russia—Soviet Russia—had “voluntarily and forever” renounced “all sovereign rights over the Latvian people and territory.” But the world never did realize that Latvia was not a part of Russia, that Riga was the capital of a sovereign state that was a member of the League of Nations.

Latvia existed as an independent republic for only two decades. Now, nearly half a century after the forcible incorporation of the country into the Kremlin's empire, the address RIGA, RUSSIA once again seems sadly appropriate.

The world has forgotten not only Latvia, but also the other Baltic States, Lithuania and Estonia. Latvians are confused with Lithuanians; Baltic athletes are called Russians. Only when the Western press raises the issue of Nazi war criminals do we suddenly hear, “Ah, these Latvians, they're all fascists!”

“Latvians are fascists.” And from a far, dark corner echo the words, “Jews are communists.” But how long has it been since it was falsely proclaimed in the West, “Latvians are communists”? And now Soviet propaganda claims, “Zionists (i.e., Jews) are fascists.”

How can it make any sense?

The paths of Latvians and Jews have often crossed, but only recently did the good relationship between both peoples deteriorate. In the dramatic year 1940, tragic misunderstandings occurred, whose consequences are still felt today. These consequences are deepest not in Russian-occupied Latvia or in the Jewish state of Israel, but in the Latvian diaspora, which in part coincides with centers of the Jewish diaspora.

If anything can be called the “Latvian ethnic Bible” and the mirror of Latvian folk phi-

osophy and attitudes through the centuries, it is the short, laconic folk songs, called dainas. There are nearly one million of these four-line verses, some reflecting ancient Latvian practices and beliefs, others documenting the Latvians' contacts with neighboring ethnic groups—Estonians and Lithuanians, Germans and Russians, gypsies and also Jews. In Krišjānis Barons' authoritative collection of dainas, there are a good number about Jews. Most, one must say, are friendly and warm-hearted, and those that poke fun at Jews do so in a well-meaning way, with far less bite than the dainas making fun of Germans, Russians or the "home folks." Some typical examples:

Oh little black-bearded Jew,
How sweet is your tobacco!
I snuffed it just once,
It made my trousers tremble!

Pray God I grow up soon
To be a Jew's bride.
A Jew has gloves, a Jew has stockings,
A Jew has pretty handkerchiefs.

The daina I chose as this book's motto is also characteristic. Indeed, we Jews and Latvians have had our disagreements and problems, but the root of the conflict must be sought in Latvia's unfortunate geopolitical position between two avaricious great powers—Germany and Russia. The country is simply in the way, an obstacle to be gotten rid of. This has been a misfortune, not a fault, of both our peoples. In this book, I will consider this complex problem and its peculiarities.

In my subjective opinion, even the best novels, with their innumerable dramatic situations, cannot compete with history, with history's facts, parallels and paradoxes. The segment of history examined here, the meeting of Latvians and Jews, is small, but even so is surprisingly rife with parallels and paradoxes.

One parallel, or analogy, is quite old. In the eleventh century, the Teutonic knights went on a crusade to the Holy Land, Terra Sancta, and along the way slaughtered thousands of Jews, culminating in a bloodbath in Jerusalem itself. Then, in the thirteenth century, the Teutonic knights invaded the territory of present-day Latvia, killing thousands of inhabitants—pagans who refused to submit to foreign rule. By deceit and violence the homelands of the historical Latvian tribes, the lands of the Kurlanders, Semigallians, Seelians and Latgallians, became the property of the crusading order, who called it Livonia, or Terra Mariana. The crusades in the Middle East and the crusade on the Baltic coast made the image of the knight one of evil personified in both Jewish and Latvian history, in contrast to the idealized "noble knight" of Western European tradition.

I would like to mention another interesting parallel. When the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and started the great Jewish diaspora, they struck a medal with the inscription IUDAEA CAPTA and the figure of a mourning woman under a palm tree. More than

1500 years later, when the Polish king Stephan Batory gained control of the territory of present-day Latvia, he issued a medal to commemorate the conquest with a similar motive—a mourning woman under a tree somewhat resembling a palm tree.

To be persecuted and subjugated, banished and slaughtered, has again and again been the fate of both Jews and Latvians.

What has been the fate of Latvians and Latvian Jews in this century, squeezed in the vise between Russia and Germany? Before pursuing the subject in greater detail, I would like to give several pairs of quotations that speak for themselves and show how mocking the laughter of history can sometimes be.

* * *

A special Latvian unit which had been guarding Lenin at the Smolny Institute arrived on the same train from Petrograd as the Government.... All responsible security positions at the Kremlin were entrusted to riflemen of the Latvian Ninth Regiment; the Latvian Parade Unit and the Second Riga Regiment guarded the staff of the Supreme Soviet for Military Affairs, various commissariats, and foreign embassies¹.

Finally, about 80 men, that at the time was the entire Fifteenth Reconnaissance Battalion, arrived at their designated post Unter der Linden. The perimeter secured by the unit included the Reichskanzlei, the Ministry of Aviation, Himmler's security police building and several other buildings. The Reconnaissance Battalion was given defensive positions in Himmler's former headquarters (RSHA). Oberleutnant Neilands, the battalion commander, set up his command post in Himmler's own underground bunker².

* * *

What destroyed Russia? Jewish brains, Latvian bayonets, and Russian stupidity.
-A view prevalent among White Russian émigrés in the twenties.

The Estonians are the elite of the Baltic peoples. Then come the Lithuanians, and lastly the Latvians. Stalin used Latvians for the executions which the Russians found disgusting. They're the same people who used to have the job of executioners in the old empire of the Tsars³.

* * *

The Jews, however, comprise a conspiracy against the entire world and humanity....

¹ Nikolai Nefiodov, "The Revolt of July 1918," article in *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, New York, September 30, 1973.

² Bulletin of the Latvian Welfare Association *Daugavas Vanagi*, Nr. 3, 1955, which discusses the fate of the Fifteenth Reconnaissance Battalion of the Fifteenth Latvian Waffen-SS Division in Berlin on April 30, 1945.

³ Adolf Hitler, night of July 11–12, 1941, from *Hitler's Secret Conversations 1941–1944*, New York, Signet Books, 1961, p. 38.

Though scattered throughout the world, they together make up a separate, secret nation, and they take the citizenship of other nations only as a mere formality. They are dual nationals.... There is only one stand to take with the Jews, and that is to destroy them.... The time of the Jews is over!⁴

The chauvinistic idea of world hegemony formulated in the “Holy Scriptures” and reflected in prayers has always been especially repellent.... In practice, this is reflected in the struggle for a “worldwide Jewish nation” centered in Israel and based on the dual loyalties of Jews beyond its borders.... No true national government, unless it has been taken over by Jewish bankers, will ever surrender its sovereignty and recognize as legitimate this “state within a state”.... Zionism was born at the same time as imperialism, shared its fate, and together with it will disappear from the face of the earth⁵.

* * *

... when Latvia was invaded for the first time by the Soviet Union, the actions of the Jews, without regard to the privileges they enjoyed in free Latvia. Masses of Jews along the streets of Riga greeted, embraced, and gave presents to the invading Red Army soldiers. The Jews without hesitation took the side of the communists⁶.

The Latvian population of Riga welcomed the Nazis in their Sunday garb. Most of the buildings were decorated with swastikas.... The destruction of Latvian Jewry will remain an eternal stain on the Latvian and German peoples.... History is very cruel and at times it repays what a people deserves. It is in this context that I venture to say that Latvians will be repaid for their complicity in the extermination of Jews, and for stabbing retreating Russian forces in the back. With its millions of citizens, the huge neighbor to the East is flooding Latvia with its citizens; Latvians are bound to become a minority in their own country in the not-too-distant future⁷.

* * *

These excerpts make fascinating reading. Historical facts mix with human prejudices, brazen lies, distorted perceptions, grievances, and vengeance. The rational mixes with the irrational. All this is involved in the blood stained saga of Eastern Europe.

My purpose is to help the reader understand what actually happened in this time and place to the relationship between these two peoples.

⁴ R. Č., “The True Face of the Jews,” from the Jelgava (Mitau), Latvia, newspaper *Zemgale*, Nr. 1, August 18, 1941, during the German occupation.

⁵ Vladimir Begun, *Ielaušanās bez ieročiem* (Invasion Without Weapons), Riga, Avots, 1981.

⁶ Open letter by the president of the Latvian Officers’ Association in Australia and New Zealand, June 21, 1983.

⁷ Max Kaufmann, “The War Years in Latvia Revisited,” in *The Jews in Latvia*, Tel Aviv 1971, published by the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel.

16. Jews in Latvia in the Early Years

Jews started to settle in the present territory of Latvia after 1561, when Latgale, in Eastern Latvia, fell under Polish rule, which continued for 200 years. Daugavpils (Dünaburg, Dvinsk), Rēzekne (Rositten, Rezhitsa), Ludza (Lutsyn), and other townships (*shtetl*) in Latgale, such as Krāslava (Kreslawka), Balvi, and Preiļi, became centers of settlement for Jewish artisans and traders. Settlement intensified after 1648, when many Jews settled here after fleeing the Cossack hordes of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who conducted massacres in the southern regions of Wolhynia and Podolia (the Ukraine).

The first place of settlement for Jews in Kurland (Courland), in Western Latvia, was the district of Piltene, which for a time was subject directly to the king of Poland. Jewish settlers came from Lithuania and Prussia. In the Duchy of Kurland itself, conditions for Jews were much harsher, but Jewish communities formed in Jelgava (Mitau), Kuldīga (Goldingen), Aizpute (Hasenpoth), Tukums, Bauska, and elsewhere.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the entire region of present-day Latvia became part of the Tsarist Empire. Kurland and Latgale fell in the “Pale of Settlement.” The tsars sought to keep Jews apart from the main bulk of the population, and so restricted Jewish residence to certain *gubernias*, or provinces, in the western part of the empire. Even within the Pale of Settlement, as this area was called, Jews could not buy land, were barred from certain professions, and so on. In the mid-nineteenth century the first Jews who engaged in trade in Riga, the capital of the *gubernia* of Livland (Vidzeme), formally registered as residents of Sloka (Schlock). In this little town and its environs, there were no restrictions on members of the Mosaic faith. Later, Jews were permitted to settle in Riga itself, mainly in the district to the southeast of the old city, the Moskauer Vorstadt or Moscow suburb. That is where my father was born in 1896, after his parents arrived from northern Lithuania.

A popular character in Latvian literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the *paunu žīds*, or traveling Jewish peddler with his bundles. He would visit Latvian farmsteads, buying flax and selling cloth, sewing needles, notions and household articles. Jewish artisans, especially tailors, were also welcome guests in Latvian farm homes. In the classic play *Skroderdienas Silmačos* (The tailors come to Silmachi), written in 1902 by Rudolfs Blaumanis, positively-portrayed Jews are among the main characters. The play was and is one of the most popular pieces of Latvian theater, from tsarist times, through Latvia’s independence between the world wars, to the present-day Russian occupation, and among Latvians abroad after 1945. Jews are also portrayed sympathetically in another of Blaumanis’ plays, *Trīnes grēki* (Trina’s sins).

One can name a number of Latvian prose writers who vividly portray the everyday life of Jews in rural Latvia: Apsīšu Jēkabs’ *Žīds iebraucis!* (The Jew has arrived!), Anna Brigadere’s *Trīs Skroderi* (Three tailors), Rudolfs Blaumanis’ *Trakais Izaks* (Mad Isaac), Jānis Poruks’ *Mūžīgais Žīds* (The eternal Jew), Ernests Birznieks-Upītis’ *Seskiņš* (The polecat), Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš’ *Ripkas laulība* (Ripka’s wedding), etc. Descriptions of Latvian–Jewish contact in urban settings are fewer. Notable is Jānis Grīziņš’ (Griķis’) account of childhood memories in novel form *Vārnu ielas republika* (The world of Varnu Street). Set in a typical working-class

district in Riga, it sympathetically portrays, among other characters, the Jewish doctor who treats poor families free of charge.

Latvian literature reflects the friendliness of the Latvians toward Jews and their curiosity about the latter's "exotic" ways. In 1938, the Logos Publishing House of Riga published H. Etkin's Yiddish anthology *Jidn un lotvišn* (Jews and Latvians), with an introduction by K. Tolman entitled "Jews in Latvian Literature." At the end of his essay, the author writes: "The Jewish figures that appear in Latvian literature are on the whole portrayed with quiet sympathy, even warmth. Latvian writers were not hostile to Jews; on the contrary, they were very friendly, adding them, like good acquaintances, to their gallery of characters." This is in contrast to the attitude of the Baltic German landowners, a class that looked with contempt on the Jews, especially the deeply religious and poorly educated Jews in the small towns⁸.

Here we reach the focal point of this chapter, the 1905 revolution in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire.

Marxism had been introduced to Latvia directly from Germany, and the Latvian proletariat had virtually no contact with the Marxist groups in St. Petersburg, Moscow, or other Russian cities. Unrest broke out in St. Petersburg on January 22, 1905, and was echoed two days later in Riga with the proclamation of a general strike. The strike was called by the Federative Committee, which consisted of representatives from the Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDSP, from the Latvian name), founded in 1904, and the Jewish Social Democratic organization "Bund," founded in 1897. One can say with confidence that Latvian Social Democrats and Jewish Bundists were close allies in leading the struggle for social reform, abolition of class privileges, a democratic constitution, and national autonomy—territorial autonomy for Latvians, cultural autonomy for Jews. Bund representative Leonid Korobotchkin and others were prominent revolutionary activists alongside several Latvians. The LSDSP and the Bund established "military organizations" with 500 members at the garrisons in Rīga and Liepāja (Libau), which agitated among soldiers of the Russian army. The Bund played a leading role in revolutionary activity in Latgale, Eastern Latvia, especially in the center Daugavpils (Dvinsk), a railway junction town where many Jews lived.

It must be noted that the Latvians fought not only against the tsarist autocracy, but also against the Baltic German landowners. This ethnic German class had kept its vast landholdings in the Baltic and its position of power and privilege within the Russian Empire. Agrarian reform, the breaking up of the large estates held by a few German families, was a major goal of the struggle.

The 1905 revolution was followed by repression—punitive expeditions, gallows, forced labour. Toward the end of 1905 and in early 1906, savage pogroms were organized in the western and southwestern parts of the Russian Empire, which claimed many Jewish lives. Latvians refused to join in these antisemitic actions. In the town of Ludza (Lutsyn) in Latgale, there was an incident in which local Latvian Catholic peasants prevented Russians from attacking the town's Jews. This was reported at the end of January 1906, by the newspaper

⁸ Jakob von Uexküll, *Niegeschaute Welten*, Munich 1957, pp. 94–95)

Gaisma (Light), published in St. Petersburg in the Latgalian dialect:

Shortly before Christmas, the Black Hundred [a right-wing Russian gang] set out to attack the Jews in Ludza, to beat them up and plunder their shops. It is well known that no decent Latvian belongs to the Black Hundred. It had been decided to attack the Jews on a given day. Many of the Black Hundred showed up in Ludza, and by the end of the day, it appeared that the shedding of innocent blood was close at hand. Catholic Latvians from the surrounding area, having learned of this, came to Ludza in large numbers and stayed until late in the evening. They told members of the Black Hundred there would be no violence against the Jews, for Jews were people like everyone else. More Latvians than Black Hundred members had arrived in Ludza, who soon understood there would be no fooling around with the Latvians. Having failed to achieve their objective, the Black Hundred cursed the Latvians and retreated to their dark corners.

However, despite the repressions, some measure of freedom had been won. In the Dumas, or parliaments, until 1917, the interests of the Baltic provinces were represented by both Latvians and Jews. Latvian representatives were Jānis Čakste, later the first president of Latvia, Fricis Trasuns, and others. Jewish representatives in the four Dumas from 1906 to 1917 were, respectively, Dr. Nissan Katzenelson, Jacob Shapiro, Lazar Nisselovitch and Dr. Ezekiel Gurevitch, all from Kurland. This was a result of political coalitions established with the Latvians and some of the Germans in Kurland.

The events of 1905 also had bloody repercussions in England, described by E. G. Clarke in his book *Will-o'-the-Wisp: Peter the Painter and Anti-Tsarist Terrorists in Britain and Australia* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1983). It concerns Latvian and Jewish revolutionaries--anarchists, Social Revolutionaries, left-wing Social Democrats--and their girlfriends, Jewish girls from Russia. Living in exile in London in 1910, Jēkabs Peterss, Jānis Jakle, Fricis Svārs, Jacob Lepidus, Morris Stein, Sara Trassjonsky, Luba Milstein, and others founded a secret organization, Liesma (Flame). They resorted to armed robbery to finance political actions in the Baltic. When their attempts failed, they battled British police, killing several officers.

That too was a form of Latvian–Jewish “comradeship in arms,” albeit a peculiar one. One of the most fearless members of the group, who shot to death three British policemen, was Jēkabs Peterss. After the Bolshevik coup in St. Petersburg, he became a close associate of Feliks Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka (forerunner of the KGB), and was counted among the greatly-feared Red “hatchet men.” But that is another, no less dramatic story, to be told in the next chapter.

2. The Bolshevik Coup d'Etat: The Dream of the World Commune

On June 28, 1914, when my mother was 16 years old, Gavrilo Princip shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria–Hungary, in Sarajevo. It was the day that marked the end of the “old world.” I have not checked whether Nostradamus predicted it, but what followed was truly apocalyptic. Four empires collapsed—the Reich of the German Kaiser, the Habsburg dual monarchy, the Ottoman sultanate, and, not least, the giant fief of the Romanovs.

The events that heralded and followed the fall of the Tsarist Empire dragged both Latvians and Jews into the whirlwind. Ironically, many members of both groups gained a kind of Herostratic fame in this horrific storm, deservedly or not.

Let us start with the Great Flight (*bēgļu laiki* in Latvian). World War I dragged on, and in the spring of 1915, the German army invaded Kurland. The retreating Russian army forced many civilians near the front to flee to the east and the northeast. Others fled voluntarily, in fear of “German barbarians.” Thousands of Latvians in Kurland abandoned their homes and fields to embark on an unknown, far-flung odyssey. It took them first to Vidzeme (Livonia) and later far into the depths of Russia proper. Of more than 800,000 inhabitants in Kurland, some 400,000, that is, half, left their homes. Later, the total number of Latvian refugees reached 700,000.

Latvians felt bitter hatred toward the Germans, more precisely, toward their German landlords, the Baltic barons. Kaiser Wilhelm’s offensive into Kurland promised no good. The Baltic barons did not hide their hopes to annex the entire Baltic region to Germany, or at least turn it into a grand duchy, a protectorate. They envisioned importing thousands of German settlers, especially to Kurland. Thus, Latvians, who in 1905 had risen against both the German landlords and the tsarist autocracy, ten years later saw Russia as the lesser evil. They volunteered in large numbers for special battalions in the Russian army, the Latvian Riflemen Battalions. The commander of the Russian army’s northwestern front gave the order for these battalions to be formed on August 1, 1915, a year after the outbreak of the war. As we shall see, it was an order that changed world history.

The attitude of Baltic Jews toward these two warring powers was quite different than that of the Latvians, although to a degree the effect was the same, in that many Jews were also forced to become refugees. Jews did not care for the deeply antisemitic ruling classes in Russia, that had carried out vicious pogroms, prevented Jews from settling freely within the empire (restricting them to the sort of giant ghetto, the Pale of Settlement), kept a *numerus clausus* against Jews in higher education, and so on. Jews understandably felt no respect or affection, much less patriotism, toward Nicholas II and his court. Also, the *Ob. Ost* (Eastern Areas) administration of the German-occupied territories of Russia was much more humane toward Jews than the tsar’s *uriadniks*, *pristavs*, and gendarmes had ever been, not to mention the Cossacks. Thus, to the Jews, the German Reich of the Kaiser seemed somewhat more civilized and was considered the lesser evil.

Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, the Army’s Chief of Staff, knew well what Jews thought of the Tsarist Empire. Without much ado, he proclaimed all Jews to be traitors and

spies and ordered their expulsion from a region within 50 *versts* (53 km) of the front. In Kur-land, this order uprooted 40,000 Jews at the end of April and early May of 1915. In all, 75 per cent of the Jews living on Latvian soil were forced to abandon their homes during the war. For Jews, as well as Latvians, the First World War meant the Great Flight, that was even less voluntary than for the Latvians.

In 1916, the eight Latvian Riflemens Battalions were reorganized as regiments. They fought against the Germans with extreme valor and self-sacrifice. There were harsh battles along the shores of the Daugava, especially around Christmas 1916, and on several occasions the Latvians saved Russian army units on the same sector of the front from defeat. The Latvians proved themselves to be exemplary, disciplined, and steel-hard warriors. They became the elite troops of the tsarist army.

The winter of 1916–17 ended with the revolt in St. Petersburg that toppled the autocratic regime, and Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate. The new Provisional Government lifted all restrictions on Jews and promised autonomy to non-Russian peoples. Soon, the attitude of both Jews and Latvians changed sharply.

New times began. To paraphrase the motto on the flag of one of the Riflemen's regiments, "A Blood-Stained Sun Rises." Erosion of morale set in among Russian army troops after the February revolution in 1917, and thousands deserted from the front. Only the Latvian Riflemen maintained discipline and their reputation of prowess in combat.

In April of 1917, the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin (Ulianov) returned from Swiss exile to St. Petersburg. The Germans had allowed him and several comrades, including Zinoviev (Apfelbaum), to pass through Germany in a sealed railway car and even gave them money to promote subversive activities in Russia. In May, the energetic revolutionary Lev Trotsky (Bronstein) returned to Russia from the United States.

Bolshevik agitators in the Russian army tried especially hard to get the army's best soldiers, the Latvian Riflemen, to back their cause. This largely succeeded, mainly because the Riflemen were still angry that the incompetent tsarist military leadership had left them to their fate during the Christmas battles of 1916, costing many Latvian lives. Also, many Riflemen were sons of landless agrarian workers who believed the Bolsheviks' promises to carry out radical land reform when they came to power. The Baltic barons' great estates would be divided, giving land "to those who work the land." In the wake of the events of 1905, there were many Marxist sympathizers among the Riflemen, who thought that Bolshevik demagoguery represented the "highest and purest form" of this teaching. In addition, these young Latvians were patriots from a small country, who at the same time were internationalists to a considerable degree, well acclimatized to living in the vast stretches of Russia and meeting people of different nationalities both in everyday life and in the trenches.

The Bolsheviks promised national self-determination for all peoples in the Russian Empire. Visions were raised of the proletarians of a free Latvia joining with the working masses of a free Finland, a free Poland, and a free Caucasus in an offensive against the "old, rotting world." They would soon be joined by the workers of France and Germany, then by the "enslaved millions" of China and India. Before too long there would be a "world commune" based on absolute justice.

Of course, not every Latvian Rifleman thought of the future in these terms, but their overall attitude was euphoric, and Red propaganda was a major factor in the rapid Bolshevization of these troops. Not only the Riflemen themselves but also most of their officers embraced the Bolshevik cause, among them the highly talented Jukums Vācietis. Vācietis became commander-in-chief of all Soviet Russian military forces after the Bolshevik coup in St. Petersburg (the so-called Great Socialist October Revolution). Some officers did not go over to the Bolshevik cause: Fridrichs Briedis, shot by the Bolsheviks in 1918; Kārlis Goppers, shot by the Bolsheviks in 1941; Colonel P. Dardzāns, who died recently in Chicago.

The second All-Russian Congress of Soviets met in St. Petersburg on November 7, 1917 (25 October old style), the day of the coup. The American journalist John Reed, present as an observer, relates a speech by delegate Kārlis Petersons, a representative of the Latvian Riflemen, who in 1918 became commander of the Red Army's Latvian Division and a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. According to Reed⁹, Petersons concluded his rousing speech with the following words:

I tell you now, the Lettish [Latvian] soldiers have said many times, "No more resolutions! No more talk! We want deeds—the Power must be in our hands!" Let these impostor delegates [who opposed the Bolshevik coup] leave the Congress! The Army is not with them!

And John Reed remarks, "The hall rocked with cheering."

Indeed, the Latvian Red Riflemen were in fact the strongest pillar supporting the Bolsheviks. They were the Bolsheviks' Praetorian guard. As the Latvian historian Uldis Ģērmanis, who lives in Stockholm, points out (in *Oberst Vācietis und die Lettischen Schützen im Weltkrieg und in der Oktoberrevolution*, Stockholm, Amqvist & Wiksell, 1974), Lenin could rely on neither the disorganized Russian troops in St. Petersburg, nor the famous sailors at Kronstadt with their growing anarchistic tendencies, nor the militarily weak Red Guard, composed of workers. The Bolshevik headquarters in St. Petersburg, the Smolny Institute building, which contained Lenin's office, were guarded by a special company of Latvian Riflemen (officially called *Svodnaya rota Latyshskich Strelkov pri VCIK i Sovnarkome*). When the Soviet government moved to Moscow in March of 1918, these faithful bodyguards of the Bolshevik leadership, now known as the United Latvian Riflemens Battalion, were assigned to guard the Kremlin.

Here it would be appropriate to recall the White Russian émigré saying mentioned in the introduction: "What destroyed Russia? Jewish brains, Latvian bayonets, and Russian stupidity." Making no judgment about Russian stupidity and having looked at the role of the Latvian bayonets, let us turn to the matter of Jewish brains.

The historian Walter Laqueur, who lives in Britain, states that during Hitler's formative years he (Hitler) was greatly influenced by the Baltic German Alfred Rosenberg, who grew up in Estonia and studied in Riga. Rosenberg was the theoretician of National Socialism who con-

⁹ *Ten Days that Shook the World*, New York, The Modern Library, 1960, p. 130

vinced the future German Führer that Bolshevism and Jewry were one and the same (*die Vorstellung von der Austauschbarkeit von Bolschewismus un Judentum*). This misconception found wide support, one must admit, not only among German Nazis and Russian reactionaries, but also among certain Latvian right-wing extremists, who even in 1987 claim “Jews are communists.”

However, as the Russians say, there is no smoke without fire. In the interests of historical accuracy one must acknowledge that Jews, like Latvians, played a major role in the early years of Bolshevism’s “Great Experiment,” that is, between 1917 and 1937. This is indicated graphically in the memoirs, published abroad, of the well-known Russian poet Marina Zvetayeva, who remembers how amazed she was that in 1918 in Moscow, everywhere, in every institution, there were “only Yids and Latvians.” All Moscow, she complained, was swarming with them.

That hardly means that all Jews in the Russian Empire stood behind the Bolsheviks. A majority of the Bund opposed the Reds, as did several influential Zionist organizations, Jewish religious leaders—the rabbinate, and the wealthier classes such as industrialists and big merchants. In the summer of 1918, the attempted assassination of Lenin was carried out by a Jewish woman, Fanny Kaplan, and the Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) revolt against the Bolsheviks was led by the Jew Blumkin, among others.

Still, the fact is that the role of Jewish revolutionaries among the Bolsheviks during the civil war and the twenties was very large. One has only to name a few names to make that clear: Lev Trotsky; Grigori Zinoviev, first president of the Communist International; Yagoda, head of the secret police; Kamenev, Radek, Sverdlov, Joffe, Yakir. Thousands of young Jews joined the Bolsheviks after they became convinced that White Russian forces, Cossacks, Ukrainian insurgents, and other armed opponents of Bolshevism were organizing pogroms in the finest tradition of Orthodox Mother Russia’s antisemitism. This persecution, looting, and killing drove Jews over to the Bolshevik side. An additional factor, to be sure, was the hunger for power and respect, the possibility of at long last holding positions of authority and responsibility in revolutionary power bodies. There was also a desire for vengeance against “reactionaries” for earlier injustices against Jews, and last but not least, the aforementioned romantic dream of the dawning “world commune,” the utopian “new world order.”

Among the prominent Jewish Bolsheviks were commissars and Chekists who were members of Baltic Jewish families. For example, the Riga Jew M. Gruzenberg-Borodin in the twenties was the Kremlin’s emissary to China and worked as chief adviser to the Kuomintang nationalist government. Also, the Latvian Jew Jacob Rappoport was one of the founders of the Gulag. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn¹⁰ mentions that Rappoport, while a student at Tartu (Dorpat, or Jurjev), was evacuated to Voronezh, where he later become deputy head of the provincial Cheka and then deputy head of construction of the White Sea–Baltic Canal, built with slave labour.

In this connection I would like to quote a letter from my late father, Joseph (Jāzeps) Gordon, sent September 29, 1974, from Haifa to Tel Aviv:

¹⁰ ¹⁰ *The Gulag Archipelago*, New York, Harper & Row, 1975, v.2, p. 83

When I was last visiting you, I leafed through the book *The Gulag Archipelago* and came upon the picture of my old schoolmate, Rappoport. I want to tell you the following story, which is not a fairy tale, but the truth.

Men's Fates

In the summer of 1915, when the German army was closing in on Riga, schools were evacuated to the Russian interior. I was then in the last grade of high school. We were told that our German teacher, an ethnic German, was working at the technical high school in Voronezh. Since I had a relative there, a refugee from Jelgava (Mitau), I moved to Voronezh for the school year 1915–16.

At the time there were many refugees in Voronezh, Jews from Kurland and Lithuania, who had been forcibly exiled to the Russian interior by the antisemitic, reactionary Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich. To my surprise, I met two schoolmates, Rappoport and Gorfinkel, who had also come to complete their schooling in Voronezh. They had rented a small room together, where they lived as the best of friends, under one roof, sharing the same blanket.

When the school year ended, we each went our separate ways. Gorfinkel returned to Riga. He knew Hebrew. While in Voronezh, he had participated in Jewish youth meetings (*vetcherinkas*) held on Jewish holidays. When the Hebrew High School was founded in independent Latvia, he became its director. He held that job until 1940. Just before the outbreak of the German–Soviet war, he was deported for being a Zionist, to a far-away place in Siberia. He never returned.

Rappoport went from Voronezh to Moscow. When the revolution broke out, he joined the Bolsheviks and started to work for Dzerzhinsky's organization [the state police]. He evidently worked faithfully and well, because during the forties he became the prosecutor for the MGB [the Ministry of State Security] in Moscow. I found out in Riga from a former schoolmate that Rappoport died a few years ago, holding the rank of general.

As for myself, I was drafted into the army after finishing technical high school. During Kerensky's time I became a Junker cadet, that is, one of the bitterest enemies of Bolshevism.

I think this family letter bears witness to the times.

But let us return to the Latvians who were active in the Bolshevik seizure and consolidation of power. In St. Petersburg, Pēteris Stučka, Mārtiņš Lācis and Jēkabs Peterss were members of the committee that prepared the Bolshevik coup. I. Smilga agitated for the Bolshe-

viks among Russian army units in Finland. The seaman E. Bergs led an attack by Russian marines on the Winter Palace, site of the Provisional Government. In Moscow the Bolshevik uprising was led by Lieutenant O. Bērziņš; chief of staff of the Red Guards was J. Pieče.

The Latvian Riflemen's regiments of the Red Army, later united as the "Latdivision," participated in all the crucial battles of the Russian civil war, especially in the Ukraine and in storming the fortified zone at Perekop, which blocked the way to the Crimea. The Red Army's victories are unthinkable without the Latvian Riflemen. As the Russian communist poet Demyon Bedny (Pridvorov) wrote at the time, "Any flank is secure if Latvians are there! (*Ljubyje flangi obespetcheni, kogda na flangach latyshi.*)" It is a proven fact that the Riflemen saved the Bolshevik regime in July 1918, when the Left SR revolt broke out and the lives of Lenin, Trotsky, and Dzerzhinsky were hanging by a thread. As mentioned in the introduction, in Moscow the protection of important buildings and persons, especially in the Kremlin, was entrusted to the Latvian Riflemen. The famous Latvian military leader Jukums Vācietis and his men restored order in Moscow. As J. Poriētis records in his book *Strēlnieku leģendārās gaitas*¹¹, units of Latvians smashed anti-Bolshevik rebellions in other cities as well—the Third Regiment in Kaluga, the Fifth Regiment in Bologoye, the Sixth Regiment in St. Petersburg (Petrograd), the Seventh Regiment in Staraya Russa and St. Petersburg, the Eighth Regiment in Vologda and Yaroslav, etc. Furthermore, the father of Soviet military aviation was the Latvian Jēkabs Alksnis.

Along with Jews and Poles such as Dzerzhinsky and Menzhinsky, Latvians played a role in forming that fearsome instrument of Red terror, the Cheka. George Leggett notes this in his book¹². He quotes Trotsky as saying at a Politburo meeting on April 18, 1918, that Latvians and Jews comprised the largest percentages of the Cheka's employees at the front, in the rear, and in Soviet institutions in the center. Jēkabs Peterss, who was a close associate of the founder of the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky, and Mārtiņš Lācis-Sudrabs, who was the theoretician of the Red terror, were the most monstrous of the Latvian Chekists. The British journalist Reginald O. G. Urch¹³, who was well versed in Baltic and Soviet affairs, mentions Lācis-Sudrabs in his book. Urch cites an article by Lācis-Sudrabs in which he wrote: "The Central Executive Committee has abolished the Cheka, but it has created and placed on duty a new sentinel—the GPU. The Cheka has done its work.... And you, the new sentinel, be alert."

In the twenties and thirties, Latvians continued to be active in the Soviet Union's political police and intelligence service. The creator of Soviet spy networks in the West was Bērzins, who was also the supervisor and mentor of the famous spy Richard Sorge. Another Bērzins supervised the slave labour camp system at Kolyma, the *Dal'stroy*, which was the Soviet predecessor to and equivalent of Auschwitz.

Solzhenitsyn remarks in *The Gulag Archipelago*: "The Estonians and Lithuanians are close to my own soul.... They never harmed anyone, lived quietly, in good conditions, morally more honestly than we. As it turned out, they were guilty of living next to us and cutting us off

¹¹ The Riflemen's legendary deeds, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1966

¹² *The Cheka, Lenin's Political Police 1917–1922* (Oxford 1981)

¹³ *The Rabbit King of Russia* (London 1939).

from the sea.... As for Latvians, my attitude is somewhat more complicated. There is an element of fate. It was they, after all, who started the whole thing.”

Solzhenitsyn is emotionally biased. He cannot forget the Latvian bayonets.

In 1920, two years after Latvia became independent, Soviet Russia renounced all claims to Latvian territory “for all time.” A repatriation action was undertaken, and the great majority of Latvian and Jewish refugees, including the Riflemen, returned to Latvia. Only about 60–70,000 of those who had left during the war years stayed in the Soviet Union. To that figure one must add about 180–190,000 Latvian settlers, who had gone to various areas of Russia, including Siberia, before and just after the turn of the century.

The leaders of this community were about 12,000 Latvian communists—former Riflemen’s officers and commissars, political workers, activists. As mentioned earlier, many of them took leading posts in the Cheka, the Red Army, and other institutions. Latvians such as Eiche and Eidemanis consolidated the Soviet regime in the Crimea and Central Asia, and also in Yakutia and other regions of Siberia. The Latvian communists in Russia had their own cultural and educational organization “Prometheus,” their own cooperatives and presses, schools and theaters, newspapers, a literature and art journal *Celtne*. The exile community of Red Latvians was secure in its national–cultural autonomy.

Unfortunately, Stalin’s Great Purge started to affect this community at the end of 1936. In two years all Latvian organizations—cooperatives and presses, schools and theaters, newspapers and journals—were closed. Thousands of Latvians were shot, from Chekists and high Red Army commanders to teachers and writers. Thousands were imprisoned in the Gulag. Many changed their Latvian surnames, for even to be Latvian was suspect. Stalin considered all Latvians in Russia to be spies for independent Latvia. The persecution of Latvians, especially Latvian communists, was almost genocidal in nature. Most tragic of all was the fate of the gifted writer and poet Linards Laicens. In independent Latvia, he had enthused about the proletarian revolution. More than once spending time in prison, he always returned to editing leftist journals. In 1928, while in prison, he was elected to the *Saeima* (parliament) as a representative of the communist Workers’ and Farmers’ List. He was a *Saeima* deputy until 1932, when he went to “the fatherland of all workers,” the Soviet Union. There he received many honors. In 1934 Laicens participated in the First All-Union Writers’ Congress, representing the “Western proletarian writers’ group.” But in the end he too was arrested and was shot like a dog on December 14, 1938. So ended the dream of the “world commune.”

The dream ended also for thousands of Jewish communists who were shot in Stalin’s Great Purge, which lasted from 1934 to 1939. Stalin then did not yet dare to openly declare his antisemitism. It was enough to call Jews he wanted to liquidate “Trotskyite” or “Zinovievist”; that was sufficient to kill outright or starve to death in labour camps untold numbers of Jewish commissars and diplomats, Chekists and officers, editors and writers, including those as talented as Isaac Babel, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Osip Mandelstam.

The antisemitic tone of the purge was quite noticeable, and Nazi propaganda to the contrary was completely unfounded. A Nazi line in the summer of 1941 was that the Soviet Union was run by “the Kaganovitches and the Kosherovitches.” Lazar Kaganovitch and Zakhar Mekhlis, Stalin’s personal friends and favorites, were rare exceptions. After 1939, when the

Jew Litvinov was replaced as foreign minister by Molotov, there were no Jews left in the top echelons of the Kremlin.

I would like to mention one more interesting episode. In the first volume of his memoirs, published in Stockholm in 1983, the leader of the Latvian Social Democrats Brūno Kalniņš mentions a certain young man, Herberts Cukurs. Cukurs was expelled from the Social Democrat youth group in Liepāja in February 1919, for advocating Bolshevik propaganda. He was in contact with Kārlis. Pētersons, war commissar of the Latvian Bolshevik leadership. In the years of Latvia's independence, Cukurs was a famous pilot. He became a rabid antisemite, and in the fall of 1941 personally participated in the shooting of Riga ghetto Jews in the Rumbula forest. He was assassinated on February 24, 1965, in Uruguay's capital Montevideo by self-styled "revengers" from an organization called "Those who do not forget." Indeed, an odd destiny, a strange fate.

3. Carl Ballod and Jānis Rainis

Let us depart from a strictly chronological sequence to honor two eminent Latvians, each of whom was well known in his respective field outside the narrow confines of the land of his birth. Professor Carl Ballod (Kārlis Balodis, 1864–1931) and Jānis Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929) were also noted as friends of the Jewish people and supporters of Jewish national strivings. Both repudiated nationalistic narrow-mindedness and provincialism. They were ardent Latvian patriots and at the same time, one might say, “European humanists.”

Carl Ballod was born in 1864 in Koknese. He studied theology, geography, and economics at universities in Dorpat (Tartu), Jena, Munich, and Strasbourg. After being a Lutheran minister in Russia, and from 1900 to 1902 a journalist in Latvia, he became widely known as an economist. At the University of Berlin during the First World War, he developed a rationing system that was the first comprehensive structure for equitable food distribution in an emergency. This achievement, primarily, gained him respect and recognition not just in Germany, but also from the Allied Powers. In 1919 Ballod became a professor at the newly founded University of Latvia, and from 1928 to 1931 was a member of the Latvian parliament, the Saeima, representing the Democratic Union. A specialist in urbanization and demographic issues, Ballod favored rational planning, while rejecting Marxist utopias. He published widely in Latvian, German, French, and English. His most influential works are “Der Bankerott der freien Wirtschaft,” “Der Zukunftsstaat,” “Quel maximum de population notre terre est-elle en état d’alimenter,” and “Garden Cities or Agricultural Cities?” His book *La Latvie* introduced Latvia to the general public.

As mentioned, Carl Ballod was Latvian patriot. In the autumn of 1919, the democratic government of the young independent Latvian State had to defend itself not only against the Bolsheviks, but also against the German mercenaries of von der Goltz and the Russian mercenaries of Bermond-Avaloff. One might have thought Ballod would have German sympathies. Instead, the venerable 55-year-old professor volunteered for the legendary Latvian army unit that saved the center of Riga.

But what is Ballod’s contribution to Jewish history? At the beginning of 1918, when Germany’s collapse was not predictable, he became the chairman of the German Committee for the Advancement of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, known as the Pro Palestina Committee. He brought into the committee several well-known German politicians and scientists, among them Gustav Noske, Erzberger, Sombart, and Max Weber.

In 1918 Eretz Israel, or Palestine, was a part of the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Germany and Austria–Hungary, that were fighting against England and France. The Bolshevik government concluded a separate peace treaty with Germany at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. Zionists and religious organizations were active among the millions of Jews, the *Ostjuden*, that lived in the vast area of Russia occupied by the Germans—Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia, the Ukraine. On the other side, Zionists in England pinned their hopes on the Allied powers, the Entente. The head of the Zionists was the respected chemist Chaim Weizmann, who became Israel’s first president. On November 2, 1917, the British government with the Balfour Declaration had promised to turn the Zionist dream into a reality. But the executive offices of the World

Zionist Organization were still in Berlin, as before the war. Concerned about the effect of the Balfour Declaration on the great number of Eastern European Jews, the German government published its own Lichtheim Declaration. Named for a German Zionist, this declaration promised that, in the event of a German and Austro–Hungarian victory, the Jews would get not only a “national home in Palestine,” but also an autonomous state under the benevolent aegis of the Ottoman Empire.

This was the situation when Professor Carl Ballod undertook the leadership of the Pro Palestina Committee. In his pamphlet “Palestine as a Territory for Jewish Settlement,” he gave a positive answer to two questions: Are the goals of Zionism attainable, practically speaking? Is it physically possible to settle a significant part of the world’s Jewry in Palestine? Analyzing in detail data about population density, climate, water resources and the like, Ballod showed that it would be feasible to settle millions of Jews in Eretz Israel, without infringing on the local Arab population. This could be achieved by maximizing intensive agriculture and irrigation, developing the cooperative approach, and founding “industrial villages” and “garden cities.”

Of course, Carl Ballod’s analyses were based on the scientific and technical knowledge of his time. He also had to take into account the German government’s strategic self-interests. But it is a fact that he was one of the first Gentile scientists to document the rationale for the Zionist ideal and to strongly support its goals.

Near the end of his brochure, Professor Ballod stressed that if the new Jewish settlement in Palestine were to be stable and not ephemeral, it would have to be “a society of free comrades, not a society of masters and servants.” He ended with a quote from Goethe’s Faust:

Though not secure, yet free to active toil;
And such a thing I fain would see—
Stand on free soil among a people free!

* * *

Jānis Rainis is Latvia’s most famous poet. As Rolfs Ekmanis states in the *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century*¹⁴, Rainis’ “place is unquestionable as the greatest Latvian poet, and perhaps the greatest Latvian writer. He was also the key figure in Latvian literary and intellectual history during the 1900–1930 period.” In the 1920s it was proposed to nominate Rainis for the Nobel Prize in literature, but this was defeated by the intrigues of his political opponents. In my opinion he richly deserved the Nobel Prize.

In the same article Ekmanis continues:

As one of the central figures in the 1905 revolution (which in Latvia developed into a nationalist movement), he [Rainis] had to flee from Latvia. Like many other eastern Europeans of the age, Rainis and his wife Aspazija (pseud. of Elza Rozenberga, 1868–1943), a well-known

¹⁴ New York, Ungar, 1984, v. 3, pp. 140-141

Latvian poet and a feminist leader, emigrated to Switzerland. During fourteen years of exile, Rainis wrote his major literary works and became the ideologist of an autonomous Latvian state, envisioning it as neither a slave to the East nor a servant to the West. In 1920 Rainis returned to the newly proclaimed independent Republic of Latvia, where he held prominent positions in the government (including that of Minister of Education) and in the Social Democratic party. He was instrumental in founding the Riga Art Theater in 1920, and directed the Latvian National Theater from 1920 to 1925.

Rainis was also a deputy in the *Saeima*, in his speeches passionately defending the rights of a free press. He repeatedly stressed that free Latvia was an integral part of a free Europe, and that the example of the ancient Greeks showed that even small nations can make significant contributions to world culture and civilization. As a dedicated democrat and humanist, Rainis in all his public offices championed the rights of ethnic minorities, especially the Byelorussians and Jews. In the 1920s ideologues of the National Club, a group of rightist extremists, disparaged Rainis as a “Jew-lover,” ignoring the fact that Rainis was a dedicated Latvian patriot and that his poems and plays, especially *Fire and Night* (1907) and *Daugava* (1919), inspired the Latvian people to struggle for their freedom and national independence.

Ekmanis further states that Rainis’ play *Joseph and His Brothers* (1919), in the English translation (1924) called *The Sons of Jacob*, “is usually considered Rainis’ greatest drama because of the handling of the emotions and psychology of its characters. Based on the biblical story of Jacob and his sons, it expresses the irreconcilable conflict between the individual and society, of which Rainis was so aware.” It is worth noting that this play about Joseph and his brothers still has an honored place in the Latvian theater repertory of Russian-occupied Latvia, and actors consider it a great honor to be entrusted a part in this striking, deeply philosophical play. Regrettably the play has not become part of the repertory of leading theaters in the free world, which is the more surprising since translations exist. An English translation has been available since 1924, and there is an adequate, even congenial German translation, done by Rainis’ wife Aspazija. There is also an Italian translation, *Giuseppi e i suoi fratelli*¹⁵. In my subjective opinion, Rainis’ play *Joseph and His Brothers* is truly a work of genius, in its spirituality and depth of thought surpassing Thomas Mann’s widely known epic novel of the same name.

Early in 1930, Thomas Mann accompanied by his wife, visited Egypt and Palestine to acquaint himself with the area as background for the novel. Four months before his death in 1929, Rainis visited Palestine. In the words of Brūno Kalniņš:¹⁶

Rainis’ journey to far-off Palestine was motivated by his deep interest in the Jewish people and their achievements in the land of their forefathers.... Rainis arrived in Palestine on April 17, 1929.... He was accompanied by Dr. Lifschitz [his doctor and close friend]. The

¹⁵ Florence, Sansoni, 1949

¹⁶ *Raiņa un Aspazijas Gadagrāmata*, Stockholm 1972, pp. 36–38.

next day Rainis visited the Histadrut cultural committee, health insurance company, and the cooperative press Hapoel Hatzair. In the afternoon Rainis visited the Histadrut headquarters, where he was greeted by one of the leaders, Kaplansky, who told him about the workers' movement in Palestine....

On April 19 and 20 Rainis travelled around the country, visiting Nes-Ziona, Petach-Tikva, and Rishon-Lezion, where he saw workers' moshavim and kibbutzim. He also visited the agriculture organization Yakhin and the workers' village Shechunat Borochov. In the evening Rainis visited the Jewish workers' youth association and went to a concert. As noted in Rainis' own travel notes, he also saw the ruins of Joseph's tomb and the pit of Dothan, "into which Joseph was thrown by his brothers."

On April 21 Rainis attended the congress of the Jewish socialist party Achdut-Avoda, the predecessor of the present-day Israel Labour Party. At the opening session he was introduced by Ben-Gurion, who emphasized the role played by Rainis in the Latvian socialist movement and his positive attitude toward Jewish inhabitants of Latvia and their cultural interests. In his lengthy speech Rainis expressed great pleasure in having been given the opportunity to participate in the congress and the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Palestine workers' party. He delivered friendly greetings from the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party and the Latvian people. "Coming here," said Rainis, "I knew something about Palestine, but I realized right away that my knowledge was incorrect in many ways. The Bund, the Jewish workers' party in Latvia, states that there isn't a strong workers' movement in Palestine, that Zionism is a bourgeois movement supported by only some of the workers. Here in Palestine, I have become convinced that this is not so. The workers' movement is the basis of Zionism, and without it the Zionist organization would not be what it is today...."

Rainis ended his speech: "In the few days I have spent here, I have seen how democratic socialism is being built. I would like to specially emphasize the great enthusiasm with which you are turning your ideals into reality. There is no doubt that the Social Democrats of Latvia and all of Europe could learn a great deal from you, especially from your enthusiasm."

... He was now convinced that the Zionists were building a new Jewish state, and that at the forefront of the Zionist movement were the Jewish socialists. Rainis realized that Latvians as a matter of principle should support this effort and also the Latvian Jews who wished to emigrate to Palestine. He understood that Jews had the same right

to a state of their own as did the Latvians. Perhaps Rainis' enthusiasm for Palestine went a little too far, for he thought that kibbutzim, democratic agricultural communities, should also be founded in Latvia, which was not a practical possibility. He was not able to carry out his plans on behalf of Palestine, for he died four months after the trip.

According to Aspazija, Rainis shortly before his death told her, "I want to see if, after all, Lipschitz is my only friend, the only true human being?" (Cited in the newspaper *Socialdemokrāts*, September 18, 1929). Rainis' last words were: "Lipschitz, dear friend, save me!" (Newspaper *Pēdējā Brīdī*, September 13, 1929).

4. The Good Years

On November 9, 1918, a revolution broke out in Germany, and the Kaiser was forced to abdicate his throne. On November 11, the armistice was signed on the Western front, the official end of World War I.

That same day, His Majesty's foreign minister, who a year before had become famous in the history of the Jewish people and the Zionist movement with the Balfour Declaration, wrote to the provisional Latvian National Council in London that his government *de facto* recognized the independence of the Lettish (Latvian) state, a state that at that moment had not yet even been born!

That, too, was a "Balfour declaration;" that, too, was an extremely important historical document—this time not for Jews, but for Latvians.

And who was the provisional Latvian National Council's emissary, who was the person who succeeded in gaining his country's recognition, despite the fact that the state had not yet declared its independence? It was Zigfrīds A. Meierovics, the son of a Jewish physician from Durbe, a little town in Kurland, and a Latvian mother, who had died when he was two days old.

Zigfrīds Meierovics, 30 years old, was a tireless defender of the national interests of the Latvian people. As a leader of the Farmers' Union headed by Kārlis Ulmanis, he attempted to gain more autonomy for Latvia in negotiations with the Provisional Government of Russia after the February revolution. Later he went to London to further the Latvian cause, and his efforts were crowned with outstanding success.

On November 18, 1918, when German troops getting ready to "go home" were still in Riga and bolshevized Red Riflemen's regiments were approaching from the northeast, the National Council held a meeting in the hall of the city's Second Theater. The vice-chairman, Gustavs Zemgals, announced that state power in Latvia had devolved to the National Council. On this chilly autumn day, after almost 700 years of foreign rule over Latvia's fate, the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed. Kārlis Ulmanis, the leader of the Farmers' Union, became the head of the Provisional Government. Zigfrīds Meierovics became independent Latvia's first foreign minister, and led this important department until his tragic death in an automobile accident in 1925.

It was Meierovics who brought about the 1920 peace treaties with Germany and the Soviet Union, who later succeeded in gaining *de jure* recognition of Latvia by the Allied powers, paved the way for a defensive alliance with Estonia, and gained Latvia's admission to the League of Nations. For two years, 1921–1923, Meierovics was also head of the Latvian government.

The German journalist Bernhard Lamey, who in the 1920s was the *Vossische Zeitung* correspondent in Riga, tells in his memoirs of a conversation with Meierovics in 1925, shortly before the gifted statesman's death. Latvia, emphasized Meierovics, will never want or be able to be a barrier between East and West: "The basis of our foreign policy is to grow closer to both Germany and Russia, to cooperate economically and in the question of European security."

Thousands of Latvians paid their respects at Meierovics' funeral; it was truly a day of national mourning. One of Riga's most beautiful boulevards was renamed in his honor. Even now, when the boulevard has long since been twice renamed, when for over 40 years the Kremlin masters have tried to erase all memory of the time of independence, the Latvian people ignore the police and the KGB and place flowers and lighted candles not only on the grave of Latvia's first president Jānis Čakste, but also on the grave of Zigfrīds A. Meierovics—the son of a Jewish physician.

* * *

The two decades of independent Latvia's existence are remembered by both Latvians and Jews as the "good years." Neither before nor since has life been as good for Latvians and Latvian Jews. There were, of course, many difficulties and problems—corruption and unemployment, political intrigues, later even the caprices of a populist dictator—but in this world everything is relative, and in retrospect an objective observer has to admit that in these two decades Latvians were masters in their own land and governed well, and that Jews and other minorities were guaranteed all the rights envisioned by the League of Nations for ethnic groups in Eastern Europe. Jewish religion, culture, and national aspirations were not hampered or fettered in these years.

* * *

Latvia's independence was proclaimed on November 18, 1918, but armed conflict ended only on August 11, 1920, when a peace treaty with Soviet Russia was signed in Riga. The defenders of the new state, very few in number at the beginning, had to fight against the Bolsheviks, and in the summer and fall of 1919 also against the units of the German Free Corps' commander von der Goltz and of the Russian adventurer Bermond-Avaloff. In Latvian history this war had the same significance that the 1948–1949 war of independence had for Israel. It was the only war in this century in which Latvians fought to defend their country and freedom under their own red–white–red national flag.

As the well-known Israeli historian Dov Levin states in his book *With Their Backs to the Wall* (in Hebrew, Jerusalem 1978, p. 20), "the majority of Jewish inhabitants supported the new Latvian State. About 1200 Jews took part in the Latvian war of independence." Jews fought not only in the Latvian national army, but also in Latvian anti-Bolshevik partisan units (called the "Greens") in Latgale. Information about these events can be found in the following articles: Dov Levin's "Jewish participation in the Estonian and Latvian wars of independence" (in Hebrew, *He'Avar*, 1955, pp. 140–153), I. Wajspap's "Jewish participation in Latvia's war of independence" (in Yiddish, *Der Bafrayer*, Riga 1931, pp. 55–65), and B. Kessel's "With the 'Greens' in Latgale's fields and woods" (in Yiddish, *Der Bafrayer*, Riga 1933, pp. 35–37).

These Jewish veterans founded the Jewish Latvian Liberators' Association. They had a hall at 45 Gertrude Street in Riga. The chairman of the association was the lawyer Michael Eljaschoff, the general secretary was M. Blumenau. After the German Wehrmacht entered Riga

on July 1, 1941, Michael Eljaschoff was named chairman and M. Blumenau a member of the Riga ghetto's "Jewish committee" (*Judenrat*). Along with tens of thousands of other Jews, in the end they, too, perished.

* * *

Detailed statistical data on Jews in Latvia during this period is given in the book *The Jews in Latvia*, published in 1971 in Tel Aviv by the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel. My purpose is to give an idea of the general atmosphere of these years, and so I will limit myself to several short sketches, starting with biographical sketches of some Latvian Jews, whose fates mirror these tempestuous times.

The biographic dictionary *Es viņu pazīstu* (I know him) was published in Riga in 1939, the last publication of its kind before Latvia lost its independence. On page 349 one reads: "MOREIN, Īzak, journalist, Jewish press reporter to the foreign ministry, born December 28, 1903, in Krustpils. Finished science high school studied law at the University of Latvia. Lectured on Latvia in Kaunas, Athens, Jerusalem, published articles on Latvia in Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Greek and Arabic." A lot is said in these few lines.

In the archives of the Association of Latvian Jews in Israel, I found Morein's book *Letland* (Latvia), in Yiddish, published by the press department of the Latvian foreign ministry in 1929. The author richly describes the new Latvian nation that had just celebrated its tenth anniversary. The book seems to have been aimed at Jews in other Eastern European countries, and perhaps also in the United States. Unfortunately I have not been able to determine Morein's fate. It is likely that he was deported by the Bolsheviks to Siberia, or killed by the Germans in Latvia.

We turn to the Mintz brothers, whose fate can be recounted. Paul Mintz, born in 1868, was appointed state comptroller in the Latvian Provisional Government in 1919. He was a professor of criminology at the University of Latvia from its founding, and wrote many works on this subject. He headed the committee that prepared the Latvian criminal code, and represented Latvia at international legal conferences. He was awarded Latvia's Order of Three Stars. As noted in *The Jews in Latvia*, when Latvia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, he and his wife and son were exiled to Siberia. A few months later he was arrested and incarcerated in the Taishet concentration camp. All efforts made by public figures in the United States to obtain his release were in vain. He died in Siberia in 1941.

His brother Vladimir (Wolf) Mintz, born in 1872, had a well-earned reputation as one of the best surgeons in Moscow and Riga. In 1917 he became a professor at the University of Moscow. *The Jews in Latvia* describes how after Lenin had been attacked and shot by the Social Revolutionary Kaplan in 1918, Mintz was called to attend him, operated, and saved his life. With Lenin's aid he was allowed to return to Riga. There he was in charge of the surgical department of the Jewish hospital Bikur Holim, which he later headed. He lectured at the University of Riga, holding the chair in surgery from 1940. After Riga was taken by the Wehrmacht, he passed through the entire Nazi inferno, beginning with the Riga ghetto, where he organized a kind of hospital. This was followed by the Kaiserwald (Mežaparks) concentration camp. Fi-

nally, after all kinds of vicissitudes, he was sent to Buchenwald, where he found his death in a mass grave.

A different sort of person was Max Schatz-Anin. He was born in 1885 in the little town of Nairi (Friedrichstadt, Jaunjelgava). According to the Latvian Social Democrat Fricis Menders, in 1909–1910 Schatz-Anin was in Vienna, where he was known as a Zionist–Socialist. When the Russian civil war broke out he joined the Bolsheviks. When General Denikin’s White Army occupied Kiev in 1919, Schatz-Anin was arrested and tortured, losing his eyesight. Returning to Latvia at the end of 1919, Schatz-Anin, an educated and erudite man, organized a Jewish Marxist group and formed the publishing house *Arbeter-Heym*. This was a legal cover for the destructive activities of the banned communist party. He published brochures in Yiddish about various economic and sociologic questions and gave fiery talks at Jewish leftist youth rallies, not letting his handicap, his blindness, be an obstacle to his energetic work in furthering Lenin’s utopia. Schatz-Anin had to interrupt his propaganda activities during the authoritarian regime (1934–1940), but his moment arrived when the Red Army entered Riga on June 17, 1940. He organized the communist Yiddish newspaper *Kamf* and journal *Ufboj*, enthusiastically touting the “Stalin Constitution,” and it was clear even then that his blindness was not just physical. When the German army neared Riga, he and his relatives and friends fled—on foot, under the scorching sun (Dov Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 48). Via Kasan and Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan, he ended up in Moscow, where he was a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. After the war ended, he returned to Riga.

Max Schatz-Anin, this utterly dedicated communist, was arrested in 1949 when Stalin unleashed his antisemitic campaign against “unpatriotic cosmopolites,” and was held for a time in Riga’s MGB (Ministry of State Security, forerunner of the KGB) prison. Even this did not cool the blind utopist’s ardor. In the mid-sixties I had a lengthy conversation with Schatz-Anin, by then a frail old man, and even though he had started to take a greater interest in the Jewish national, rather than “international,” cultural heritage, one could clearly see that illusions about “mankind’s radiant future under the aegis of the only true faith and teachings of Marx and Engels” still kept their hold on him. Max Schatz-Anin died a communist.

Outstanding figures in the Latvian Jewish community of the inter-war period were Max (Mordechai) Nurock (of the Misrachi Movement), Mordechai Dubin (Agudas-Isroel), Noah Maisel (the Bund), and Max Laserson (Zeire–Zion). They were all deputies in Latvia’s parliament, the *Saeima*, defending the interests of their constituencies and reflecting the viewpoints of their respective Jewish political and religious circles.

Of interest here are Professor Max Laserson’s comments in his posthumously published article in the book *The Jews in Latvia* (p. 182):

Towards the end of December 1933, the third and last Conference of the United Zeire–Zion and Zionist–Socialist parties met in Riga. After analyzing developments the present writer stated in his address that in the situation which had developed, the two Baltic countries, Latvia and Estonia, “are once again nothing but candidates for a transformation into German Provinces.” To our regret this harsh forecast was fulfilled some time later, in summer 1941. However,

I was not correct when I said in the course of the same address that the loss of Latvia was to be envisaged through Hitlerist Fascism only. Now that everything is over we have seen that it was Soviet Russia which was also prepared to swallow democratic Latvia.

The book makes significant points regarding Jewish cultural autonomy in the inter-war period:

The resurrection of the Hebrew language and culture between the two world wars took place not only in the land of Israel, but also in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states, and nowhere were its achievements more impressive and far-reaching than in the latter. The most important achievement of the minorities in Latvia was the Law of Cultural Autonomy, an exceedingly democratic piece of legislation which served as a model for its period. It is doubtful whether there was any other parliamentary institution to be found in Europe or elsewhere which at any time dedicated so much attention to the autonomous administration of Jewish schools. Between the two world wars Latvia was the only country where the Bund had a parliamentary representative of its own.

It must be remembered that the capital of Latvia was the cradle of the worldwide Zionist–revisionist movement: a lecture in Russian by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky led to the formation of Brit Trumpeldor (Betar) in Riga in 1923. Betar was the nucleus of a whole new Zionist stream, and one of this radical Zionist youth organization's leaders in Poland, Menachem Begin, was Israel's prime minister from 1977 to 1983.

Latvia's parliament, the *Saeima*, consisted of 100 deputies, among whom were representatives also of minority lists, or parties—Germans, Russians, Poles, and Jews. Due to the peculiarities of the proportional electoral system, as well the endemic instability of the political balance in Latvia at the time, each of the minority representatives' votes carried great weight in the recurring votes of confidence in the coalition governments. In fact, the leaders of the larger parties readily "bought" the votes of the smaller parties, including those of the minority factions, making lavish promises to support their interests. This parliamentary arithmetic was not at all good for political morale, and even though Latvia was truly a model for democracy with respect to civil liberties (even the banned communist party, under a different name, was for a time represented in the *Saeima* and in city governments), Kārlis Ulmanis easily carried out a coup on May 15, 1934, dissolving the parliament and persuading the populace that the time had come to "end inter-party wrangling."

The years 1934–1940 were the years of the authoritarian regime. It must be admitted that Kārlis Ulmanis, who proclaimed himself "Tautas Vadonis" (Leader of the Nation), was not only "populist" in his propaganda, but also quite popular with the people, especially among the farmers. His personality cult in the media tended to the nauseous, the press was censored, and several party leaders spent some time in a special concentration camp in Liepāja, but on

the whole the Ulmanis regime was very mild, in comparison not only to Mussolini's regime in Italy and Horthy's in Hungary, for example, but also to dictatorships in Latin America in the last decades. The present presidential regime in Turkey, a member of NATO and the EC, seems barbaric when compared with the dictatorship of Ulmanis.

It is true that Ulmanis banned the Jewish Zionist parties and the Bund, but he also banned all other political parties in Latvia, including his own party, the Farmers' Union. Other organizations continued to function: the religious society Agudas-Isroel, headed by Ulmanis' personal friend Mordechai Dubin; the nationalistic youth organization Betar mentioned above; the Zionist workers' youth organization Olim (although only after a time); the associations Gordonia and Herzlia; the trade school society ORT; the health care organization Bikur-Holim; the association Kinderfraynt (Children's friend); Jewish schools, which taught in Hebrew or Yiddish; the Latvian Jewish Minority Theater; the Jewish Club at 6 Skolas Street in Riga; Keren Kayemet, the national fund; Jewish publishing houses, libraries, bookshops, and so on.

Although Ulmanis, influenced by his friend Dubin, favored the conservative, non-Zionist society Agudas-Isroel and gave preference to the radical Betar, while restricting the activities of the Zionist workers' movement, he in no way hindered any initiatives that aimed to further Jewish emigration to Eretz Israel, Palestine. In contrast, the British government created obstacles with its infamous White Paper of 1939.

The Zionist youth organizations in Latvia had their own farms, where youngsters attended *Hachshara* courses, learning farming skills that would serve them in good stead in the land of their ancestors, Eretz Israel. My cousin and her fiancé, a soldier in the Latvian army, also attended these courses. They very much wanted to get to Eretz Israel, but the Red Army's invasion of Latvia put an end to their dreams. By the next day, June 18, 1940, all Zionist youth organizations were hurriedly burning their membership rosters.

In a way Kārlis Ulmanis can be said to have directly contributed to strengthening Jewish national identity. He encouraged Jewish parents to send their children not to German or Russian schools, but to schools in which the language of instruction was Yiddish or Hebrew. This can be explained by the fact that Ulmanis was an ardent Latvian nationalist, who held that every ethnic community in Latvia should develop its own authentic national culture, instead of assimilating.

Ulmanis cannot be considered an antisemite, even though he tried to "Latvianize" industry and, to a degree, commercial enterprises, forming semi-governmental corporations such as *Latvijas Kokvilna* (Latvian cotton), *Degviela* (fuel), and *Bekona Eksports* (bacon export), and buying the chocolate factory *Laima* from the Moshevitz family. This had nothing whatever to do with hatred of the Jews as a people. Incidentally, the Moshevitz family later founded the largest chocolate factory in the Middle East, the "Elite."

Further, during the *Saeima* period two rightist organizations openly advocating antisemitism, the National Club and *Pērkonkrusts* (Thunder cross), had been operating semi-legally. Immediately after the May 15, 1934, coup they were declared illegal, and heavy penalties imposed for open, aggressive antisemitic propaganda. During the authoritarian regime the police actively pursued illegal groups, such as the communists and *Pērkonkrusts*. The leader of the latter group was Gustavs Celmiņš, one of Ulmanis' bitterest enemies. When the

Wehrmacht entered Latvia in 1941, he had high hopes for the Nazis, but seeing that they had no intention of renewing a “national” Latvian state, he joined the anti-Nazi resistance and was eventually arrested.

During the entire independence period Latvia gave asylum to a large number of Jews seeking refuge from both the Bolsheviks and the Nazis. The case of Roman Vishniak is instructive. Roman Vishniak, now 86 years old and living in New York, is a Russian-born Jew—doctor, biologist, physicist, philosopher, historian, art lover, numismatist, and last but not least, a famous photographer. Recently volumes of his work were published in Zurich and New York, depicting the everyday life of Jews in Eastern Europe—Central Poland, Galicia, Slovakia, Carpatho-Ruthenia, also Lithuania and Latvia—in the thirties, on the eve of the Holocaust. Escaping from the Bolsheviks in the twenties, Vishniak secretly crossed the Russian–Latvian border to Rēzekne, and the democratic regime in Riga granted the young doctor Latvian citizenship. With a Latvian passport in his pocket Vishniak went to Berlin. The passport helped save him from persecution when Hitler came to power in Germany. With the Latvian passport still in his pocket Vishniak travelled around Europe from 1936 to 1940, recording Jewish life with his camera. When the German army occupied Paris, police of the Vichy regime arrested Vishniak and held him in a camp for foreigners as an “unwanted alien.” Sooner or later he would have probably perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, but he managed to make contact with one of Latvia’s diplomatic representatives in Western Europe (Latvia itself by that time had been annexed to the Kremlin’s empire). The representative succeeded in having Vishniak released after three months, and at the end of 1940 he went to Portugal and from there to the United States.

Several outstanding Russian journalists of Jewish descent, M. Hanfman, M. Milrud, B. Chariton, and Dr. B. Pollack, also managed to save themselves by finding a safe haven in free Latvia. With the Latvian-born Jacob Brahm they founded the Russian-language morning newspaper *Segodnia* in Riga, later also the evening newspaper *Segodnia Vetcherom*. In the twenties and thirties *Segodnia* was the best Russian newspaper outside the USSR, much more interesting and informative than, say, *Posledniya Novosti* of Paris. This Russian–Jewish journalist and publishing group helped found the Latvian daily *Pēdējā Brīdī* (At the last minute), which competed successfully with the largest Latvian paper *Jaunākās Ziņas* (Latest news) until 1935, when difficulties under the authoritarian regime caused it to end publication. M. Milrud and B. Chariton in the end did not escape the reach of the Bolsheviks. Both were deported in 1940–1941 and perished in the Gulag camps.

The Latvian historian Uldis Ģērmanis, now living in Stockholm, states (newspaper *Laiks*, April 25, 1984): “Independent Latvia was a state that respected human rights, that gave asylum also to the Jews persecuted by Hitler (who were turned away by humanitarian Sweden).” I can vouch that that is true. A frequent guest in my parents’ apartment at 13 Dzirnava Street was an emigrant from Vienna by the name of Ben-Zion (we called him “Zionchen” because of his small stature), who was immensely grateful at having found refuge in Latvia.

The most famous of these Jewish emigrants in Latvia was the notable historian Professor Simon Dubnov (1860–1941), the author of the standard *History of the Jewish People*. Fleeing the Bolsheviks in 1922, he settled in Berlin, and fleeing the Nazis in 1933, he came to

Riga, continuing his research in his office in the lovely *Mežaparks* (Kaiserwald, Forest park) neighborhood. He was too old to flee yet a third time, and was murdered by the Nazis in the Riga ghetto in 1941.

George Clare relates an interesting episode in a book (in German translation *Das waren die Klaars*, Ullstein, 1980, pp. 253–258) about his family, who were Austrian Jews. On September 23, 1938, in Berlin, the author's father decided that his son definitely had to get away, and the only country that then still admitted Austrian Jews was Latvia. Unfortunately the Latvian government could no longer recognize Austrian passports, as Austria had ceased to exist in March 1938, and could admit only those Austrian Jews who had been issued German passports. Prominent Latvian Jews appealed to the Ulmanis government, and the issue of the Klaar and Mandl families, who had only Austrian passports, was discussed at length in cabinet meetings, and finally resolved favorably.

As mentioned, emigrants from Germany and Austria were welcome in my parents' home. My father, a small, unlicensed real estate broker, was friends with all—Jews, Latvians, Poles, and Baltic Germans, such as Baron Ernst von Mirbach (1888–1968), who, when the Wehrmacht occupied Latvia, became a member of Riga's governing board. My mother was active in committees that collected donations for the Jewish organizations ORT, Bikur-Holim, OZE, and Kinderfraynt.

I studied at Riga's French lycée, because my father wanted me to learn at least one foreign language well. The lycée was one of the best schools in Riga that taught in Latvian. Of course one also had intensive French courses from the first grade. In this school, studying together with Latvian boys and girls, I learned much about Latvian history and literature. In our class we had another Jewish boy, Sven Arenstam, a Boy Scout and the son of the owner of the best stationery store in Riga, and two Jewish girls, Gabriela Goldman and Betty Pevsner. There was almost no antisemitism in the school, not counting the rather innocuous jokes. For example, occasionally somebody would show me the flap of his coat folded into the shape of a pig's ear. Or mischievous boys would try to get Betty Pevsner, who came from a religious family, to eat bacon, in the common, tasty Latvian dish of grey peas and bacon. Newspapers and humor magazines would run doggerel (*perwas*) mimicking the accented Latvian spoken by some Jewish merchants, and cartoons showing fat Jewish mammas with baby carriages in the Esplanade park. Occasionally, as I walked to school from Dzirnavu Street to Aristide Briand Street, flush-faced, quite drunk carriage drivers, hauling firewood from the *Preču* (goods) station, threatened me with their whip handles as a "joke." But overall I personally felt fine. Since I was not attending a Jewish school and was approaching my bar-mitzvah, my father in 1938 arranged for a student, who was active in the national religious movement Misrachi, to come twice a week and teach me the Old Testament and modern Hebrew. The Soviet army's invasion on June 17, 1940 put an end to my Jewish education.

Jānis Rainis was not the only member of the Latvian intelligentsia to interest himself in the Zionist enterprise in the Holy Land. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, the firm Valters and Rapa published Jānis Kārklīņš book *Leģendārā un modernā Palestīna* (Legendary and modern Palestine). The author, a journalist with the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas*, described his visit to Eretz Israel with undisguised enthusiasm. Illustrated articles about the visit also ran

in the weekly *Atpūta* (Relaxation). In Palestine he met Jewish Zionist pioneer youth from Latvia (Chalutzim)—from Riga, Ogre, Daugavpils, and Liepāja. They spoke perfect Latvian. Meeting Kārklīņš, they said, “Let’s sing *Kumeliņi, kumeliņi!* No—*Tek saulīte tecēdama...*” (popular Latvian folk songs). “Delightful Latvians,” concluded Kārklīņš. In Haifa he walked on Mount Carmel with Jewish friends, singing in Hebrew the “Jewish Marseillaise,” *Kadimah, ha-poel* (Forward, ye worker).

To complete the picture I would like to cite from an article in the May 18, 1932, issue of Riga’s largest Latvian newspaper, *Jaunākās Ziņas*, headlined “Latvian pavilion awarded gold medal in Tel Aviv exhibition.” On May 10, at the closing of the Levant Fair in Tel Aviv, the representative of the administration of Palestine, a Mr. Wolley, remarked that the organizers of the fair had been particularly impressed with the pavilions of Latvia, Bulgaria, Egypt, Rumania, and Cyprus, all of which received gold medals. Special citations went to the Latvian firms *Žuze* chocolate factory, *Kontinents* rubber products, and *Howsch* and *Michelson* linoleum factory of Jelgava. Latvian butter, displayed by the association *Konsums*, received a gold medal, increasing its prospects to successfully compete with Australian butter, which until then was the only butter imported into Palestine. Almost all goods were sold out during the show, especially Latvian canned goods. The article concluded that there was a favorable opportunity for exporting Latvian goods to the Near East.

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The good years in Latvia were drawing to a close. The Jews understandably grew more and more afraid of Nazi Germany’s expansion, and this fact was skilfully exploited by young, energetic communist agitators like J. Eidus, M. Vulfson, V. Lifschitz, and P. Krupnikov. They held “social evenings” in the homes of rich relatives or friends, reading from works by Romain Rolland and Thomas Mann as well as Henri Barbusse, Bertold Brecht, Maxim Gorky, and Vladimir Mayakovski, and proclaiming that only the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics could guarantee protection from the horrors of fascism.

The pace of events quickened. In March of 1939 the German army marched not only into Prague but also into Klaipēda (Memel), close to Latvia’s border; on August 23 Ribbentrop and Molotov signed a treaty between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia, in whose secret protocol the Fuehrer “sold” Latvia to the Bolsheviks; on September 1, when I celebrated my eleventh birthday, the Wehrmacht invaded Poland and World War II started; on September 17 the Soviet Union entered the war on Germany’s side, attacking Poland from the rear; on October 5 Stalin forced Latvia to sign a treaty allowing Soviet military bases in this small country; on October 9 Hitler’s proclamation about Baltic German evacuation from Latvia to the Wehrmacht-occupied Polish western territory, now named Warthegau, was published; on November 30 the Soviet army invaded Finland; on March 12, 1940, the USSR forced Finland to sign a peace treaty, taking 40,000 square kilometers of Finland’s territory; on April 8 the German army invaded Denmark and Norway, on May 10—Holland and Belgium; on June 14 the unopposed German army marched into Paris... and on the same day Molotov handed Lithuania, Latvia’s southern neighbor, an ultimatum, demanding that an unlimited number of Soviet troops be allowed to enter the country and a new government “friendly” to the Soviet Union be formed. The fateful hour had struck.

5. June 17, 1940.

On Friday, June 14, 1940, German troops marched into Paris. The eyes of the entire world turned to poor France; nobody saw what was happening to the Baltic states.

On that Black Friday, Lithuania was handed an ultimatum by Germany's ally, the Soviets. The next day, June 15, the Bolshevik army occupied Lithuania and moved into positions along the southern border of Latvia. Also, during the night of June 14–15, a Red Army patrol raided Latvian territory to the east of the village of Masļenki, killing three Latvian border guards, a woman, and a child, and taking captive 11 border guards and 32 civilians. The Latvian government demanded an official investigation by the Soviets of this provocation, but the demand was simply ignored.

In this tense time, on June 15 and 16, a large song festival went ahead as planned in the capital of Latgale, Daugavpils (Dvinsk). However, the 60,000 participants, choir members and spectators, knew what was happening in Lithuania and had dark premonitions about the future. At the end of the festival, the national anthem "Dievs, svētā Latviju" (God bless Latvia) was sung three times, with tears in the eyes of most of those present.

During the festival, a solemn service was held in the main synagogue of Daugavpils. The government representative was greeted by guard of honor formed by Jewish schoolchildren. He was repeatedly asked, "allowing for the threatening political situation," to deliver to the president the Daugavpils Jewish community's affirmations of confidence.

The government was represented at the festival by the minister for public affairs, Alfreds Bērziņš, since the crisis situation prevented President Kārlis Ulmanis from attending as initially intended. The president did, however, give a radio address, stressing that "international events this week have moved with a rapidity far exceeding all precedents any of us have witnessed. The present situation demands that I stay in Riga, and I hope all of you understand.... Latgale borders directly with our large Eastern neighbor, with whom we share extremely important items of mutual interest. These items deal with our security and with the security of the Soviet Union, and first of all with mutual faith and trust."

Mutual faith and trust.... At 2 p.m. on June 16, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics gave Latvia an ultimatum that demanded an answer by 8 p.m. the same day. Estonia received a similar ultimatum. That evening the Latvian ambassador to Moscow, Fricis Kociņš, delivered an answer, in which he "served notice that the Latvian Government agreed to the conditions of the Soviet Union," as reported by the Latvian Telegraph Agency.

Who knows, if this cynical and brutal action had been carried out in a less tumultuous time, perhaps the Western democracies might have taken more notice. Perhaps they might have protested at least as emphatically as they did in March 1939, when Hitler forced Czechoslovakia's President Hacha to accept the German ultimatum and turned Czechoslovakia into a Reich protectorate, Bohemia and Moravia. As it happened, the world's attention was focused on the German army's victory in France and Britain's isolation, leaving the death-throes of the Baltic states to take place in an international vacuum, with only the slightest mention in the press.

What did the Kremlin demand in the ultimatum? “1) Immediately form a Latvian government that is ready and able to ensure that the Soviet–Latvian mutual assistance pact is carried out; 2) Allow the Soviet army to immediately enter Latvia’s territory unhindered and be stationed in the most important centers in such numbers as to ensure that the Soviet–Latvian mutual assistance pact can be carried out and to prevent possible provocations against Soviet garrisons in Latvia.”

If Czechoslovakia, with a large, well-armed army, capitulated to Hitler without a fight, what could Latvia do? As reported in the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas* on Monday, June 17, 1940, “in the early hours of the morning, the first Soviet army units crossed the Latvian border.” This was a terrible shock for the Latvian people.

That summer, as every summer, my family lived on the Baltic coast at Jūrmala, on Balvu Street in Avoti. We stayed in a summer home belonging to the baker and confectioner Schortmann, father-in-law of the prominent lawyer Armins Rūsis. On that fateful day my father returned from Riga earlier than usual, and his first words were, “Frankie, listen, who would have thought! You know who’s greeting Soviet tanks by the railroad station? Jewish *yingelech* (lads) from the Moscow suburb!”

By September 1938 there were only 200 local communists left in Latvia, and by June 17, 1940, probably far fewer. But the communists had sympathizers, and unfortunately Jews were conspicuously present in their ranks. Dov Levin wrote about “the abundant enthusiasm and sympathy with which the Red Army was welcomed in many areas by the Jews—principally by communists but also by ‘ordinary Jews’” (*Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1975, p. 40). In his book *With Their Backs to the Wall* (pp. 22-23), he recounts, for example, Baruch Minkewitz’s testimony that in Riga Jewish communists “covered Soviet tanks with flowers, and there were those who jumped up on the tanks and kissed the Red tank drivers.”

In the *Soviet Jewish Affairs* article, Levin writes that

There were instances where Jews took part in the safeguarding of Red Army units and the prevention of hostile acts against them by Lettish military organizations. According to eyewitness accounts, in the town of Viļāni, in Latgālia (Eastern Latvia), Jewish youths forcibly prevented members of the Aizsargi organization from firing upon Red Army tanks which entered the town.... The participation of many Jews in armed clashes with the Aizsargi in Libau (Liepāja) on June 19, 1940, is described by one of the participants, a Jewish dock worker in Libau.

The correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* in Riga, Donald Day, was a witness to these dramatic hours: “On June 17 there was a mob at the railway station, waving red rags and screaming in hysterical joy about the arrival of the Russians. The Latvian language could not be heard. The speeches, the shouts, the screams were all in Russian or Yiddish.”

What had happened? How could that happen? How can it be explained?

Latvia's Jews were, after all, on the whole loyal to the country of which they were citizens, and we have just seen that in Daugavpils, during the Latgale song festival, many Jews affirmed their solidarity with the Latvian government and people.

And yet... Some months before the Red Army entered Latvia, police uniforms had been changed, and the French–Austrian “képi” was replaced by a cap somewhat resembling that of a Russian officer. When the first Latvian policeman in the new uniform and cap assumed his post in the Daugavpils central square, eyewitnesses reported that some Jewish youths ran up to him, exclaiming in Russian, “Finally! How we’ve waited for you!” Strange indeed...

Dov Levin (*op. cit.*, p. 42) explains: “Although it is true that only a small proportion of the Jewish community took part in the excited and joyful demonstrations that welcomed the Red Army into Latvia, there were very many Jews who shared a feeling of relief and concord with that army, because of their fear that, in the international political constellation of those days, the only other alternative was the Nazi domination of Latvia.”

That is understandable. But one can also understand the Latvians, who, to say the least, were surprised by the actions of many, but not all, Jews on that fateful day. That was the day that their nation ceased to exist, a day of national tragedy. A clash of interests? Perhaps. But later, within a year, this clash was to have a macabre echo, a deadly aftermath.

When the Red Army invaded Poland's eastern provinces on September 17, 1939, many Jews also welcomed the invaders. However, it must be remembered that antisemitism was pronounced in Poland, and, more importantly, Hitler's divisions were approaching from the west, which for the Jews was undoubtedly the much greater evil. Again, when the Red Army invaded Bessarabia, a Rumanian province, on June 28, 1940, many Jews welcomed the invaders, and here too one must remember that Rumanian antisemites in the Iron Guard had frequently provoked incidents with Jews and organized mini-pogroms, while in the Soviet Union, so it was said, use of the denigrating term “Zhid” (equivalent to “yid” or “kike”) was punishable by fines or even jail.

But in Latvia, Lithuania, and even Estonia, where Jews were few in number, where antisemitism was absent, and where this ethnic minority was guaranteed unheard-of cultural autonomy? What led so many Baltic Jews to welcome the hordes of Soviet militarism, of Bolshevik totalitarianism, of, one might even say, Red fascism?

It is true that fear of the other alternative, Hitler's Germany, and illusions about the “essentially internationalist” nature of the Soviet regime played a large part. But the traditional complex or syndrome of “mimicry in self-defense,” characteristic of the Jewish diaspora in various troubled periods, also came into play. It is a fact that Jewish communities in those regions where a strong nation oppressed a weaker one, tended to support the stronger nation, not side with the weaker one. For example, it was so in Austro–Hungary, where Bohemian Jews sent their children not to Czech, but German schools; Galician Jews identified with the Polish upper class, not with Ruthenians (Ukrainians); and Transylvanian Jews even now consider themselves to be not Rumanian, but Hungarian Jews.

Compared with Hitler's Germans, Stalin's Russians were, quite understandably, the lesser evil in the eyes of the Baltic Jews, but there was also the inclination to please the new

masters, hoping for their favour, not considering the emotions of the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians.

The course of Latvian history shows that there were always quite a few flatterers and toadies among Latvians, too, ready to serve one or another foreign master. But in this specific case, in the summer of 1940, one can say there was a clash of interests between most Latvians and many Jews, and so the seed for the tragic events of the summer of 1941 was sown.

The Israeli historian Dov Levin states: "It is impossible to understand the Holocaust without knowing what happened in the western Soviet territories in 1939 to 1941" (*Newsview*, Jerusalem, August 10, 1980, p. 22).

6. A Tragedy of False Premises

Just after the Red Army crossed the Latvian border from the east and the south, the fearsome Soviet proconsul, Andrei Januaryevich (Solzhenitsyn wrote only half-jokingly “Januaryevich”) Vyshinsky arrived in Riga. Vyshinsky had been the prosecutor at the infamous Moscow trials of 1935–1938. In Riga he played the role that Hitler’s first gauleiter, Seyss-Inquart, played in Vienna. Vyshinsky implemented the sovietization of Latvia: the instalment of a puppet government, mock elections, the deportation of the president, and finally, outright annexation.

Why did I title this chapter “A tragedy of false premises”?

Many Jews believed that Bolshevism in 1940 would be something different, something more moderate than in 1919, and that the Nazi threat would be fully eliminated with the arrival of the Red Army. Many Latvians believed that the Red regime was essentially Jewish and that only Germany could give them back a free and independent Latvia.

However, it must be realised that *before* June 17, 1940, the Latvian people were more inclined to be vaguely pro-Russian, rather than pro-German. Latvians well remembered 700 years of servitude under German knights and barons, tsarist punitive expeditions in 1906 led by the German barons, the Latvian Riflemen’s heroic battles against the kaiser’s army in 1915–1917, the fledgling Latvian national armed forces’ defensive fight against von der Goltz’s *Landeswehr* and the German mercenaries’ Iron Division in the summer and fall of 1919.

Pan-German Nazism was always unpopular in Latvia. Latvian boys would get into fights with young Baltic German Nazi sympathizers, in their black shorts and white socks. Few were sorry to see the Baltic Germans go, when in the fall of 1939 they were officially repatriated by Hitler. With them went some Latvians, who had suddenly discovered German relatives. In a radio speech on October 12, 1939, President Ulmanis contemptuously said: “If anyone wants to leave, go ahead. But don’t come back.”

But when the Russians (and, it seemed to many, Jews) were running the country, many Latvians longed for the flirtation between Stalin and Hitler to end, for it seemed their only hope was in Berlin and Koenigsberg. They could not know what was happening behind the scenes. They recalled that in October 1939 Molotov ridiculed England and France for their intent to annihilate Hitlerism, calling it an attempt to renew the religious wars of the Middle Ages; they saw Britain and the United States helplessly standing by as not only Hitler, but also Stalin occupied one country after another. They could not know that London was formulating the Baku Project (“Military Implications of Hostilities with Russia”), that foresaw supporting uprisings among the peoples of Trans-Caucasia and Soviet Central Asia (see William Stevenson, *Intrepid’s Last Case*, 1983), and that 60,000 British soldiers were prepared to invade Soviet territory from the Middle East. They only sensed that Stalin and Hitler were having differences of opinion over the division of the spoils, and that a conflict was developing between the two totalitarian giants.

During the summer and fall of 1940 the sovietization of Latvia progressed rapidly. In the article published in *Soviet Jewish Affairs* (vol. 5, no. 1, 1975), Dov Levin writes:

Jews who had taken an active part in the Communist Party, in the Komsomol, and in peripheral organizations during the underground period (some of them only recently freed from prison) were appointed to responsible positions in the Party, in the trade unions, and other organizations, especially in Riga. Particularly noticeable were those who had been active in the spheres of information and journalism (among them K. Berkovits, director of the propaganda section of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party). A well-known Riga physician, Dr. M. Joffe, was appointed to the senior position of people's commissar for health. J. Blumenthal was appointed director of the state bank. Other Jews filled other high civic positions in Riga and the provincial cities....

Even more impressive for the self-esteem of the Jewish community was the comparatively large number of Jews serving in the police force, including the senior ranks. The custom in the armed forces was that Jewish soldiers who were promoted were given duties in the political apparatus. A number of young Jews were admitted to the officers' academy, which at the time was known as the Riga Infantry School.

Levin further points out a very significant fact:

Almost unlimited opportunities were offered to young Jewish men and women to participate in security and military activities upon the establishment of the militant formation "Workers' Guard." The Guard, set up by a decision of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party on July 2, 1940, was initially intended to serve as a kind of police auxiliary and support force for the government "in its struggle against counterrevolutionary groups." The organization, stationed in Riga and other large cities, was constituted on a military basis and comprised about 10,000 men and women.... Its members included not only Jewish communists and Komsomol members, but also former members of the Bund, the left Poale Zion, and former members of the Zionist Socialist "hakhsharot." The organization's clubs and centers served also to promote ideological activities and social events. In some areas, most of the members were Jews, so their activities were conducted in Yiddish, at least for part of the time.

The conspicuous position of the Jews in the new regime and its political and administrative apparatus caused the Letts to identify the whole of the Jewish community with the hated Soviet regime, which had been imposed upon them by the Red Army.

Stalin and Beria crowned all that with a Machiavellian decree, appointing a Russian Jew, Semion Shustin, as people's commissar (minister) for state security in the Latvian SSR. Many of his assistants, especially in the KGB, were local Jews, who knew both Russian and Latvian.

In May 1941, when the German–Soviet war had not yet started, Shustin ordered the shooting of my schoolmate, the very young son of the MEDFRO pharmaceutical plant owner Fronckēvičs, for alleged treason. Against which country? On June 26, 1941, while preparing to flee from Riga, Shustin took the time to sign order no. 412, the death sentence for 78 Latvians. He used red ink, misspelling the Russian: “Considering the social danger they represent, all must be shot.” What, one must ask, is “social danger”?

Is it any wonder that the Latvian leader of the infamous “Arājs group,” which shot Jewish civilians in July 1941 to oblige the Germans, was called “Shustin” by the group’s members? And is it any wonder that Dov Levin, who interviewed hundreds of people in Israel and abroad researching Jewish communities in 1939–1941 in Eastern European territories taken over by the Soviet Union, encountered numerous difficulties: “Even 40 years later, many of the Jews who played a public role in the short-lived *occupation regimes* were reticent about revealing their cooperation with the Russian authorities, for fear of being cast as *collaborators*” (my emphasis; see *Newsview*, Jerusalem, August 10, 1980).

In my opinion, it is significant that in 1936–1938 Stalin, suffering from a persecution complex, ordered tens of thousands of Latvian Bolsheviks, trustworthy communist party members, to be shot. If he had not done this, a large group of Latvian “Chekists” (KGB agents) led by Jēkabs Peterss and Mārtiņš Lācis-Sudrabs would have entered Latvia along with the Red Army and proceeded to arrest, interrogate, and shoot their own “bourgeois” compatriots. As it was, there were no “national cadres” left in the ranks of the KGB, and the dirty work was entrusted to the Jews.

Latvians also worked with the Soviet occupiers during that year, called the “terrible year” (*baigais gads*). There were those who were naive, there were opportunists, cynics, careerists, toadies. Macabre incidents abounded, among them the following (from the memoirs of J. Kārklīņš). When the Bolshevik regime was established, a Mrs. Dāvis made the rounds of well-to-do families’ summer homes, looking to appropriate choice pieces of furniture before the homes and goods were nationalized. The woman was the wife of the well-known teacher and pathologic antisemite Dāvis, who openly expressed his desire to eliminate the “Jewish scum” and during the Nazi occupation years published a series of pamphlets called the “Antisemite’s Library.”

Another side of the complex situation is given by Peggie Benton, a former chief of the visa office in the British consulate in Riga, who recalls in her book *Baltic Countdown* (London 1984), that

the streets were quiet. Not so our office, which spilled a queue of terrified applicants through the Consulate and out onto the path. Stories of Russian antisemitism had reached Riga.... With the escape route to the United Kingdom virtually cut, the demand for British visas had eased, but now, in spite of the threat of Arab violence, the unfortunate Jews were determined to use any means of getting to Palestine.

In the spring of 1938 Peggie Benton was in Vienna and witnessed the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria to Germany. In Latvia in 1940,

for the second time we had seen a country invaded and disrupted, and the suffering that this brought. But whereas in Vienna the Jews had born the brunt of the German annexation and the tenure of daily life continued more or less the same, in Latvia there was a total downgrading of the environment. For most people it was the end of the pleasant life they had struggled to build up and the death of their hopes.

The effect of the two takeovers might be compared with that of a man attacking a meadow with a scythe, or one flattening it with a bulldozer.

Latvian Jews soon came to feel the effect of this bulldozer, and not just in the nationalization of industrial and commercial enterprises, which affected all inhabitants. All noncommunist Jewish organizations were banned, all “reactionary” Jewish books in public libraries, reading rooms, and clubs were confiscated, all Jewish schools had to change from Hebrew to Yiddish, and Max Schatz-Anin’s newspaper *Kamf* and journal *Ufboj* carried out a vicious and slanderous campaign against rabbis and the Jewish faith. If such blasphemy had appeared in gentile papers, it would have been immediately labeled blatant antisemitism. Zionists, especially those active in the rightist Betar organization, were arrested and deported starting in the summer and fall of 1940. The famous historian Simon Dubnov, whose eightieth birthday, September 18, 1940, was celebrated by Jewish communities overseas, pursued his academic work at home, in almost total isolation.

Dov Levin writes:

On the night of June 13–14, 1941, there began a mass deportation of undesirable elements from Soviet Latvia. From that night on, thousands of Jews, whose attitude to the new regime was considered to be hostile or, at least, reserved, were arrested and herded into goods trains bound for the Soviet interior.

Historians estimate the number of Jewish deportees from Latvia to be 5–6,000. After the Hitler–Stalin Pact of August 23, 1939, and the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, the Baltic countries, Bessarabia and Rumanian Bukovina, some 1,900,000 Jews came under Soviet control. Of these, about 400,000 were deported to Siberia and central Asia (L. Unger and C. Jelen, *L’Express*, Paris 1985).

Among those deported were former deputies of the *Saeima*, including the representative of the Jewish Bund, Noah Maisel, also industrialists, rabbis, teachers, merchants, doctors, and completely apolitical people, who had been denounced by ill-wishers. My parents’ best friends were H. Berlin and his wife, who with their two children—boys about my age—lived at 26 Tērbatas Street in Riga. The Berlin family was not rich. They owned no land, no houses, no businesses. The head of the family was a small-time textile salesman. However, he had good taste, and invested his modest savings in antique furniture, carpets, and tapestries, so the

family's apartment looked quite luxurious. Apparently someone out of envy notified the authorities. The Berlin family was deported to Siberia. The parents died there of starvation; the fate of the boys is unknown.

Levin continues:

The day after the outbreak of the war (June 23, 1941), some 250 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, some of them communists, were arrested and deported from Riga to Siberia. Some of them were accompanied by their Latvian-born wives.

This group included the historian Herbert Rosenkranz, an emigrant from Austria, and the philosopher J. A. Wohlgemuth, who was born in Berlin.

Many of the deportees were sent to the Solikamsk, Vyatka, and Vorkuta camps. Some of the women, children, and others were taken to Narym and Novosibirsk. I know that many of these Jewish victims of Bolshevism continued friendly relations with the Latvian deportees in the taiga and tundra, for they shared the same fate and had a common enemy, Red fascism.

The Memorial Hall of the Jewish communities of Latvia and Estonia is located not far from Tel Aviv, at the kibbutz Shfayim. The wall of the conference room is covered with memorial plaques inscribed with the names of prominent Jews and where they died—Rumbula, Biķernieki, the Riga ghetto, Bergen-Belsen, and also Petchora, Vorkuta, and Solikamsk.

Unfortunately, in those terrible days when 16,000 men, women, and children were torn from their midst, Latvians in Latvia noticed only that the perpetrators were not just Russians and Latvians, but also Jews—"again those Jews!" And this stuck in their memory.

7. July 1, 1941

The mass deportations of June 13 and 14 broke the patience of the Latvian people. Latvian patriots went into hiding in the woods. They were supplied with weapons that had been hidden the previous summer by members of the paramilitary *Aizsargi* (Home Guard), and so arose the first groups of national partisans, or guerrillas. The actual numbers of Latvians deported and shot by the Bolsheviks in their first year in power were still not known. The figures are 30,000 deported and 1,488 shot.

Early in the morning on Sunday, June 22, 1941, Hitler started Plan Barbarossa, and divisions of the Wehrmacht from the Baltic to the Black Sea crossed the Soviet Union's new borders, which had been drawn in agreement with Hitler himself. As could have been expected, the Latvian national partisans came out of the forests and attacked the Bolshevik forces retreating from the Wehrmacht's Blitzkrieg operations.

Max Kaufmann, who suffered much during the Nazi occupation period, condemns the Latvians "for stabbing retreating Russian forces in the back," as cited in the introduction. I dare say quite openly: if I were a Latvian, and if at the end of June 1941 I had been not quite 13 but, say, 18, I would have "stabbed the retreating Russian forces in the back" without a moment's hesitation and with the greatest enthusiasm—the same enthusiasm, for example, with which Czech patriots in the first days of May 1945 stabbed retreating German forces in the back. Essentially it was the same cause, and I say that as a Jew, to whom Stalin naturally was the lesser evil compared to Hitler.

On June 22 German troops crossed the "Molotov–Ribbentrop border," and by June 25, after the Wehrmacht had captured Kaunas (Kowno) and Vilnius (Wilna) and surrounded Liepāja (Libau), panic broke out in Riga. During the night of June 27–28, the puppet government of Soviet Latvia, with its cash safes, folders of documents, and bodyguards, moved to Valka, a city straddling the border between Latvia and Estonia. Riga was in a political vacuum. On June 27, on the eve of the government's flight, the commander of the Riga garrison, Lieutenant General Safronov, ordered Riga Radio to announce in Latvian: "Yesterday and today several people were arrested for counterrevolutionary activities—sabotage, terror, signalling the enemy, etc.—including Miervaldis Lūkins, son of Jānis; Nikolajs Rainics, son of Georgs; Heinrichs Neibergs, son of Jānis; Matvejs Kuzyecovs, son of Nikolajs; *Jāzeps Kagans, son of Ābrāms*; Arnolds Čuibe, son of Jānis; and others. All of them were sentenced to death by shooting, and the sentence has been carried out. Everyone who tries to help the enemy in any way will be treated the same."

Miervaldis Lūkins, a colonel in the Latvian army, was President Ulmanis' adjutant; Matvej Kusnetsov was probably an ethnic Russian who disliked the Bolsheviks—but how could Joseph Kagan, son of Abraham Kagan, support the Nazis?

On Saturday, June 28, my mother's 43rd birthday, we said goodbye to my grandfather, who was 85 years old. He said, "How long do I have to live? And it's hard to walk even with a cane, and today is the Sabbath, when it is forbidden to travel. You know that I am a religious person. Good luck, and may God protect you!" He stayed in Riga, as did three of my aunts with their husbands and children. They were all taken to the ghetto and later shot.

We made our way to Riga's main railway station, where a long passenger train stood ready. The Bolsheviks were moving all rolling stock to the rear, and refugees that crowded into the cars were not forced out, at least not in Riga. We had not yet managed to get into a wagon when someone started to machine-gun the train from the corner tower of the Hotel Bellevue. We lay down beneath the cars. A Soviet tank in the station square fired a shot at the hotel tower and silenced the machine-gun. The train stayed there the whole day and evening, but just after midnight a sharp order suddenly rang out—everyone was to move to another train, in complete darkness. A pandemonium of pushing, shoving, and yelling broke out, children cried for their mothers, mothers tried to find their children. After an hour the first train was cleared, to carry wounded Russian soldiers. In the early morning of June 29, the second train, with us aboard, slowly started to roll towards the northeast. So we left the city where I was born and raised, where my father was born and raised.

Other Latvian Jews had it much worse. Many from Latgale headed east on foot, in horse-drawn carts, or on bicycles. When they reached the old Latvian–Soviet border, that no longer existed, their way was blocked by special NKVD troops, the *zagraditelniye otriady*: “Stop! You are forbidden to go further! The road is closed. Go back, or we shoot!” The Kremlin had issued orders that no refugees were to be allowed to cross the old border, regardless of their ethnic background, because in their midst might be “doubtful elements” or even “German spies.” The Jewish refugees were forced to turn back to certain death.

There were also cases where refugees in trains were not allowed through. In her book *I Survived Rumbuli*, Frida Michelson tells how in the town of Varakļāni, a young Jewish girl told her that she had been on a train and already quite close to the old border not far from Zilupe, but no one of the great mass of refugees was allowed to cross into Russia, and she had to return to Varakļāni.

* * *

On Tuesday, July 1, the German army entered Riga. In the words of an observer from a neutral country, the Swedish journalist Arvid Fredborg (*Behind the Steel Wall*, London 1944, p. 52):

Another advantage for Germany was the state of public feeling in the Baltic States. An overwhelming majority of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians—perhaps more than 95 per cent—looked upon the Germans as liberators. Such real sympathies as the Germans met in the Baltic countries immediately after their conquest had certainly not come their way since Hitler's assumption of power. No one could mistake the spontaneity of these heartfelt feelings.

I would like to advance a hypothesis. If everything had happened in reverse order, that is, if the German army had been the first to occupy independent Latvia, as it occupied Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, and the Germans had been later driven out by the Bolsheviks,

perhaps in that case the Latvians would have welcomed the Russians, as did the Czechs in May 1945. The Czechs too were bitterly deluded in their hopes in the Russians.

The Latvian publisher Helmārs Rudzītis gives the following testimony in his memoirs *Manas dzīves dēkas* (My life's adventures, New York, Grāmatu Draugs, 1984, pp. 181–183):

Then on July 1, a bright Sunday morning, our national anthem “Dievs, svētī Latviju” resounded from an open window on Martas Street. It was being broadcast by Riga Radio.

It is hard to express the joy we felt on hearing these sounds. The anthem had never sounded so magnificent, so inspiring. Only those who experienced this moment can understand this feeling.

We immediately went out into the street. People were streaming in from all sides. The streets filled with joyful people, with smiles on their faces, which had not been seen for a long time. Strangers embraced each other. Latvian national flags appeared in front of some houses.... If German soldiers appeared, the crowd welcomed them with applause and cheers.

It is hard to describe the elation that reigned in Riga's streets that day. It was extraordinary, something that could never happen again. This day can be understood only by those who were there. The terrible nightmare year was over. That day no one thought about what was to come, what was to come. The joy at being liberated—and this time the word so abused by the Bolsheviks can perhaps be used in its true meaning—overshadowed any thought of the future. Even the Social Democrat Cielēns writes in his memoirs that this time the Germans were truly “liberators.” The barbaric deportations had raised hatred of Stalin's empire to its highest level.

Mountains of flowers were laid at the foot of the Freedom Monument. Everyone wanted to place at least one flower by the symbol of Latvia's freedom. Several German armored cars were parked in the square by the National Opera. Slender, blond, athletic, smiling youths stood by the cars....

Perhaps it was an ephemeral elation that reigned that first day of July, but it was everywhere. That day no one realized that we had gone from one occupation to another. That day no one realized that the Latvian people would not regain even partial freedom, that the Latvian people would have to go through new, difficult trials. That day we still did not know that Hitler, so close to victory, instead of giving nations freedom and gaining their friendship, in his senseless intoxication and hunger for power would lose everything and destroy his own country. We understood the reality later, not on that first day of July.

When I pointed out to Rudzītis in a letter that July 1, 1941, was not a Sunday but a Tuesday, he wrote back:

It has really always seemed to me that July 1 was a Sunday! Maybe because it was one of the happiest days, perhaps the happiest day of my life. What came after doesn't matter. But that day I felt like a man condemned to death but had suddenly been freed. How much longer could I have stayed in hiding before some Chekist dragged me to Siberia or picked me off right there in the Central Prison.

"What came after doesn't matter." And what did come after? Latvia's independence was not restored. The German occupiers incorporated this land, called *Generalbezirk Lettland*, in a completely new administrative unit, *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. This was essentially a German colony, with even less rights than *Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren*, the former heartland of Czechoslovakia. On September 17–18, 1941, in one of his confidential conversations (*Tischgespräche*), Hitler declared: "But now we have no interest in maintaining the Baltic States" (*Hitler's Secret Conversations*, New York, Signet Books, 1961, p. 61).

The Germans called the Latvians, as well as the Lithuanians and Estonians, *Einheimische*, which sounded just like the word "natives" in, say, British Rhodesia. *Der Reichskommissar für das Ostland* Hinrich Lohse governed his territory from Riga. Under him was *der Generalkommissar für Lettland* Otto-Heinrich Drechsler. His superior was *der Minister für die besetzten Ostgebiete* (minister for the occupied Eastern territories) Alfred Rosenberg, in Berlin. One could say Lohse was the viceroy, and Rosenberg—colonial minister in London.

No time was wasted in renaming Riga's streets. Brīvības (Liberty) Street became Adolf-Hitler-Strasse. Another was named for Walter von Plettenberg, grand master of the Livonian knights. Completely obscure Germans such as Carl Schirren, Karl Ernst von Baer, and Victor Hehn got their own streets, while the Latvian epic hero Lāčplēsis, eminent poet Jānis Rainis, and national awakening era leader Krišjānis Valdemārs lost theirs.

All signs and notices had to be first in German (above), and only then in Latvian (below). Germans were allocated larger food rations than Latvians, who were restricted to 700 calories a day. Lucky were those who had relatives in the country. The University of Latvia was renamed the University of Riga. The Latvian Institute of History was closed. Corporal punishment (lashing) was introduced for the *Einheimische* in the railroad administration for Ostland.

In August 1942 a frightening article appeared in Himmler's official newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps*. Titled "Germanisieren?" it stated that after all only persons with German blood could be allowed to live in the vast Eastern areas and implied that racially "inferior" local inhabitants, who were not even worth "Germanizing," would have to leave.

During the years of German occupation, 1941–1945, approximately 10,000 Latvians were shot, about 3,000 of them from Riga. Approximately 50,000 Latvians were arrested and incarcerated in prisons or concentration camps such as Salaspils. About half were released after lengthy, debilitating incarceration; others were sent to the Stutthof, Neuengamme, and Mauthausen concentration camps in 1943 and especially 1944. Most of them perished there in the first months of 1945 (see Brūno Kalniņš, *Fifty Years of the Latvian Social Democratic Party*, in Latvian, Stockholm 1956, pp. 288–290).

And what happened to the 10,000 Latvian men, many rounded up on the streets, without notification to their families, that the German *Feldgendarmarie* (military police) herded into the Riga circus arena on October 5, 1944, and transported to Germany for forced labour? The fate of many is still unknown.

All this happened. But it came later. On July 1, 1941, the Latvians had no premonitions. That day there were no clouds in the sky.

8. Stahlecker, Jeckeln, Arāš Cukurs

The sun did shine brightly for Latvians that first day of July, but for Jews it was the beginning of a long, dark night.

German troops entered Riga on July 1, but the new invaders did not fully introduce their notorious *Ordnung* until July 17, when they forbade any local initiative in matters of internal security. Responsibility for all matters relating to Jews, among other things, was assumed by the “Black Power”—Himmler’s SS organizations, specifically the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, Security service). The official SS flag, which was raised in front of Riga’s former city hall on Reimers Street, was black; the SS newspaper was titled *Das Schwarze Korps* (The black corps); SS uniforms, including those of high-ranking Nazi officials’ bodyguards, were black; so it did not take long for Latvians to dub these formidable men the “Black Power.” In addition, as is well known, their caps had a death’s head—a very appropriate emblem.

But in the first weeks after the Russians had been driven out, small groups of Latvians, filled with bitter hatred, roamed through Riga and provincial cities and towns hunting down Jews and communists. In the groups were former members of *Pērkonkrusts*, which had been banned during Kārlis Ulmanis’ authoritarian regime; relatives of people killed or deported by the Bolsheviks, who felt that all Jews were responsible for the tragedy that had befallen them; self-seekers hoping to gain the new invaders’ favor; as well as common criminals, drunks, and sadists, the dregs of society. Prominent among them was Viktors (Voldemārs) Arājs, about whom more later.

Just as those Latvians are wrong, who then and even now equate Jews and communists, so also those Jews are wrong, who then and even now maintain that “the Latvians” slaughtered Jewish men, women, and children.

The fact remains that these groups of vigilantes and self-styled avengers ran wild during July and the beginning of August of 1941, in Riga and in the provinces. They carried out pogroms, beating and killing Jews in their homes, in Biķernieku forest, in the Riga police prefecture courtyard and basement, in synagogues. The main synagogue of Riga on Gogol Street was burned to the ground, along with all the Jews that had been herded into it.

These murderers were not the same as the national partisans or guerrillas, who attacked Russian *soldiers*. Not all members of the groups could justify themselves by claiming they had in fact been interrogated and tortured by such-and-such Jews in the KGB. They were just people thirsting for blood. How many were there? A dozen, a hundred, a thousand? No one knows for certain. One thing is clear: the entire Latvian nation cannot be blamed for the deeds of these few villains.

As mentioned, the organized liquidation of Jews was a matter under the jurisdiction of the German administration. The Germans did not tolerate disorder. They carried out Hitler’s *Endlösung* (the final solution of the Jewish question) with iron determination, methodically, to the end.

Some Jews in Latvia still did not understand this, still harboured their illusions. Helmārs Rudzītis writes in his memoirs (p. 184):

A few days after the Germans came I ran into Riga's well-known jeweler, Vidzers, on Brīvības (Liberty) Street. We talked a while. Vidzers was a Jew, and understandably worried about his future. "It will not be easy for us," he said. "Jews will be persecuted. But it can't be worse than it has been. Good that we got rid of those devils." Poor Vidzers. He fared no better under the new "devils." He was left alone for a while, then his path too carried him to the ghetto, from which there was no return.

It is now known that Vidzers was killed within a few days of that conversation. He was mercilessly beaten, for the killers wanted to find out where his jewels were hidden.

* * *

Audiat et altera pars. Let us listen to some Latvian exiles. Vilis Hāzners states: "It is no secret to us that there are Latvians who along with the Germans took part in exterminating Jews" (newspaper *Laiks*, November 17, 1982). Several books have been published that describe the extermination of Jews, such as *Salaspils* by A. Ruņģis and *Rūgtā pelavu maize* (Bitter chaff bread) by V. Nollendorfs. The Reverend Egils Grīslis, a Latvian Lutheran theologian at the University of Manitoba, writes in a book popular in the Latvian exile community: "Latvians too were involved in the murders. Some by force, some voluntarily, the riff-raff did exactly what our occupiers wanted them to do: now the murder of Jews could be seen as a Latvian, not German matter!"

The well-known Latvian Social Democrat Felikss Cielēns wrote in his memoirs (*Laikmetu maiņā*, vol. 3, 1964, pp. 226-227):

The history of mankind shows dark and terrible deeds, but such bestiality had never been seen before. A few days after the German army entered Jelgava, a large yellow banner was hung from the railroad overpass, which proclaimed in black letters: *Mitau judenfrei* (Jelgava/Mitau free of Jews). Echoes of the horrors hidden behind these words reached us in the district of Platone. Latvians had participated in these barbaric executions not just as eyewitnesses, but also as participants—executioners. Drinking in Jelgava's bars they told of the mass executions. The forest where this took place was about ten kilometers from Zilēni [Cielēns country home], and sometimes the night made one's blood run cold, when it seemed the wails and curses reached to the heavens. The occupying power's aim was to arrest and kill all of Latvia's Jews, about 80,000 people. Moral responsibility for this appalling criminal act falls to a certain extent also on those Latvians who actively and on their own initiative cooperated with the occupying power in this matter.

The Latvian writer Gunārs Janovskis writes in *Pēc pasterdienas* (After judgment day, 1968, p. 107):

And we? Did we know that? But our own fate was so uncertain, so harsh and undeserved, that the injustice done to another people made us just turn away, shudder in revulsion, and stay silent. What would have been the point of raising our voices? No one would have listened to us. Not then, not later. Not the victors, not the vanquished.

Rev. Egils Grīslis points out that “Those who took part in the murder of Jews were not the flower of the Latvian people, but the dregs.” He admits that Max Kaufmann is right in

reproaching Latvians for having lacked Christian compassion. In Denmark, when Hitler decreed that Jews had to wear a yellow Star of David, the king himself immediately wore the star—and so did his subjects. If only we could cite a similar example!... The few voices raised against Hitler on behalf of the Jews do not counterbalance the great lack of compassion of the Latvian people. We *can* be faulted for hard-heartedness and lack of Christian love of one’s neighbor! No matter how many mitigating circumstances we cite, which explain why we acted as we did—it does not erase the guilt. The time is long overdue to admit this to the Latvian Jews we meet in exile. Human weakness is not a matter for boasting, but to acknowledge it is a matter of honor.

Interestingly enough, Grīslis also does not take exception to Max Kaufmann’s sharp words quoted in the introduction. “I agree with his main point,” states the Latvian theologian, “that punishment is inevitable for every sin not repented, that God’s commandments are not to be followed only at our pleasure, when it can be done without inconvenience. As God has forbade murder, we have to understand that not preventing murder and keeping silent is a shameful and criminal act.”

These events have also been mirrored in works of fiction published by Latvians in exile. Eduards Freimanis writes in his novel *Diletants* (The dilettante, in *Laiks*, June 2, 1984): “Vilis met friends, whose hands were stained with the blood of innocent Jews.” Richards Rīdžinieks writes movingly of the Jewish tragedy in his novel *Zelta motocikls* (The golden motorcycle, New York, Grāmatu Draugs, 1976). Richards Rīdžinieks (Rīdžinieks means a man from Riga) was the pen name of the late gifted writer, journalist, and graphic artist Ervins Grīns (1925–1979). The novel *Zelta motocikls* is to an extent autobiographical. Like the book’s hero, the author was called into the Latvian Legion and fought in Pomerania. The book’s hero, Igors, living in Stockholm (like the author), remembers: “But we had to move. Not far from the Government Print Shop, near the ghetto.” Then comes the following dialogue:

“That couldn’t have been very nice.”

“Well, yes. Many perhaps didn’t notice, at times, how they were forced into work crews. One simply looked the other way! And yet the whole time you had the feeling, that there was the ghetto, that people are herded in there behind

barbed wire like beasts. It was more than awful. And that I why I don't like to think too much. If you think, then everything gets mixed up together."

"What's the matter with you? The Germans were making a dirty mess and you worry about it!"

"But weren't any of us there too?"

"Somebody was, probably."

Another section:

In the summer of 1943 Igors met Dzintars in Riga. The latter was in a sharp SD uniform. He had finished school in Germany, and now served in Salaspils. Somewhat sadly Igors watched his old acquaintance. The uniform was sharp, and he wore it proudly.... The dirty past pressed down like a nightmare. When the Russians were here it was the Communist Youth, and during the deportations a Latvian stood next to every Russian. Now with the Germans here, Latvian SD men were ready to do anything for food and to get out of being sent to the front.

Later on the hero sinks into heavy depression. He starts to drink, starts hallucinating.

You can't erase Latvia's Jewish tragedy from your soul. Your conscience is far too developed for that.... You saw but at the same time you didn't see the columns of Jews. The yellow Stars of David. You did see them and you did not. You were prepared to suffer everything, bear everything, only so that the night of horrors [deportations] would not be repeated. *The Russians have fled, the Germans have saved us from the Jews, all that's left is to get rid of the Germans.* And how do you get rid of the Germans?

Following his wife's advice, Igors goes to the doctor, Dr. F. Bernson. In the doctor's office,

Igors looked around. On the walls were drawn three storks, with baby baskets in their beaks, flying over homes and factories with smoke rising from the chimneys.

"And earlier you never had anything like this?" asked the doctor.

"No."

"How would you describe what's wrong with you?"

The storks were flying, they would soon be over the chimneys, the babies would fall into the chimneys like Jewish children into the gas chambers! One wanted to scream! But one had to answer. ANSWER.

No comments are needed here. We can only add that besides such Latvians with “far too developed consciences” were those who had no conscience at all, for example, the journalist R. Č. cited in the introduction. No one forced him, in the first weeks of the German occupation, to write such viciously antisemitic articles, stooping so low as to ask outright for their destruction. There were many who worked in the Latvian press during the years of German occupation, hoping to help the fight against Bolshevism and to contribute to the preservation of Latvian culture, but only rarely did this collaboration express itself in such an abhorrent way.

* * *

Himmler’s men were in charge of the destruction of the Jews in Latvia’s territory. The deeds themselves were carried out by the infamous *Einsatzgruppe A* (Special action group A), led by SS-Brigadeführer and Police General Dr. Walter Stahlecker. Stahlecker was killed by Estonian partisans in March 1942, and was replaced by SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Jost.

In his October 15, 1941, report on the activities of the *Einsatzgruppe A* in the Baltic States and Byelorussia, Stahlecker admits that pogroms against Jews could be carried out only with great difficulty, especially after the occupation of Riga. The *Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo, Security police) initially had to avoid harsher measures, so as not to cause a negative reaction among the Germans. They had to create the impression that the local population itself was the first to rise up against centuries-long oppression by the Jews. Stahlecker continues: “As an overall stillness immediately settled over Riga, it did not seem necessary or useful to carry out further pogroms. As far as possible, films and photographs were made in Kauen (Kaunas) and Riga to document the first spontaneous executions of Jews and communists carried out by Lithuanians and Latvians.” According to Stahlecker, 500 Jews were “liquidated” in the Riga pogroms (*Dossier Historama Nr. 1, Histoire du nazisme: les SS*; Joseph Wulf, *Les Einsatzgruppen*, Paris 1975, pp. 124-127).

So we see that Stalin and Beria cynically used Jews to carry out purges in Latvia, and in the same way Hitler and Himmler used Latvians to initiate the process of exterminating Jews.

Besides Stahlecker, those in charge included the Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer für das Ostland, SS-Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln; his immediate subordinate in Latvia, Major General Walter Schroeder; the chief of the SD in Riga, SS-Obersturmbannführer Rudolf Lange; SS-Obersturmbannführer Gerhard Maywald; and the commander of the Riga ghetto, Eduard Roschmann.

Gertrude Schneider writes in her book *Journey into Terror: The Story of the Riga Ghetto* (New York 1979, p. 25):

In the forest adjoining the camp [Salaspils], graves had been prepared by the inmates. After they had undressed, the victims were either shot immediately at the edge of the graves or else they were ordered to lie face down between the legs of those already shot, and were then killed. The latter method saved much-needed space. It was invented by Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln, who called it *Sardinenpackung* (sardine packaging).

This was the renowned German efficiency and order: *Ordnung muss sein!*—Order must prevail! It was the Germans, not the Latvians, who also saw to it that Latvian Jews “contributed to the advancement of science.” As spelled out in an order (*Verfügung*) signed by *der Generalkommissar in Riga* in November 1942, the Ostland branch of the Institute for Medical Zoology “asks for permission to supply three Jews for medical zoology for less than eight hours daily. It concerns chosen blood donors for the feeding of lice in the lice laboratory of the Institute, which must be kept going in connection with measures for combating spotted fever” (Isaac Levinson, *The Untold Story*, pp. 131–132).

The mayor of Nazi-occupied Riga (*Kommissarischer Oberbürgermeister*) from 1941 to 1944 was a Baltic German, Hugo Wittrock, who detested Latvian nationalists. He wrote in his memoirs (published posthumously, Lüneburg 1979, pp. 37–38):

1941 was drawing to a close when a frightful event happened in Riga. On the second Sunday of Advent rumors spread throughout the city that on Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer Jeckeln’s orders, Jews had been taken from the ghetto to a place about 10 kilometers outside Riga, and SS men had shot them all—men, women, and children—in a mass grave and covered up the bodies. It was said thousands were shot. When the frightful rumors turned out to be true and details of the perpetuated crime became known, there was a general feeling of shock about this inhuman action in the city.... The local inhabitants ... perhaps because of religious feelings condemned the merciless shooting of unarmed men, women, and children, and were deeply distressed at this ungodly cruelty. When shortly thereafter I made the mood in Riga known to the Reichsminister in Berlin [Wittrock’s friend Alfred Rosenberg], I understood from his responses that the frightful bloodshed was ordered and carried out over his head by higher authorities.

I do not believe that Alfred Rosenberg was bypassed in this case, that the Reichsführer SS, Himmler, did not take into account his opinions. After all, it was Rosenberg who first proposed to Hitler that Bolshevism and Jewry are the same (see Chapter 2).

According to its own reports, *Stahlecker’s Einsatzgruppe A* in the three months before October 15, 1941, killed 30,025 Jews in Latvia. After this came the shootings in the Rumbula forest near Riga on November 30 and December 8, and in the Šķēde dunes near Liepāja (Libau) on December 15–17. Latvians took part in both actions, on German orders. They were recorded for posterity by a photographer, a Latvian from Liepāja, who was particularly interested in how women, stripped naked in bitter winter weather, faced their death.

Two Latvian antisemitic fanatics, Viktors Arājs and Herberts Cukurs, actively collaborated in carrying out the plans of Hitler and Himmler, Stahlecker and Jeckeln. Arājs was a major in the Latvian security section, and was promoted to SS-Sturmbannführer. He was awarded the German medal *Kriegsverdienstkreuz mit Schwertern*—war service cross with swords. One must say he earned it. In the first days of July he formed the group, known as the Arājs gang, that roamed from city to city brutally settling accounts with Jews. When the Ger-

man administration organized the extermination of Jews “in an orderly fashion” (*in geordnete Bahnen*), Arājs made sure that his men were not left without work in the new arrangement. He personally shot Jews in the streets of the Riga ghetto and in the Rumbula forest. After the war he hid in Germany under an assumed name, but was found out and sentenced to life imprisonment at a trial in Hamburg.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Herberts Cukurs in 1919 was a Bolshevik sympathizer. In independent Latvia he became famous as a pilot. Between 1924 and 1936 he designed and constructed a glider and three airplanes. In 1933–1934 he flew from Riga to Gambia and back in one of his own planes, the C-3. (Gambia, in West Africa, had been a colony of the Duke of Kurland in the seventeenth century.) Two years later he flew from Riga to Tokyo. He also visited Palestine, and his reports of the visit were colored with strong antisemitism. As soon as the German army entered Riga, Cukurs joined those who were shooting Jews. At the end of 1941 he personally participated in the shooting in Riga’s ghetto and Rumbula, killing infants and dancing with joy by the graves. After the war Cukurs found refuge in Brazil, running a boat and plane rental service on the Rio de Janeiro beach and later owned a banana plantation. On February 24, 1965, he was killed in Uruguay’s capital Montevideo by members of a secret group called “Those who do not forget.” It is said that they were Israeli “Mossad” agents.

* * *

Several Latvian Jews who were lucky enough to have survived have written their memoirs. Max Kaufmann (*Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands*, Munich 1947) and Frida Michelson (*I Survived Rumbuli*, New York 1982) are full of bitterness, and blame “the Latvians” for the atrocities and executions. A more balanced view is taken by the painter Alter (Arthur) Ritov, born in 1909 in Riga, and by Meir Levinstein, born in 1914 in the picturesque town of Kuldiga (Goldingen). Levinstein wrote *On the Last Line* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv 1975) about his sad experiences. Both of them now live in Israel, do not feel revengeful against Latvians, and are interested in Latvian life both in Latvia and in exile. They understand that one cannot blame an entire people for the evil deeds of individuals.

9. The Savers

Like all peoples, including mine, the Latvians had their villains and heroes. It required courage to help persecuted Jews, and real heroism to give them shelter, for harboring Jews was punishable by death. The Nazarene called on people to be not only just, but also merciful. In Latvia as in other Nazi-occupied European countries, there were people who could in this regard be truly called Christians.

The Latvian Lutheran archbishop, Dr. Teodors Grīnbergs, succeeded in obtaining the release of Jews who had converted to Christianity from the ghetto, and in ensuring that Latvian–Jewish married couples could continue to live together in freedom (Ralph Rotenberg, *Kirche im Osten*, VIII, 1965, p. 117). He also obtained the release of a Lutheran minister who was to be sent to a concentration camp for having led prayers for the Jewish people.

Meir Levinstein writes in his memoirs that when he worked in a Jewish forced labour crew in Riga's goods station and port in the fall of 1941, there were always people who gave him bread and other food, so he gave his ghetto rations to his family. Later, when Levinstein and other Jews worked in the German army's garage (*Heereskraftfahrpark*) at the corner of Valmieras and Matisa Streets, Latvian drivers always gave them bread. The German NCOs looked down on the Latvians, considering them *Bauernvolk*, a lower race, and frequently beat them, not to mention what they did to the Jews, who were not even considered people.

A Latvian from Riga, born in 1925, was conscripted into the RAD (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*, German labour service) in the fall of 1943, and later into the Latvian Legion. He received serious eye and leg injuries during battles in Pomerania in March 1945. This man wrote me as follows:

It distresses me that Latvians could have been capable of anything so un-chivalrous and that they could act so brutally, for I considered my people to be good and just.... The following winter I looked over the high fence surrounding the Jewish cemetery at Šmerli. It was a grotesque sight: the monument to the Jews who had given their lives in the fight for Latvian independence next to the burned-out synagogue [burned in July 1941 along with the people herded inside]. Dear Mr. Gordon, please don't be offended by what I have written, for I somehow also feel guilty for the sins of my people.

He also writes in the letter of his father, who had a restaurant in the Moscow suburb of Riga. When this neighbourhood was made into the ghetto in the fall of 1941, he had to move to the centre of town:

Since we hadn't been able to move everything yet, Riga's SD gave us an entry and exit pass, for the ghetto was strongly guarded.... On these trips my father smuggled in food, cigarettes, etc., for his Jewish merchant friends. I went along on these trips. For me it was an exciting adventure. When a SD patrol appeared, we unloaded the old chairs off the cart, then loaded them back on again....

It was much more dangerous to harbor Jews, saving them from certain death. In November 1944, when Riga was already in the hands of the Soviet army, members of the Latvian resistance working for the Latvian Central Council (LCP, from the Latvian name) located one of the Jews hiding in dug-outs in the Kurzeme forest, living off food supplied by local inhabitants. In great secrecy he was brought to the port city of Ventspils, from where the Latvians and this Jew fled across the Baltic Sea to Sweden. In Sweden this man, Israel Michelson, testified to the International Red Cross about Nazi atrocities in Latvia. Valentīne Lasmane, who still lives in Sweden, was one of the participants in this daring escape.

The late Frida Michelson (no relation to Israel Michelson) writes in her memoirs that she managed to survive by lying beneath piles of clothes of those shot in the Rumbula forest. She was sheltered by two Latvian families, the Bērziņš and Mežulis families, and later by a group of Seventh-Day Adventists, who hid her and supplied her with food the entire time until the Germans fled from Riga.

Near Krāslava a pious Roman Catholic woman, Petronella Vilmane, hid a 13-year-old Jewish girl from Daugavpils, Maja Zarch, on her uncle's farm. In Liepāja several Jews—Mrs. Raikin and her small son, Michael and Hilde Skutelsky, and others—were hidden by a minister, who settled in exile in the United States. Jews were saved by Anna Fimbauere, the nurse Emīlija Strēlis, and Anna Zvirgzdiņa. These women have passed away, but Zvirgzdiņa's son lives in Stockholm. Yad Vashem, the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, has sent him the medal and diploma of honor awarded to his mother.

Arel Westerman and his wife, now living in Israel, were saved by the Latvian Roberts Sedols, who unfortunately did not survive the war. He was a janitor and later the manager of a building at 22 Tirgoņu Street in Liepāja, in whose basement he hid Jews. In Liepāja alone Latvians saved at least 22 Jews from certain death.

In New York on December 11, 1986, the group Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the US honored the Latvian Catholic priest Kazimirs Vilnis. In 1943 he hid David Patzkin in his house in Mežaparks (Kaiserwald) on the outskirts of Riga. Patzkin survived the German occupation and after the war settled in New York. At the end of the ceremony everyone joined in singing the national anthem of independent Latvia, "Dievs, svētī Latviju."

During the German occupation notices like the following would appear in the newspapers *Tēvija*, *Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland*, and others: "The Latvian Anna Polis was shot at 15 Peldu Street, Riga, two days after several Jews had been found hidden in her home." Not far from there, the teacher Elvira Ronis and her mother hid a group of Jews for six months.

In the files of the Jerusalem memorial institute Yad Vashem are testimonies about Latvians who saved Jews. Among them is the Ozoliņš family—Anna, Eduards, Voldemārs, and Jānis—also Katrīna Skujiņa, the aforementioned Anna Zvirgzdiņa, and Freds Bankovičs. Freds Bankovičs, born in 1908 in the small Latgale town of Kārsava, hid not just his wife, Rachel Edelman, but also a six-year-old Jewish girl, Judith Silber, and later also Sonia Minkin (born in 1913) and the boy Liova Udem. He was helped by the Latvian policeman Eduards Stabiņš, who was conscripted into the Latvian Legion. Not all Latvian policemen, who then perforce worked for the Germans, were German myrmidons. Freds Bankovičs was later arrested by the Cheka (MGB) on suspicion of being a German spy. Sonia Minkin, whom he had saved, went to

Moscow and successfully appealed to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and to the State Procurator's Office for his release from the Reutovo concentration camp.

Bernhard Press, born in 1917 in Riga, and now living in West Berlin, remembers:

About 27,000 Jews were shot in two "actions" on November 30 and December 8, 1941, among them my mother and all our relatives. After the second "action" I wrote a guarded letter to the wife of Professor Krūmiņš, asking her for a clandestine meeting. My father and I were at that time working on the railroad for the Germans, loading wagons with goods for the front. Every morning our column of workers, consisting of about 100 to 150 men, walked, guarded only by two Germans (there was no place for a Jew to flee to) through the dark streets to the main building of the railroad administration. It was there that we met Mrs. Krūmiņš and her elder daughter, who in a hurried conversation told us we could come to their place as soon as our lives were in danger.

A couple of days later my father and I slipped away in the darkness of the morning out of the column of workers and reached the flat of the Krūmiņš family. There we stayed for two years and ten months—from December 13, 1941, to October 13, 1944, the day the Russian army entered the town—without ever leaving the flat.

The Krūmiņš family who saved our lives were just *acquaintances* of ours. My father had seen the professor a couple of times professionally, my mother had met Mrs. Krūmiņš at some Italian courses that both ladies frequented. Otherwise no ties existed between the families. Soon after the Germans entered the town Mrs. Krūmiņš came to see us and took our valuables, saying they would be safer at their place. When my father and I were in jail, the family tried to contact certain Latvian circles in order to help my mother obtain our release. Mrs. Krūmiņš and her elder daughter had also come to the ghetto when it was still open, bringing food for us and repeatedly saying that we were to come to their place if our lives should be in danger. One of the last things my mother told me was not to seek help from the Krūmiņš family because it was not decent to worry other people with one's personal troubles. For once I did not obey her.

The family consisted of Professor Arturs Krūmiņš, who was at that time professor of architecture at the Riga Polytechnical Institute and later, after the war, became a member of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, his wife Erna Krūmiņš, their elder daughter Velta Mēters, and their younger daughter Ilga Krūmiņš. Their cook Lina Pilsroze also lived in the same apartment. An important part in rescuing us was played by the teacher Elza Mileika, who not only became a close friend of ours (we did not know her before), but who occupied herself most actively in providing for our living.... The food coupons the Krūmiņš family received were hardly sufficient for themselves, let alone two unexpected "guests." It was Elza Mileika who took upon herself the task of providing for us. She had many very close friends among her colleagues and also many friends

among peasants in the country. She mobilised all of them, and, by the way, many of them wondered how it was that a family of two, she and her mother, could consume so much food. Once a week she used to appear at our flat with a big basket full of bread, or bacon, or meat, depending on her luck....

The only other people who knew of our existence were Professor Štālbergs (an architect too) and his wife, a physician, who was Jewish.

* * *

Last but not least, here is the saga of Žanis Lipke, from the *B'nai B'rith Bulletin* of Australia and New Zealand, vol. 22, no. 22, June 1977:

Seventy people attended a luncheon at B'nai B'rith Lodge Home in Sydney on Sunday, May 21, to pay tribute to Žanis Lipke from Riga. A tall, erect, silver-haired man in his mid-seventies, Mr. Lipke and his family have been honoured by Israel's Yad Vashem as "righteous gentiles" for their courageous help in saving Jewish lives from Hitler's persecutors in the years 1941–44 in Riga.

B'nai B'rith District 21, taking the opportunity of Mr. Lipke's brief visit to his son Alfred, who lives in Australia at Anna Bay, NSW, presented Mr. Lipke with a special certificate, flown out from B'nai B'rith in Washington.

Žanis Lipke risked his life, and that of his wife and family, again and again, to save 41 Latvian Jews from certain death.... Žanis Lipke was a wharf labourer in Pārdaugava [the part of Riga situated on the left bank of the Daugava river]. When all the Jews were driven into the ghetto, Žanis got a job as a porter in the "Red Warehouses" (*Sarkanie Spīķeri*) managed by the German Luftwaffe. Each morning he was to transport a group from the ghetto to the stores and supervise their work. He was able to help them with food and medicine. Because the guards at the ghetto gates only counted the returning prisoners, without checking names, Latvian friends of Žanis donned yellow stars and made up the numbers. With organized commotion at the gates, Jews would remove their stars, and walk out as Aryans in charge of the groups which had been brought in. Once, unable to find a trusted person nearby, it is said Žanis pinned a yellow star on himself and his group walked into the ghetto without an escort, but with the correct number of people.

In September 1941 Žanis came under suspicion and a sudden search of his house was organized. At that time he had given sanctuary to a Jewish friend Chaim Smolanski, who had injured his foot in the warehouse and could barely move. The guards found the fugitive and marched him and Žanis to the police station, after looting the house.

"Two guards in naval uniform met us at the police station," recalls Smolanski, who survived the occupation. "One of them pointed a gun at me, ready to shoot. Žanis jumped in front of me, shielding me with his body and shouting angrily, 'Kill me first, you son of a bitch! You don't even know who this man is. He is working for me and I am responsible to the Germans for him!' The guard was stunned by this outburst. He cursed and had us put into a prison cell. Next day Žanis was let out. He'd bribed a policeman. A couple of days

later he got me out the same way. In the ghetto this incident was considered a miracle. Never before had anyone come back alive from the police.”

From October 25, the gates of the ghetto were finally closed, the guard strengthened. Jews returning from work were frisked thoroughly and cruelly punished if the smallest bit of food was found on them. Žanis warned his friends, “Build hiding places in the ghetto. When danger comes, hide for a day or two. When things calm down a bit, I’ll come and take you away.”

Forty thousand lives were mown down in Riga, mainly those of children, women, and the elderly. Ghetto pavements were littered with the limbs and shattered corpses of children thrown from upper floors, and with the useless possessions of the deceived victims, who were told that they were being transferred to a different camp.

“I was standing alongside my father at the barbed wire of the ghetto. I was eight years old,” recalls Žanis’ younger son Zigrīds. “I shall always remember his trembling voice: Look, my son. Look, and never forget. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.”

Only men, slaves for work, were now left in the ghetto. It was clear they would be killed as soon as they became unnecessary. Žanis started feverishly searching the town for hiding places for these people. He found a cellar here, an abandoned building there. When safe hiding spots ran out, Žanis Lipke decided to build an underground bunker in a shed near his house. The frost was severe, the ground had to be heated by a blowtorch, and no one had any experience for such a construction. When the warm weather melted the snow, the lot caved in, and had to be started all over again. Žanis appropriated wood logs, tiles, mortar, whatever building materials he could find. A well-concealed bunker was soon finished. Žanis, his wife Johanna, and eldest son Alfreds provided the fugitives with guns, bullets, and a radio set, in addition to food.

Until the beginning of 1943, Žanis planned and plotted with a handful of loyal friends to encourage Jews to escape from the ghetto and hide in the forest. They were fed and hidden. Not all managed to outsmart the Germans, unfortunately, but not for want of Žanis’ trying.

Early in 1943, Žanis exchanged his job at the Luftwaffe stores for one working in the country. This allowed him to travel legally all over the countryside, to transport fugitives to hiding places in haystacks and farm lofts or cellars. He could also supply them more easily with food.

... Latvians working in the recruitment office for rural laborers drifted away, under the lax supervision. Žanis took possession of the keys to the office [which was in Riga] and used it as a temporary retreat for concentration camp fugitives waiting for transport to safer hiding places.

Žanis never lagged in his mission of rescue, even in the terrible days of 1944, when the SS with the help of police dogs hunted fugitives and those who gave them help, all over Riga, shooting on sight.

... Žanis now lives alone in an old house where so many exciting events happened in years past. Thanks to the efforts of his friends, he was granted the rank of “personal pensioner of Latvia,” but little prosperity accompanies the title.

Most of the material on Žanis Lipke and his exploits based on interviews with survivors, was sent to the Israeli Institute of Research on the Holocaust and Heroism, Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem. He and his wife were awarded the highest recognition, the “Medal of the Righteous,” and were invited to plant a tree on the Avenue for Righteous Gentiles in Israel in 1966. However, the Soviet government denied them permission to attend.

Now, eleven years later, he has been permitted to visit his son Alfred, who fled Latvia and lives in Anna Bay. Members of B’nai B’rith Russian Repatriants Lodge “Let My People Go” in Tel Aviv, some of whom are from Riga, brought the case to the attention of Brother Dr. N. Urmann of Melbourne while he was in Israel. Brother Brian Lenny of Sydney located Žanis Lipke’s son and arranged a meeting to coordinate some long-overdue tributes.

The first of these, the Medal of Honour from Yad Vashem, was presented to Mr. Lipke by the Israeli Consul General, Mr. David Ben-Dov, at the community Holocaust Remembrance Night in Sydney in April.

Now for the aftermath of Lipke’s visit to Australia. The Soviet authorities had allowed him to visit his son in Australia, but denied him permission to go to Israel, where he was eagerly awaited by so many Jews that he had saved. In Australia, Žanis Lipke accepted the air ticket to Israel given him by the people mentioned above. The flight was the next day. The Soviet consulate was closed; however, the Israeli consulate was open.

In short, Žanis Lipke arrived in Israel, and planted a tree in the Avenue of the Righteous on the Mount of Remembrance. Israel’s largest newspaper, *Ma’ariv*, carried a lengthy article about him, and on August 30, 1977, the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel and B’nai B’rith organized a ceremony in his honor. The 77-year-old man had tears in his eyes when he saw the hall filled with people and heard the thunderous applause with which he was received. I had the honor to address Žanis Lipke that evening, in Latvian. I quoted from the Holy Scriptures, Genesis 18, 26–32: “If I find in the city of Sodom fifty good men, I will pardon the whole place for their sake... For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” Ending my short talk, I paraphrased the first words of the Latvian national anthem “Dievs, svētī Latviju”—“God bless Latvia for having people like you.”

10. 2X2 Divisions

In 1944 a peculiar symmetry prevailed along the northern part of the German–Soviet front. On each side there were two Latvian divisions, forming respective army corps. A lot of blood was shed by these “2x2” divisions, as they could be called, figuratively if not literally fighting brother against brother. Some fought voluntarily, but most, on both sides, had been drafted and forced to fight.

On the German side corps and division commanders were Germans, but the so-called “Inspector-General of the Latvian Legion,” most of the officers, and all of the soldiers were Latvians. On the Soviet side corps and division commanders were Latvians, the rest—officers and soldiers—were mainly Latvians, but also Jews and Russians.

On the one side, as part of the German armed forces, taking part in the war were the Latvian Second Brigade, later the Nineteenth Division and Fifteenth Division, that is, the so-called Latvian Legion of the Waffen-SS Sixth Army Corps, as well as six border guard regiments, air force helpers, and pilots, part of the *Luftwaffenlegion Lettland*.

On the other side, as part of the armed forces of the USSR, taking part in the war were the remnants of the Twenty-fourth Territorial Corps, the First Independent Latvian Riflemen’s Regiment, the Second (Seventy-sixth) Independent Latvian Riflemen’s Regiment, later the 201st Latvian Riflemen’s Regiment (renamed the Forty-third Latvian Guard Riflemen’s Division), and the 308th Latvian Riflemen’s Division (both of these divisions were combined into the 130rd Latvians Riflemen’s Corps), as well as pilots, who formed the First Latvian Night Bomber Aviation Regiment.

One can contrast the two Latvian Waffen-SS divisions, the Nineteenth and the Fifteenth, with the two “Red” Latvian Riflemen’s divisions, the Forty-third Guard and the 308th. One side was the Latvian Legion, the other—the Latvian Corps. The Legion was sent into battle by those whose flag had a swastika, the Corps by those whose flag had a five-pointed star. The Legion’s enemy was “Bolshevism,” the Corps’ enemy was “Fascism.” Thousands of Latvians fell in battle, on the one side, and on the other. On several occasions Latvians fought against Latvians, especially in Kurland, by Džūkste, in December 1944. The total number of Latvians on the German side was about 140,000; on the Russian side—about 65,000, plus 15,000 Latvian Jews, Russians from Latgale, Poles, and others.

I had the opportunity to acquaint myself with rather extensive source materials about these 2x2 divisions and to talk with veterans from both sides, who often talked very openly and freely. I became convinced that these Latvian warriors (and Latvians have been known as brave warriors throughout history), fighting in front line trenches, were not responsible for the crimes committed by the two totalitarian regimes in the rear. There were, of course, exceptions, but the majority were typical front line soldiers, who do not have to be ashamed of fighting in war, having been conscripted under foreign flags—one with a swastika, one with a five-pointed star.

In the West, people who are not well informed are frequently suspicious and mistrustful of veterans who admit they fought on the German side in the ranks of the Waffen-SS. A full analysis of these armed formations is beyond the scope of this book. I can only point out that

Hitler and Himmler decided to form Latvian divisions, which were organized as the Latvian Legion in the Waffen-SS Sixth Army Corps because otherwise it would have been logistically impossible to send over a hundred thousand Latvians to the front. It must be emphasized that Latvia was in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, a territory not annexed to Germany but in a legal sense considered occupied enemy territory. The Hague Convention forbids occupying powers to call inhabitants of such territories into their regular armies (in this case, the Wehrmacht). Therefore Hitler, overcoming his dislike of Latvians (see the quote in the introduction), decided he could get the necessary Latvian cannon fodder by calling the new army units “volunteer divisions.” The Waffen-SS was formally a volunteer army defending the “new Europe.”

In fact the Latvians were mobilized, by force, with severe punishment for avoiding call-up orders, and death for deserting from the front. Intensive conscription into the Latvian Legion started in the fall of 1943, when the German army was suffering one defeat after another on the Eastern front. Before that, there were Latvian battalions fighting on the front, especially in the Volchov region, but they were intermingled among German units.

Hitler's and Himmler's purpose was two-fold. First, they circumvented the Hague Convention, with its prohibition against conscripting the people of occupied lands into the regular army. Second, they inextricably joined the conscripted soldiers to the Nazi regime. With the SS “runes” on their collars, the death's head on their caps, and their blood group tattooed in their armpit, the soldier's carried the mark of Cain. They were identified with the Allgemeine-SS, the General-SS. They fought to the last breath, refusing to be taken prisoner, for they knew that, as SS men, the jails of the Cheka and camps of the Gulag awaited them. This Machiavellian ploy succeeded to a large extent. It is not accidental that Latvians, from the Fifteenth Battalion of the Waffen-SS Fifteenth Division, desperately defended the Reichskanzlei and Himmler's State Security Headquarters (*Hauptamt*) in Berlin at the end of the war. These 80 men were surrounded on all sides, but kept on fighting. They were not just Waffen-SS, but also Latvians, therefore, to the Soviets, double traitors.

Ironically, the last commander of this battalion, Lieutenant Neilands, was the translator at the capitulation talks between the commander of Berlin, General Krebs, and the Russians. Another Latvian, the Soviet Colonel Nikolajs Bērzariņš (Bersarin) became the first commander of Russian-occupied Berlin.

Since the war the Latvian exile press has, in my subjective opinion, excessively glorified the political stance taken by the leaders of the Latvian Legion. However, other, more critical approaches have also appeared. For example, Captain Ādolfs Blāķis of the Latvian Legion, awarded the Iron Cross, who died in 1984, strongly castigates the mistakes, illusions, and delusions of Latvian political and military leaders in his book *Medaļas otrā puse* (The medal's other side, Buenos Aires 1956). Blāķis had the moral right to criticise, being an insider who fought heroically and was severely wounded on the front.

It must be emphasized that the soldiers of the Latvian Legion fought *against* the Bolsheviks, not *for* Germany. A popular song was: “First we'll hit the lice-ridden ones [the Russians], then the bluish-grey ones [the Germans].”

And what about the veterans of the other side—those who fought in the ranks of the Soviet army? Among them were those who at the time believed that Latvia's greatest enemy was not Bolshevism, but fascism, that is, the same Germans who took over as masters 700 years ago. Just like the legionnaires on the other side, they too had their illusions: they hoped that after the war Latvians, even as part of the Soviet Union, would enjoy more rights and freedoms. The Kremlin after all had promised to allow "national army units" after the war, and to allow each "Soviet republic" to form "national foreign ministries." They were bitterly disappointed, just as were those who hoped that Hitler would give them back their country for fighting so bravely. The only achievement was that the Latvian Legion was sent to fight only on the eastern front, not against the Western Allies.

Like the Latvian Legion, the Forty-third Guard Riflemen's Division of the Soviet army had its heroes. The sharpshooter Jānis Vilhelms earned the title "Hero of the Soviet Army" in 1942, and in July 1943 the Americans awarded him the Gold Cross as an outstanding Allied soldier. The sharpshooter Ērika Gaile fell at the front at the end of 1942; she had been a prominent skier during Latvia's years of independence. Many pilots from the air force of independent Latvia served in the Soviet Latvian Aviation Regiment—Ernests Jākobsons, K. Kalniņš, F. Sproģis, and others.

Having had long, frank discussions with veterans of both sides, it seems to me that they all could meet over vodka or beer and together reminisce about the bloody battles, not reproaching each other about the alien flag each fought under. It was a tragedy for both sides. Old front-line fighters understand each other, as long as they are not fanatics, but ordinary men.

* * *

Jews in the Soviet army's Latvian divisions were in an unusual position. The second in command of the 121st Guard Riflemen's Regiment and later commander of the 123rd Guard Riflemen's Regiment was a Jew, Colonel Perlovsky. Captain Joseph Pasternak, a Jew, fought side-by-side with Captain Ernests Veiss.

Jewish soldiers could be divided into two groups. There were those who had been communist sympathizers before the war, such as Zalman Eidus, Juri Vaters, and M. Vulfson. They were completely convinced that they were fighting for an absolutely just cause, not just against fascism, but also for Soviet power. Others, probably the majority, fought against the Germans as the greater of two evils. On the German side only one fate awaited them and their families—certain death, while Stalin's empire as of June 22, 1941, had the same goal as democratic England and America, that of defeating the Nazis. The Soviet regime was abhorrent to these Jews. Many had relatives and friends who had been sent to the slave camps in Siberia. They conversed among themselves in Yiddish, and members of the banned Zionist organizations also spoke in Hebrew, in whispers, so others would not understand their longing for their true fatherland, Eretz Israel. In 1945 and 1946 some of the Latvian Corps soldiers tried to illegally cross the border, to make their way despite the British blockade to Palestine, through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Italy. Starting in the period 1969–1971, others emigrated

to Israel with their children and grandchildren, and the Soviets have “for all time” erased their names, including those of decorated heroes, from all history books, rolls of honour, etc. One of the bravest soldiers in the Latvian Corps was a scout, Sergeant Datel, a Jew from Kurland. His son Michael Datel, who emigrated from Riga to Israel in 1971, met a hero’s death in October 1973, defending not just his people, but also his independent country, his fatherland, Israel.

11. Kurland: The Last Stand

In the middle of October 1944, about 500,000 soldiers—32 German divisions and the 20,000 men of the Latvian Nineteenth Division of the Waffen-SS—were cut off from the rest of the German army and encircled. To the east and the south was the Soviet army, to the north and the west—the Baltic Sea. The Latvians called it *Kurzemes katls*, the Kurland kettle; the Germans called it *Festung Kurland*, Fortress Kurland.

The Latvians trapped in Kurland were in a tragic situation. Besides the soldiers, there were also about 500,000 local inhabitants and civilian refugees from Riga and Vidzeme, altogether about a million people encircled by the Bolsheviks. Food and other supplies were scarce, and winter was approaching. Civilians and soldiers, Latvian and German, understood that Hitler was defeated, that the Nazi Reich would soon collapse, and nothing good could be expected from the Bolsheviks.

For the Nineteenth Division Kurland was truly the last stand. They took part in six major battles between October 12, 1944, and April 3, 1945. Together with the German army units they on the whole held the front line, keeping the Bolsheviks out of Kurland, until May 8, 1945, when Germany capitulated. These soldiers remained undefeated until the final moments of the war, *im Felde unbesiegt*, as the Germans say. In one of the last battles, Captain Miervaldis Ādamsons' company in a single 24-hour period repelled seven attacks by the Russians, and after the battle the bodies of 400 fallen Soviet soldiers could be counted in front of the Latvians' unconquered positions.

Soviet war historians have also written about the stubborn resistance put up by the defenders of Fortress Kurland, especially by the Latvians. Using these Soviet sources, Gershon Shapiro, a veteran of the Soviet–German war who emigrated to Israel, writes in his document collection *Jews—Heroes of the Soviet Union* (in Russian, Tel Aviv 1982, pp. 359–360) that the Soviet High Command asked the commanders of the First and Second Baltic Fronts to take forceful action in Kurland, in order to drive the enemy from the northern sector of the Baltic Sea and free their units for more important positions on the Soviet–German front. The first attempt occurred on October 16, 1944, but was stopped in the area around Tukums. The next Soviet offensive took place on October 27, but met with strong resistance from the outset and did not result in any gains. November 20 saw another offensive, but the Germans and Latvians stabilised their defensive line, utilising favourable geographic features. Equally unsuccessful were the final attempts of the First and Second Baltic Front Armies to liquidate the German Army Group “Kurland” in December of 1944 and February and April of 1945.

Soviet documents show that Stalin threw division after division into the Kurland inferno, disregarding the appallingly high losses. According to German estimates, the Soviet army lost 320,000 soldiers—including those fallen, wounded, and taken prisoner— and 2388 tanks, 659 planes, 900 cannons, and 1440 machine-guns.

When the 33 divisions (32 German and one Latvian) were forced to capitulate on May 8, 1945, some of the Latvian legionnaires refused to submit as prisoners of war and fled into the forest of Kurland, to continue fighting the Bolsheviks as partisans, or guerrillas. Knowing what dismal fate awaited them, they decided to fight until their bullets ran out, or until the interna-

tional situation changed. There were those who hoped that the United States and England would finally see the situation clearly and would turn against Stalin. The Latvian national partisans, like those in Estonia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, continued armed resistance in complete isolation until 1952, when Bolshevik “punitive expeditions” liquidated the last of the “forest brothers,” as they were called.

A few years later, around 1954, the US military command sought to compile a list of Latvian soldiers in exile who would be ready to parachute into Latvia, in case World War III were to start (newspaper *Laiks*, May 8, 1985). The British went further and trained Latvian soldiers, who then parachuted into Russian-occupied Latvia. Unfortunately, as was later disclosed in spy trials in England, these plans had reached Soviet intelligence in advance, and the parachutists were met at the drop locations by KGB agents.

By then it was too late to do anything for free Latvia. However, there had been time, there had been chances earlier to save Latvia from Soviet imperialism. But just as Hitler sold the Baltic states to Stalin in 1939, so Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill did exactly the same in 1943, 1944, and 1945, finally completely capitulating to Stalin at the Yalta Conference. As a Jew, I have to add that this was the same Roosevelt who did not raise a finger to provide asylum to Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, and who refused to order the bombing of Auschwitz and the railroad lines leading to it to paralyze the gas chambers and crematoria. This was the same Churchill who did not allow Jewish refugees into Palestine, and who delayed for years sending the Eretz Israel Jewish brigade to the front to fight against the Germans.

* * *

But let us return to the Latvians. Latvians also took part in World War II on the Western, democratic side. The Latvian ambassador in Washington, Alfrēds Bilmanis, reached an agreement with US authorities turning Latvian merchant ships, which were not under communist control, over to the Western Allies. As reported in *The New York Times*, independent Latvia’s merchant fleet played a significant role in war transports. More than half of these ships were torpedoed in the Atlantic within a year by German submarines.

Within Latvia itself, then occupied by German troops, were people who did not recognize the right of either the Nazis or the Bolsheviks to rule the country. They put their hopes in the United States and England, expecting that after the war the Western Allies would help Latvia regain its independence.

In the spring of 1943 the Latvian ambassador in Stockholm, Voldemārs Salnais, sent a secret memorandum to Riga, which was received by Verners Tepfers, a general in the prewar Latvian army. On August 13 of that year, Konstantīns Čakste, the son of Latvia’s first president Jānis Čakste, called together an illegal meeting to form the Latvian Central Council—*Latvijas Centrālā Padome*, LCP. Čakste was elected the first chairman of the LCP, which included representatives of the Latvian Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Center, the Christian Farmers’ Union of Latgale, and the Latvian Farmers’ Union. It included such prominent figures

as Dr. Pauls Kalniņš and his son Brūno Kalniņš, J. Rancāns, J. Breikšs, V. Bastjānis, F. Cielēns, Ā. Klīve, L. Sēja, and others.

The purpose of the LCP was to work for the reestablishment of the Latvian State, an independent, democratic Latvia, which would form friendly relations with the United States, England, and the Scandinavian countries, and promote the formation of a confederation of Baltic States. The LCP established contact with similar democratic organizations in neighboring lands, the Lithuanian Supreme Liberation Council and the Estonian Resistance Movement. With the knowledge and tacit approval of Colonel Janums of the Latvian Legion, the LCP actively worked with General Kurelis, whose group had continuous contact with the LCP through Captain Upelniēks. General Kurelis headed a group of armed men, a sort of Home Guard that had been formed with the initial approval of the Germans.

Unfortunately the Gestapo found out about these activities, arrested many of the leaders of LCP, surrounded a large part of the Kurelis group, and ordered them to surrender their arms. Konstantīns Čakste died in the Stutthof concentration camp in 1944. Most of Kurelis' officers—Captain Upelniēks, Colonel Liepiņš, Captain Muceniēks, First Lieutenant Gregors, and others—were shot on November 20, 1944, in Liepāja, after a German court martial. General Kurelis himself was granted amnesty, but about 500 of his men were sent to the Stutthof concentration camp.

Lieutenant Rubenis' battalion, which included two heavy armor companies, one machine-gun company, and one riflemen's company with about 400 men, refused to surrender its arms and fought the Germans surrounding it for 25 days. Forty men lost their lives, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Rubenis. The Germans also suffered heavy losses. On December 10 these Latvian soldiers broke up into small groups and dispersed into the forest (O. Freivalds, *Kurzemes cietoksnis*, Part 2, p. 75).

So ended the attempt to find a "third way" between the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. And what was being done by the Western Allies?

Mr. Eden cannot incur the danger of antagonizing Stalin, and the British War Cabinet has consequently determined that they would agree to negotiate a treaty with Stalin which will recognize the 1940 frontiers of the Soviet Union.... He was fully aware, the President said [Roosevelt at the Teheran Conference, November 1943], that the three Baltic Republics had belonged to Russia in the past and had once again been incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940. He did not, he added with a smile, intend to go to war with the Soviet Union when the Red Army reoccupied these areas (W. Averell Harriman and Ellie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941–1946*, New York 1975, pp. 135, 278–279).

The opinion of the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians evidently was of no interest to the Big Three.

12. The Dilemma of the “Lesser Evil”

During the long years of World War II, those who wanted to help their own people, who wanted to defend the vital interests of their own nations, were faced with an agonizing choice—which side to join. These patriots and their followers were caught in a tragic dilemma between the two opposing sides, and most often their end was an unhappy one.

For example, in Yugoslavia the Serb patriots, the Chetniks, who had formed the resistance group *Ravnogorski Narodni Pokret* under the leadership of Draxa Mihajlovič, were forced to fight simultaneously against the German and Italian invaders, against their collaborators the Croatian Ustashi, and against the antifascist, communist partisans of Josip Broz (Tito). In the end the Western Allies turned away from their faithful friend Mihajlovič and extradited him to Tito’s agents, who executed him. His soldiers, who had trusted British promises of asylum, met the same fate.

The Polish *Armija Krajowa* met a similar tragic end. These courageous partisans fought against the German invaders and organized the uprising in Warsaw. They were oriented to the West and recognized only the legal Polish government in London. The Soviet army, liberating their homeland from the Germans, also destroyed this army. Some of the AK men fought against the Bolsheviks as guerrillas in the forests to the last bullet, some ended up in the jails of the Polish pro-Soviet puppet government.

Particularly complicated was the situation of the Ukrainian Insurgents’ Army, *Ukrainska Povstanča Armija*, UPA. They fought on three fronts—against the Soviet army and Red partisans, against the German SD, and against the Polish AK. Most of these Ukrainian guerrillas perished.

The Jews in Palestine also had a radical nationalist group, which gravely erred and ended up in an unenviable position while looking for the “lesser evil.” This was the “Stern gang” or LEHI, the acronym of *Lohamej Herut Israel*, Israel’s Freedom Fighters. The group’s leader was Avraham Stern-Yair, an ardent Jewish nationalist. Stern-Yair felt that his people’s greatest enemy was England, for the British government, holding the Mandate for Palestine, in 1939 practically stopped Jewish immigration into Eretz Israel and did everything possible to prevent the proclamation of an independent Jewish state in the Holy Land.

In the spring of 1941, when the true, terrible scope and meaning of Hitler’s “final solution” was still not known, Avraham Stern-Yair decided to establish contact with the Nazis, to save Europe’s Jews and drive the British from Palestine. His coworker and biographer, the late Nathan Yalin-Mor, wrote that Avraham Stern never believed the Axis powers would win (*Israel, Israel*, in French, Paris 1978, p. 90). On the other hand Eitan Livni, of Menachem Begin’s rival organization ETZEL (the *Irgun*), asserts that “they [LEHI leaders] believed the Italians and Germans would win” (newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*, Tel Aviv, March 9, 1979).

Be that as it may, the fact remains that in the spring of 1941 Avraham Stern-Yair offered Germany, and Italy, a deal through his emissary Naftali Lubentchik: the Axis powers would recognize the “Hebrew Nation’s right” to found its sovereign national (and authoritarian–nationalistic) state and help LEHI move all of Europe’s Jews to Palestine as soon as pos-

sible; LEHI would undertake to do everything possible to harm British interests and to drive the British from Palestine.

That was utopian. The German diplomat Otto Werner von Hentig, who after the war was West Germany's ambassador in Indonesia, replied to Lubentchik in essence the following: there was a movement in Germany that supported the idea of forming a Hebrew state in Palestine, that would be a practical solution to the "Jewish problem"; however, this movement had become too weak to influence the decisions of the government in Berlin, and in any case it was already too late to consider any such action. The Wehrmacht's generals had already decided to rely on the Arabs—whose numbers had to be counted in millions—in the fight against Great Britain in the Near and Middle East, whereas there was only a handful of Jews.

One of his friends, Arye Kotzer, relates that Stern-Yair said in a moment of insight: "I have no doubt that the Allies will win, and then I and the few men who think like me will be executed and branded as public enemies. But by then, Palestine will have a massive Jewish population." In February 1942, British intelligence agents discovered Avraham Stern-Yair's clandestine flat in Tel Aviv and shot him on the spot.

Another interesting episode from the LEHI saga: At the end of December 1946, a Russian woman living in Paris, Iranda-Betty, married to the Jewish poet David Knut and a veteran of the French Resistance against the Nazis, approached the Soviet foreign minister, Molotov. After the war she had become a journalist, and wanted to help the LEHI fighters. She made use of the fact that her mother was the daughter of the famous Russian composer Skriabin, who himself was Molotov's uncle on the paternal side. Molotov was very surprised when she introduced herself not only as a relative, but also as the "diplomatic representative" of the underground Jewish Palestinian organization LEHI. She detailed LEHI's doctrine, stressing its anti-imperialism, and asked his help in getting the support of the Soviet Union (see Natan Yalin-Mor, *op. cit.*, p. 294).

These two episodes show that before condemning any political group for collabourating with a totalitarian regime, one should first determine these persons' motivation. Perhaps they only erred, wishing only the best for their people.

13. Latvian and Jewish DPs

Did the Latvians who fled to the West in 1944 and 1945 do the right thing? In my opinion, yes. If I had been in their place, I would have done the same. And many, many Jews took the opportunity, when it arose in the chaotic spring and summer of 1945, to leave the Eastern European lands of their birth and cross the Elbe River.

Reasons for fleeing to the West varied. Future prospects were decisive. When the war ended in Europe, millions of DPs—displaced persons—flooded into the British, American, and French occupation zones of Germany and Austria. In this great mass, among Ukrainians and Croats, Russians and Poles, were also Latvians and Jews. Most Latvians, it seems, were in Germany's British zone; most Jews were in the American zone. Living conditions for both in these DP times, 1945–1949/50, were much the same. They were cared for at first by UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, later by IRO, the International Refugee Organization. They lived in barracks, published their own newspapers and journals, organized courses and concerts, heatedly discussed current political events, argued among themselves about what to do next, and tried to fathom what the future held for them.

The DPs were half-starved, worried, hoping for a better future. In this motley, truly international crowd were all sorts of characters: former Nazi henchmen, who hid their identity; adventurers, racketeers, crooks; KGB agents and other spies; visionaries, lunatics, and freaks, preaching all sorts of eccentric gospels. But the great majority were simply tired people, who had been through so much and just wanted peace and a safe haven.

One year after the war ended there were more than a million DPs in the occupation zones of Germany and Austria, including almost 200,000 Latvians and other Balts, and about the same number of Jews. Latvians and Jews lived in separate DP camps, not knowing anything about each other and, understandably, not wanting to know. The Latvians lamented their lost homeland, prayed that war would break out between the Western Allies and the USSR, and at first did not even want to move on to distant lands overseas, for they hoped that their exile would soon be over. Only after the USA, Canada, and Australia opened their doors a little wider, and all hopes for the definitive "War of Liberation" faded, did they pack their meager belongings, their beloved books, national flags, and national costumes, and go into distant exile.

The Jews lamented their millions of lost relatives, wasted no regret on the ruins of the Nazi concentration camps and the rubble of the Eastern European *shtetl*, and prayed that the British would soon leave Palestine. Waiting for this moment, they did not sit with their hands folded in their laps, but tried by various roundabout ways to reach the Promised Land, Eretz Israel, the only country in the whole world that they could with full historical justification call their national home. They knew that Arabs too lived in Palestine, but they also knew that there, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, the Jews had their roots, that only there could they defend their place in the sun.

The paths of the Latvians and Jews diverged in the DP camps. They crossed again in the Latvian exile and Jewish diaspora, creating misunderstandings skillfully exploited by the Kremlin to further its own interests. But more on that later.

14. Yuri Vater and Mulya Joffe

Two Latvian Jews—Two Patterns of Destiny: A Comparative Study

It seems to me that a paper I wrote with the above title fits within the thematic bounds of this book. I had sent the paper to be presented at the Sixth Conference on Baltic Studies, organized by the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, in Toronto in 1978. Unfortunately it was never presented because, as was written in the Latvian newspaper *Laiks* on November 17, 1979, by a V.J. from Toronto, “it disappeared under mysterious circumstances.”

* * *

The generation that suffered the heaviest losses, both physically and spiritually, during the Second World War was the one born in the closing days of World War One. Its members died in battle and in the concentration camps of Hitler and Stalin, and the illusions they cherished were erased by war and repression, along with all dreams of a new world of justice, freedom, and dignity.

An especially bitter fate awaited this generation of Jews, who were slated for complete extermination in all European countries occupied by German forces. Any young Jew who managed to escape from the SS, the SD, and the *Sonderkommando* roundups ran the risk of being drawn into the mills of repression of Stalin’s “antifascist” empire, which ground more than one strong personality into dust.

The life stories of two brave young men exemplify the fate of many a Latvian Jew of that generation. Both Yuri Vater and Mulya (Samuel) Joffe died heroically. But in every other respect they took different paths; they had different motivations for heroism, different perceptions of their nation, the land where they grew up, the world, and the meaning of life.

Both were born in the period when the Romanov, Hohenzollern, and Habsburg dynasties collapsed. One of them died gallantly in battle against the Germans, convinced that under the red flag he fought for the good of all mankind. The other died a hero’s death in the Gulag archipelago, counting his life well sacrificed because he had enabled many of his fellow Jews to escape to Eretz Israel. Both men felt they had done their duty, following their consciences.

The views and attitudes of these young men took shape in the thirties. This was a time when those young Jews who for various historical, sociological, and psychological reasons did not want or were not able to identify with the national aims of the *Wirtsvolk* (in this case, the Latvians), had one of two ways to develop and affirm their personal identity: communism or Zionism. Yuri Vater chose one route; Mulya Joffe, the other.

In outlining the tragic fate of these two remarkable youths, representatives of their generation, I relied on two fairly comprehensive books: Ingrida Sokolova (pseudonym of Ida Levit, a Jew), *Cik jauni mēs bijām* (How young we were, in Latvian), Riga, Liesma, 1969; and Avraham Itaj and Mordechaj Nejshtat, *Cherez tri podpol’ja, Iz istoriji chalucianskogo dvizhenija “Necach” v Latviji* (in Russian, abridged translation from Hebrew), No. 30, Tel Aviv, Aliya, 1976. I gained additional information about Yuri Vater, the hero of Sokolova’s documentary es-

say, from his two closest friends, Mavrik Vulfson and Anatoli Kahn, survivors of similar experiences. They were my colleagues for a number of years in Riga, where I worked at the news agency LETA, the branch of TASS in Latvia, and at the evening newspaper *Rīgas Balss*. For obvious reasons, I was unable to supplement my information on Mulya Joffe in Russian-occupied Latvia; however, the Itaj and Nejshtat book provides a detailed account of Joffe's most significant years, from 1941 to 1955.

* * *

To begin with Yuri Vater. He was born in Riga in August 1917, as the German army approached the city. His mother, Helena, was "a girl from Kuldiga," and his father, Lazar, was a typesetter whom the hurricanes of war had already driven to Riga from the border of Poland. They joined the vast number of other refugees fleeing to Russia. In 1922 the Vater family returned to Riga and settled in the Moskauer Vorstadt, or Moscow suburb. Yuri's father "was seriously ill for many years with a stomach ailment and his mother had to support the family.... When he improved slightly, he began to work at the glover's trade."

In 1934, "with support from relatives," he established "a tiny workshop." Yuri assisted his father and soon learned "to handle the shears skillfully." Sokolova continues: "They were three, Yuri, Mitya (Mavrik Vulfson), and Tolya (Anatoli Kahn). They grew acquainted, not as classmates or neighbors, but as fellow combatants who shared the same opinions." Yuri had become friendly with the head of the "progressive Ettinger Library, where some books were issued only to well-known and trusted readers. Here he stealthily read publications brought in from the Soviet Union," for instance, F. Gladkov's *Cement* and Bruno Yasensky's novel *Man Changes His Skin*.

It seems that Yuri never discovered that this same Bruno Yasensky paid with his own skin, with his life, for his fidelity to the ideas of Marx and Engels—he was murdered by "his own people," the NKVD. Sokolova, of course, does not mention this.

"He wanted to become a surgeon... His elementary school years passed unnoticed," and Yuri entered High School No. 4 in Riga, near the so-called Red Warehouses. When Yuri enrolled at this school in 1932, Sokolova writes, "four cells of the [communist] underground were already active here," and among the Komsomol were many "active and energetic members of the underground."

Thus Yuri did not attach himself to the Zionist–Socialists, or to the anti-Zionist Jewish Social Democratic Bund, but instead joined in the activities of the illegal communist youth organization. Riga's High School No. 4, a Latvian school, had a "long-standing progressive tradition," asserts Sokolova, where "children whose parents represented all nationalities and varying convictions could receive an education." It was indeed a truly progressive school. At that time in Yuri Vater's ideal state, the Soviet Union, schoolchildren suffered heavily if their parents' convictions, not to mention their social origins, did not come up to the stringent requirements of the Party's Central Committee.

Since he had always been a top student, Yuri began to receive secret assignments: "It started with the Alanik, a general education organization, where gifted young people met to

broaden their intellectual horizons. Taking advantage of the cover provided by the organization's legitimate activities, a Komsomol group flourished—T. Babchina, T. Zālīte, V. Lifschitz, B. Weimann-Manusov, J. Eichmanis, J. Eidus, and others.... The group listened to lectures on various topics.... Here, Yuri first heard of the German philosopher, Spengler, of Romain Rolland, and of political economy. Yuri himself was among the lecturers. He most often, and more than others, lectured on Marxism." In telling others about Marxism, the enthusiastic boy was noted, says Sokolova, for "his critical attitude not only toward the bourgeois regime, but also towards the narrow-mindedness of middle class society."

After some time, "he was approached by Joseph Eidus, a Komsomol leader who had long had his eye on Yuri," and the boy was formally accepted into the illegal Komsomol, "at the school center of the Riga Committee, in the presence of E. Opincāns."

"When the Ulmanites closed High School No. 4, Yuri experienced some unpleasant moments. After his earlier freedom, the reactionary atmosphere of High School No. 1 was unbearable," and the youth "decided to transfer to night school—the Latvian Working Youth High School." (On the diploma reproduced in the book, only the words "Latvian Youth High School" appear, without "Working.")

Even after the coup of May 15, 1934, Yuri carried out his Komsomol duties "without anxiety." For example, he "went to the assistance of his friend Mitya in the Third District." I can add in passing that this Mitya, Mavrik Vulfson, now the world news commentator for Soviet Riga television, was the son of a wealthy man. He had no knowledge of poverty or physical labour during the years of "bourgeois" Latvia, and joined the Komsomol out of sheer romanticism, much like the leftist students of the sixties in Western Europe and North America.

"Here at one point they got carried away with rockets that hoisted flags up into the air, and with exploding boxes that could scatter proclamations for great distances without arousing suspicion. Yuri was involved in mixing the chemical explosives for these."

Yuri also established an illegal print shop in a basement, under what is now the Flora Cafe, next to the glove workshop where his father worked. If we believe Sokolova, Yuri's father "knew full well the secret undertakings of these young people. He debated with his son almost every day, and the youth could discuss in detail the Five-Year Plan in Russia, the economic crisis in the West, and the problems of fascism and democracy."

In 1936, Yuri entered the school of medicine at the University of Latvia. Sokolova describes a typical episode: "In the summer of 1939 Yuri and Mitya rented a small room in Liepupe. They had to be in Riga by eight in the morning, but they had just received, by way of Estonia, the *Short Course in Party History*. Yuri suggested getting up at five, taking the boat, and rowing out to the middle of the river. He rowed for two hours while Mitya read to him. Later they also read *The Communist Manifesto*.... Mitya had poor eyesight and had to use a magnifying glass to make out the text of the *Constitution of the USSR* on microfilm.... This went on until September 1."

In October of 1939 Yuri was drafted into the Latvian army. "Although ostensibly removed from his usual environment, Yuri was not separated from the underground. This involvement was especially dangerous for a member of the bourgeois armed forces and demanded great ingenuity, resourcefulness, and nerves of steel."

And so Yuri and his friends, the Latvian communists, gave priority to the interests of Latvia's "great Eastern neighbor," the Soviet Union, even though Stalin had already signed a treaty of non-aggression and, moreover, friendship with Hitler's Germany, and many "progressive antifascists" now had no more illusions about Soviet imperialism.

Sokolova writes that a "meeting of the underground" in the Latvian army approved "a decision to stand on the side of the Soviet Union in case of war." Was this not outright treason? But the author does not specify which war was meant: what if the Soviet Union were to join Hitler's Germany in fighting Britain and France? Communists, after all, must blindly obey any directives from Moscow.

Later on the author writes abruptly and elliptically: "1940. This year brought enormous change into the life of the whole Latvian nation." Sokolova says not one word about the fact that on June 17 of this fateful year, the Soviet army occupied the country, putting an end to Latvian independence.

After some time, "Yuri joined the ranks of the Red Army..., and began to work on the newspaper *Sarkanais Kareivis* (The Red soldier)... And once again the three friends were reunited. Mitya was appointed assistant to the editor, Alfreds Balodis, ... and Tolya got a job at the same paper."

Sokolova quotes Tolya, saying that Yuri was at that time "fearless in his encounters with hostile ex-officers of the bourgeois army." He was accepted into the communist party and became an agitator. Sokolova notes that at the chocolate factory *Laima*, "the factory committee was up for re-election. The reactionaries protested doggedly against nominating a communist. And again Yuri spoke. He knew how to inspire the workers with the belief that it would pay off to elect a communist, and in a show of hands vote, he gained the victory." In other words, he succeeded in convincing the workers that it was better not to argue against the "new, democratic people's power."

"War! The sunny June sky teemed with a hail of bombs and a rain of bullets," writes Sokolova about June 22, 1941. Yuri "reports to the Party Committee of the Proletariat District, and patrols the city with a *družhina* [approximately 20 people] to hunt down saboteurs. He protects his city on the morning of June 27 too. Shots are heard from the tower of the Old Church of St. Gertrude and from the bridge at Jugla. Then the *družhina* commander, Kārlis Vilciņš, orders them to get into cars. The city must be abandoned!"

Sokolova comments: "How young, how very young we were!... *And there was much we did not know then...* And Yuri too.... Could it even have occurred to him that he was leaving forever his native Latvia and his parents, who would die in fascist torture chambers, betrayed by their own tenants—two young girls" (emphasis added).

"Young we were, but with an infinite love for our homeland and an infinite readiness to defend it," write Sokolova. She writes about "homeland," but she does not mean Latvia. She means the Soviet Union, which annexed Latvia by force in the summer of 1940. Perhaps Ingrīda Sokolova, repeating her nostalgic refrain "How young we were," and using it as the title of her book, intends a careful reader to understand something else: how naive, how easily carried away, how stupid we were. The book was published in Riga in 1969 and the author, of course, draws no conclusions.

Yuri was evacuated to the rear and settled at Kameshnitza on the banks of the Volga with other evacuees, Latvians, Jews, and Latvian Russians. “*Many people are surprised at the thatched roofs and the poverty of the kolkhoz,*” but Yuri, who “has long dreamed of getting to know the Soviet Union, although in different circumstances, *debates fervently, explains, talks of the industrialization to which the resources of the country are devoted*” (emphasis added).

Poor, incorrigible Yuri: he is still the victim of his illusions. His mentor in the Latvian evacuee commune is the Latvian communist Kārlis Vilciņš. “Yuri could ask endless questions about the forced labour camp where Vilciņš had spent seven whole years.” But that was not a Soviet labour camp, it was not the Gulag, but a labour camp in “bourgeois” Latvia—child’s play in comparison to what was endured by Yuri Vater’s fellow Jew, Mulya Joffe, of whom later.

Sokolova describes in detail Yuri Vater’s military service in the Red Army’s Latvian Division. (In October 1942 it was renamed the Forty-third Guard Division.) Not having succeeded in completing his medical studies, Yuri served as an orderly. His “dear friends, Kārlis Vilciņš and Eduards Opincāns,” died in battle.

On November 15, 1942, in Moscow, writes Sokolova, “there was a meeting of students against fascism.... Yuri had the honor of representing the whole Forty-third Latvian Division. He was elected to the presidium, and he was the one who read out the meeting’s resolution, an ‘Appeal to the Students of the World.’”

Soon after, in January 1943, Yuri was transferred to the Counter-propaganda Unit of the Eleventh Army’s Political Section. A letter written to Mitya on October 26, 1943, hints of dissatisfaction, even bitterness, that he was no longer with the Latvian Division: “I had hoped to meet you soon, but now all plans are changed. Still, I have written to Kalnbērziņš [the first secretary of the Latvian communist party].... If you have the opportunity, intercede for my request. I am ready for anything, if I can only get away from here and come back to the Division.” On December 10, Yuri writes again to Mitya: “I want to get back [to the Division] so very much. But how can you run away?”

“After the liberation of Homel, Yuri ... was transferred to the First Ukrainian Front’s Political Department.”

Inter alia, in the so-called “first Soviet year,” Yuri married a Latvian girl, Vera, who was at that time “a Komsomol organizer and evening student at the Party School.” In the confusion of war, Yuri lost track of her during the summer of 1941. He was convinced that his wife had died on the Estonian front. Yuri “never found out” writes Sokolova, “that he had a daughter, Aina, born March 2, 1942.” I should note that she was born on the other side of the front, in Latvia, which at the time was part of the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. When the Red army returned, after the war, Vera no longer wanted to remember the nice young man who was Aina’s father. It is only to Aina that Mitya and Tolya occasionally talk about her father.

Ingrīda Sokolova once happened to meet Yuri Vater at some crossroads at the front. She recalls: “It is strangely pleasing to meet a fellow countryman so far from home and speak to him in the language of your birthplace.” A significant description follows: “What a handsome young man! For a moment I give rein to a girlish fancy.... Under a bright blue sky, beside a camel, an Oriental warrior, an ancient Assyrian stands and waits for the call to arms. His face is swarthy....”

Comparisons like this never occurred to Yuri Vater himself. Never in his short life, as far as we can tell from Sokolova's book and the reminiscences of his fellow Jews Mitya and Tolya, was he really conscious of his origins or of the land where his ancestors lived and which hundreds of other young Latvian Jews were striving to reach.

What was the epilogue? A detailed description of Yuri Vater's last battle would take up too much of this chapter. Let us say only that, surrounded by soldiers of a Waffen-SS division's *Wiking* battalion in a Ukrainian village, he defended himself with a machine-gun until he was seriously wounded. The Germans hung him from a hook in the ceiling of the peasant cottage where he took his last stand. This happened on February 13, 1944, in the village of Shenderovka in the Ukraine. "On August 25 he received the Order of Lenin posthumously."

In the short annotation which follows the title page of Sokolova's book, the publishers point out that Yuri Vater "was one of the generation of famed fighters of the thirties and forties, one of those Komsomol members who forged the victory of Soviet Power in the underground movement of bourgeois Latvia.... He knew how to love fervently and how to hate fervently; he knew how to be uncompromising in separating two worlds."

Therefore—a fanatic? I doubt it. More likely, an enthusiast who did not know how to separate dreams from reality. He died honorably, fighting an enemy who had vowed to destroy not only democracy (which Yuri did not believe in), but also Yuri's people, the Jews, to the last man. But what kind of a power did Yuri Vater himself serve—as stated in the annotation, "to the last drop of blood"?

* * *

Samuel (Shmuel) Joffe, called Mulya or Mul'ka, was an entirely different kind of person, but nevertheless as representative of young Latvian Jews as Yuri Vater.

In the Tel Aviv publication on Joffe, the authors point out that the Jewish Zionist youth organizations' major competitors were the youth organizations of the Bund, a Social Democratic but anti-Zionist Jewish workers' association, and of the communists. In contrast to the Bund, the authors state, "the communist movement relied largely on *selected* groups—the *elite* of students and working youth" (emphasis added).

Mulya Joffe had already become an activist with the youth organization *Hashomer Hat-zair*—*NETZACH* (The young guard—scouting and pioneering youth) shortly before the coup of May 15, 1934. One of his fellow activists, Rivka Dukarevitz, recalls those years: "Actually we were a Palestinian island in the midst of the Jewish population in Latvia.... Everything that applies to Palestine also applies to us in the highest degree ..., *for we did not consider ourselves a part of Latvian society: we were Israelis through and through*. We assessed world events in terms of whether they would advance our cause or harm it" (emphasis added).

After the coup of May 15, 1934, in Latvia, the "first underground" began for Mulya Joffe and his friends. The new regime banned Zionist–socialist organizations, permitting only the Zionist–revisionist group, the nationalistic Betar, and the orthodox religious association Agudas Isroel to continue their activities. However, a new organization or club was formed under the

name Olim, where within certain limits it was possible to prepare young people for physical labour and painful struggle in Palestine, maintaining the kibbutz ideal.

In connection with what has been said about Yuri Vater, it is useful to mention the analysis offered by another of Joffe's friends, Gamliel Blauschild, in the same book: "I believe, notwithstanding the possibility of an organized campaign, that the strengthening of communist influence on [Jewish] young people in the winter of 1939–40 was largely a reflection of the might of the Soviet Union.... The Hitlerites also had influence over Germans who had not previously supported the National Socialists; it was their strength that held the attraction."

Later on we read: "At dawn on June 17, 1940, the Soviet army entered the Baltic republics." This is not quite accurate, for the Soviet army entered Lithuania on June 15. An account of the "second underground" of Mulya and his friends follows. This was in the "first Soviet year"; by the end of July, 1940, the communist regime in Latvia had already banned all youth organizations except the Komsomol. Relating directly to the earlier material on Yuri Vater, Mitya, and Tolya is the following statement: "Occurring on the background of the Latvian national tragedy, the fact that many Jews were happy to welcome the Russians and accepted the Soviet regime fanned the flames of antisemitism."

Itzhak Gordon was responsible for Mulya (Mul'ka) Joffe during the "second underground" of 1940–41. He knew that in this situation Mul'ka was "capable of greater things." He said, "Mul'ka must be saved for special assignments." He could not have known what kind of special assignments Mulya Joffe was destined for, and how it was to end.

On June 22, 1941, the German army crossed the new Soviet border. On June 26, "the panic in Riga mounted," and the next morning Mulya Joffe with his friend Gamliel Blauschild headed for Estonia. At Valka, on the border between Latvia and Estonia, they joined a partisan command that was being organized. "There were 20 people in our platoon," recalls Blauschild. The next day Mulya was made a machine-gunner. Within a few weeks, this platoon, already incorporated into the regular Soviet army in Estonia, received orders to attack a unit in the German vanguard, and Mulya was wounded.

He was taken to Tallinn and from there to Leningrad. "Recovering from his wound, Mulya petitioned to join the Red Army, but at that time the Soviet authorities refused to induct anyone who was from the Baltic States (*vychodcev iz Pribaltiki*)." There was a massive evacuation of civilians from Leningrad: "The evacuees were allowed to choose a destination far behind the front lines. Locating on a map of the Soviet Union a largish city near the Iranian border, *the closest border to Palestine*, Mul'ka requested to be evacuated to Aschabad" (emphasis added).

Mulya Joffe "did not intend to cross the Iranian border alone. He wanted to take along as many members of the Movement [Hashomer Hatzair] as possible.... He visited a number of cities and searched everywhere for his comrades."

He stopped off at Vologda and Kirov, where there were many evacuees from Latvia. In Sverdlovsk he found his comrade Yakov Yanaj. According to Yakov, his first words were, "Let's head south!" Yakov continues, "We immediately began to discuss how to cross the border on our way to Palestine."

In Tashkent the two friends tried unsuccessfully to contact smugglers who promised to get them over the border to Afghanistan. When it became clear that a trap was waiting for them, the plan was abandoned. But the decision to break through to Afghanistan or Iran, in order to reach Palestine, was not abandoned. On the contrary, the authors write, their determination to realize their goal grew even stronger.

Meanwhile, beginning in late autumn of 1941, others who shared Mulya's views were drafted into the Latvian Division of the Soviet army and engaged in combat. Many were killed. One of them, Shmuel Rosenberg, wrote from the Velikiye Luki combat zone to his friends in Tashkent in the summer of 1944: "I am going to do battle ... against slavery. I am going, so that when the enemy is defeated I can return to our country, to our beloved kibbutz, to live the way we have longed to live.... This is why I am harassing the Jerries ... and let us not forget my father, my mother, and Yashka, about whose fate I know nothing. But let us also remember Eretz, a place dear to our hearts, from which the damned enemy has torn us, though hopefully only for a while." In the letter the words "kibbutz" and "Eretz" (i.e., Eretz Israel, Palestine) were written so that the censor could not decipher those exotic Hebrew words.

But let us return to Mulya. At the end of 1943, Mulya left Tashkent for Moscow, where two of his aunts lived. He attended the Hydrotechnic Engineering Institute for a year, learning a profession he hoped would be useful in Palestine.

On October 13, 1944, the Soviet army drove the Germans out of Riga. After two months, Mulya succeeded in returning to Riga, and immediately started gathering up the broken threads of his life's work, helping his fellow Jews reach Palestine.

During the first half of 1945, Mulya was a student at the Polytechnical Institute. He also worked at the docks, and "looked for opportunities to escape from the Soviet Union." Soon the opportunity came to go to Poland. Mulya's former classmate, Raya Rosenkovitch-Levenberg, a former activist in the Jewish nationalist youth organization Betar, recalls how this came about. She and Mulya joined a group of ethnic Poles who intended to cross the border legally as repatriating Poles. The venture succeeded. This was in early July of 1945, when the border between the USSR and Poland was not yet so carefully guarded.

In the ruined city of Warsaw, Mulya found not only a Jewish congregation but also friends, and even an organization, Bricha (Flight). Staying in Warsaw was dangerous, and Mulya and Raya continued their journey. They travelled first to Czechoslovakia with groups of Jewish refugees, then, illegally and furtively, to Austria. Here, in the Soviet zone, they almost fell into the hands of the NKVD. Finally, they succeeded in reaching Linz, where they obtained documents showing them to be Austrian citizens.

Two months after leaving Riga, at the beginning of September 1945, Mulya arrived in Milan. He wore the uniform of the British army's Jewish Brigade, and was accompanied by some young Palestinian Jews serving in this brigade.

In Milan, there was a Zionist organization, Merkaz la-Gola (Center of the diaspora), that provided material relief to Jewish refugees and, unknown to the British administration, arranged illegal immigration into Palestine. Workers in the center were astonished to learn that Mulya, newly escaped from "over there," was in no hurry to reach the Palestine he longed for (and where his sister and many friends now lived). Instead, he demanded permission to return

to the Soviet Union and organize the escape of as many of his fellow Jews as possible. No amount of persuasion to avoid such a grave risk or at least accept an easier assignment had any effect. "He was tortured by the thought that he was the only one to reach freedom while the prospects for his friends were so very dim."

On his return journey from Lodz, in Poland, Mulya wrote a letter dated November 5, 1945, to the head office of the NETZACH movement: "I am certain you have already heard about the situation in Russian and about their terrible antisemitism.... Is this not the proper time to think about how to rekindle the spark of Zionism in Russia?"

In mid-December of 1945, Mulya recrossed the USSR border, using "clean" papers obtained from the illegal Jewish organization Bricha in Lodz, and arrived in Vilnius (Wilna). This new stage in his enterprise was the most dangerous. The scope of this chapter does not permit one to dwell on the details of what Mulya achieved. More than once he escaped capture by a hairbreadth. Once, he spent eight days behind bars at Brest on the USSR–Polish border, escaping when his guards came to take him to the baths. He continued to assist small groups of Jews from Latvia and Lithuania to leave the USSR, illegally or semi-legally.

Zvi Netzer, one of the leaders of this Eastern European operation, recalls: "The Russians knew, of course, that Jews were getting into Poland.... At first, they paid no attention. It is even possible that they were favorably inclined. The policy the Soviet government pursued at the time was to cause problems for the British, making use of the desire of Jews to reach Palestine. As long as it seemed to the Russians that these were isolated, unorganized escapes, they looked the other way. However, it soon became obvious that behind the isolated escapes there was an organization, possibly led by people sent in from Palestine. This could not be permitted. They had to destroy this organization."

A group of special agents was sent from Moscow to Latvia and Lithuania. They captured Mulya Joffe on the evening of September 27, 1946, at Baranovichi, not far from the border. However, Mulya's task was accomplished: an operation lasting more than nine months had been successfully completed, and 450 Jews from Latvia, Lithuania, and other places had left the USSR for Palestine.

Mulya was taken to Moscow and imprisoned in the notorious Lubyanka prison. Yakov Netzer, imprisoned along with Mulya, recounts how they were interrogated: "The interrogator wanted me to admit also that I acted out of hostility to the Soviet system. I disagreed with that: I am not interested in what kind of system the Soviet Union has—as long as Jews are allowed to leave for Eretz Israel."

Mulya's attitude was exactly the same. His sentence was not imposed by a court, but by the so-called Special Conference (*Osoboye Soveshchaniye*). The sentence read: based on Items 1a, 10 and 11 of Section 58 of the Criminal Code, twenty-five years imprisonment in correctional labour camps. At that time the death sentence in the Soviet Union had been repealed, otherwise death by shooting would have been Mulya's due. He was convicted of the following crimes: high treason, counterrevolutionary Zionist activity, based on nationalistic prejudice, and membership in an anti-Soviet organization. He had not the slightest chance of parole. Since Mulya had already escaped once from prison, in Brest, he was sent to top secu-

rity prison camps. He languished in three forced labour camps in the sub-Arctic Komi ASSR, Pechora, Abez, and Dzhantuy. Mulya attempted to escape but the plan came to nothing.

At the end of 1953 Mulya was transferred to the Balej camp in the Chita region of Eastern Siberia. He slaved ten hours a day in the lumbering operation, and then attended evening classes in lumber sorting for six months, hoping to transfer to an easier, skilled job.

However, early in 1954 Mulya despaired of leaving the labour camp before the end of his 25-year term. He made a fateful decision—to begin a hunger strike, in the hope that the medical commission would take his weakened condition into account and draw up the necessary papers to write him off as being on the verge of death (this was known as “papering,” *aktirovka*). Such half-dead prisoners were usually freed and sent home, allowed to die “in freedom.” (The custom was also described by Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*.) Mulya trusted that his body would be strong and resilient enough to cheat death. He overestimated the limits of his endurance.

Mulya’s sister Ruth, who lived in Riga, set out on the 10,000 km journey to the Balej camp at the beginning of March 1955. She intended to see her brother and persuade him to call off his hunger strike. In Chita, the chief labour camp physician told her he had already twice signed the necessary documents recommending the release of the weakened Mulya. The superintendent of the labour camp and the district camp administration, however, objected to his release.

In forty-below weather, Mulya was transferred in an open car to Nerchinsk. The forced labour camp there dated back to the time of the tsars. His ordeal dragged on. Next came four months in the prison hospital at Chabarovsk, followed by an order to transport the prisoner to Birobidjan. Birobidjan was the part of Siberia that Stalin had proclaimed the “Jewish Autonomous Area” and where early in 1953 he intended to settle hundreds of thousands of Jews from Moscow, Leningrad, and other large cities.

Mulya died on the way to the prison at Birobidjan, while the train of prisoners made a short halt at the station of Bira. It was the night of October 4–5, 1955.

When he last met his sister, Mulya said: “Even if I knew that I could save only one person, and that for this reason I would come to such a sad end, I would still have done what I did. I do not regret it.”

* * *

Two Latvian Jews: Yuri Vater and Mulya Joffe. Two destinies. Two very dissimilar lives—but both are characteristic of their generation and times.

15. *Sine Ira et Studio*

Forty-four years have passed since the defeat of Nazi Germany, but Bolshevik Russia still exists and is still trying to expand its sphere of influence worldwide. The brown fascists were masters at setting peoples against each other—Germans against Poles, Ukrainians against Russians, Slovaks against Czechs, Croats against Serbs, and all of them against Jews. This lesson was also well learnt by the masters of disinformation in Moscow's KGB, who artfully exploited the post-Holocaust emotions and frustrations of Jews in the diaspora to set them against the exile communities of Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Latvians.

The main weapons in the KGB disinformation campaign were collective accusations of collabouration with the Nazis. These charges were not directed against individual murderers, who justifiably deserved to be so accused, but against whole ethnic groups of émigrés, who were indiscriminately stamped with the mark of Cain. The KGB's experts manipulated the psychic trauma of Holocaust survivors and the frustrations of overseas Jews, who had not been able to avert this tragedy. These people, and influential Canadian and American Jewish organizations, were for years sent English-language brochures fabricated in Moscow, Kiev, Vilnius, and Riga, containing proven facts intermingled with insinuations and lies. The gist of these brochures, which was picked up by various media in the US and Canada, was as follows: "Those Ukrainians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, they're all Jew-baiters. Those savage Slavs and Balts fled from their homelands with the poor Jews' jewels and gold. They fled because they're afraid of just punishment, etc., etc."

Instead of stating something like "many Ukrainians" or "some Latvians" collaboured with the Nazis in killing Jews, it was stated or at least insinuated that these deeds were done by "the Ukrainians" or "the Latvians." A typical example is the book *Wanted! The Search for Nazis in America*, by Howard Blum (Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1976). Judging from the book's contents, Blum most likely took his information on the Latvian exile community in the United States almost exclusively from Soviet pamphlets published in Riga by the KGB, written by the journalist Paulis Ducmanis and the KGB officer Imants Lešinskis, who has since defected. Lešinskis now admits that the pamphlets are an ingenious mixture of fact and fiction.

Howard Blum writes:

a Latvian SS regiment stationed at the Zedelgheim [*sic*] prisoner of war camp formed a group called *Daugavas Vanagi*, the hawks of the Daugavas [*sic*], a river which runs through Latvia. The hawks would be a brotherhood of exiles bound by their complicity in common crimes. They would protect each other, hoping to survive until the day Latvia was again a fascist, anti-Jewish, anticommunist state. And then, in triumph, they would return.

First, Latvia never was an "anti-Jewish" state. Second, I myself, being an Israeli, an ethnic Jew, and a Social Democrat, openly declare that I am anticommunist. It is not a shame. I personally know quite a few members of the organization *Daugavas Vanagi*, and can testify

that most of them have no complicity whatsoever “in common crimes.” They are former combatants, honest ex-soldiers, who fought in the front lines against an armed enemy, in most cases not as volunteers but as conscripts. Perhaps among this organization’s members are also individual rightist extremists, some of whom may also be antisemites (just as there are antisemites among leftist extremists), but there is no basis for accusing the entire organization and all of its members of “complicity in common crimes.”

Blum’s assertion about the American Latvian Association, “the mysteriously well-financed Washington-based American Latvian Association,” is particularly absurd. I knew the former chairman of that organization, the late Jānis Riekstiņš, still have friendly contacts with various officers, and know that it is merely an umbrella organization that is neither rightist nor leftist, whose activities are not at all mysterious, and which is in permanent financial difficulties. How does Blum’s assertion differ from assertions by antisemites and Soviet anti-Zionists about the “mysteriously well-financed” B’nai B’rith or American Jewish Congress, etc.?

* * *

A few years ago great controversy was caused by another book with a similar theme, Allan Ryan’s *Quiet Neighbors* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984). In this book Ryan with great satisfaction recounts that in mid-January, 1980, in Moscow, he was received personally by the chief prosecutor of the USSR, the late Roman Rudenko, who promised to cooperate with him in identifying Nazi war criminals in the United States and in collecting evidence.

Who was Rudenko? The same person who, on August 1, 1953, after the Nuremberg Trials, after Stalin’s death, led the massacre by Soviet Chekists of prisoners at Camp No. 29 at Vorkuta. Roman Rudenko himself shot one of the prisoners, the Pole Ignatowicz (see A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *The Time of Stalin*, Harper and Row; also Johann Urwich-Ferry, *Ohne Pass durch die UdSSR*, and other sources). And from this authentic postwar criminal Allan Ryan accepted cooperation in searching out Nazi war criminals?

Ryan, born in 1944 and having no experience of the war himself, makes various errors. He confuses Latvians and Lithuanians, stating on page 18 that Latvians “were largely Catholic” and Lithuanians “were largely Protestant.” In reality it is the other way around. He asserts that the Baltic states were incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1944; the correct date is 1940. He professes a rather naive piety when talking about the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, “our wartime ally,” ignoring the fact that earlier it had been Nazi Germany’s ally.

Typical of Ryan’s attitude is the following (p. 72, 75):

Before we had left Washington, an officer on the Soviet desk at the State Department had urged us to take every opportunity to make known to the Soviet side the United States’ stern disappointment of the invasion of Afghanistan. I had no intention of following his advice. We had come to Moscow for one purpose only—to seek Soviet cooperation in our search for Nazi war criminals....

For the first time I noticed that there was an empty seat at the head of the table. My spirits rose at once. That could only have been meant for General Roman Andreyevich Rudenko, the Procurator General of the Soviet Union.

In Moscow Ryan behaved like a reverential supplicant in seeking the cooperation of a Bolshevik postwar criminal. He evidently was not aware of the Soviet chief prosecutor's past. Yet he should have been aware of what kind of totalitarian regime and what kind of system of justice he was dealing with. Later on he did receive a small shock (p. 87):

There was one striking and discomfiting epilogue to our Moscow negotiations. When we arrived in Zurich, I picked up the international edition of *Newsweek*, which had on its cover Andrei Sakharov and, inside, the story of his abrupt banishment to the closed city of Gorky, far from the scientific and academic circles of Moscow. I took the magazine to a lounge chair and leaned back, but as I opened to the story, I sat up quickly. According to *Newsweek*, the Soviet official who had ordered Sakharov summoned to his office, and who had read him the decree of exile, was the First Deputy Procurator General of the Soviet Union, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Rekunkov.

Rekunkov was the man with whom Ryan had such a "frank, candid, and constructive session, not in the sense that those words are often used among diplomats as synonyms for halting progress, but in their full literal sense" (p. 86).

This little shock did nothing to cure Ryan of his naivete. In *The New York Times* in the summer of 1984, he regretted that Chernenko was not invited to participate, as "our wartime ally," in the fortieth anniversary commemoration of the Normandy invasion.

What can one say about *The New York Times* itself, this competent and respectable newspaper, for publishing the following on October 18, 1976, in an article titled "Some Suspected of Nazi War Crimes Are Known as Model Citizens," by its staff writer Ralph Blumenthal:

Almost all the suspects are from Eastern Europe, particularly the former republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia that were overrun by the Nazis in World War II and pressed in the liquidation of the Jews and the war against the Soviet Union. The territories were taken over by the Soviets after the war, and this remains an emotional issue with the suspects, most of whom are fiercely anticommunist.

One can only wonder at the blatant ignorance displayed by not stating one word about the fact that the Baltic Republics were first over-run by the Bolsheviks.

Let us return to Allan Ryan. On page 257 he writes:

Many people, particularly Eastern European émigrés, demanded to know why OSI [Office of Special Investigations] was not investigating communist per-

secution. The Soviets, they reminded us, were as capable as the Nazis—deporting innocent people to Siberia, liquidating political enemies, and all the rest.... My answer was simple. Communist criminals do not come to America when their crimes are complete, and I can't prosecute someone who is not here. But my answer always included a promise: if anyone could give me information on any person within the reach of our law today who had taken part in the persecution of innocent people, for any reason under any regime, I would personally see that a full investigation was carried out.

While Ryan is no longer the director of the OSI, the office itself still exists, and it seems to me that Ryan's pledge obligates also his successor. It is theoretically possible that among the Soviet citizens, who in the seventies and eighties emigrated to the United States via Vienna and Rome under the refugee quotas, were those who had been in the GPU–NKVD–KGB apparatus. Some 35 to 55 years ago, they could have been low-level functionaries such as interrogators or armed guards in the Gulag. In their old age, hoping that no one would discover their past history, they decided to start a new life in the opulent New World, along with their adult children and grandchildren.

It is not likely that many cases like that could be found, but it is possible that individuals like this, who are war or postwar criminals, live in the West. Eastern European émigré organizations, especially the umbrella organizations, could prepare lists with the names of those Chekists about whom precise data exists, and submit these lists to the Immigration and Naturalization Service and to the Office of Special Investigations. The lists could also be submitted to appropriate offices in Canada, Australia, West Germany, and Israel. Crimes are crimes, whether committed by the SD or the NKVD. And why not bring into the open the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

* * *

Regarding Nazi war criminals, I have to say the following. If the guilt of an individual is proved after thorough investigation by courts in the free world, if he can be tried by the laws of a democratic country, if due process is followed, if the courts are truly independent, if evidence is given freely, with no direct or indirect pressure and with the right of cross-examination, then the guilty individual has to answer for what he has done, even in old age. Usually there is no threat of a long prison term, much less the death penalty, because everything else notwithstanding, old age and poor health generally mitigates the sentence. What is ethically significant in cases like this is the fact that one has to answer for one's crimes, even if only formally or symbolically. And most importantly, one cannot generalize and accuse entire émigré or exile communities.

I repeat: I would have been among those Latvians who fled from their country in 1944 and 1945 when the Bolshevik troops approached. An uncountable number of Jews took the opportunity to flee from the German and Austrian Soviet zones to the American, British, and

French zones in the spring of 1945. Fleeing from the Bolsheviks is no sin in and of itself. Germans still flee from the German Democratic Republic. And what about the “boat people”?

* * *

If we look at the concept “collabouration with the enemy” objectively, *sine ira et studio*, then we also have to consider cases like the following. Jews in Finland were loyal Finnish citizens, who were not persecuted. Drafted into the Finnish army, they fought bravely against the Soviet army not only in the “Winter War” of 1939–1940, but also in the years 1941–1944, when Finland was Germany’s ally. Should they have switched sides?

How is one to judge the behavior of those Jewish soldiers who served in “work companies” of the Hungarian Expeditionary Corps on the German–Soviet front? In early 1943, after the battle of Stalingrad, when Hungarian army units fled in panic to the West, with them retreated also “Jewish work companies, who in the chaos had the opportunity to await the arrival of the Russians. This they did not do, and we know of cases where the Jews even acquired arms and made their way westward by force” (Peter Gosztony, *Hitlers fremde Heere*, Bastei-Lübbe Verlag, 1980, p. 337).

* * *

On December 23, 1983, an article by Lawrence S. Leshnik of New York appeared in the newspaper of the West German Jewish Association, *Allgemeine*. He warned that investigating and judging war criminals was a very complicated matter, and one had to be careful. As an example he gave the case of Frank Walus, who was accused in Chicago in January 1977, of having killed children, an old woman, and a cripple during the war in Poland. For two years Walus was under the threat of deportation from the United States. Suddenly he was notified that there had been a misunderstanding and that new evidence showed he was not even in Poland at the time. No one repaid the great expense he had incurred during the court case, leaving him financially ruined.

In an article published in the same newspaper on April 19, 1985, Leshnik pointed out that between 1948 and 1952 about 400,000 displaced persons arrived in the United States, of whom about 10,000 were under suspicion of being Nazi war criminals. That is 2.5 per cent. Even if this figure were not exaggerated, and even if 10,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe were to a greater or lesser degree guilty of Nazi atrocities, that is no reason to vilify all 400,000 former displaced persons, who were threatened with the Gulag and other niceties of the communist regimes. Among them was the cream of the Latvian intelligentsia—writers and composers, artists and architects, doctors and lawyers. All of them do not deserve to be called “fascist murderers.”

* * *

Let us also look at the other side of the coin. Isaac Levinson in his book *The Untold Story* (Johannesburg 1958) asserts that “the Latvians heartily collaboured with the German

invaders in 1941 and committed the most dastardly acts against the helpless Jews” and “the behavior of the Latvians ... is one of the most inhuman and darkest pages in the history of man.” In exactly the same way some Latvian émigré circles accuse the whole Jewish community of Latvia of crimes committed by the Bolsheviks. Foremost of these is the Latvian Officers’ Association of Australia and New Zealand, headed by E. Ģērmanis in Sydney. This organization’s letter to US Attorney General Edwin Meese III, full of vulgar antisemitism, greatly damaged Latvian interests in the United States and Canada (see Mary Thornton’s article in *The Washington Post*, April 6, 1985).

E. Ģērmanis, in this organization’s name, protested against my being invited as a guest speaker at the Sixth Latvian World Youth Conference in Australia, referring *inter alia* to “the actions of the Jews in Latvia, without regard to the privileges they enjoyed in free Latvia, when Latvia was invaded for the first time by the Soviet Union....

The Jews without hesitation took the side of the communists.”

In the same vein, O. Akmentiņš wrote on April 15, 1985, in his bulletin *Vēstnesis*, published in Boston: “The refugees did not think that mentioning the people that committed crimes against the Latvians constituted antisemitism.” Thus an *entire people*, not individuals of a particular ethnic group, are to be accused of crimes? Akmentiņš continues: “Jews suddenly became hostile to the Latvian state and turned savagely against the Latvian people, who had never wronged the Jews in any way.” Again the sweeping condemnation, “the Jews....” And Akmentiņš talks of “the Holocaust myth, so much written about over the years.” The word “myth” is curious, as if he disputes that the Nazis murdered Jews. Twelve of my relatives, including children, were killed by the Nazis in Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. That is no myth.

* * *

A somewhat contradictory position is taken by Vilis Hāznars, who complains of “Jewish retribution” in his book *Varmācības Torņi* (vol. 2, Vaidava, 1985). After a long court proceeding, the deportation case against him was dropped for lack of evidence. He cites his wife’s laments about “Jewish lies” and “Jewish money,” accuses “those trying to disgrace me, the Jews,” and asserts that he was persecuted by the “three Big Powers—the Soviet Union, Israel, and the United States of America.”

In a chapter entitled “Jewish and Latvian relationships,” Vilis Hāznars shows he simply cannot cope with the complexity of this matter. He writes: “And it is exactly this ruthless destruction of Latvian citizens of Jewish nationality during the German occupation that has spoiled [Jewish and Latvian] relationships in these past years.” But then he continues with: “I also have to mention in this regard the insolent and hostile stance taken by the Jews against me.” Again—“the Jews.”

Further, he writes: “Now the Jews have published many works in their own and other languages accusing the entire Latvian people of destroying them in Latvia.... At the same time the Jews everywhere keep silent about the Russian terror in Latvia, especially in 1940–1941, in which they also played a part, and not a small one.” If Hāznars had read what the competent

Israeli historian Dov Levin wrote about this period, he would have come to a different conclusion.

Hāznern asks: “Why did twenty to thirty thousand Jews flee with the Russians when World War II started? Was it only because they were afraid of the Nazis?” If Hāznern asks the question in this way, why is he, and some other Latvians, offended when Jews ask in turn, and with the same bias: “Why did 150 to 200 thousand Balts flee with the Germans when World War II ended? Was it only because they were afraid of the Bolsheviks?”

Finally Vilis Hāznern rhetorically declares: “But have I ever blamed the entire Jewish people? The way the Jews blame the entire Latvian people?” Mr. Hāznern, with such recriminations we will not get very far.

* * *

Latvian–Jewish Relations is a brochure written by the former Latvian parliament (*Saeima*) deputy J. Lejiņš and published by the World Federation of Free Latvians and the Latvian National Federation in Canada (LNFC). A “Publisher’s Note” states: “The LNFC is proud to publish this well meant and carefully considered [*sic*] article.” However, the brochure is rather one-sided and unobjective. About the well-known writer, the Irishman Frederick Forsyth, the author of *The Odessa File*, J. Lejiņš insinuates: “Presumably Solomon Tauber [the hero of the thriller] is a fictional name hiding the author of the book.” Lejiņš considers the figure of six million Jews murdered by the Nazis as a “figure under dispute” and writes: “It appears that the Jews are too grasping of political and/or economic power. But power not only corrupts, it embitters others, especially if they consider that such power has been obtained in doubtful ways.” It hardly seems that this is “well-meant and carefully considered” opinion.

J. Lejiņš also writes:

During the deportations the Jews of Gulbene watched the Latvians being brutally herded away as if it was a circus show.... How many Jews took part in the various actions against Latvians during 1940/41? The exact number might be in doubt, but there is no doubt at all that this number is much larger than the number of Latvians who participated in actions against the Jews during the German occupation.... After a year of terror, many Latvians greeted the Germans as liberators.... Even at that the percentage of Latvians jubilantly greeting the German Army was far smaller than the percentage of Jews greeting the Red Army a year earlier.

Considering the recapitulations of those events given above, it seems that Lejiņš' arithmetic is not quite accurate.

Finally, Lejiņš writes: “Our best wishes to the Jews, especially to the loyal Latvian Jews wherever they may be. We also hope that those who will not admit their own errors, and who generalize the misdeeds of individuals to a whole nation, will acquire objectivity, tolerance, and true understanding.” One can only agree.

* * *

J. Lejiņš' brochure is mild compared to one called *The Other Side of the Holocaust*, in English, written and published in 1981 by a K. Willis. This most likely a pseudonym. Willis states that he is a Latvian, a veteran of the German army, who now lives in the United States. Some excerpts will suffice to show the tone of the pamphlet:

Stalin was surrounded by so many Jewish communists in high places, like M. Litvinov, Kaganovich, and so many other Kosheroviches.... Was Hitler a Jew? [There is a] story of Reinhard Heydrich's alleged Jewish ancestry.... Hopefully, this is not true. Otherwise it could be added that Jews had better bring their own house in order.... To the Jews, communist crimes are not considered as crimes at all.... The Jews should look for skeletons in their own closets before they accuse the Eastern European people.... Who influences or controls our TV and new media?... Who is controlling our Senate, House, and administration? The Zionist Organization has a most powerful lobby which influences our elected officials....

These allegations by Willis agree almost word for word with Soviet propaganda about the "international Zionist conspiracy" and so on. It is odd indeed, that these antisemitic vituperations come from E. Ģērmanis' and K. Willis' bitterest enemies, the Bolsheviks. Hundreds of Soviet propaganda brochures, books, and articles like this were published and distributed widely in the Soviet Union, especially at the end of the Brezhnev era. They were published not just in Russian, but also in the Soviet Union's many local languages, including Latvian.

A typical example of this propaganda is Vladimir Begun's book *Invasion Without Weapons*, published in Riga in 1981 by Avots in a Latvian edition of 12,000 copies—a very large number for such a small country as Latvia. Some representative quotes:

The main strategic goal of the Zionist movement is the establishment of world sovereignty.... Zionism's influence in the United States of America is enormous.... Zionists have crowded into the top levels of economics, politics, ideology, science and culture.... Zionism influences the USA's domestic policy and foreign policy.... Zionists buy up editors, take over editorial boards, work as commentators, get rid of journalists they do not like—in a word, do everything possible to control the mass media.... Zionists unremittingly repeat and force upon the public the theme of the plight and eternal suffering of the Jews....

These are only some of the peculiar paradoxes that come to light when one tries to analyze the relationships between Latvians and Jews *sine ira et studio*.

* * *

Based on direct experience, I can state that in Russian-occupied Latvia, antisemitism among Latvians is practically nonexistent. Moreover, the Six-Day War, in which the Israeli army turned Russian armor into scrap metal in the Sinai and on the Golan Heights, furthered Latvian solidarity with the Jewish state and the national aspirations of Latvian Jewry.

Since the summer of 1987, when Gorbachev began his campaigns of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, a broad national independence movement has developed in Latvia. Latvians have formed a powerful mass organization, the Popular Front (*Tautas fronte*), that fights for self-determination, economic sovereignty, and basic civil rights and liberties. Characteristically, thanks to the activities of the Popular Front, there has been not only a renaissance of Latvian nationalism, but also a legal revival of Jewish national culture. A Jewish cultural society has been founded in Riga. Many Latvian Jews support the aspirations of the Latvian people. The popular Riga weekly *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and art) devoted a special issue in November of 1988 to Latvia's Jews. This was the first time since the Bolshevik coup in 1917 that a Soviet publication has praised the Jewish people as such: "... that have created such uncommon spiritual riches..., that have given the world the Bible, unforgettable masterworks of literature, music, art, and science."

Today Latvian and Jewish relations in Latvia are characterized not by misunderstanding and mistrust, but by harmony and solidarity. I am happy and grateful that I can experience this time.

About the Author

Frank (Efrayim) Gordon was born in Riga on September 1, 1928. He studied at the French lycée. On June 28, 1941, he and his parents fled to Russia, returning to Riga on April 3, 1945. From 1945 to 1957 he worked at the Latvian Telegraph Agency (a division of TASS), and from 1957 to 1971 at the evening paper *Rīgas Balss* as a translator and columnist in the international affairs section. He studied journalism by correspondence at the Moscow Lomonossov State University, graduating in 1959. His thesis was "Latvian satirical journals of the time of the 1905 revolution."

In 1972 Gordon managed, with great difficulty, to get permission to emigrate to Israel. From 1973 to 1984 he worked at the Tel Aviv newspaper *Nasha Strana*, and since 1985 he has been on the editorial staff of the Tel Aviv German-language daily *Israel Nachrichten*.

In 1974 the New York Latvian publisher Grāmatu Draugs published Gordon's book *Flexibility and Obstinacy: The Fate of Non-Russians in Muscovy Today*, under the pseudonym Alberts Sābris. Gordon has translated A. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* into Latvian. His novel *Twilight in the Microdistrict* was serialized in the Latvian newspaper *Laiks*. He has published numerous articles in the Latvian exile press, and has lectured extensively in North America and Australia.