2025 1 (57) Genocidas ir rezistencija p. 164–180
ISSN 1392-3463; ISSN 2783-8293 (online); https://doi.org/10.61903/GR.2025.100

From Division to Solidarity: Latvian Refugees, the Latvian Central Council, and National Identity in Exile Post 1945

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The solidarity of Baltic exile communities after World War II was not an automatic result of shared national identity, but emerged from historical traumas and the realities of displacement. The destruction of civil society under Soviet rule and the pressures of exile fostered unity among Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians, despite internal divisions. Latvians had particularly deep divisions to overcome. Latvian national consciousness, growing out of a divided regional and cultural past, developed later than Lithuania's. Political divisions during the period of independence after 1918 were compounded by issues raised by wartime collaboration and resistance.

The Soviet reoccupation of 1944 led to mass flight, with Latvian and Estonian refugees removed by sea in German-organised evacuations. In postwar displaced persons (DP) camps, Baltic refugees sought Western protection from Soviet repatriation, reinforcing ethnic solidarity. Latvian exiles established self-governing institutions, schools and cultural organisations, fostering a stronger sense of solidarity in exile than had existed before.

Despite this growing unity, wartime political divisions persisted. The example is given of the Latvian Central Council (LCP), formed in 1943 to restore independence, which was suppressed by the Nazis, while Latvian officials who cooperated with German occupiers argued they were acting in the nation's best interests. These disputes carried into exile, sparking fierce debates over loyalty and legitimacy. Over time, however, the reality of permanent Soviet occupation led former ideological opponents to prioritise a united front over past conflicts. This process of selective historical memory was essential in forging a cohesive Latvian exile identity.

Keywords: Latvian, Baltic, exile, occupation, resistance.

 https://doi.org/10.61903/GR.2025.107 | Įteikta 2025-01-16 / Priimta 2025-05-02

Given how closely the Cold War-era Baltic exile communities in the West resembled and supported each other, some might believe they originated from nations with a largely identical heritage and political culture. However, these groups' solidarity was neither natural nor inevitable, as all three had to cope with internal divisions carried over from independence-era politics and from the Soviet and Nazi occupations. The fact that all three exile communities were galvanised into unity was primarily due to the destruction of normal civil societies through Stalinisation, but also by the realities of refugee life. In particular, the Latvian nation had been riven and divided to a greater extent, both internally and by manipulation from above, since its inception.

This article has two primary aims. The first is to explore the sources of political and social divisions confronting the Latvians in postwar refugee camps and the ways that selective historical memory shaped the reconciliation of wartime political disputes, fostering a unified exile identity given the fact of permanent Soviet occupation. The second aim, in service of the first, is to examine the legacy of the wartime Latvian Central Council (Latvijas Centrālā Padome – LCP) in the eyes of the postwar exiles, before and after they dispersed from displaced persons (DP) camps across the Western world. New in this research is the use of unpublished archival material, including personal correspondence between influential exiles from opposing political poles, showing how their political disputes were superseded by the need for unity in dealing with specific challenges as refugees.

There have been a number of studies of the Latvian refugees in the postwar DP camps and after. The most comprehensive review in English is Andrejs Plakans' *The Reluctant Exiles: Latvians in the West after World War II* (2021), while monographs by Inta Gale Carpenter and Maija Krūmiņa describe the development of an exile ideology from a folklorist point of view, focusing on refugee narratives. The most significant studies in Latvian are Ilgvars Veigners' encyclopaedic work, *Latvieši rietumzemēs* (2009), and Kristīne Beķere's *Latvijas labā* (2022), a history of the Latvian exiles' political activity from 1945 until the end of the Cold War.

This paper is an expanded version of a presentation given at the Tuskulėnai Peace Park Memorial Complex conference of 4 October 2024, "The Great Exodus from the Baltic States: Emigration Processes in Europe in 1944–1949".

Background

Latvian writers commonly regret their lack of internal unity and common cause compared with Lithuanians and Estonians; perhaps the most famous exemplar is poet Vizma Belševica's "The Latvian Indriķis's Marginal Notes on the Livonian Chronicle" (1969). The poem, which masked its critique of Soviet realities with its ostensible medieval setting, was understood by readers and – after publication – by Soviet censors:

O, kalpu tauta! Saldā priekā trīc
Tev mugura, kad saimnieks tevi nesit,
Bet tavus brāļus.
[O, servile nation! With sweet delight your back trembles when the master beats not you,
but your brothers.][1]

Belševica's poem is quoted to this day in Latvia and abroad by those who mourn the lack of national solidarity. The solidarity of the Latvian exiles in the West after 1945 should not be taken for granted, but is a remarkable fact, worthy of closer examination.

Unlike predominantly Roman Catholic Lithuania, the early modern confessional splits of Central Europe divided the religious heritage of the regions of Latvia. With the rise of nationalism in the 19th century – the very word "Latvija" only first appeared in 1856 – Latvians (like Estonians) were conscious of the fact that they had no confessional identity that had not been imposed from above by non-Latvians. In the 1880s, some activists such as newspaper editor Frīdrichs Veinbergs recommended that Latvians bind their heritage to the grandeur of Lithuania:

> So-called Baltic history is largely Baltic German history ... it is not the history of the Latvian fatherland, not a history that it could see as its own ... As one brother rejoices in his brother's happiness and glory, so Latvians have the right to share the fate of the Lithuanian people. Here is the flesh of his flesh. The history of the Lithuanians is in this respect the same as the history of the Latvians; a Latvian can see the history of the Lithuanians as the history of his fatherland.[2]

Given that 19th century Lithuanian nationalism identified itself partly in opposition to Polish cultural domination, there were some similarities to the Latvians' situation vis-à-vis the Baltic Germans[3]. However, the complicated Polish–Lithuanian relationship played out differently in the wartime and postwar reality[4].

Latvians began imagining their national community into existence, to use Benedict Anderson's formulation, out of a splintered foundation. Political moderates and leftists who competed to speak for the mass of Latvian speakers shared an anti-German animus, which the tsarist state was content to encourage[5]. The eastern province of Latgale, whose history under Poland–Lithuania and Russia had diverged from the rest of the country since the 16th century, experienced a much later and less complete development of nati-

1 Vizma Belševica, *Gadu gredzeni*. Rīga: Liesma, 1969, p. 94.

2 Frīdrichs Veinbergs, *Iz Latveešu-Leišu vēstures* (1885), reprint: Rīga, B. Diriķa, 1921, pp. 5–6.

3 Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 51–52.

4 Vitalija Stravinskienė, "Between Poland and Lithuania: Repatriation of Poles from Lithuania, 1944–1947", *Population Displacement in Lithuania in the Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities and Legacies*, eds. Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliūtė, Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016, pp. 160–178.

5 Anatol Lieven, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–51.

onal consciousness; the word *Latgale* itself first appeared in print in 1904[6]. Even with the establishment of an independent Latvian national state, such regional divisions did not simply vanish.

Ideological Polarisation up to the Second World War

If the high point of the 1905 Revolution in Lithuania was marked by the Great Seimas of Vilnius, Latvian revolutionaries concentrated their wrath less on tsarist Russian officialdom than on local Baltic German landowners. While there were many underlying causes, and Latvians on the right and left have claimed 1905 as part of their political heritage[7], Līga Lapa's 2018 re-examination of the revolution arrived at conclusions similar to Baltic Germans such as Astaf von Transehe-Roseneck, who regarded extensive private crimes – arson, robbery, murder – as a main feature of the revolt, in addition to attacks on Lutheran churches[8]. Suppression of the rebellion caused the first large wave of emigration, mainly to the USA. By comparison with Lithuanians, the Latvian emigrant group was very small, politically far left, indifferent to national identity and scattered to the point of irrelevance by the time the wartime exiles began arriving from the refugee camps.

The independent Republic of Latvia established itself despite the fact that most of the Latvian regiments formed during World War I – the first all-Latvian military units ever – part joined the Bolshevik side with the outbreak of the Russian Civil War[9], so the Latvian government was dependent on German military support until mid 1919. A comparison with the long history of the Lithuanian infantry regiments of the Imperial Russian Army is instructive, as the new army of the Republic of Latvia had to put down roots in much shallower historical soil.

Like Lithuania and Estonia, Latvia's new democracy was replaced by an authoritarian ruler whose regime suppressed political opposition up to the time of the Soviet occupation. In Estonia, Soviet agents attempted a communist putsch in 1924, hoping to take advantage of Estonian political and social conflicts[10], while Lithuanian political solidarity was threatened by issues such as the Vilnius dispute[11]. Internal divisions were certainly not unique to Latvia.

The relations between Lithuania and Latvia on one side, and ethnic Germans or Hitler's

6 Edward C. Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland*, 1855–1914, Princeton: Princetown University Press, 1981, p. 264.

7 Valdis Bērziņš, ed., *20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture*, Vol. I, LVI apgāds, 2000, pp. 333–335.

8 Līga Lapa, *Kaujinieki un mežabrāļi 1905. gada revolūcijā Latvijā*. Rīga: LVI apgāds, 2018, pp. 99–100, 265; Astaf von Transehe-Roseneck, *Die lettische Revolution*, Berlin: Verlag Georg Reimer, 1908, pp. 180–181, 335.

9 Andrejs Plakans, op. cit., pp. 115–118 [Andrejus Plakanas, „Latviai: trumpa istorija", *Hoover Institution Press*, Stanfordas, 1995, p. 115–118]; Anatol Lieven, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

10 Alan Palmer, *Northern Shores: A History of the Baltic Sea and its Peoples*, London: John Murray, 2023, p. 299.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 300–301.

Germany on the other, became fateful as the occupation approached. Germans in Lithuania were not a target of national resentment as they were for the Latvians. The principal problem in German–Lithuanian relations centred on the dispute over the Klaipėda (Memel) region, which had no analogue in Latvia. In March 1939, Germany forcibly occupied and annexed the Klaipėda territory. The rancour resulting among the Lithuanians contributed to their hesitation to support the Germans during the war to the extent that the Latvians did[12].

It is noteworthy that Hitler declared the Memelland as having returned home – *Heim ins Reich* – using the same phrase as he did later, following the destruction of Poland, summoning the Baltic Germans to leave their countries which had effectively become Soviet protectorates[13]. There were Baltic Germans who declined to leave before the Soviet occupation, as well as some Latvians who identified as ethnic Germans in order to flee – whom Ulmanis publicly scolded, proclaiming they should never return[14]. This also contributed to a sense of disunity during and after the war.

Occupation, War and Flight

The reasons to flee a looming second Soviet occupation in 1944 were shared across all three Baltic countries, and formed a basis for solidarity among the postwar refugees. The shock of the first Soviet occupation in 1940–1941 – the dissolution of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian states, termination of private property, and especially political murders and mass deportations to Siberian labour camps on the eve of the Nazi German invasion in June 1941 – ensured that intramural rivalries were dwarfed by anger and fear of the Soviets. Yet there were significant differences among the countries' wartime situations.

German attitudes to Estonians and Latvians were generally more positive than towards Lithuanians; the most notorious example of this was the treatment planned for the respective nationalities in Generalplan Ost, which foresaw the expulsion of most Lithuanians eastwards after a Nazi victory[15]. This is reflected in the number of labourers taken to Germany – some voluntarily, most conscripted – prior to the evacuations beginning in the summer of 1944. Based on a report from *Reichsminister* Alfred Rosenberg to Heinrich Himmler, some 15,000 Estonians, 35,000 Latvians and 75,000 Lithuanians had been sent to Germany[16]. However, historians' estimates vary widely. In her presentation, "Between East and West: the fate of the Lithuanian war refugees in the Soviet occupation zone", Dai-

[12] Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence*, 1940–1990, rev. ed. Berkeley: California University Press, 1993, p. 14.

[13] Aivars Stranga, *Latvija: neatkarības pēdējais cēliens. 1939. gada 23. augusts–1940. gada 17. jūnijs*, Rīga: Mansards, 2022, p. 145.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[15] Romuald Misiunas, Rein Taagepera, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

va Dapkutė cited a total of 185,000 Lithuanian labourers in Germany, while Kārlis Kangeris has estimated 30,000 Latvians, making the discrepancy in terms of forced labour even greater. What may have felt like a wartime reprieve for Latvians became problematic in the refugee camp setting, where any groups which had been favoured by German occupation authorities could be accused of pro-Nazi leanings[17].

	Latvia	Lithuania
	(All numbers approximate; estimates vary)	
Population (1943)	1.8 million	2.4 million
In German combat units	120,000	50,000
Evacuated or fled westwards, 1944–1945	100,000	100,000
POWs in Western Allies' zones of occupation	25,000	4,000
In Western German DP camps	120,000	60,000

The Germans found substantial local civilian administrative and military support in occupied Latvia, which led to antagonisms among Latvians during and after the war. The Latvian Self-Administration (German *Selbstverwaltung*, Latvian *Zemes pašpārvalde*), although its members petitioned in vain for some degree of autonomy, not only countenanced the creation of a Waffen-SS *Freiwillige* Latvian Legion, but under General Director Oskars Dankers it approved and aided conscription of all military-age Latvians, who found themselves in units required to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler[18]. This went beyond the levels of civilian or military collaboration seen in Lithuania.

As the Red Army approached the borders of Estonia and Latvia in early 1944, German authorities including *Reichsminister* Alfred Rosenberg hoped to evacuate Estonians and Latvians behind the Daugava River, first to Lithuania and further westward if needed[19]. Any such plans were ruined by the Soviet Bagration offensive of summer 1944, which crossed Lithuania in July, cutting the overland route west of Rīga for three weeks in August, then permanently near Klaipėda in October[20]. Thus, most Lithuanian refugees fled the approaching destruction as the front rolled across their land, while the majority of evacuees from Latvia and Estonia escaped in an organised, months-long operation by the

17 Sources: Romuald Misiunas, Rein Taagepera, *op. cit.*, p. 55–60; Andrejs Plakans, *The Reluctant Exiles: Latvians in the West after World War II*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2021, p. xiii, 45, 91; Daiva Dapkutė, "Lithuanian Diaspora: From Displaced Persons to Diaspora Politics", *Population Displacement in Lithuania in the Twentieth Century: Experiences, Identities and Legacies*, eds. Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliūtė, Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016, pp. 240–242; Kārlis Kangeris, "Evakuācija/bēgšana no Latvijas 1944. gadā: Jauns novērtējums uz jaunas datu bāzes", *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2016, Vol. 98, pp. 122–125.

18 Valdis Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, pp. 181–187, 368.

19 Kārlis Kangeris, *op. cit.*, p. 118; Lumans, *op. cit.*, pp. 148–151.

20 Valdis Lumans, *op. cit.*, pp. 347–349.

German navy. In some cases Latvians sniped at each other, accusing them of using their privileged occupation administration positions, not to advocate on behalf of Latvians, but to escape westwards as quickly and safely as possible[21]. Soviet propagandists claimed the evacuees were Nazi lackeys, while the refugees saw themselves as fleeing destruction and brutal oppression, as surely as if shells were exploding around them.

The DP camps and ethnic solidarity

Newspapers in German-occupied Latvia in 1944 encouraged Latvians to evacuate to safety in Germany, where they would receive work, shelter and food conditions comparable to Germans as far as circumstances allowed[22]. For a popular historian like David Nasaw, this essentially disqualified Latvians in Germany after the end of the war in May 1945 from being treated as refugees, much less as DPs[23].

From the beginning, the fear of forcible repatriation spurred Latvian and Lithuanian refugees to put their best foot forward as models of civilisation for the British and US occupation authorities. This was understandable, given the Soviet Union's aggressive demands that anti-Soviet Balts be turned over to them as traitors to the socialist fatherland. In November 1946, Lt Col. G. B. Vaughan-Hughes of the British Control Commission addressed these concerns in an internal memorandum:

> [The] Control Office is anxious to consider the possibility of ultimately absorbing Baltic Displaced Persons in the British Zone of Germany into the German economy.
>
> We do not think there can be any question of doing this while the Soviet Repatriation Mission remains in the British Zone. This Mission claims all Balts are Soviet citizens. If they were dispersed throughout the British Zone of Germany, it would give the Soviet Mission unlimited opportunity to indulge in every variety of unpleasant practice ...
>
> The Balts are otherwise the best of our Displaced Persons. They contain a large proportion of professional classes and give less trouble than any other class of Displaced Person. We do not think it is right to discriminate between different classes of Displaced Persons and especially against the Balts who are the best of them.[24]

Unfortunately, as a number of historians have noted[25], the fear of being associated with Nazi war criminals led Latvian refugees to deny knowing of collaboration in Holocaust crimes under the Nazi occupation, allowing accused murderers to hide among them.

[21] Jēkabs Kalniņš, *Atmiņas*, ca. 1975, p. 85.

[22] Kārlis Kangeris, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–120.

[23] David Nasaw, *The Last Million: Europe's Displaced Persons from World War to Cold War*, New York: Penguin, 2020, pp. 134–135.

[24] British National Archives, FO 1032 2242: Treatment and disposal of Balts, Block 5: Vaughan-Hughes memorandum.

[25] Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, Rīga: Historical Institute of Latvia, 1996, pp. 11–12; David Nasaw, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

The protracted process of evacuation led to a larger proportion of propertied, conservative, religious, pro-Ulmanis Latvians – those most likely to fear Soviet reprisals – living in the postwar DP camps than was true for the country's population at large. In addition, the setup of the camps themselves pushed the Latvian refugees to band together on purely ethnic terms. Refugees organised themselves to claim desirable locations for creating camps under the British or American occupying forces, competing with each other for control of ethnically based refuges from the ruined German economy around them[26]. From the outset, this led Latvians to band together who had not necessarily done so up to that point, with a more cohesive sense of national community than had been the case in Latvia.

Looking beyond the overcoming of specific political enmities, Inta Gale Carpenter uses the concept of folklore to describe the Latvian refugees' process of creating a new identity as exiles in their official and unofficial DP camp communications and memories: "The first-person singular voice used earlier to express private fears and expectations gradually goes public and gives away to the plural 'we' among Latvians who narrate and act in order to author their lives"[27]. Of particular interest is her analysis of the way Allied press and occupation authorities' statements led refugees to be most concerned about accusations of collaboration with Nazis, fear of forced repatriation under Soviet pressure, descriptions of DPs' suspicions of each other based on collaboration in 1940–41 and 1941–45, and internal clamping down on "unworthy" Latvian DPs who sullied the reputation of all.

Ethnic Germans were explicitly barred from being granted DP status in the Allied occupation zones of Germany, including refugees from outside the former German Reich[28]. In the Latvian DP camps, this could lead to spiteful behaviour, as individuals or families who had been Latvian citizens who had not emigrated *heim ins Reich*, were nevertheless denounced as ethnic Germans and expelled by camp authorities. The most notorious Latvian collaborator in Holocaust crimes, Viktors Arājs, claimed at his trial in a West German court that he and his wife had been expelled from a DP camp in Memmingen on just this basis[29]. The Latvians' new-found sense of common cause also revealed itself in a negative aspect.

It would be difficult to exaggerate what a haven the DP camps provided to the Baltic refugees. Even in conditions of material hardship, with economies strained by war, Allied authorities offered some opportunities for employment and camp self-administration. Latvian organisations created camp schools and many other activities. Their cultural activity was energised by a sense of duty to maintain Latvian national culture, given that culture in

[26] Andrejs Plakans, *Reluctant Exiles*, p.74; Jēkabs Kalniņš, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

[27] Inta Gale Carpenter, "Folklore as a source for creating exile identity among Latvian Displaced Persons in post-World War II Germany", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2017, Vol. 48, No. 2, p. 217.

[28] British National Archives FO 1032 2242, Block 5: 30 August 1946 memorandum.

[29] Uldis Neiburgs, ed., *Viktora Arāja tiesas prāva žurnālista Kārļa Štāmera pierakstos*, Rīga: Latvijas Mediji, 2020, p. 189.

Soviet-occupied Latvia was yoked to Stalinist ideology[30]. Maija Krūmiņa expands on Carpenter's account by analysing the process by which Latvian DPs developed an ideology of forced exile, convincing themselves and those around them that physical flight from peril took place[31]. The camps were not only an ethnic "safe space" in a not always friendly German landscape, but a social equaliser and a training ground for the DPs who would soon emigrate and take their place as active participants in the Western democracies.

The Case of the Latvian Central Council

The divisions among Latvians under the German occupation and at the end of the war are especially clear if we consider the history of the LCP, secretly founded in August 1943 by members of the main Latvian political parties from the parliament elected in 1931, prior to its dissolution by Kārlis Ulmanis in 1934. A total of 189 people signed the LCP Memorandum, dated 17 March 1944, declaring the need to restore sovereignty of the Republic of Latvia. A copy was secretly passed through Sweden to the British, but General Rūdolfs Bangerskis, Inspector General of the Latvian Legion, declined to forward it to German occupation authorities. Signatories of the declaration were arrested and LCP leaders sent to the Stutthof concentration camp. A nascent military wing for the Council formed, a military group of Latvian reservists and deserters from the Legion, which reached an estimated 3,000 in number. Led by the previously retired General Jānis Kurelis, the Kurelieši were surrounded and disarmed in Kurzeme by German units directed by SS General Friedrich Jeckeln in autumn 1944. A brief, bloody attempt at armed resistance was crushed, and Kurelis's subordinate officers were taken to Liepāja and executed[32].

The Latvians collaborating with Germans mentioned above – the Directorate or Self-Administration – achieved some German concessions on autonomy, in the form of a Latvian National Committee formed and approved by *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler in Potsdam in February 1945, with General Bangerskis as President. At that stage of the war, of course, such a concession was worse than useless as a basis for a hoped-for renewal of Latvian independence with Allied support[33].

It might appear that the LCP and the Latvian Self-administration simply represented two options (both doomed to failure) in exploring possibilities for local autonomy, either by cooperation or through underground organisation and attempted contacts with the

30 David Nasaw, op. cit., p. 46, 152; Andrejs Plakans, *Reluctant Exiles*, p. 116.

31 Maija Krūmiņa, "Escape Narratives of World War Two Refugees from Latvia.", *OIKOS: lietuvių migracijos ir diaspora studijos* 2018, No. 2 (26), pp. 91–94.

32 Uldis Neiburgs, "Planned and Attempted Military Resistance: The Latvian Central Council and General Kurelis Group 1943–1945", *Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia*, Vol. 29, Rīga: Zinātne, 2021; Geoffrey Swain, "Latvia's Democratic Resistance: a Forgotten Episode from the Second World War", *European History Quarterly* 39:2 (2009), pp. 241–263.

33 Valdis Lumans, *op. cit.*, pp. 371–372.

Western Allies. But the cruelty of the choices available allowed no such middle ground. The LCP Memorandum declared there could be no provisional Latvian government that included collaborators with the German occupying administration[34], and with the Kurelis group's destruction, the Latvian Legion frontline soldiers gained nothing, while perhaps 1,000 men who might have at least joined the partisans in the forests died in vain. To make matters worse, SS General Jeckeln was apprised of the *Kurelieši* activities and locations by Latvian informers, and it is believed that the SD *(Sicherheitsdienst)* units that imprisoned and executed Kurelis' officers in Liepāja included Latvian security police[35].

Even as Latvians in the DP camps in the Allied occupation zones of Germany began to develop a sense of unity in exile, the polemics in periodicals circulating among the refugees regarding the LCP show the bitterness and raw wounds of those involved. For example, the newspaper *Tēvzeme* [Fatherland] published an article on 4 December 1946, "What did the LCP do?" claiming that the LCP had selfishly refused to cooperate with other resistance groups agitating and fighting the occupiers, instead formulating abstract plans for the future:

> From this it is evident that the leadership of the resistance movement which the LCP attributes to itself is just empty words, because there was no such leadership and it did not want to assume it.[36]

For their part, LCP activists who survived the war and escaped – most went to Sweden – reacted bitterly to criticism from those who had largely supported the dissolution of Latvian democracy by what they saw as the dictator Ulmanis and his clique. Social Democratic leader Bruno Kalniņš, who had survived the Stutthof concentration camp and a forced-march winter evacuation under the Germans, responded:

> The struggle of these circles against Latvian political parties and our politicians is similar. It is familiar to us from the times of dictatorship and occupation, when parties were rejected as the greatest evil. It is a bad reflection of these anti-democratic views that the right is now turning against our politicians and recommending that non-political persons, especially professors and pastors, should be put at the head of our emigrant groups.
>
> But the Latvian emigration is a political emigration. It is only as such that we are given the right of asylum as political refugees abroad. Right-wing circles are now trying to undermine this important role of the LCP in the struggle for the liberation of the Latvian people. One J. Arājs even inserted a crudely slanderous article about the LCP's underground work in Hanau's "Tēvzeme", which is all the uglier because the author of the false attacks himself never risked his precious life or took part in illegal work.[37]

Such a split seems irreconcilable: each side regarded the other as having harmed, disgraced or betrayed the Latvian nation. It should be noted that here the LCP is being con-

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 364–365.

[35] Andrew Ezergailis, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

[36] "Ko 'Latvijas centrālā padome'ir darījusi", *Tēvzeme*, 4 December 1947, p. 3.

[37] Bruno Kalniņš, "Kāda demagoģija", *Latvju Ziņas*, 25 January 1947, p. 3.

sidered to the extent that it was known by the postwar exiles. Since the restoration of Latvian independence, a more more complete and detailed body of historical research has developed, spurred especially by the writings and publication of documents by one-time LCP activist Leonīds Siliņš[38].

A key figure in this story is Rūdolfs Bangerskis (1878–1958), a retired Latvian Army before the war, who in 1943 accepted the post of General Inspector of the newly created Latvian Legion. Criticised for aiding the mobilisation of military-age males in 1944 (a violation of the Hague and Geneva Conventions) as well as for spurning the LCP Memorandum, in his memoir he defended himself without personally attacking his critics. Carrying out mobilisation, he argued, was at least establishing some sort of right to positive action, and he had used his show of good faith to intercede personally with the murderous General Jeckeln and win the release of Latvians imprisoned for anti-German agitation[39]. Regarding the LCP, he understood why he had been chosen, since he had once forwarded a petition to Jeckeln, though without result.

> Since it was already clear to me that the memorandum's authors planned the role of lightning rod for me, and I did not want to play it, nor did I want to worsen the position of the Latvian fighters at the front, I did not change my negative attitude to receiving the formal [LCP] delegation and refused to accept it.[40]

Bangerskis emphasised his efforts to win the release of imprisoned LCP activists from Jeckeln – successfully for Mintauts Čakste, but not his brother, LCP leader Konstantīns Čakste, who had been caught passing military information to British secret services[41]. Thus, by the 1950s Bangerskis regarded himself as on same side as the LCP: not seeing the Germans as friendly to Latvian independence, and critical of the LCP mainly for showing poor judgement.

We can see the softening of animosities and cooperation in dealing with a new reality leading to solidarity among Latvians in the example of the Liepāja attorney Jēkabs Kalniņš (1889–1986). A socialist student in the 1905 revolution who fled to the US and returned to newly independent Latvia in 1919 with a legal education, Kalniņš defended the radical communist Imants Sudmalis in court during the Ulmanis era[42], and worked in Liepāja under the Soviets and Germans while avoiding deep entanglements with either occupation regime[43]. Evacuated to Germany in December 1944, he and his family were refugees near

[38] See e.g. Edgars Anderson, Leonīds Siliņš *et al.*, *Latvijas Centrālā Padome – Latviešu nacionālā pretestības kustība 1943–1945*, Uppsala: LCP, 1994. On the fate of LCP activists trapped in Soviet-occupied Latvia after May 1945, see Dzintars Ērglis, *Latvijas Centrālās padomes vēstures nezināmās lappuses*, Rīga, LVI apgāds, 2003.

[39] Rūdolfs Bangerskis, *Mana mūža atmiņas*, Vol. II, Copenhagen: Imanta, 1959, pp. 147–148.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 85, 94.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[42] Jēkabs Kalniņš, *Atmiņas*, pp. 71–72.

[43] Ēriks Jēkabsons and Valters Ščerbinskis, eds., *Latvijas tiesneši. Senāts, Tiesu palāta un Apgabaltiesas Biogrāfijās, 1918–1940*, Rīga: Tiesu administrācija, 2017, p. 130.

Augsburg until emigrating to the US in 1948. In the DP camps, he was active in the campaign to gain the release of Latvian soldiers in British and US prisoner of war camps.

Through his advocacy for Latvian soldiers who had served in German uniform, Kalniņš also visited and corresponded with Bangerskis. In his letter of 26 June 1947, Bangerskis wrote from Oldenburg about personal matters, Soviets press accusations and possible attempts to abduct him or others, and comrades who had protected him who had begun emigrating to England. Responding to Kalniņš' remarks on how accommodating the Latvian Self-Administration Directors had been to the Germans (as revealed in their meeting protocols), Bangerskis noted it was common knowledge that this was due to fear of the approaching danger from the east. He added that he was glad to hear that General Dankers (who had also consulted Kalniņš) had been released, and asked to pass along his regards.

> Well, I have written you a very long letter and also put in a lot of unnecessary things which are not relevant to our case, but I wanted to make my present situation as well as my concerns for the future and the mood I have been in for the last few weeks somewhat understandable to you. But now, please accept a warm greeting from a compatriot and best wishes.
>
> Yours, R. Bangerskis
>
> P.S. My landlady also thanks you for your greetings and asks me to pass on her greetings to you.[44]

By this time it was clear that Soviet rule in Latvia was likely permanent, so questions of Latvian statehood were already less pressing, and the LCP itself was cooperating with other exile organisations to advocate to the Western powers[45]. From the tone of the letter it appears that animosity based on political ideology, or actions taken under duress when Latvians' fate was in the hands of characters such as Andrei Vyshinsky or Friedrich Jeckeln, was ebbing and being replaced by greater empathy.

Also in 1947, Kalniņš referred to the LCP in a refugee newspaper, *Tiesībnieks* [Jurist]:

> The Russians insist that the Latvian people in 1940 expressed their will through the newly [and fraudulently – Peter Kalninš] elected Saeima. Only a representative body of the nation can dispute this and claim otherwise. Such a body could be a parliamentary conference, which would include all members of the last Saeima elected (in 1931) who are in exile and who agree. The conference could be supplemented by delegates chosen by the political parties, 30–40 in number. Its executive body could be the Latvian Central Council, created in German-occupied Latvia in 1943. The Conference would then be the Latvian Saeima in exile, with the task of waging a political struggle. Representation of the people is a political work and is carried out by political parties, which would form the parliamentary conference.[46]
>
> Objectively evaluating the events, only one opinion can be accepted: the coup d'état of 15 May

[44] Rudolfs Bangerskis (26 June 1947), [letter to Jēkabs Kalniņš].

[45] Kristīne Beķere, *Latvijas labā. Politiskā darbība trimdā 20. gadsimta 40.-80. gados*, Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2022, pp. 97–98.

[46] Jēkabs Kalniņš, "Vai Latvijas valsts tiesiski vēl pastāv un satversme ir vēl spēkā?", *Tiesībnieks*, 1947 (1–4), reprinted in *Treji Vārti*, 1975 (45/46), p. 14.

> 1934 put an end to the existence of the Democratic Republic of Latvia, together with the whole constitution. In its place, a corporate state with a system of chambers was introduced, leaving a one-man dictatorship ... It was not Vyshinsky who abolished the Democratic Republic of Latvia with its constitution. We did it ourselves, with the dictatorship introduced on 15 May 1934.[47]

From this perspective, the LCP representatives in exile could theoretically represent Latvia; but in reality the issue was moot, and any hopes were in vain.

In spite of his lingering anger over the Ulmanis regime's dissolution of Latvian democracy (and thereby Latvia's political legitimacy), Kalniņš' shock over the Soviet occupation and his shared fate with legionnaires and their families led him to devote his energy to advocating for them – even including former Liepāja SD political police inspector Kārlis Siljakovs and Self-Administration director Oskars Dankers[48]. In 1950, he persuaded a group of 1905-era Latvian socialist immigrants in America to write appeals to the Displaced Persons Commission to help his son, conscripted into the Latvian Legion in 1944, emigrate to the US, providing a sample text: "I believe the Latvians had a good cause against the Soviets"[49].

The exiled historian Uldis Ģērmanis carried the discussion regarding the LCP in a different direction. In his 1958 book *Latviešu tautas piedzīvojumi* (a later edition translated as *The Latvian Saga* in 2023), he dissolved the once-bitter antagonisms over the LCP by blending the Council with the Latvian mainstream, merging opposition to the Soviets in 1940–41 with resistance to the Nazi German authorities:

> But the Germans alone cannot govern Latvia. Thus, the Latvian self-government is allowed to operate alongside the German authorities. Its divisions are called General Directorates, and Gen. O. Dankers is in charge of internal affairs. The Latvian Self-Government must, of course, carry out all German orders, even illegal ones. It cannot prevent arrests, the setting up of concentration camps, the shooting of people and their deportation to work in Germany.
>
> As best they can (some more, others less), the Directors try to defend the interests of the Latvians and provide the people with a bearable life under German occupation. ... But the efforts to achieve even a partial restoration of Latvian independence are completely futile.
>
> Then several Latvian statesmen, leaders and workers of the former political parties, secretly set up the Latvian Central Council (1943) to organise resistance to German rule. It enters into contacts with the Estonians and the Lithuanians, and tries to convey abroad news of the true conditions in Latvia. The LCP is headed by Professor Konstantīns Čakste, the son of the first President of Latvia. In 1944, he falls into the hands of the Gestapo and dies in the Stutthof concentration camp in Germany.[50]

This presentation of the LCP and the Self-Administration essentially as good neighbours, with no hint of discord, is significant. Because Ģērmanis's book was the standard

[47] *Ibid*., p. 23–24.

[48] Jēkabs Kalniņš, (15 February 1951) [letter to Kārlis Siljakovs].

[49] Jēkabs Kalniņš, (5 June 1950) [letter to Eugene Kalnins *et al*.].

[50] Uldis Ģērmanis, *Latviešu tautas piedzīvojumi*, Stockholm: Daugava, 1959, pp. 376–377.

history textbook in Latvian exile Saturday schools, it represented the exile consensus less than a generation after the DP camps were emptied.

An even more striking example of writing the deep intra-Latvian divisions out of the shared history of the people can be seen in the memoir of Vilis Hāzners (1905–1989), a Latvian Army captain who became a security police officer under the Germans and a regimental commander in the Latvian Legion, and was a co-founder of the exile veterans' organisation Daugavas Vanagi. In the 1970s he was accused of murdering Jews during the German occupation, and exonerated[51].

Just as Jēkabs Kalniņš' common cause with ideological opponents softened his attitude, Hāzners' stance was influenced by his experiences, which included helping gain Bruno Kalniņš' release from Nazi captivity in 1941 and working with disabled veterans in the 1950s. In his 1977 memoir, Hāzners described the LCP as follows:

> Immediately after the occupation of Latvia on 17 June 1940, underground resistance organisations began to operate in the country. At first, they were military in nature – former soldiers of the national army, guards and police officers – forming partisan units, and then a central political organisation – the Latvian Central Council (LCP) – emerged. The latter was also active during the German occupation (from 1 July 1941 to 8 May 1945). The LCP was active until 26 November 1950. At the end of the Second World War (1944–1945), the members of the LCP moved partly to Sweden, partly to Germany and other countries of Western Europe, which, understandably, made its activities very difficult.[52]

Given that the LCP had been vigorously discussed among Latvian exiles from 1945 on, including the public disputes quoted above, Hāzners' rewriting of its history is remarkable; yet it is so agreeable to envision all sides working against both totalitarian regimes for the common good, that it seems poor sportsmanship to call it into question.

Conclusion

The reputation of the LCP, despite its hopeless wartime situation and the disputes over its role during the Nazi occupation, is an example of the shift from division to unity among Latvian refugees from 1945 until the 1950s. The Council's legacy, reframed in exile narratives, bridged ideological rifts – between collaborators and resistors, Ulmanis supporters and democrats – changing a fractured political heritage into a shared commitment to national survival. This unity was not simply a reaction to the LCP's actions, but a process begun in the Latvian DP camps and sustained through cultural and political advocacy in the West.

This solidarity, though remarkable, was neither inevitable nor complete; lingering accusations of collaboration and exclusions of ethnic Germans reveal its limits. Especially

[51] Andrew Ezergailis, *op. cit.*, p. 235; David Nasaw, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

[52] Vilis Hāzners, *Varmācības torņi*, Vol. I, Lincoln, NE: Vaidava, 1977, p. 500.

critical was the fact of the Soviet and Nazi occupations, which, alongside the crises of refugee life, dismantled the historical barriers to Latvian solidarity. The shared trauma of Stalinisation – the loss of civil society, mass deportations and political terror – united exiles across ideological lines. Refugee life further equalised these groups, as the DP camps' conditions necessitated collective self-representation to Allied authorities, while the threat of Soviet repatriation unified Latvians against a common threat.

The Latvian exiles' shift in hindsight from dividedness to solidarity against both also reminds us of Benedict Anderson's aphorism: "All profound changes in consciousness bring with them characteristic amnesias"[53]. For the Baltic refugees, a wrenching change in consciousness had grown out of their shared traumas. In these radically new circumstances, consigning old antagonisms to oblivion and creating a sense of common cause was vital.

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Pēteris Kalniņš

Nuo susiskaldymo iki solidarumo: Latvijos pabėgėliai, Latvijos centrinė taryba ir tautinė tapatybė tremtyje po 1945 m.

Santrauka

Baltijos šalių tremtinių bendruomenių solidarumas po Antrojo pasaulinio karo nebuvo savaiminė bendros tautinės tapatybės pasekmė, bet atsirado dėl istorinių traumų ir tremties aplinkybių. Sovietų režimo sunaikinta pilietinė visuomenė ir įtampa dėl tremties skatino latvių, lietuvių ir estų vienybę, nepaisant vidinių susiskaldymų. Ypač gilų susiskaldymą teko įveikti latviams. Latvių tautinė savimonė, išaugusi iš susiskaldžiusios regioninės ir kultūrinės praeities, susiformavo vėliau nei lietuvių. Politinius nesutarimus nepriklausomybės laikotarpiu po 1918 m. stiprino dėl kolaboravimo ir pasipriešinimo karo metu iškilę klausimai.

1944 m. sovietų reokupacija paskatino masinius bėgimus, o pabėgėliai iš Latvijos ir Estijos buvo perkeliami jūra per vokiečių surengtą evakuaciją. Pokario perkeltųjų asmenų (DP) stovyklose Baltijos šalių pabėgėliai prašė Vakarus apsaugoti nuo sovietų repatriacijos, taip sustiprindami etninį solidarumą. Latvijos tremtiniai steigė savivaldos institucijas, mokyklas ir kultūrines organizacijas, skatindami stipresnį nei iki tol solidarumo jausmą tremtyje.

Nepaisant stiprėjančios vienybės, karo metu politiniai nesutarimai išliko. Kaip pavyzdys pateikiama 1943 m. įkurta Latvijos centrinė taryba (LCP), siekusi atkurti nepriklausomybę, kurią naciai slopino, o su vokiečių okupantais bendradarbiavę Latvijos pareigūnai tvirtino, esą jie veikia „tautos labui“. Šie ginčai persikėlė į tremtį, sukeldami aršias diskusijas dėl lojalumo ir teisėtumo. Tačiau ilgainiui nuolatinės sovietų okupacijos realybė paskatino buvusius ideologinius priešininkus pirmenybę teikti vieningam frontui, o ne praeities konfliktams. Šis selektyvios istorinės atminties procesas buvo labai svarbus formuojant darnią latvių tremtinių tapatybę.

Raktiniai žodžiai: latvis, Baltija, tremtis, okupacija, pasipriešinimas.