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The Communist Party of Latvia, Section of the Communist International

1. A suggested periodisation of the history of the Communist Party of Latvia

The Latvian Communist party always considered the date of its foundation to be June 1904, when the first congress of the Lettish Social-Democratic Labour Party (*Latviešu Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija*; LSDSP) was held, illegally, in Riga. But at that time this party included not only supporters of Lenin (Bolsheviks) but also opponents (Mensheviks). These two wings sprang from a common root and down to 1914 had about equal influence in the party's ranks. Consequently (1) the period 1904-1914 is the period of coexistence of Lettish Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the same party. During the First World War the Menshevik "defencists", who supported the war, were expelled from the party, but the Menshevik "internationalists", who opposed it, remained in it. Consequently (2) the period 1914-1918 was the period of joint activity by Bolsheviks and very prominent Mensheviks (Pauls Kalniņš, Fricis Mendērs and others). In 1906 the Latvian party became a constituent part of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. From that year it was called the Social-Democracy of the Lettish Territory. In 1917 it took the name Social-Democracy of Latvia (*Latvijas sociāldemokrātija*; LSD). In 1918 the Mensheviks (including the internationalists) formed a separate Social-Democratic Labour Party of Latvia (*Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija*; LSDSP), as they did not wish to support the revolution of October 1917 and the government it had created. Consequently (3) the period 1918-1940 was the period when the Communist Party of Latvia (*Latvijas Komunistiskā partija*; LKP) existed separately from the Mensheviks. Officially, however, the Social-Democracy of Latvia was renamed the Communist Party of Latvia in March 1919, at its sixth congress.

Between 1919 and 1943 there were the following stages in the development of the LKP: (1) in 1919-1928 the LKP based itself on a wide network of legal trade-union and cultural-educational organisations; (2) in 1928-1933 the principal legal basis of the LKP was formed by the deputies of the "workers' and peasants'" fraction in the *Seim* (Parliament); (3) in 1934-1940, under the autocratic regime, the LKP was almost completely deprived of legal possibilities for work among the masses; (4) in 1940-1943 the LKP was no longer an independent section of the Comintern, having become part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

This approach differs substantially from the periodisation which was traditional for many years, when the periods of the Party's history were adapted to the periods of the country's history as recognised at that time - for example, the period of the 1904-1907 revolution, the period of the World War of 1914-1918 or the period of the economic crisis of 1930-1933 in Latvia.

2. Accessible sources

The most extensive archive for this subject is the Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia (*LKP CK partijas arhīvs*), in Riga, which contains several thousands of files. The activity of the LKP in the period 1919-1940 is reflected in the materials in fund 240. They consist of the correspondence of the LKP with the Communist International (CI), especially the Party's reports to the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) and materials from the local Party organisations. All these documents often reflect the subjective and dogmatic nature of the views of their authors, and they are not free from falsification of facts. The 1940 period is reflected in the materials in fund 101. For example, the first schedule of this fund includes file no. 4, containing more than 50 sheets. Of particular interest is fund 54 of the archive in question, which contains a number of personal files on Comintern emissaries in Latvia, including their answers to questionnaires, autobiographies, and personal descriptions.

The richest archive in Riga is the Central State Historical Archive (*Latvijas Centrālais valsts vēstures arhīvs*; LCVVA). This contains materials from the political police - the political administration of Latvia's Ministry of Internal Affairs (fund 3235). In the files of this fund are the reports by the head of the political police to the Minister of Internal Affairs. On the whole these are objective, though sometimes they underplay or else exaggerate the scale of the Communist movement in Latvia. It may be that this was done with a view to obtaining larger allocations from the budget for the political police. This historical archive also contains documents of the LSDSP (fund 3017) which show the profound contradictions between the Social-Democrats and the Communists.

References to all these archive materials are found in a number of scholarly works which are described below. These books give the numbers of the funds, schedules, files and sheets for the documents used.

The most important publication of documents dealing with the subject of this report is the book containing the resolutions and decisions of the congresses, conferences and Central Committee plenums of the LKP from the period 1904-1940.¹ In this collection of documents each set (e.g., the resolutions of the eighth congress) is preceded by a commentary. These commentaries provide apologies for the documents and no critical, non-standard opinions are expressed by the authors.

Another collection of published sources is a three-volume publication of the illegal leaflets issued by the LKP, the Young Communist League of Latvia (*Latvijas Komunistiskās jūnātkas savienība*; LKJS) and the Red Aid of Latvia from the period 1920-1940.² Each volume contains detailed commentaries, but there are many crude mistakes in the text, some of them factual. As regards the content of the leaflets, this reflects the sectarianism, ultra-left tendencies and primitivism of their authors.

The first collection of memoirs of participants in the Communist movement published after the Second World War appeared in 1960.³ These are memoirs of Communists of the Latgale region, the eastern part of Latvia. The conditions in which Communist underground activity was carried on are described most concretely by Josifs Ļenskis and Dominiks Kaupužs. But these memoirs are one-sided and tendentious. Similar memoirs by Communists of Kurzeme (the western part of Latvia), of Pardauglava (the Riga district) and other areas came out in subsequent years. Among biographies of Communist activists the most complete is the collection of articles entitled *People of Tempered Steel*.⁴ The authors of the biographies are scholars and journalists who idealise the heroes of their studies, failing to show their weak points.

All these sources are extensively used in published scholarly works, which also contain many references to concrete archive materials. The most concrete of these studies is the collective work entitled *Očerki* (Outlines).⁵ A highly detailed piece of research is the monograph by B. A. Toman.⁶ It gives a detailed analytical review of numerous works on its subject. The author's views differ from those of other writers and are far from always beyond debate. The first monograph on the policy of the Communist Party of Latvia in the period of the Comintern's activity was J. Šteimanis's book published in 1965.⁷ This work made extensive use of archive documents, memoirs and the periodical press of 1920-1940. Like the *Očerki* mentioned above, the book was critical of Stalinism. Nevertheless, its critical approach to the activity of the LKP was inadequate. Like other publications of the 1960s and 1970s, Šteimanis's book was not completely objective: both censorship and self-censorship in those years permitted one to write only half-truths. Other scholarly works will be considered in subsequent sections of this article.

¹ *Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas kongresu, konferenču un CK plēnumu rezolūcijas un lēmumi*, Vol. 1: 1904.-1940. (Riga, 1958). - It should be noted that all the books in Lettish which are mentioned in this report contain an official Russian translation of the book's Lettish title.

² *LKP, LKJS un Sarkanās palīdzības revolucionārās lapiņas. 1920.-1940.*, 3 vols. (Riga, 1959, 1960 and 1963).

³ *Kommunisty Latgalii v gody podpol'ja - 1920-1940. Vspomminaniya* (Riga, 1960; in Lettish: Riga, 1962).

⁴ *Tēraudkaluma cilvēki. Biogrāfiski apraksti* (Riga, 1975).

⁵ *Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas vēstures aprerējumi*, Vol. 1: 1893.-1919. (Riga, 1961), Vol. 2: 1920.-1940. (Riga, 1965); in Russian: *Očerki istorii Kommunističeskoj partii Latvii*, Vol. 1 (Riga, 1962), Vol. 2 (Riga, 1966).

⁶ B. A. Toman, *Istoriografija istorii Kommunističeskoj partii Latvii (konec XIX v. - načalo 60-ch godov XX v.)* (Riga, 1983).

⁷ J. Šteimanis, *Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas taktika cīņā pan padomiju varas atjaunošanu. 1920.-1940.* (Riga, 1965).

3. The Formation of the Communist Party

The Communist Party of Latvia was not created on the eve of the formation of the Third International. It actually existed as a party of Communists already during the First World War, when the Menshevik "defencists" were expelled from the LSD. As a result, the Bolsheviks enjoyed immense preponderance in the party. This was shown at its fifth congress, held legally in Riga in July 1917. Out of 120 delegates only ten were Menshevik "internationalists" - opponents of the October Revolution (they included Kalniņš, Menders, Elias and Andrejs Petrevics). Thus, 110 delegates (96%) at this congress were Bolsheviks - as were, too, the 32 representatives of the Lettish groups in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) who also took part in the work of the fifth congress in Riga. Represented at this congress were 14,099 members of the party, of whom fewer than 400 were Mensheviks. This provides grounds for claiming that already before the October Revolution the LSD was a Bolshevik organisation.⁸

Thus, one must regard the adoption in March 1919 of the title "Communist Party of Latvia" as merely a change of name by the party's sixth congress, and not the creation of a new party. At this sixth congress 139 delegates represented 7,564 members of the party's youth organisation.

At the sixth congress also the question of the Third International was discussed, as on 2 March 1919 there opened in Moscow the Constituent Congress of the CI. Among the 52 delegates from 30 countries who attended the Moscow gathering was a Lett, Kārlis Gailis, who signed the manifesto of the Constituent Congress. Thus, the LKP was one of the parties which set up the Third International.

The report on the Third International was given at the party's sixth congress by Fricis Roziņš, one of the most important theoreticians of the LKP. The congress sent to the First Congress of the Third International a telegram in which it greeted the founders of the new international organisation.⁹

There was no opposition to the creation of the Third International in the LKP. The principal opponent of the Third International was the LSDSP, which joined the Two-and-a-half International and then, when that body merged with the Second International, joined the latter.

The attitude to the Third International in the LKP was absolutely positive. The chief ideological and political leader of the LKP was Pēteris Stučka, a close comrade-in-arms of Lenin. (Stučka was, from December 1917 to March 1918, the People's Commissar for Justice, that is, a member of the government of Soviet Russia, which was headed by Lenin). On the problems of the Third International Stučka and Lenin shared the same views.

However, the creation of the Third International brought about a split in the labour movement which eventually weakened it so much that it was unable later to withstand Fascism.

4. Political and Economic Conditions of the Development of the Communist Movement

The period of the Latvian Republic (1920-1940) is most objectively described in books by Lettish émigrés, especially the Social-Democrats among them. This applies, for example, to the books by Voldemārs Bastjānis.¹⁰

Down to 1934 Latvia was a parliamentary republic with a democratic system. But the Communist Party was illegal from 1920 to 1940, because it set as its aim the violent overthrow of the existing order. In 1921 and 1922 ten LKP activists were executed: Jānis Šilfs-Jaunzems, Augusts Arājs-Bērce, Mārtiņš Čuče-Upmāls and others). A firearm had been found on them which they had used at some time. There were no subsequent executions, but mass arrests were carried out. About one-third of the Communists were usually in prison any one time.

Between the mid-1920s and the end of the 1930s the economic and social situation in Latvia was relatively good. The majority of the country's population of almost 2 millions lived quite comfortably. Until the

⁸ The state of the Lettish party organisation in the summer of 1917 is analysed in an article by L. Dribins, "Latvija 1917. gadā", in *Pretstatu cīņā* (Riga, 1990), pp. 6-41.

⁹ For the proceedings of the sixth congress, see *Očerki*, 1, pp. 477-482.

¹⁰ Voldemārs Bastjānis, *Demokrātiskā Latvija. Vēnojumi un uērtējumi* (Stockholm, 1966), and *Gala sākums. Vēnojumi un uērtējumi* (Lindigö and Pilvāgen, 1964). The first book covers the period from 1920 to 1934 and the second the period 1934-1940.

beginning of the 1930s there were only a few thousand unemployed (in 1932 there were about 40,000). In the course of the agrarian reform (1920-1937) about 140,000 peasants obtained land (from the confiscated estates of the German barons). Two-thirds of the population were engaged in agriculture and most of them supported the prevailing system. The Communists' influence in the countryside was very slight, and was insignificant in the towns as well. The broad masses set a high value on the creation of an independent Latvian state. The most influential parties were the Lettish Peasants' Union (*Latviešu zemnieku savienība*; LZS), led by Kārlis Ulmanis, and the LSDSP, led by Ansis Rudevics and others.

On 15 May 1934 Ulmanis carried out a coup d'état and an authoritarian political system was established in Latvia. All political parties were banned. The *Seim* was dissolved and many of the deputies arrested, especially the Social-Democrats. Both they and the Communists described the political system which prevailed between 1934 and 1940 as fascist. Unlike in Germany and Italy, however, there was no mass-scale political and judicial terror. Consequently, there is reason to describe the political system as "authoritarian" rather than fascist. There were, though, none of the political freedoms which had existed before 1934, such as freedom of speech, the press, association and assembly. The absence of democratic freedoms after 1934 increased somewhat the influence of the Communists among the working people of the towns. But the Communists lost the possibility of forming legal trade unions and publishing a legal workers' press. As a result the scope of the Communists' agitational work was restricted and their mass influence declined. This was due, to a considerable degree, to the fact that the economic situation was good in the period 1934-1940. Before 1934 Latvia had imported grain, but after that date the country exported it. Gross industrial production also approximately doubled in those years.

From all this it followed that the socio-economic and political situation in Latvia in 1920-1940 was unfavourable for Communist activity and that the overwhelming majority of the population did not support the Party.

5. Programmatic Documents

In the 1920s the LKP adopted resolutions and theses of a programmatic character almost annually, at its illegal Party conferences. Between 1920 and 1928 there took place the 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th Party conferences: the 26th conference was not held till 1939. Resolutions and theses were often adopted on the trade-union movement, the agrarian question, the youth movement and the national question. These documents were not distinguished by originality and took little account of the specific conditions of Latvia. The writers of the documents were mainly concerned to conform to the directives issued by the leading organs of the CI. Consequently, decisions of a programmatic nature were "standard" in character. The Comintern unified its sections and their policies were its policy.

During the period between 1920 and 1940 only two congresses of the LKP were held, both of them in Moscow, under the Comintern's aegis. The seventh congress took place in 1923 and the eighth in 1931.

The seventh congress resolved to set up a commission to work out a programme for the party. It was provided that the first section of such a programme should set out the common programme of the Comintern - or rather, since no such programme was available at that time, the programme of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The second section of the programme should describe the specific conditions of Latvia, and the third should set out the path to be taken by any socialist revolution: through the dictatorship of the proletariat to Communism. The fourth section should deal with the fight for the everyday interests of the workers and peasants, whose demands were to be constantly deepened and revolutionised. No Party programme was, in fact, adopted either in the 1920s or the 1930s. Typical, too, was the statement made in the seventh congress's resolution on the activity of the CI that the LKP expressed its full agreement with the resolutions of the Second Congress of the Comintern and submitted to them. The manifesto issued by the seventh LKP congress spoke of the need for unity in the trade-union movement, co-operation between the workers and the small peasants, and a united front of the working people against the bourgeoisie. The Party's aim was to fight for a Soviet Latvia within the Soviet Union and for world-wide revolution.¹¹

The Party's eighth congress also confined itself to standard resolutions and theses, on subjects which included the war danger, organisational problems, economic struggle and work among women. In the manifesto of the Party's Central Committee (CC) which was drawn up after the eighth congress, in the spirit of the Comintern's directives, it was said that the leaders of Social-Democracy were helping the bourgeoisie to establish

¹¹ For the documents of the seventh congress, see LKP CK partijas arhīvs, 35/43/6.

a fascist dictatorship and unleash a war of intervention. It was emphasised that after the formation of a workers' and peasants' government this government would give land to the small peasants for rent-free use, would raise workers' wages, would reduce their working day to seven hours and would establish a comprehensive social security for the working people of town and country. Emphasised also was an undertaking that the peasantry would be brought together in collective farms only on a voluntary basis. It must be said that this promise was not honoured when Soviet power was set up in Latvia, any more than the promise to improve the economic situation of the working people. It must also be mentioned that the manifesto of the eighth congress issued the sectarian slogan "class against class" which was then being popularised by the CI. This manifesto further stressed the need to prepare for struggle against a fascist coup and to defend the Soviet Union against military intervention. The LKP aimed to draw the working people into armed struggle for a Soviet Latvia. Thus, the Party groundlessly regarded violence as the decisive method of struggle. The manifesto was published in the Party's newspaper *Cīņā* (Struggle) in May 1931.

6. *Composition of the Membership of the LKP and Election of its Leadership*

In the mid-1920s the illegal LKP had about 500 members, in 1928 700, in 1931 about 1,000, and at the beginning of 1934 1,160. These figures appear in the Party's reports to the Comintern.¹² However, Fricis Deglavs, who was First Secretary of the CC in 1931-1939, told the writer of these lines at the end of the 1950s that they did not correspond to reality. Actually, according to Deglavs, the illegal Party never had more than 500 members in those years, and the Comintern was fed exaggerated figures.

The proceedings of the eighth LKP congress, published in Moscow in 1931¹³ give these figures for the social composition of the party: over 220 urban workers, about 90 agricultural workers, more than 110 peasants, about 100 craftsmen and about 70 intellectuals, office-workers, and others. The majority of the members were Letts - in 1930 about 82% of those living in Riga. But in Latgale (the eastern part of Latvia), Russians, Jews and Poles predominated. The small size of the LKP was due not only to the conditions of illegality in which it worked and the Party's weak influence among the masses but also to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Lettish Communists were in Soviet Russia.

According to figures in the Party Archive, in the second half of 1935 more than 800 Communists were in prison and only about 600 at liberty.¹⁴ In 1936, on the instructions of the Comintern a baseless purge was carried out in the ranks of the Latvian Party. As a result of this, only 200 members were left in the illegal LKP. In June 1940, when the Party was legalised, its ranks numbered about 1,000 persons.¹⁵

The Party's highest organ was its congress, and between congresses, the conference. Congress elected the Party's CC. Thus, for example, the seventh congress, in 1923, elected 10 members of the CC and 7 candidates for membership. Only some of the members of the CC worked in Latvia, in underground conditions. Most of them lived in Moscow. The composition of the CC was also supplemented at conferences. Sometimes the CC's numbers were made up not through elections but by way of co-opting new members to take the place of those arrested. In 1920 the First Secretary of the CC was Jānis Šilfs-Jaunzems: he was shot in Riga in 1921. Until 1923 the CC was then led by Eduards Zandreiters, who had been a Party member since 1902. From 1923 to 1927 the First Secretary was Jānis Bērziņš-Andersons. All these men were professional revolutionaries of working-class origin.

Delegates to the illegal conferences were elected by the Party's regional, town and district committees. These regions and districts did not correspond to the official administrative divisions of Latvia. Owing to the systematic arresting of members, those elected to local leading organs were changed very frequently - usually as a result of co-option of new members to the committee. The local organisations below regional level were seldom headed by professional Party functionaries. The town and district committees were mostly made up of active workers, peasants and office-workers.

¹² See LKP CK partijas arhīvs, 240/2/833.

¹³ *Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas VIII kongress. Protokoli un rezolūcijas* (Moscow, 1931).

¹⁴ See LKP CK partijas arhīvs, 240/1/122.

¹⁵ See *Kommunistiĉeskaja partija Latvii v cifrach (1904-1971 gg.)* (Riga, 1972), p. 26.

7. National problems

Of the 1,900,000 inhabitants of Latvia 75% were Letts, about 10% Russians, nearly 5% Jews and over 3% Germans. Down to 1934 the national minorities enjoyed extensive national-cultural autonomy. The LKP underestimated the Letts' desire for an independent state, and also the specific features of the national minorities. Consequently the Party's documents put forward the aim of making Latvia part of the Soviet Union, and the national sections of the Party (Russian and Jewish) were dissolved in 1930 and condemned as manifestations of the extra-territorial principle of the Bund. The Party similarly failed to appreciate the importance of carrying on Party work in people's mother-tongues.¹⁶

The seventh LKP congress in 1923 condemned the slogan "Beat the Jews and Russians", alleging that this was the slogan of Latvia's bourgeoisie. In reality antisemitic agitation was carried on only by relatively narrow circles (the National Club and the *Latvis* newspaper). Most of the bourgeois politicians pursued a liberal policy toward the national minorities.

The 23rd conference of the LKP, held in 1926, took a decision regarding Latgale, which it saw as constituting a national problem. There were more non-Letts in Latgale than in the other regions of Latvia, and it was an economically more backward region, towards which an unjust economic policy was pursued. But the Party's slogan about ensuring Latgale's right to self-determination (going as far as separation from Latvia) was mistaken. The majority of the population of Latgale were Letts who, though they spoke a local dialect, were an integral part of the Lettish people.

Typical of the Latvian Communists was exaggerated internationalism and often a nihilistic attitude to the national question.

8. Attitude to the Trade Unions

In 1921 the Communists decided to leave the first congress of Trade Unions of Latvia, at which the Social-Democrats succeeded in winning the majority of the delegates (88 out of 174). This led to a split in the trade-union movement and a weakening of that movement. The Communists claimed that the Social-Democrats were to blame for the split, but they clearly manifested a sectarian striving to form revolutionary trade unions, separate from the reformist ones, so as to be able to legalise Communist activity to some extent and use the revolutionary trade unions for Communist agitation. In 1930 the chief of the political police sent a report to the Minister of Internal Affairs which stated that the existing laws allowed Communist agitation to be carried on legally.¹⁷ The revolutionary trade unions, which were headed by Communists, held question-and-answer evenings and also lectures on political subjects. But the majority of the workers stayed in the reformist trade unions, which were headed by Social-Democrats. Their leading organ was the Central Trade-Union Bureau of Latvia. The Communists led the Riga Bureau of the Trade Unions of Latvia, to which a few unions in Liepāja and Ventspils belonged. In the 1920s Communist influence was greatest in three Riga unions whose members consisted of 2,000 port workers, 700 workers in the wood-working industry and 500 workers in metal-working enterprises.¹⁸

Membership of the revolutionary trade unions declined from 17,000 in 1922 to 10,000 in 1928 and 5,000 in 1932. In these same years the membership of the reformist unions increased from 22,000 to 22,500 to 30,000. The revolutionary opposition in the reformist unions had about 4,000 members. The Communists tried to utilise economic strikes to draw the workers into political conflict and did not do enough to defend the economic interests of the working people, while accusing the Social-Democrats of making compromises with the factory owners.

9. Communist Non-Party Organisations

Attached to the Communist Party of Latvia were the Young Communist League and the Red Aid, which were

¹⁶ See *Organizatsionnaja struktura Kommunističeskoj partii Latvii (1904-1941)* (Riga, 1978), p. 174.

¹⁷ See LCVVA, 3235/1-22/940, sheets 100, 101.

¹⁸ See LKP CK partijas arhīvs, 240/2/184, sheet 12.

also illegal organisations. Information about their make-up is contained in the CC's Party Archive.¹⁹

In 1920 the LKJS had 150 members, and 615 in 1934. The membership was always smaller than that of the Party, as the young generation were less interested than the adults in politics and those youngsters who joined the Party did so early in life.

The Red Aid was the Latvian section of the International Red Aid (IRA) organisation and collected money to support arrested Communists and their families. In 1928 the Red Aid had 200 members in Latvia and at the beginning of 1934 more than 300.

The LKP's legal cover in 1928 was a party called the Independent Socialists (*Neatkarīgo sociālistu partija*; NSP), which functioned for a year before being banned. Most of the 750 members of this party were Communists and their supporters, though an influential leader of the party, Eduards Dzelzītis, did not support the Communists. This party played an important role in organising a political strike and street demonstrations on 22 August 1928, to protest against the intention of the Riga regional court to take a decision on that day to ban the activity of the revolutionary trade unions. About 24,000 workers took part in the strike and demonstrations on 22 August, 15,000 of them in Riga, where about 500 persons were arrested. The issue of banning the revolutionary unions was postponed, but the NSP was banned. In November 1928 the Party's paper *Cīņā* alleged, without foundation, that the Independent Socialists had held back the revolutionary activation of the masses.

10. Attitude to the Social-Democrats and Other Parties

The LSDSP declared in its programme of 1929 that it was fighting for power not in order to liquidate democracy but in order to preserve it. This evoked categorical disapproval from the LKP, which at that time identified democracy with the bourgeois order. On the Right in the *Seim*, the most influential party was the Lettish Peasants' Union, led by Ulmanis. But the LKP directed its main fire not at this party but at the Social-Democrats, which had the effect of weakening the labour movement and playing into the hands of the bourgeois parties. The LKP popularised the tactic of the united front.²⁰ It has to be said, however, that the Communists endeavours were directed not so much at achieving unity of the working class as at "exposing" the Social-Democrats, declaring that they alone were responsible for the split in its ranks. When between December 1926 and January 1928 five ministers out of nine were Social-Democrats, this government fought vigorously against the fascist forces and against corruption, yet the LKP did not support it. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s the Communists asserted that the Social-Democrats were Social-Fascists, and rejected any co-operation with them. The Social-Democrats considered, with good grounds, that the masses were not ready for the transition to socialism, that the development of society must follow an evolutionary path, and that the correct tactics should be in the spirit of Austro-Marxism. The Communists branded all this as betrayal and saw armed struggle as the decisive path to their goals. Only after Ulmanis's coup d'état in May 1934, when the LSDSP was banned along with all the rest, did co-operation begin between the Communists and those Social-Democrats who were united in the illegal Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party of Latvia (*Latvijas sociālistiskā strādnieku un zemnieku partija*; LSSZP). With this party the LKP made an agreement in November 1934 for a united front, which remained operative till July 1940. But whereas before 1934 there had been between 6,000 and 30,000 Social-Democrats, the illegal party they formed in 1934 had only 200 members. Nevertheless, this party was headed by some influential leaders: Ansis Buševics, Ansis Rudevics and others.

As regards the bourgeois parties in the *Seim*, the LKP saw no substantial difference between those on the Right and those in the Centre, which ruled out any differentiated approach to them. The Communists sometimes criticised the centre parties more severely than those on the Right. They also tended, without justification, to treat some parties as pro-Fascist - for example, the small peasants' party led by Adolfs Bļodnieks. However, the LKP's most important mistake was its hostility to the Social-Democrats.

¹⁹ For their make-up, see LKP CK partijas arhīvs, 240/1/180, sheet 335; 240/1/184, sheet 21; and also 240/2/504, sheet 30; and 240/2/833, sheet 6.

²⁰ Cf. *Tretij Kongress Kominternā* (Moscow, 1975), pp. 541-549.

11. The LKP and the Central Organs of the Comintern

Regular contact between the LKP and the Comintern was maintained by the CC's Foreign Bureau, situated in Moscow.²¹ Until 1932 the Bureau was headed by Pēteris Stučka.²² From 1923 Stučka was President of the Supreme Court of Soviet Russia and from 1924 he was simultaneously, Chairman of the Comintern's International Central Commission. Another prominent Lettish Communist was Vilis Knoriņš, who in 1928-1938 was a candidate for membership of the ECCI and its Presidium, a member of its Political Secretariat, and the head of its Central European Department.²³ In the 1920s and 1930s Knoriņš was also in charge of the agitation and propaganda department of the CC of the CPSU and director of the Institute of Party History of the Red Professorate in Moscow. He was also a member of the CCs of the Communist Parties of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Also working in the Foreign Bureau of the LKP were Jānis Rudzutaks and Roberts Eihe, both of whom were at the beginning of the 1930s candidates for membership of the Political Bureau of the CC of the CPSU. The Communist Party of Latvia was thus closely linked with the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party. Within the Comintern the LKP's closest contacts were with the regional Secretariat for Poland and the Baltic States, which was headed by the Lithuanian Communist Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas. The Party's most intimate relationships were with the Communist Parties of Estonia and Lithuania. LKP delegates took part in the work of all the Comintern's congresses, but they did not become involved in any factions. Nevertheless, in 1931 the ECCI criticised the LKP's agrarian policy and, frequently, its practical activity.

The emissaries of the Comintern in Latvia were professional Party workers. They led the work of the Party's underground CC (e.g., Fricis Pauzers at the end of the 1920s) and also the Party's regional organisations (e.g., Ernests Ameriks, in the same period). These professional revolutionaries were usually graduates of the University of the Western Nations in Moscow. Their work was financed by the Comintern.

The LKP considered itself obliged to carry out the Comintern's decisions on "bolshevising" the Party's ranks. In practice, this meant uncritical fulfilment of the Comintern's directives and blind imitation of the standards of the Russian Communist Party, taking no account of the specific features of Latvia. Implementing the slogan of "bolshevisation" of the Party also led to bitter struggle against any dissidence among the Latvian Communists and suppression of any creative approach to Party policy.

12. The internal Structure of the Party Apparatus

The LKP's Foreign Bureau was formally subordinate to the Party's CC but in practice often gave instructions to the latter. The CC ran (1) the illegal "Spartak" printing press, (2) the group of propagandists and (3) the centre for illegal work. Most of the members of this apparatus were not professional revolutionaries but Party activists, who combined Party work for which they were not paid with work "in production". Subject also to the CC were the Party's regional committees, which ran their own underground printing presses and propaganda groups, together with "national" sections and an inter-fractional bureau to co-ordinate the work of the Communist fractions in the trade unions and other legal organisations. As a rule there were only one or two professional Party workers in the regional or town parts of the apparatus. The rest were unpaid. The members of the propaganda group conducted circles for theoretical study and wrote articles for illegal newspapers and journals. Organisers maintained communication between the various parts of the apparatus, and directed electoral campaigns in the run-up to elections to the *Seim* and the municipalities. The Party's basic organisations were its cells, either in factories or on a territorial basis. Around these there were groups of candidates for Party membership and of sympathisers. The Party congresses elected the Central Committee and the auditing commission. The Party conferences of the local organisations elected their own leading organs.

²¹ The work of this Bureau is examined in detail in the book by Elmar Pelkaus, *Partijas vārdā. LKP CK Ārzemju biroja darbība 1920.-1936.* (Riga, 1981).

²² For Stučka's biographical details, see *Latvijas PSR mazā enciklopēdija*, Vol. 3 (Riga, 1970), pp. 438-439.

²³ See *ibid.*, Vol. 2 (Riga, 1968), p. 84.

13. The Press of the LKP

The central organ of the LKP was the newspaper *Cīņa*, which began appearing in 1904 and was one of the oldest Marxist newspapers in the world.²⁴ From 1920 to 1920 *Cīņa* was produced in an underground printing press in Riga, in a house, in which a secret room had been fitted up. To avoid the suspicious inquiries of the political police the press was subsequently transferred to various "illegal" flats in Riga. Many who worked on the paper were arrested. As a result, between November 1931 and July 1933 there was even a break in publication. As a rule it was published once a month, the average print being 5,000. *Cīņa* was normally edited by the First Secretary of the CC. The lack of a large group of competent journalists told negatively on the content and form of the articles in the paper. *Cīņa* was printed, but the regional Communist newspapers and journals were often duplicated. The Party cells in some enterprises issued their own illegal newspapers and journals, as also did the LKJS.

The theoretical journal of the LKP, *Cīņas Biedrs* (Comrades in the Struggle) was published in Russia from March 1920 until December 1935. In this period 130 issues appeared. These were sent illegally into Latvia, where they were regularly used by the Party's propagandists. Discussion articles were to be found in this journal, but it consisted mainly of contributions in which, in a disciplined way, the Comintern's directives were set out, especially those concerning problems of tactics. These articles expressed the Comintern's ultra-left line and its idealisation of the Soviet Union, with nothing said about the negative aspects of Soviet reality. This was typical also of the Communist publications produced inside Latvia. Persons caught distributing illegal publications were arrested.

The Communists of Latvia also published legal periodicals and newspapers. The publishing bodies for these were the revolutionary trade unions, the cultural-educational societies and other legal organisations. From 1924 the revolutionary trade unions published a monthly called *Vienība* (Unity), which was banned because of its Communist contents. However, this journal reappeared after every ban under a new name - *Strādnieku Vienība* (Workers' Unity), *Jaundā Vienība* (New Unity), *Arodnieciskā Vienība* (Trade-Union Unity) and others - and with different editors-in-chief.

In 1928 more than 230 legal periodicals, newspapers and appeals were published by the Communists, in 2 ½ million copies. Many issues of legal papers were confiscated by the police on the orders of the Press Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (there was no preliminary censorship). In 1925 25% of these publications were confiscated, in 1926 77% and in 1927 75%. Most of the authors of the articles in legal newspapers and journals were members of underground Communist organisations in Latvia, but among them were also prominent Lettish Communists living in Moscow, workers in the Party's Foreign Bureau. Articles were published under various pseudonyms.

14. Important subjects discussed in the LKP

In the April 1926 issue of the journal of the Foreign Bureau, *Cīņas Biedrs*, Jūlijs Kiršs opened a discussion with an article saying that, given the growing threat of fascism in Latvia, the Communists ought to defend bourgeois democracy. On 8 June 1926 in the Lettish newspaper published in Moscow, *Krievijas Cīņa* (Russia's Struggle) an anonymous opponent accused Kiršs of Social-Democratism. Here was expressed the profoundly mistaken view of many Lettish Communists, namely, that bourgeois democracy was no less harmful to the proletariat than fascism. Pēteris Stučka came forward in defence of Kiršs in the May-June issue of *Cīņas Biedrs*. Stučka's article was answered by Jānis Krūmiņš-Pilāts and some other leading workers of LKP, but the editors upheld Stučka's view.

In 1928 a discussion was opened on how to evaluate the political protest strike against the suppression of the revolutionary trade unions which had taken place on 22 August 1928 under the Party's leadership and had been accompanied by street demonstrations and clashes with the police. Many of the Party's activists considered that this action by 24,000 workers proved that a directly revolutionary situation had arisen, and the CC drew the mistaken conclusion that it was necessary to prepare to fight for power. The eighth LKP congress, held in 1931,

²⁴ The most detailed accounts of the Communist press are to be found in two books - in the collection of studies and materials entitled "*Cinja*". *K pjaatidesjaitietiju so dnja vychoda pervogo nomera* (Riga, 1954) and in *Cīņas balsis. Apeŗējumu un atmīgu krājums pan revolucionāro presi latviešu nacionālistiskās buržuāzijas kundzības laikā. 1920.-1940.* (Riga, 1959).

quite correctly condemned these views as erroneous. In 1930 a discussion began in the Party regarding its agrarian policy. Kārlis Kaufmanis (Soms) opposed the line of Stučka in a pamphlet, in Lettish, which was published in Moscow in that year, under the title: Problems of the agrarian policy and agrarian programme of the LKPC. This pamphlet correctly criticised the Party's attempt in 1919 to set up large socialist farms and its underestimation of the desire of landless peasants and those with little land to establish their own individual farms. But Kaufmanis-Soms wrongly tried to discredit Stučka, accusing him of opportunism, Kautskyism and Trotskyism. Differences on problems of agrarian policy continued to be expressed at the Party's eighth congress, in 1931. As a result, the resolution on the agrarian question, which was drafted with Stučka's participation and passed by the congress was withheld from publication, in accordance with an instruction from the ECCI. However, the main theses of this resolution were included in the Party's manifesto which was composed by the CC by decision of the eighth congress.

15. *Oppositional Groups within the Party*

There were differences of opinion among the Communists of Latvia, and, owing to the excessive fetishising of discipline, any dissidence was denounced as "oppositionism". This was all the more marked because the LKP leaders considered it necessary to "discover" in their own party those oppositional tendencies which the CPSU was combating in a given period. Thus, at the end of the 1920s the Soviet Communist Party intensified the fight against "the Right deviation" (Bukharin's), so the Communists in Latvia strove to "expose" a Right deviation, and duly "found" it. One of the leaders of the Communists in Zemgale region, Ansis Leja (Bauers) was accused of overestimating the importance of legal work and underestimating that of the Party's illegal activity. Actually, Leja (Bauers) had the right idea when he called upon the Communists not to "stew in their own juice" but, instead, to work in those legal organisations in which the broad masses were united. Nevertheless, in 1929 the Political Bureau expelled him from the Party. Only after the twentieth congress of the CPSU and the condemnation of the Stalin cult, in 1956, did the Political Bureau restore Leja's Party membership.

In 1932 a Plenum of the CC sharply criticised a former leader of the Party, Alberts Strautiņš-Citrons, who had been the CC's Secretary at the end of the 1920s. In 1933 the ECCI's regional Secretariat for Poland and the Baltic States decided that Strautiņš and his co-thinkers (Jānis Balodis, Alberts Briņķis and others) constituted an anti-Party group. Strautiņš's views were indeed ultra-leftist. He was against Communists working in the reformist trade unions and against co-operation with the Social-Democrats. But such ultra-left tendencies were inherent in the policy of the LKP as a whole, and of the CI.²⁵

In 1932 an Enlarged Plenum of the CC, held in Moscow, condemned Jānis Eiduks and some other Lettish writers living in the USSR as "Right-wing", owing to their endeavour to co-operate with the Independent Social-Democrats. In reality Eiduks and his co-thinkers took up a correct position and, contrary to the Communist sectarians, popularised the works of all progressive Lettish writers.

The mid-1930s, especially just before the year 1937, saw the beginning of the devastation of the leading cadres of the LKP who were living in Moscow, through baseless accusations of support for the Trotskyists and Bukharinists. By order of the Comintern the Foreign Bureau and the CC were annulled. In their place a temporary Party Secretariat was set up, with the task of purging the Party's ranks. As a result, in 1938 the Communist Party of Latvia had fewer than 200 members.

In its issue No. 12 of 1964 the Moscow journal *Kommunist* carried an editorial in which these actions by the Comintern were acknowledged to have been unjustified. The CPSU had come to this conclusion in agreement with a number of other Communist Parties.

The fight against so-called oppositions in the LKP was an expression of the desire of Stalin and his circle to denounce as enemies persons who were devoted cadres of the Communist Party.

16. *Attitude to Events of Importance to the International Communist Movement*

In 1933 the illegal Communist press in Latvia paid much attention to events in Germany and sharply condemned the mass terror being carried out by the Hitlerites who had come to power. In October 1933 the newspaper *Cīņa* called on the masses to fight for the release of Georgi Dimitrov, Ernst Thälmann and other arrested anti-fascists.

²⁵ For Materials against Strautiņš, see LKP CK partijas arhīvs, 240/2/698, sheets 1, 2.

During the civil war in Spain two Lettish units fought in the International Brigades - a heavy artillery group named after Jānis Jansons-Brauns (a well-known Lettish Marxist) and an anti-tank battery named after Leons Paegle (a Lettish Communist poet). Between 1936 and 1938 over 100 volunteers from Latvia - Communists, Socialists, democrats - defended the Spanish Republic in arms. The LKP's central organ, *Cīņa*, declared in June 1938 that it was the duty of every anti-fascist to support the Spanish Republicans.

As regards the Moscow trials of 1936-1938, the majority of Latvia's Communists failed to realise that these were monstrous falsifications and manifestations of the criminal terror waged by the Stalin regime. Many Communists considered that the bourgeois and Social-Democratic press, which told the truth about these trials, were engaging in slander in order to harm the USSR. Popular with the Communists was Lion Feuchtwanger's book *Moscow 1937*, which justified the trials. But some Communists in Latvia did not believe that the many prominent Lettish Communists who were being victimised in Moscow were really "enemies of the people."

A negative attitude towards the Germano-Soviet treaties of 23 August and 28 September 1939 was very rare among the Communists of Latvia. Their narrowness of outlook and their habit of always approving of the Soviet Union's policy was shown in this case, once again, in their support of the Soviet actions. This is evidenced by the November 1939 issue of the newspaper *Cīņa*. In that month an appeal by the Latgale regional committee of the Party went so absurdly far as to state that Hitler had been forced to come to an agreement with the USSR under pressure from the antifascist movement in Germany... A section of the Socialists of Latvia took up a negative attitude towards the foreign policy of the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940, the collaboration between the USSR and Germany and the invasion of Finland by the Soviet armed forces. But all the LKP documents and its press in these years show that this party failed to appreciate the criminal character of the foreign policy of Stalin and his circle.

17. The influence of the Communist organisations

The number of Party members was not always proportionate to its influence among the masses. In the period 1923-1933 the LSDSP had between 6,000 and 12,000 members, and this party's share of the seats in the *Seim* was between 20% and 32%. In the same period the Lettish Peasants' Union had up to 30,000 members, but its share of Parliamentary seats was considerably smaller (16-17%). The LKP had about 500 members in the 1920s and the early 1930s, which was few even for an illegal party. The first half of 1934 was an exceptional time, when the Party had over 1,000 members, but in 1936 it was down to 600, and in 1938 to a little more than 200. Yet the Party's influence among the masses was more considerable than these figures would suggest.²⁶

The Communists were for the first time allowed to take part in Latvia's parliamentary elections in 1928, and this they did under the formal guise of non-Party "workers' and peasants'" candidates and deputies. For these candidates, who were backed by the Party, in 1928 more than 70,000 electors voted, and in the 1931 election almost the same number. As a result, the Communists had seven deputies in the *Seim*, out of the total 100. That was not bad for an illegal party. The majority of the "workers' and peasants'" deputies were urban workers, but there was one agricultural worker and one peasant. There were few representatives of the intelligentsia among these deputies. It was typical that about 30,000 of the votes for the "workers' and peasants'" deputies were cast in the country's capital, Riga.

In their speeches the "workers' and peasants'" deputies (who were almost all Letts) extolled the achievements of the Soviet Union, idealising it because they had no correct idea of the actual state of affairs there. In parliamentary and municipal elections it was mainly the poorest section of the working people who voted Communist. They found the Communists attractive because they were usually workers and because they were distinguished by disinterestedness, bravery and readiness for self-sacrifice, regardless of persecution, prison and penal servitude. The Social-Democrats often occupied well-paid positions. Yet, nevertheless, for them there voted three or four times as many electors as voted for the Communists, because the Social-Democrats' policy was more realistic and they strove in a practical way to improve the material, social and legal situation of the working people.

²⁶ This is shown in the book by B. Hiršfelds, *Latvijas saeimas strādnieku-zemnieku frakcija* (Riga, 1960).

18. The Development of a Specific Communist Culture

The legal publications of the Communists (through the trade unions, etc.) carried writings by revolutionary Lettish authors, poets and playwrights - Andrejs Upīts, Leons Paeģle, Linards Laicens and others. In some of these writers the influence of the "proletarian culture" concept was observable, meaning rejection of the cultural heritage of the past and abandonment of common human values in favour of "purely class" ones.²⁷ The revolutionary trade unions, which were led by Communists, organised choirs and dramatic groups, who put on shows in trade-union clubs, such as "The Crime of Sacco and Vanzetti". Especially popular were the Festivals of Labour which were held in Forest Park in Riga. On 20 July 1924 more than 4,000 workers took part in this festival, and in 1925 as many as 10,000. At the Festival of Labour in 1926 a play by Linards Laicens was performed, called "Compromise", about the British coal-miners' strike.

Festivals of Labour were also held in Riga in 1927 and 1928, with attendances of 8,000 and 10,000. Similar cultural events were held in Ventspils, Jelgava and other towns. Revolutionary songs were sung, poems read, speeches made. Lecturers from the club of the Riga Central Trade-Union Bureau (Communists and their supporters) gave lectures not only on political subjects but also on questions of science and art. These lectures were also given at the People's University of Riga (an institution for adult education), where the teachers included not only Communists but also Social-Democrats. They ousted the Communists from the People's University and most of the other cultural and educational associations.

Police and judicial persecution hindered the Communists' cultural and educational work. This was also not helped by the exaggeratedly "class" approach made by the Communists to literature and art. Nevertheless, they did draw many workers into artistic creative activity and contributed to raising their cultural level.

Translated by Brian Pearce

²⁷ The specific character of the development of a Communist culture in Latvia is depicted in chs. 8 and 9 of the book by J. Šteimanis, *Ciņā pret kapitālu. Arodkustība Latvijā no 1920. gada līdz 1940. gadam* (Riga, 1959).