Unofficial Latvian Political Organizations in the Gorbachev Era: Their Evolution, Accomplishments, and Goals

Peter Albertins

Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses

Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation


This Honors Thesis—Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
Unofficial Latvian Political Organizations in the Gorbachev Era: Their Evolution, Accomplishments, and Goals

Western Michigan University
Senior Honors Thesis
Winter 1990

Written by
Peter Albertins

Examined by
Dr. James Butterfield
Dr. Elizabeth Dalton
Dr. William Ritchie
My sincere thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Dalton and Dr. William Ritchie for serving on the examination committee. Special attention should also be given to Dr. Faith Gabelnick and the entire Lee Honors College staff for their moral support, and to Western Michigan University's Undergraduate Research Fund for its financial support. Most of all I am indebted to Jim Butterfield for all the time and effort he put into this project. Thank you for making my undergraduate study stimulating, worth while, and memorable.
Introduction

Since the people called Latvians began living on the shores of the Baltic Sea, they have almost continually been in conflict with their neighbors, including the Estonians, Lithuanians, Swedes, Germans, and Russians. The major enemy to the Latvians over the centuries, however, has been the Russians. Perhaps this is because the Russians always wanted access to the Baltic Sea and the rest of Europe, but whatever the case, Russians and Latvians have not had a friendly history.

Since 1721, Latvia had been part of the Russian Empire. On November 18, 1918, however, with the defeat of Germany and the turmoil of the Russian Revolution, Latvia declared itself an independent nation. In December of 1918, the Red Army invaded Latvia, attempting to regain the territories lost during the Revolution. For a short time the Bolsheviks met with success and established a communist puppet regime in Latvia. By the middle of 1920, however, the Red Army was forced out of Latvia. On August 1, 1920, The Latvians and Soviets signed a peace treaty which guaranteed perpetual peaceful coexistence between the two (Germanis, 1962; 47-69).

Latvia flourished as a democratic, agricultural country. It was a full member of the League of Nations and enjoyed the rights of all sovereign countries. However, a secret protocol in the Soviet-Nazi Pact of September, 1939 (also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), divided Eastern Europe between Hitler and Stalin. According to the protocol, the three Baltic nations were considered within the sphere of Soviet influence (Germanis, 1962; 167).

On June 15, 1940, an ultimatum was delivered by Soviet foreign
minister Molotov to the Latvian embassy in Moscow. It asked to allow Soviet troops into Latvian territory for protective reasons. The Latvians, realizing that they were outnumbered, agreed. On June 17, 1940, Soviet forces entered Latvia. This day marks the end of Latvian independence (Germanis, 1962; 182).

On July 15, 1940, the Latvian government was replaced by one sympathetic to the Soviets. On July 21, 1940, the puppet government asked to join the Soviet Union (Germanis, 1962; 197). The incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union has never been recognized by the United States as a legal act, and today is still a very major issue in Latvian politics and society. The events following the occupation have only fueled the tensions between the Latvians and the Soviets.

Between July 1940 and the end of June 1941, over 35,000 people (1.75 percent of the population) were deported from Latvia or executed. Most of these people were government, military, and social leaders, and included Latvian president at the time, Karlis Ulmanis (Germanis, 1962; 214). The Nazi occupation in July 1941 halted the Soviet deportations and repressions, and brought a repression of its own, but the main damage to the Latvian nation and people had already been done.

The Soviet Army rolled back into Latvia in 1945, but the Latvian Legion, which was a part of the German Army, held the westernmost state of Kurzeme until the capitulation of Germany on May 8, 1945. Many Latvian soldiers, vengeful that the Soviets occupied Latvia not only once but twice, refused to surrender and became guerillas (Silde, 1985; 8). Although no specific numbers are available, the fact that guerillas
operated throughout Latvia between 1945 and 1952 indicates that the number was significant (Silde, 1985; 12). The Soviets, however, have had the ultimate authority since that time.

Since the end of World War II, Latvia has been under tight control from Moscow. Post war Stalinism (1945-1953) brought forced collectivization, industrialization with imported labor, building of a local Communist Party, the destruction of Latvian culture, deportations, and Russification.

Although less efficient than private farming, collectives were forcibly introduced. On March 20, 1949, about 50,000 Latvians, mostly farmers who resisted collectivization, were deported from Latvia. By December, 1951, 98.4 percent of Latvian farms had been collectivized (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 96).

In addition to the war and emigration, these and other deportations further decreased the labor pool in Latvia. When Moscow decided to industrialize Latvia, workers had to be sent in from other republics. Mostly Russians immigrated into Latvian cities. About 400,000 Russians and 100,000 other nationals arrived from 1945 to 1959. This amounts to 25 percent of Latvia's prewar population. (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 188).

The Russification of Latvia has occurred consistently under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. Russification is the introduction of and eventual dominance of the Russian language and culture in Latvia. This has taken place in educational, historical, cultural, political, and professional contexts.

In the educational system, a USSR school reform in 1958 created new
laws that allowed parents to decide what languages their children would be taught. Latvian, therefore, became voluntary in Russian schools, and Russian became voluntary in Latvian schools. In reality, however, it forced Latvian children to learn Russian, but put no pressure on Russians to learn Latvian (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 108).

In 1965, an 11-year curriculum, as opposed to a 10-year curriculum prevalent in the rest of the USSR, was introduced to the Baltic States. This was supposed to allow for the maintenance of the national languages in the professional sphere. In Latvia, however, almost all of the extra time was used to study Russian (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 189).

Another educational policy was the introduction of bilingual schools. In 1967, 240 out of a total 1,500 schools were bilingual. Some of these schools were set up in areas that were primarily Latvian, and therefore were considered attempts to Russianize the Latvians (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 189).

Russian language was introduced in every day life as well. In 1960, Latvian Communist Party's First Secretary Voss said that Latvians should learn Russian because, "it was the language of socialist culture, of the most progressive literature and art, and of twentieth century technology and progress." All the speeches at the joint session of the Latvian Supreme Soviet's Central Committee held on July 22, 1960, and most thereafter, were in Russian. Riga street signs were renamed in Russian and after Soviet revolutionary figures. The main street in Riga, formerly Freedom Boulevard, was renamed Lenin Boulevard. Cultural events, such as literary evenings, began taking place in Russian. Famous Russian cultural figures also started visiting Latvia more frequently (Misiunas and
During the second half of the 1970's, Russification not only continued, but increased. Russian was used half the day at nursery schools, and taught continually from the first grade on. Two complete subjects in high school were forced to be taught in Russian. The university curriculum was altered to include more Russian, and informal groups such as amateur theatrical and music groups were forced to use Russian. Air time for Russian television and radio programs also increased (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 203).

History was altered to make the Russians sound superior. According to official history books, trade flourished when a territory was taken by Russia. The Russian conquest of Latvia in the eighteenth century was glorified. Latvian masses were said to have been extremely enthusiastic in 1919 when the Red Army entered Riga and a Communist government set up. These recreations were repeated in the press, media, and schools. It entered operas, theatres, and films as well (Misiunas and Taagepera, 1983; 115-116).

This intense Russification was only increased by the continuous immigration of labor into Latvia. The 1989 census indicated that Latvians had fallen to 51.8% of the population, and Russians were 33.8% (Anderson and Silver, 1989). Latvians have become a minority in the seven largest cities. In 1979 they only constituted 38% in Riga, 12.6% in Daugavpils, 41.9% in Liepaja, 46.2% in Jurmala, 47.5% in Ventspils, and 35% in Rezekne (Latvian SSR Central Statistics Board, 1979).

The effects of this intense Russification are reflected in native and second language statistics. In 1989, seventy percent of Latvians report Russian as their native or second language. Only 22% of Russians in
Latvia, however, report Latvian as their native or second language (Anderson and Silver).

**Gorbachev and the New Era in the USSR**

In 1984 Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union. Almost immediately he began shaking things up by talking about *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). Glasnost refers to openness dealing with political discussion, tolerance of opinions, and dialogue between the people and the state. Perestroika deals with restructuring both the political and economic systems to make them accountable, responsible, and efficient.

A definite change has been felt in the Soviet Union both on paper and in people's attitudes. Gorbachev has introduced many new things in the Soviet Union. Central domination by Moscow is declining, republic autonomy is increasing, and dissenting political views (never tolerated earlier) are heard both from the people and within the government. Disclosure of government abuses and corruption, multiple candidate elections, and new economic opportunities for individuals and republics are some of the reforms introduced by Gorbachev.

The reforms have not been accepted equally by everyone. Some conservatives are wary of change and oppose Gorbachev and his ideas. Different republics have reacted differently also. The Baltic republics, however, have pushed the hardest for more reforms and more autonomy.

One of the reactions to the reforms in Latvia has been the sudden emergence of many social groups. It is the intent of this project to
examine and analyze the current tensions of the Latvian nation in a centralized, multi-ethnic state. Specifically, it will focus on the recent formation of unofficial Latvian social groups in the Gorbachev era, the demands made by these groups, their achievements and goals. Special attention will be given to the challenges by the people of Latvia to the authorities, and the response by the state in Riga and in Moscow.

Since all people do not agree with how, or even if, reforms should take place, opposing forces have emerged. The actors that will be analyzed in this paper include Latvian groups striving for an independent Latvian nation, non-Latvians that oppose Latvian independence, and Latvian and central governments.

The unofficial groups and their demands have evolved in two distinct phases: emergence and mobilization. The stages are distinct in the importance of group activity in Latvia's political processes, membership size, and the types of demands made by the groups. The emergence stage lasted from 1985 until June 1988. This stage can be described as a “testing of the waters” stage. People tested Gorbachev's policies of glasnost at the local level. Political activity awakened and started to grow. Since June 1988, the unofficial political groups formed, there has been widespread political involvement by the masses, and groups have been making demands attempting to influence government policies. The next sections of the report deal with the chronological developments of the emergence stage with government responses, followed by a similar treatment of the mobilization stage and responses.
Emergence Stage

There has always been dissent in Latvia. Until 1985, however, it was mostly individual people acting in an unorganized way. These people were also effectively monitored and prosecuted by the secret police. Gorbachev’s policy of glastnost has changed all of this.

At first, the government exposed itself to criticism. Stalin’s terrorism and Brezhnev’s stagnation were things Gorbachev began talking about. These things strayed from Marxism-Leninism, and therefore there had to be change, the government claimed. Perhaps by distancing itself from Stalin and Brezhnev, and making links to Lenin, the new reform leadership legitimized its authority and the need for reforms.

With this openness, however, the people began voicing their opinions. Often they complained about government policies, living standards, human rights abuses, and many other social topics. People began discussing things openly among themselves, something which they were afraid to do earlier. With these exchanges, people saw they were not alone in their views. Organizations began to emerge and activists began translating ideas into actions. Social groups, therefore, began their emergence stage. The emergence stage of social group activity in Latvia lasted from 1985 until the middle of 1988. After June of 1988, we will consider the mobilization stage of these groups.

Early Unofficial Group Activity

In Latvia, one of the first and most influential unofficial groups to form
was the Helsinki '86 Watch Group. The group was formed by 35 working class people in the port city of Liepaja, in July 1986. The group formed to monitor Soviet compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The group sent letters to Gorbachev, the United Nations, and the Pope, demanding the self-determination of Latvia, the end of political surpression, and an end to the Russification of Latvia. The leader of the organization, Linards Grantins, was taken into custody for three months, but no charges were filed against him and he was subsequently released (Latvian News Digest, May 1987; 1).

It was almost a year until the Helsinki '86 group acted again. The next action, however, was a bold step: an anti-Soviet demonstration. The demonstration was held in the heart of Riga on June 14, 1987, and commemorated the 1941 "night of terror," when 15,000 Latvians were arrested and deported by Stalin's men. The demonstration was announced over the Radio Liberty Latvian broadcast for two weeks prior to its scheduled date, so it was not a secret. On the fourteenth, over 1,000 people marched through Riga to the Freedom Monument (which was built during the independence years) and laid flowers at its base to commemorate Stalin's victims. The flowers were arranged in the red-white-red pattern of the flag of independent Latvia. A banner was unraveled that said, "To All of Stalin's Victims." During the next three hours about 5,000 more people gathered at the monument. Police forces were present, but did not stop the demonstration. Music was played loudly over loudspeakers when the crowd began singing patriotic songs. There was no official response to the demonstration. Government officials said
that the mass gathering of people was because of a bicycle race and not a nationalist rally (Gillette, July 1987; 1).

The man who led the demonstration, Rolands Silraups, was subsequently arrested. He was notified that his safety could not be guaranteed and that he should leave the country. On July 26, 1987, Silraups arrived in Vienna (Gillette, July 1987; 3).

On August 23, 1987, another demonstration was held in downtown Riga. This demonstration was also organized by Helsinki '86 to commemorate the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Estimates say that between 7,000 and 10,000 people marched to the Freedom Monument and laid flowers. Authorities attempted to disrupt this demonstration by rerouting traffic to disturb the crowd and by cordonning off the Freedom Monument with buses and police. The leaders of Helsinki '86 were placed under house arrest that day. This action was criticized by Latvian television commentator Mavriks Vulfsons (now a member of the Congress of People's Deputies) (Latvian News Digest, Oct. 1987; 1).

On November 18, 1987, a third demonstration took place at the Freedom Monument. It commemorated the day that Latvia declared its independence in 1918. It is estimated that about 10,000 people gathered at the monument (Sieff, January 1988; 2).

On January 2, 1988, Dr. Juris Vidins, a Latvian Communist Party member and chief physician of the city of Rezekne, joined the Helsinki '86 group. He was the first Communist Party member to join the group. This, however, resulted in the loss of his job and expulsion from the Communist Party (Kalnins, Feb. 1988; 1).
On March 25, 1988, another demonstration was held in Riga. This demonstration, like the one on June 14 the previous year, commemorated Stalin's victims. It was, however, officially sanctioned by the authorities. The Latvian Writer's Union, an official organization, sponsored the rally. The demonstration was the largest to date, with over 15,000 people participating (Kalnins, April 1988; 1).

On April 18, 1988, Gunars Astra died. Astra was the best known Latvian human rights prisoner of conscience. After spending a total of 19 years in Soviet prison camps, Astra was released February 1, 1988. Over 8,000 people attended his funeral. His coffin was draped in an outlawed Latvian flag (Kalnins, May 1988; 2).

On April 25, 1988, an environmental group (VAK- Environmental Protection Club) held a demonstration in Riga. The demonstration was a protest of the proposed building of a subway in Riga. Over 12,000 people marched and held a rally. This action resulted in the cancellation of the proposed subway (Zvaners, June 1988; 2).

The 1988 Writers' Union Conference

On June 1 and 2, 1988, a Latvian Writers' Union Plenum was held in Riga. The plenum was attended by high ranking government officials, including First Secretary Boris Pugo, A. Gorbunovs, V. Sobolevs, and M. Ramans (Daugmalis, June 10, 1988; 1). The opening speech was by the chairman of the Union, Janis Peters. In his speech he said, Latvia's joining and existence in the USSR has been deformed by Stalinist elements. Therefore, radical economic
reform, openness, democratization, which includes free elections, and new thinking are the most important things in this historical period (Daugmalis, June 10, 1988; 3).

This point was emphasized by the speech given by television commentator Vulfsons, who said, "The establishment of a Communist government in Latvia in 1940 came about as a result of a Soviet occupation and not a popular revolution. (Literatūra un Maksle, June 10, 1988; 3)."

The Writers' Union, however, went even one step further by passing a resolution with specific demands. The resolution was consequently printed in the major Latvian newspapers, and reported by radio and television. The resolution included dozens of demands, with the most important following (translated from the June 10, 1988. Literatūra un Maksle):

*We express our support for USSR General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's initiatives dealing with politics, with the maximal support for success.
*We support free elections, the democratization of the Communist Party, a larger role for People's Deputies, and the realization of the Congress of People's Deputies as the actual legislature for the USSR.
*Due to Latvians becoming a minority in their own country, we ask the Latvian government to see to the continuation and growth of the Latvian people and nation.
*We ask that a plan for republican citizenship be adopted.
*We ask for strict control and regulation of immigration into Latvia.
*We ask that Latvia become an autonomous state in the Soviet federation. We support Latvia being accepted as a full member to the United Nations, the Olympic Federation, sport and other international federations, with the right to engage in international political, cultural, science, and sport forums, using the free republican national symbols.
*We suggest that Latvia be granted a foreign ministry.
*We find it absolutely necessary that Latvian media personnel be granted reporting rights in Moscow and other Soviet cities.
*We see the need for Latvians to be able to freely choose foreign work, study, and travel.
*We support decentralization to local organs for autonomy in national affairs. This must be done by guaranteeing the USSR Constitutional right to republic autonomy.
*We ask that the Latvian national language gain republic national language status. We ask the government to guarantee the right to professional education at all levels in Latvian and to guarantee the right to use Latvian in all spheres of society.
*We ask for the opportunity for a Latvian armed forces division to be based, operated in Latvia, and manned by Latvians.
*We demand openness in dealing with the atrocities done to the Latvian people by the Soviets.
*We demand a new historical investigation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 dealing with the incorporation of Latvia into the USSR.
*We ask the creation of a safe mail, telephone, and telegraph system.
*We ask for the creation of a free market dealing with agriculture.
*We demand the accountability of government officials.
*We demand the right for every person to be able to voice and defend his opinion.

The Writers' Union Conference and the declaration of the resolutions was the breakthrough event that signified the end of the emergence stage of unofficial social groups. After the conference, a popular movement, supporting the demands made by the writers, solidified and started acting to realize their demands, signaling the beginning of the mobilization stage.

Analysis of the Emergence Stage

Helsinki '86

The Helsinki '86 group was the first such group formed in the Soviet Union since 1977. Other groups formed to monitor Soviet compliance with
the 1975 Helsinki Accords had not been tolerated. Their members were arrested or forced to emigrate. There are several reasons why Helsinki '86 was allowed to continue. First, it is significant that the Helsinki '86 group was formed by blue collar workers away from the capital and not by important social figures in Riga. The town of Liepaja is closed to foreigners, which would make it more difficult for this group to communicate with the West. The letters written by the group were simple, handwritten documents with honest concerns. Although Grantins was detained after the formation of the group, he was never prosecuted and convicted. This relatively mild treatment by the authorities definitely reflected a new era in the relationship between the people and the state. It also showed the state at least minimally willing to tolerate this sort of activity. But the state also set the limits to tolerance when a Communist joined this organization in January 1988. He was subsequently fired and dismissed from the Party. This shows that the Party would not tolerate such actions from Party members. This also showed the Party trying to limit the membership of Helsinki '86 as well as other groups.

**Demonstrations**

These first three demonstrations (June 14, Aug. 23, Nov. 18, 1987) constituted a very significant step in the formation of other groups, demands, and actions. First of all, it showed that the authorities were at least half tolerant towards nationalist, public demonstrations. The demonstrations could have been brutally suppressed and the leaders, such as Silraups, could have been sent into internal exile or prison, as it was
done prior to Gorbachev. This tolerance paved the way for future nationalist demonstrations and discussions at all levels, from the individual to the state itself. The increasing number of people participating in the rallies reflects this.

These three demonstrations also signified a new era for the Latvian nation. It demonstrated a changing of the times and an awakening of people’s political ambitions. For decades dissent had been the exception, but suddenly everyone was involved in political discussion, which earlier would have been seen as dissent. The Latvian nationalists were clearly gaining momentum. The demonstrations had been organized by unofficial groups, and the government did not interfere with them. Soon, however, the demands and actions taken by the nationalists would reach such a high level that the future of the Latvian nation would become the number one issue on everyone’s agenda.

The fourth mass nationalist rally, on March 25, 1988, was the first officially sanctioned demonstration. The sanctioning showed that the growing pressure on the government by the Latvian people was increasing. It also signified the first time that some sort of cooperation had taken place between the state and the social groups.

The Environmental Club (VAK) demonstration, on April 25, 1988, protesting the subway, was very significant that it actually achieved results. The people demanded something, and they received it. The government yielded to public pressure, which, when the people realized their success, only created more pressure upon the government.

On the whole, it can be said that the unofficial groups started with small steps in their demonstrations and demands, and slowly pushed for
more. The first demonstration was only to commemorate victims, while the VAK demonstration, less than a year later, demanded and received a positive response from the government. This clearly shows how the groups gradually tested the waters before going farther, but once they started, they quickly progressed.

Writers' Union Conference

The Writers' Union Conference was the watershed event in unofficial group evolution and consolidation into a national force. The two speakers at the conference stated, for all to hear (including the government), the same messages that the people at demonstrations, at home, and at the workplace were discussing. No one had ever publicly talked about a Soviet occupation. No one had ever demanded that Latvia become an autonomous state, but suddenly it was on the front page of all the newspapers for everyone to see.

These ideas and this openness at such a high level drew support from the public. The ideas also gave rise to a whole new popular movement among the Latvian people. No longer would there only be hastily organized demonstrations with vague demands. Earlier demonstrations rallied support for one thing or another, but now there was a comprehensive list of demands for which to strive. The passing of the resolutions was the first time such a list of demands had been made by an official organization, under the nose of government officials, and printed in the Soviet press. A direction was created which the Latvian people could, apparently legally, follow. With this conference and the resolutions, the
voice of the Latvian people was created. The embodiment of the movement would quickly follow.

Many people opposed these sorts of radical reforms. A platform, therefore was created to oppose. This is perhaps also the time at which the reformers and the conservatives began drawing their lines in both society and the state. It also is the time when the emergence, or "testing of the waters" stage ended, and the mobilization stage began.

One of the main questions of the emergence stage is why the state, either Moscow's central government or the one in Riga, did not take more action against these activities in order to stop them. The answer is multi-faceted. One reason why Moscow did not act could be that they simply underestimated the national sentiments in the republics. They did not believe that the popular movements would be a success. Another reason was that Gorbachev was attempting to restructure the economy, and in order to succeed, he had to allow the people and society to open up and experience glasnost, since perestroika could not take place without glasnost. A third reason why Moscow chose not to crush the popular movements was due to the fact that Gorbachev was trying to show the West that legitimate changes were taking place in the USSR, and that the Soviets could be trusted in arms agreements, foreign investment, and loans. Crushing the protesters would have sent the opposite message. The reasons why the local authorities did not act stems directly from the fact that they received no directions from Moscow. Therefore, they tried to appease the people by granting small concessions in the hope that the nationalist activity would level off, while at the same time attempting not to offend the non-Latvian segment of the population.
Mobilization Stage

After the Writers' Union Conference, Latvian nationalist activity greatly expanded. People no longer feared the government. The resolutions of the Writers' Union Conference showed that Latvian nationalism and strives for more autonomy were legitimate. The people now offered support for these demands.

Events Following the Writers' Conference

On June 14, 1988, over 50,000 people rallied and marched in Riga to commemorate Stalin's victims. The crowd gathered at the House of Political Education, where the Writers' Union Conference was held two weeks before. There several speakers addressed the crowd. One of the speakers was Mavriks Vulfsons, who repeated his comments about the Soviet occupation of Latvia. During the peaceful march to the Freedom Monument, a large flag of independent Latvia was unfurled. The marchers met with no resistance from the police (Latvian News Digest, August, 1988; 1.).

The Soviet Latvian press described the events the same way, with some significant additions. It was said that now was the time to put words into actions. Edvins Inkens, a television commentator, said that all Latvians were victims of Stalin, and now was the time to find the truth. The organizers of the demonstration were the Environmental Club, and the newspapers Padomju Jaunatne, and Sovetskaia Molodjoz. The demonstrators also decided to collect funds to build a monument to the victims of Stalin. The article said that 44,517 rubles had been collected and gave an address where to send more donations (Bite, p. 3.).
The Latvian Communist Party Central Committee called a special meeting to address the recent events. The meeting, on June 18, was not immediately reported by the local press, causing rumors to circulate that the Party considered the situation out of control, and that a crackdown was imminent (Kalnins, July, 1988; 2.).

On June 20, 1988, a coalition of Communist Party members, intellectuals, clergymen, and human rights activists formed the Latvian Popular Front. They blamed the Soviet installed government for the crisis situation, endorsed the resolutions of the Writers' Union Conference, and called for the summoning of a Popular Front Congress (Zvaners, July, 1988; 2.).

The June 24, 1988 issue of Literatura un Maksla reported that the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee held a plenum on June 18 to evaluate the situation in Latvia. It said First Secretary Boris Pugo criticized extremist behavior in the restructuring process. The plenum's resolution stated that inter-ethnic problems must be dealt with in such a way that all nationalities would be treated and satisfied equally. An editorial in the same issue warned of dividing the country between Latvian demands and non-Latvian demands. (Literatura un Maksla, June 24, 1988; 2-3.).

Since the Soviet occupation in 1940, the Latvian flag and national anthem of independent Latvia were taboo. The next events in Latvia dealt with the rehabilitation of these symbols.

On July 13 there was a Baltica 88 folk festival in Riga. Traditional flags of all three Baltic republics were prominently displayed. On July 14 Arvids Ulme, leader of the Environmental Club, addressed a crowd at
the Riga Castle. Ulme announced plans for a flag rehabilitation rally on July 16 (Kalnins, August, 1988; 1-2.).

On July 16, 1988, over 30,000 people participated in an open air rally in the amphitheatre at Mezaparks, a complex just outside of Riga. Flags were prominently displayed, and the national anthem of independent Latvia was sung. Latvian authorities did not interfere in the rally, claiming that the flag was never illegal (Kalnins, August, 1988; 2.).

On August 23, 1988, over 30,000 people held a rally at the Freedom Monument to commemorate the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The local press reprinted an article from Pravda, that described the pact as the secret protocol that allowed both nations' leaders to divide the world. The article continued, that the anti-human Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact destroyed many nations, and among those was the Latvian nation (Matulis, August 29, 1988; 2.).

During this time the Latvian Popular Front was organizing its founding congress. The congress was to be held October 8-9, 1988. Many groups, such as Helsinki '86 and Environmental Club participated in the organizing committees. The Latvian people were enthusiastic about the Front idea, and copying the Estonian and Lithuanian popular movements, local chapters of the Front were established. From the local chapters, delegates were elected to the congress. The Latvian Culture Fund, an official organization, also supported the Latvian Popular Front, and gave them 8,000 rubles (Bebrisa, Sept. 1, 1988; 3).
Latvian Government Actions Before the Latvian Popular Front Congress

On September 29, 1988, the Latvian Supreme Soviet passed a decree saying that the independent Latvian red-white-red flag would be used at cultural and social events. It said that the flag had been a part of Latvian culture for hundreds of years, and therefore should still be used today (Padomju Jaunatne, Sept 30, 1988; 1.).

Three days before the Latvian Popular Front Congress, some major changes occurred in the Latvian leadership.

On October 4, 1988, Latvian Communist Party Central Committee First Secretary Boris Pugo was replaced by Janis Vagris, who was the President of the Latvian Supreme Soviet. Vagris’ spot was filled by Anatolijs Gorbunovs, formerly chief ideologist for the Central Committee. Pugo was sent to Moscow to be the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee Control Committee Chairman. Also, Jurijs Rubens retired as the Head of the Council of Ministries, and was replaced by Vilnis Bresis (Literature un Maksia, Oct. 7, 1988; 3.) Pugo and Rubens had been viewed as conservatives and holdovers from the Brezhnev era. Vagris, who replaced Pugo, was considered more of an interim leader because of his age (very close to retirement). Bresis and Gorbunovs, on the other hand, were considered reformers. Gorbunovs was perhaps the best liked of the government officials. He was a Russian, but he had learned Latvian and considered himself a Latvian. His appointment was cheered by Latvian nationalists and reformers.

On October 6 the Supreme Soviet, under the new leadership of Gorbunovs, unanimously voted to make Latvian the official state language
of Latvia. A commission was created to complete a draft of the language law by January 1, 1989. (Literatura un Meksla, Oct. 7, 1988; 3).

**Latvian Popular Front Congress**

On October 7, 1986, over 150,000 people filled the outdoor amphitheatre at Mezaparks, to rally support for the Latvian Popular Front (also referred to as the Popular Front). Patriotic songs and speeches were heard all day. Gorbunovs and Vagris both gave speeches at the event. Vagris' speech included the following comments (translated from Padomju Jaunatne, Oct 10, 1988):

As you know, I was only elected four days ago, so I can't give you precise policies, but there are some directions that we intend to follow. First, we want to emphasize agriculture to ease the food shortages. We want to achieve economic autonomy to save resources, solve the ecological problems, and halt migration. And finally, we want to emphasize the Latvian republic's autonomy in the Soviet federation.

I sincerely hope that the Latvian Popular Front will act with all of the republic's nationalities' problems in mind. Only strong cooperation between all the nationalities in Latvia will stop the creation of an opposition movement to the Latvian Popular Front. It is very important that the Latvian Popular Front keep in mind the national structure of the country, because Latvia has become home to many people. These people have the right to expect courtesy and understanding. In the period of openness, I must admit that the Central Committee will not tolerate any organization that creates conflict between the different nationalities of this republic.

The Popular Front worked out a program and statutes. The program is
very similar to the Writers' Union Conference resolutions. The main points included:

--democratization and destalinization of society
--establishment of Latvia as an autonomous republic
--the guaranteeing of certain human and civil rights
--rehabilitation of Latvia's ecology
--the end of immigration into Latvia
--the establishment of the Latvian language and culture as primary in Latvia

(Taken from Latvijas Tautas Frontes Programma un Statuti, 1988).

The Popular Front statutes describe how the Front plans on operating to accomplish its demands (taken from Latvijas Tautas Frontes Programma un Statuti, 1988).

--The Latvian Popular Front will write and propose legislation to the governing bodies.
--The Latvian Popular Front will talk with local deputies and give them relevant information on policy questions.
--The Latvian Popular Front will analyze published drafts of laws and judge them as acceptable or unacceptable.
--The Latvian Popular Front will give recommendations to the Supreme Soviet about possible law changes, deletions, and additions.
--The Latvian Popular Front will take part in the election campaign for Peoples' Deputies.
--The Latvian Popular Front will evaluate deputy candidates and either accept them or reject them.
--The Latvian Popular Front will take part in workplace, union, collective, and other elected official campaigns with Latvian Popular Front candidates.
The Latvian Popular Front will recommend the removal of officials acting contrary to the Latvian Popular Front Program.
The Latvian Popular Front will conduct discussions, demonstrations, meetings, and other public manifestations, as well as celebrate national (Latvian) holidays.
The Latvian Popular Front sees it necessary to discuss and vote on important issues at a national level by referendum.
The Latvian Popular Front will conduct national polls.
The Latvian Popular Front will create expert commissions on important matters.
The Latvian Popular Front will sponsor public discussions and lectures.

Reactions to the Latvian Popular Front Congress

The Latvian Communist Party Central Committee met to discuss the Popular Front on October 14, 1988, and had a mixed reaction. The Central Committee stated that many points made by the Latvian Popular Front were valid. Among these points were the establishment of economic autonomy for Latvia, the elimination of migration, and the rehabilitation of the ecological situation. The Central Committee also stated that the positive aspects of the Popular Front must be strengthened. It said that Communist Party members active in the Popular Front must continually defend Party policies and actions, and must follow the Constitution of the USSR in all matters.

The Central Committee also said many negative things about the Latvian Popular Front. It stated that the atmosphere in the republic had become explosive, and that many people were uneasy with the creation of the
Popular Front. It also said that the Popular Front had many extremist elements that could damage the strength of it. The Central Committee said it would not tolerate calls for the secession of Latvia from the USSR. The Central Committee emphasized that it only supported Latvian Popular Front actions that include democratization and restructuring, but that it wholeheartedly rejected any attempts that would cause inter-ethnic conflict (Padomju Jaunatne, Oct. 15, 1988; 1).

The Popular Front quickly replied to the Central Committee's statements that implied that the Popular Front was causing inter-ethnic conflict. The Popular Front published an article saying that it categorically rejected creating any conflict between the different nationalities in Latvia, and that the Latvian Popular Front was an organization for people of all nationalities (Padomju Jaunatne, Oct. 26, 1988; 1.).

By the end of October, tensions between Latvians and non-Latvians reached a high point when the formation of the International Front of Laborers, or Interfront movement was announced. The movement was made up essentially of Russians, and was created to oppose the Popular Front. Russian factory workers tried unsuccessfully to organize a general strike to protest the Latvian Popular Front on October 30, 1988. The atmosphere in the republic became so tense that Gorbunovs was forced to go on the radio and call for calm and restraint (Zvaners, November, 1988; 3).
**Events Dealing With Constitutional Changes**

Conflict between the Popular Front and the Interfront was growing when the Supreme Soviet of the USSR announced plans for constitutional changes on October 22. The proposed changes were seen by the Latvian Popular Front as an attempt to give Moscow more control of political and economic affairs. Some of the specific objections related to the proposed amendments that would remove the formal right of the republics to secede from the USSR. Another objection was that the representation of the republics in the new Council of Nationalities, one of the two chambers in the Supreme Soviet, would relatively decline, giving more power to the Russian republic (Sheehy, Nov. 10, 1988; 1-3).

In connection with the constitutional changes, but dealing more with Lacplesis Diena (Veteran’s Day), the Popular Front organized a demonstration on November 11, 1988. On this day, the Latvian red-white-red flag was raised atop the Riga Castle, which once served as the residence of independent Latvia’s presidents. City authorities said the flag would be permanently displayed there. It was estimated that about 200,000 people participated in rallies throughout the city. The events were not endorsed by the authorities, but there was no police interference either. On the same day, Vadim Medvedev, a member of the the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat arrived in Riga to rally support for the proposed constitutional changes (Kalnins, December, 1988; 3.).

On November 17 Dzemmu Skulme, a member of the Latvian Writer’s Union, delivered a petition containing 600,000 signatures to the Supreme
Soviet in Moscow protesting the proposed constitutional changes (Kalnins, December, 1988; 2).

On November 18 over 200,000 people commemorated Latvia's Independence Day in Riga. The Popular Front was also given permission to hold a concert in the National Theatre, where Latvia's Independence was declared in 1918 (Daudiss, November 19, 1988; 1). The newspaper Literatura un Maksla published articles about independent Latvia, the Soviet occupation in 1940, and the text of the peace treaty between Latvia and the USSR in 1920, which guaranteed perpetual peaceful coexistence between the two states (Literatura un Maksla, November 18, 1988; 1-2).

Before these demonstrations, the Lithuanian and Estonian Supreme Soviets had both rejected the proposed amendments to the constitution. The Estonian leadership had even passed a law that gave the Estonian Supreme Soviet the right to veto any all-Union legislation. These actions came under much criticism from the central press, especially the Estonian veto law. The Latvian Supreme Soviet, however, also rejected the proposed amendments to the constitution on November 17, 1988 (Literatura un Maksla, Nov. 18, 1988; 1-2).

Because of this, the Latvian Popular Front came under criticism from the central press. Pravda wrote on November 19 that the recent demonstrations in Riga had only destabilized the situation in Latvia and provoked inter-ethnic conflict. Pravda also said that the majority of Latvian newspapers were out of Party control. Sel'skaya zhizn' said the same thing on November 25, claiming that the Latvian Popular Front pressured the Latvian Supreme Soviet into rejecting the proposed
Moscow’s Reactions to Protests About the Constitution

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR met November 29 to ratify the proposed amendments to the constitution, but the session turned into a debate. The Baltic republics demanded that the amendments be withdrawn. Although the Politburo rejected the Baltics’ demands, certain changes were introduced. The Politburo reiterated that the proposed changes represented only the first part of the political reform package, and that the expansion of the republics’ powers would take place in the second stage. To back this up, the Central Committee passed a resolution scheduling a CPSU plenum on inter-ethnic relations for mid-1989.

Certain changes and revisions were also made. In all, 26 out of the 55 articles of the draft law were changed. The most criticism related to Article 108, Paragraph 2, which gave the Congress of People’s Deputies the right to veto demands for secession. The article was changed, to say questions of the national-state structure would be assigned to a special commission, which represented all republics equally. A change in the same article took away the right of the Congress of People’s Deputies to repeal legislative acts adopted by the highest state organs Interfront they varied with the Constitution of the USSR. Other changes included that the Supreme Soviet would no longer determine the basic guidelines for republic activity, but would provide general principles. A change gave the Supreme Soviet the right to declare martial law only with the consultation
of the concerned republics. A change in the Council of Nationalities also increased the representation of every republic to 11 delegates, instead of the proposed seven, and decreased the share of RSFSR deputies from 43% to 35% (Sheehy, December 2, 1988; 1-13).

Other changes dealing indirectly with the constitution were also made. Membership of the new Committee for Supervision of the Constitution and the USSR Committee for Constitutional Oversight was expanded to include representatives from every republic. Gorbachev also called upon the Council of Ministers to accelerate the formation of the conditions for transition to economic autonomy for republics and regions.

Certain measures were also rejected and criticized by the Supreme Soviet. Estonia's law on veto rights of all-Union legislation was sharply criticized and declared unconstitutional. All three Baltic republics were reprimanded for their radical reactions to the proposed changes. Gorbachev, however, in his closing speech stated that the center had been taught a lesson about leaving certain parties out of the decision making process. On December 1, 1988, the changed amendments were accepted by the Supreme Soviet (Sheehy, December 2, 1988; 1-13).

Events Following the Supreme Soviet Session

Following the Supreme Soviet Session, the Latvian Popular Front forces had consolidated and were actively participating in the political process, but not always successfully. One of the LPF's programs was to push for a citizenship law. The criteria for citizenship would require
knowledge of Latvian and residence in Latvia for five years before having the right to vote for the republic's governing bodies and be considered a citizen of the Latvian SSR. The December 5, 1988 issue of Pravda attacked this idea. The article said that establishing norms that created privileges for the citizens of one republic while limiting the status of citizens of other republics would violate the Soviet right to equality (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Dec. 10, 1988; 27-28).

On January 4, 1989, the Latvian Supreme Soviet declared the registration procedure for unofficial social groups unconstitutional, and, therefore the groups approved under the current policies were null and void (Literatura un Maksla, Jan. 7, 1989; 1). This included the Latvian Popular Front, Environmental Club, and the Latvian National Independence Movement. Official status was required to gain resources such as paper for printing, the use of presses, buildings, etc. The measure, however, did not hamper the movements.

Interfront Congress

The Interfront movement held its founding congress on January 7 and 8, 1989. The congress was nationally (in Latvia) televised, and notable participants included Vagris and Gorbunovs. The Latvians were very concerned about the situation, and the atmosphere in the republic was very stressful. Gorbunovs addressed one of the main issues that Interfront opposed: the Latvian language becoming the official state language.

It is sad that in a multi-ethnic state, one language must have advantages. But it is a fact that the Latvian language in Party, political, and economic spheres has diminished. Interfront we abide by internationalist principles, it is evident that we are not giving one language the upperhand, but we are helping
preserve the Latvian language. By giving the Latvian language official status, we are only hoping to create an functional bilingualism (Padomju Jaunatne, Jan. 10, 1989; 1-2).

In another speech, A. Belaichuka, the main organizer of the Interfront movement, emphasized the major differences between the Latvian Popular Front and Interfront.

Interfront and the Latvian Popular Front differ in their views about the leading role of the CPSU, on internationalism, and the federation principles of the USSR. There are differences with views concerning the status of the Latvian language and its use, with the military training ideas, and the representation of republics in the Supreme Soviet. There are also differences in the way of achieving goals (Padomju Jaunatne, Jan. 10, 1989; 1-3).

The Latvian Communist Party Central Committee gave an official evaluation of the Interfront congress in a public announcement in Padomju Jaunatne. The Central Committee had mixed reactions to the congress and the Interfront. The founding of the front was seen to be in the best interests in the consolidation of the republic's forces. Positive events of the congress included Interfront's support for economic autonomy, the clean up of the environment, and the use of Latvian in kindergartens, high schools, and in higher education.

The congress, however, had caused a negative feelings and resentment in the Latvian segment of the population. Many of the speeches were found to have an authoritarian tone, and many of the discussions showed that the delegates were unaware of the current political situation in Latvia dealing with Gorbachev's programs of restructuring. It
was noted that most of the Interfront delegates were non-Latvians, and that they did not understand Latvian nationalist ideas dealing with the economic, social, demographic, and cultural situations. It said that the Interfront had created mistrust among the people, and caused more inter-ethnic conflict in Latvia. The need for dialogue and cooperation between the two fronts was stressed, as was the intolerance for any forces increasing the tension between Latvians and non-Latvians (Padomju Jaunatne Jan. 26, 1989; 1).

Events After the Interfront Congress

The first government action after the Interfront congress was the acceptance of Latvian as the state language on January 10, 1989. The law included a constitutional amendment which made Latvian the official language in the Latvian SSR. The law was to take effect January 1, 1990. In the regions of Daugavpils, Kraslava, Ludza, and Rezekne (predominantly Russian areas) the law would take effect January 1, 1995. The language would be used in all government activities, schools, factories, kolhozes, and all other cooperatives. The necessary technical assistance and teaching facilities would be set up to ensure that all non-Latvians could learn Latvian (Padomju Jaunatne, Feb. 2, 1989; 1).

On February 15, 1989, the Latvian Council of Ministers met to discuss ways to stop migration of non-Latvians into Latvia. A resolution was adopted and passed by the government on February 18 which was meant to keep enterprises from recruiting labor from outside of Latvia. Enterprises hiring more workers were forced to pay the local district for every worker
and member of his family. The payment ranged from 15,000 rubles in outlying districts to 25,000 rubles in Riga. The money was to go for housing and food production. Future residents would only be accepted if housing was available, and improved housing would only be available to permanent residents who have lived in Latvia for at least ten years (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, March 1, 1989; 16-17).

The free atmosphere in the republic gave rise to organizations with different and more radical demands. One of these organizations was the Latvian National Independence Movement (referred to as the Independence Movement). On February 18 and 19, 1989, the Independence Movement held its first congress in the city of Ogre. 403 delegates representing about 7,000 Independence Movement members took part in the congress. It adopted resolutions that the Soviet incorporation of Latvia was an occupation and called for complete Latvian independence from the Soviet Union (Kalnins, March 1989; 2-3).

On March 7 the Latvian Communist Party’s Central Committee gave its reaction to the Independence Movement congress. The congress and its documents clearly indicated that the Independence Movement was anti-socialist and foreign to the restructuring process. It continued that the demands for secession of Latvia from the USSR was contrary to the Latvian SSR Constitution and the interests of the Latvian proletariat. The Central Committee stated that Communist participation in the Independence Movement would not be tolerated (Padomju Jaunatne, March 7, 1989; 1).
Interfront and Latvian Popular Front Demonstrations

Because of the different views of the two fronts, both tried to establish popular support for themselves. Interfront organized a demonstration on February 23, 1989. It was estimated that 100,000 people, almost all of them non-Latvian, gathered in Riga to honor the army and navy. The demonstration was not entirely peaceful. About 1000 supporters of the Popular Front tried to prevent the marching demonstrators from passing the Freedom Monument. Rude exchanges occurred between the two sides. The Interfront demonstration changed course, but the exchanges continued and some violence was reported. Twenty four people were arrested (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, March 15, 1989; 20-21).

The Popular Front reacted very unfavorably to the demonstration, saying that it was neo-Stalinist with anti-Latvian posters and only served to increase the tensions between nationalities. The Popular Front also urged its members to avoid any Interfront activity (Padomju Jaunatne, March 7, 1989; 1).

On March 12 the Popular Front organized a demonstration protesting the recent efforts attempting to stop the restructuring process (namely the Interfront). They made two declarations: one to the Latvian Communist Party's Central Committee and one to Gorbachev. Both declarations were similar in that they protested the Interfront views concerning the Latvian language, citizenship, migration, and the upcoming elections. Over 250,000 people participated in the rally (Padomju Jaunatne, March 14, 1989; 1).
Events Preceding the National Elections

On March 23, 1989, the Latvian Supreme Soviet decided that the Independence Movement must alter its statutes to bring them into compliance with the Latvian Constitution. The Supreme Soviet also asked the Internal Ministry (secret police) to energetically act against the anti-social elements of society (Padomju Jaunatne, April 1, 1989; 2).

On March 25 the Latvian Popular Front held a memorial march to commemorate Stalin's victims of 1949. An estimated 500,000 people marched up Lenin Boulevard, past the Freedom Monument to the Internal Ministry headquarters. There the marchers lowered their flags and observed two minutes of silence. The rally then continued without incident (Padomju Jaunatne, March 26, 1989; 1).

National Elections

On March 26 voting for the Congress of People's Deputies took place. The elections were considered very important with respect to how the population felt about the Popular Front, Interfront, and the Communist Party. Over 70% of the population turned out to vote in the first competitive elections in the Latvian republic. The candidates endorsed by the Popular Front won 26 out of 34 contested seats and included the chairman, Dainis Ivans. Janis Vagris, the First Secretary of the Latvian Communist Party won only 51% of the vote in the Riga district (Padomju Jaunatne, March 29, 1989; 1).

After the elections some of the unofficial groups coordinated activities.
Although this action was not endorsed by all members of the groups (or the Popular Front) on April 11, 1989, Helsinki '86, the Environmental Club, and Independence Movement formed a coordination center for the registration of all individuals who were legally entitled to citizenship in the Republic of Latvia. People who were citizens before June 17, 1940, and their children, both in the West and in Latvia, were considered citizens. The goal was to hold a congress of the legal representatives of Latvia to decide Latvia's future (Kalnins, May, 1989; 2).

The overall increase in unofficial activity caused rumors to spread that a military crackdown was imminent (activities elsewhere in the Soviet Union also affected the situation, as local police opened fired on demonstrators in Georgia). Army activity around Riga had been reported as unusually high, and on April 11 tanks rolled down the streets of Riga. Mavriks Vulfsons said that the activity was due to the elections in Riga as well as the unrest in Soviet Georgia. On April 12 the issue was addressed by the local press. The tanks in Riga were explained as being part of maneuvers conducted by the army, and had been planned well in advance of the elections (Padomju Jaunatne, April 12, 1989; 1).

Interfront continued to oppose the activities of the Popular Front and planned a general, republic-wide strike for April 28, 1989 to show that it was a force to be reckoned with. The Central Committee warned on the day of the strike that Interfront and its leaders would be responsible both politically and economically for the events that a strike may bring about (Padomju Jaunatne, April 27, 1989; 1). Although the statement did not expressly state it, it was a firm warning against any interethnic
violence.

The strike took place, but it was insignificant. The press reported that most factories worked as usual. The work stoppages that did occur were said to have usually been for only short spans, and only one plant was shut down for more than six hours (Padomju Jaunatne, April 29, 1989; 2).

In early May the Popular Front came out with a list of demands which was published in most newspapers. It demanded that Latvia adopt a completely new constitution and hold free elections for the Supreme Soviet. The new constitution would establish Latvia as an autonomous state in the Soviet confederacy, guarantee complete democracy, and protect the interests of the Latvian people. The Popular Front also demanded that the elections take place before November 1989, and only legitimate Latvian citizens (according to the Popular Front criteria) should be able to participate in the elections (Padomju Jaunatne, May 4, 1989; 1). The government did not comment on the demands.

The supporters of the Popular Front who had been elected to the Congress of People's Deputies formed a coalition called the Latvian Popular Front Representatives. They wrote a letter to Gorbachev demanding that a Latvian section of the Soviet Army be established in which Latvians could serve in Latvia. They also requested that the total number of troops in Latvia be sharply reduced, and that people with religious objections be excused from obligatory military service (Padomju Jaunatne, May 9, 1989; 1).

Up until this time the unofficial groups in Latvia had coordinated activities among themselves, but the activity between the groups in the
Baltic States, however, was still uncoordinated. On May 13 and 14, representatives from all three Popular Front movements met in Tallinn to develop a united program for reform in the Baltic States. The Baltic Assembly, as they called themselves, adopted three resolutions. They were:

1) The demand for state autonomy within the Soviet confederacy, which would form a neutral, demilitarized Balto-Scandia.
2) The demand for economic autonomy for the Baltic republics.
3) An appeal to the Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the UN to investigate the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and declare the provisions in the pact null and void (Padomju Jaunatne, May 18, 1989; 1).

The Meeting of the Congress of People's Deputies

The Congress of Peoples’ Deputies met in Moscow from May 23 to June 6, 1989. The Congress was a place where the Latvian Popular Front supporters hoped to continue and expand many of the reforms, and strive for greater autonomy. The Congress, however, did not go that way. The delegates from the Baltic States and some from the Caucuses were reform minded, but the overwhelming majority of the deputies were quite conservative. The dominant themes of the Congress were the strengthening of the ministries, maintaining state monopolies, and a refusal to address the issues of a free market economy, republic sovereignty, and expanded reforms (Padomju Jaunatne, June 6, 1989; 2).
The representatives from all three Baltic republics did send resolutions to the Congress of People's Deputies. The resolutions included:

-- granting the right to republics to freely determine their state structure;
-- granting the right to establish republican citizenship;
-- granting the right to a free market based economy;
-- granting the right for each republic to be able to conduct its own foreign affairs;
-- withdrawing Soviet troops and replacing them with local republican units;
-- creating a Baltic nuclear free zone (Padomju Jaunatne, May 25, 1989; 2-3).

During the meeting of the Congress of Peoples' Deputies in Moscow, the Independence Movement held an extraordinary congress in Riga on May 30. This congress was called to consider altering its statutes, as the Central Committee had demanded in March. The Independence Movement, however, did not change its statutes that demanded independence for Latvia, and secession from the Soviet Union. The congress was broadcast live over Latvian radio, and widely reported on TV (Lehmusa, May 30, 1989; 1).

After the initial ice had been broken by the Independence Movement in refusing to eliminate complete Latvian independence as its primary goal, more and more people and groups considered making Latvian independence their goal as well.

On June 2, 1989, the Popular Front published an article saying that two paths could lead to Latvian autonomy: one was within the Soviet
confederation, and one as a sovereign nation. Until now, the Popular Front had supported the confederation idea, but the article argued that perhaps the time had come to push for complete independence. The Popular Front said that the people should thoroughly debate this idea, and a decision on changing the Popular Front program and statutes would be made (Padomju Jaunatne, June 2, 1989; 1).

On June 3, the Latvian Cultural Fund published a resolution supporting the Independence Movement resolution to pursue an independent Latvia (Literatura un Maksīša, June 3, 1989; 3). The Culture Fund was the first official organization to fully support the Independence Movement's resolution.

As the unofficial organizations pushed for supporting complete independence, the state continued passing reformist legislation. On June 10, 1989, June 14 was declared an official day of mourning for Stalin's victims. The day was to be a holiday, with an official demonstration at the Freedom Monument (Padomju Jaunatne, June 10, 1989; 1). The demonstration to Stalin's victims was held with mass participation. On the same day, the Popular Front published a draft of the proposed republic constitution. The main changes in the proposed constitution dealt with the issues presented by the Popular Front in May (Padomju Jaunatne, June 14, 1989; 2).

On June 22, 1989, the Central Committee issued a statement saying that although the Independence Movement was a radical organization, in the age of glasnost, the organization would be allowed to continue its activities (Padomju Jaunatne, June 22, 1989; 1). After this, other unofficial
groups quickly began demanding complete Latvian independence, as opposed to autonomy in a Soviet confederacy.

On July 1, the Popular Front demanded a declaration of Latvia's political and economic autonomy within the USSR. If this declaration was made, the Popular Front stated that it would consider its initial goals met and then would consider a final goal of independence (Literature un Maksie, July 1, 1989; 2). With the Independence Movement's resolution of Latvian independence allowed to stand, the Popular Front was under pressure to change its goal from political autonomy to complete sovereignty. The decision was not unanimous, and some even viewed the Independence Movement as exerting undue influence, but on July 25 the Popular Front published its first platform on how an independent Latvia would be structured. The points included:

--- Latvia would be a democratic nation.
--- A monetary system would be established.
--- A Baltic Market with Estonia and Lithuania would be established.
--- Economic ties to the USSR republics would be established.
--- Economic ties to capitalist states would be established.
--- People living in Latvia for at least ten years would be granted citizenship.
--- Farms would decollectivize, and a private property system would be introduced.
--- Latvia's economy would be market oriented. (Padomju Jaunatne, July 25, 1989; 1-2)

The response came on August 5, when the Latvian Supreme Soviet passed a declaration of autonomy. This legislation was anticipated for
some time, because Estonia and Lithuania had passed similar legislation before, and as in so many cases, Latvia usually followed the actions of its neighbors. The declaration had six main points:

1. Latvia was now considered an autonomous republic.

2. Only Latvian laws, regulations, and statutes will be followed.

3. The Latvian land and its resources are strictly the property of the Latvian people.

4. The current Latvian autonomy must be established in the USSR and the Latvian Constitutions.

5. Legislation passed in the USSR will only take effect in Latvia after it has been approved by the Latvian Supreme Soviet.

6. International relations with Latvia will be based on treaties (Padomju Jaunatne, August 5, 1989; 1).

The 50th Anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

One of the events that still embittered Latvians was the Soviet denial of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that paved the way for an illegal Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. On June 30 and July 1, 1989, an international forum was held in Tallinn to assess the Soviet-Nazi pact of 1939. The participants included delegates from Finland, Poland, the Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltic States. The forum found the pact to be
a gross violation of international law and declared the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries, Finland, and Romania illegal. The forum also recommended resolving the matter in an international court (Padomju Jaunatne, July 18, 1989; 1).

On August 22, 1989, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet admitted to the secret clauses in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which gave the USSR the "rights" to the Baltic states. The resulting occupation by the Soviets were deemed illegal (Padomju Jaunatne, Aug. 29, 1989; 1). This declaration was made to try to appease the Baltic people before their planned demonstration.

On August 23 the Baltic republics held a joint demonstration to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the pact. The admission of the secret clauses the day before only gave the demonstrators momentum. A human chain stretching across all three republics was formed by more than one million people (Literatūra un Moksle, August 29, 1989; 1-2). This was the largest organized anti-Soviet demonstration by the Baltic republics.

After the demonstration and calls for complete independence, Moscow viewed the situation in the Baltics as very dangerous. Gorbachev was on vacation at the time, and the conservatives in Moscow used this opportunity to thoroughly reprimand the Baltic republics. In an open letter, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee gave an evaluation of the situation on August 29. It said that the democracy movement in the Baltic republics had led to separatism and calls for secession, which was termed extreme, unconstitutional, and illegal. Many of the unofficial groups were said to be fascist. The
nationalist movement was also said to have caused major economic losses, and created a civil war-type atmosphere. The August 23 demonstration was said to have caused hysteria, and to have spread hate against the Soviet Union, the Russians, and the Red Army (Padomju Jaunatne, Aug. 29, 1989; 1).

The Latvian Communist Party's Central Committee agreed with the CPSU Central Committee's evaluation to a point. It said that a separatist movement was evident in Latvia, and that this was anti-Soviet. At the same time, however, it reaffirmed its commitment to establish Latvia as an autonomous state in the Soviet confederacy (Padomju Jaunatne, Sept. 1, 1989; 1).

CPSU Plenum on Nationalities

On September 19 and 20, 1989, the CPSU Central Committee had planned a plenum on inter-ethnic relations. The plenum had been announced eighteen months earlier, and was long awaited by the Baltic republics in the hope that they would be granted more autonomy.

Before the plenum began, however, many of the hopes were dashed, when on August 17 Pravda published the CPSU nationalities policy platform that would be discussed at the upcoming plenum. The platform guaranteed that Moscow would continue dominance over the republics. The military was to remain inter-ethnic, and not divided into republic units as the Baltic republics had requested. A new institution was to be established to decide constitutional issues, such as the republics claiming the right to veto
all-union legislation. Citizenship requirements for local elections were also declared unconstitutional, and therefore null and void. (Solchanyk, September 1, 1989; 1-3).

The Baltic leaders were asked to Moscow a week before the plenum to discuss the plenum as well as the August 29 Central Committee's letter on the current situation in the republics. The political situation in the republics was described as complex, especially the interethnic problems. Gorbachev stated three points from which the republics could not deviate. First, the problems would have to be solved in unity with rules governing the Soviet federation. Second, the Party's unity could not be sacrificed, and third, the rights of all citizens would have to remain equal (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Oct. 11, 1989; 6-7).

At the plenum, representatives from all three republics spoke, urging and defending reformist policies. V.J. Valjas, the First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, said that complete historical truth dealing with the incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR must be dealt with. Valjas also reiterated that Estonia's official goal was political and economic autonomy in a Soviet confederation (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Oct. 18, 1989; 11).

The Lithuanian Party boss, Brazauskas, said that the Lithuanian Communist Party and the Lithuanian popular movement, Sajudis, were the center of political life. He emphasized the importance of the cooperation between the two, especially since people did not trust the Party any longer, and that some Party members demanded an independent Communist party in order to retain legitimacy (Current Digest of the Soviet Press).
Vagris, the Latvian Party leader, said that a Soviet confederacy could only be successful if the rights of the republics were optimally correlated to the rights of the entire USSR. He criticized members of the CPSU that were dragging their feet in respect to the reforms, and that this could only lead to negative results. Vagris also said that since the republics would have autonomy, the local Communist parties should also have corresponding autonomy. Commenting on Latvia's ethnic problems and defending Latvian nationalism, Vagris stated that genuine internationalism was formed only on the basis of national values, and not on their counterbalance (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Oct. 25, 1989; 14-15). At this moment Vagris defended the nationalist movement, and proved that he sided with them, and not Moscow.

Gorbachev's speech, however, summed up the plenum's results. He admitted that mistakes had been made in the past by the Soviets (referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), but declared that the non-Russian republics had also gained a lot from the Soviet regime. He said that talk of secession from the USSR would be extremely dangerous at this point, and that there would only be negative consequences from such actions. He repeated that the political, economic, social, and cultural ties between the republics were so interwound that secession would be impossible, especially because of the heavy dependence of the republics on raw materials, fuel, and food. After dealing with the separationist sectors of the USSR, Gorbachev announced, to the dismay of the Baltic States, his support for making Russian the official language of the USSR (Padomju
For our purposes this is a good point at which to end the chronological discussion of what has occurred in Latvia since 1985. The unofficial groups have emerged, and now completely mobilized into demanding independence for Latvia. An analysis of the mobilization stage will follow.
Analysis of the Mobilization Stage

After the Writers' Conference in June 1988, the June 14 demonstration to commemorate Stalin's victims was a very powerful event. To date it was the largest mass demonstration; Latvian flags were present; Vulfsons repeated his comments that Latvia was illegally occupied; and there was no police interference. This showed both popular enthusiasm and an absence of fear from the authorities. The Writers' Conference was the watershed event for nationalist activity, and the June 14 demonstration was the first result. The demonstration had no demands, but it did rally support for Latvian nationalism.

Following the demonstration, the republic was in somewhat of a state of shock. It was almost in disbelief that the population viewed the events. This was because for forty years the Latvian identity, hope, and pride had been forced into the closet. But suddenly it had reawakened. For these reasons it can be understood why the rumours circulated that after the June 18 meeting of the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee a military crackdown was imminent. But the crackdown did not come. Extremist behavior was criticized and warnings were given, but the expected did not happen. These expectations demonstrated how the Latvian people had been conditioned into feeling after living in a centralized police state for forty-five years.

The June 20 founding of the Latvian Popular Front was finally the embodiment of all the nationalist activity that had been occurring. This was to be the main unofficial organization with the strongest presence in the political arena.

48
With so much nationalist activity, the people began to seek results. The next demands made by the people were the rehabilitation of the Latvian cultural symbols. On July 13 the red-white-red flag appeared in a Baltic '88 festival. The next day the flag was atop the Riga Castle. On July 16 the huge rally just outside of Riga demanded that the flag be rehabilitated. The authorities probably saw this as a small concession, and stated that the flag had never been illegal. At this point the state probably believed (and at least hoped) that the unofficial activity could be controlled, monitored, and it would eventually calm down. What the authorities did not realize was that every time they granted a concession, more and bigger demands would result.

Before the Popular Front congress, some major leadership changes were made. At the time, it was thought that Pugo had been too conservative for Moscow, and therefore he was replaced, but that was not the case since Pugo is now in the Politburo in Moscow. Appointing Gorbunovs as the President of the Latvian Supreme Soviet and Briesis as the Head of the Council of Ministers could have been a way of making favorable changes in Latvia to take some of the wind out of the Popular Front’s sails before the congress, which was expected to herald quite a surge of nationalism for the Latvians. This was in fact the case when the day before the congress the Supreme Soviet voted unanimously to make Latvian the official state language. In this way the government tried to get support from the people by being the initiator of nationalist legislation, but more than likely it was trying to get the best out of a losing situation. Appointing Vagris, who in practicality was on his way to
retirement, was probably due to the fact that it was too early to tell how the events in Latvia would evolve, and having someone expendable, such as Vagris, would make a future reaction to the situation much simpler. If a hard line conservative was needed to rule with a firm hand it could be arranged, as could the promotion of someone reform minded, like Gorbunovs.

The Latvian Popular Front Congress, as anticipated by the authorities, was a great success for the Latvian people. Both Vagris and Gorbunovs addressed the huge crowd, which indicated that the authorities knew that the Popular Front would be an organization it would have to contend with to maintain its legitimacy and authority. With the Popular Front’s statutes and program, a definite plan for action was created. The Popular Front would participate in politics at all levels. The influence that the Popular Front would have would be very great, because it represented the identity and desires of an entire people.

The Popular Front’s program, statutes, and in a very important sense, the emotion, caused tremendous fear from the authorities. They continually warned against extremist behavior, but even more fear came from the non-Latvian (especially the Russian) segment of the population. With all the Latvian nationalism, the non-Latvians had to face the fact that they might lose their privileges in living in one of the most favorable parts of the USSR. Because of these fears, the International Front of Laborers was organized within a few weeks. The Interfront would work to ensure that the rights they enjoyed living in Latvia would be protected. The tensions in Latvia were only made worse by the proposed
constitutional changes. Since the changes were seen as taking away the power of the republics, the Popular Front was strongly against the changes; even the authorities were moderately against the changes. 800,000 signatures were delivered to Moscow, and a massive demonstration was organized by the Popular Front to oppose them. These events induced the Latvian authorities to reject the proposed amendments. The changes had already been rejected by the Estonian and Lithuanian republics, and as often is the case, the Latvians followed the actions of their neighbors. When the CPSU met to ratify the changes, there were heated debates, and many of the proposed amendments were changed, and some eliminated. Although Gorbachev criticized the republican leaders for letting the popular fronts influence them, the actions of the Estonian Popular Front, Sajudis (the Lithuanian movement), and the Latvian Popular Front had indirectly influenced policies in the entire Soviet Union. If Gorbachev and the center were unsure of the potential power of the popular movements, they now knew and understood, as did the movements themselves. Although all of the amendments were not rejected as the Popular Front had desired, this was still a great victory for the popular movements, and it only increased their legitimacy and optimism.

Another event that increased the morale of the Popular Front was the November 18 demonstration. Over 200,000 people participated, which made it the largest to date. The Latvian Popular Front was also allowed to hold a concert in the very room that Latvia declared its independence in 1918 (Padomju Jaunatne, November 20, 1988; 1).

In December the Popular Front introduced legislation in the form of a
proposed citizenship law. This is an important point in the evolution of the Latvian Popular Front. For the first time it actually came together, formulated a law, and then lobbied for it. In earlier instances the Popular Front usually rallied support for vague demands, which allowed the state to manipulate them into favorable legislation. At this point the Popular Front not only had a demand, but it also presented the specific plan that would satisfy this demand instead of leaving it up to the state.

On January 4 the Popular Front, Environmental Club, and the Independence Movement were stripped of their status as registered groups. The state believed that the groups were a serious threat to their authority, and that the retraction of their registration would cause them to lose their legitimacy and momentum. This measure was too little, too late, because by this time the groups were not concerned anymore with their official status, but rather with gaining results.

A major event in January 1989 was Interfront's founding congress. This congress was viewed as a major movement in Latvia, and there was official participation as well. Because the congress was televised, and many of the speakers outwardly criticized the Popular Front and the Latvian people. This caused tremendous outrage from Latvians, and created an extremely tense and potentially explosive atmosphere in the republic.

Two days after the congress, however, the Latvian language law was passed. This pleased the Latvians, but outraged Interfront. As a result, more tension was created.
Interfront must have felt completely ignored when the Council of Ministers adopted legislation in February to stop migration of workers into Latvia. At this point any action by any group (including the Popular Front, Interfront, and even the state) produced backlash and discontent from one segment or another of the population. The Russians despised the Popular Front and the latest legislation by the state, while the Latvians despised Interfront and thought that the government was dragging its feet dealing with nationalist legislation. The state, meanwhile, was trying to walk the thin line between the two sides. Each side was also trying to gain support from the people to prove that it was the legitimate voice of the Latvian republic.

On February 18 and 19, 1989, the Independence Movement's congress took place. The significance of the Independence Movement was the fact that it demanded a completely independent Latvia, as opposed to the Popular Front, which at this point desired an autonomous Latvia in a Soviet confederacy. The Popular Front probably also wanted an independent Latvia, but it thought that making that demand at that point would have been dangerous, and therefore stuck to autonomy. In this way the Independence Movement took a lot of pressure off the Popular Front. The Popular Front was a moderate organization compared to the Independence Movement, and this eventually proved very beneficial to the Popular Front. As the Popular Front expected, the Independence Movement was extremely criticized by the authorities, who tried to force it to alter its statutes.

In May, when the Independence Movement met to consider changing its
statutes, it refused to do so, continuing to show its support for a completely independent Latvia. All other organizations carefully watched to see how the authorities would respond. On June 22 the state said that the Independence Movement could exist, although its demands for an independent Latvia were unconstitutional. Within a week the Popular Front had changed its stance from demanding an autonomous Latvia into demanding an independent Latvia. The first Independence Movement congress, as well as its subsequent activities, were paramount to the evolution of the demands by other unofficial Latvian groups.

At the end of February tensions in Latvia ran extremely high. The Interfront demonstration drew 100,000 people, with Popular Front supporters present and protesting Interfront. It was surprising that both sides showed restraint. Two weeks later, on March 12, the Popular Front held its demonstration in which 250,000 people protested the policies of the Interfront. By this point the relations between the Interfront and the Popular Front had reached a boiling point. This in turn caused the authorities to fear that a civil war, or at least that massive violence could occur. On March 25, the day before the national elections, a Popular Front march drew an estimated 500,000 people into the streets. The march was to commemorate Stalin's victims of 1949, but it also created a great emotional boost for Latvians.

The next day in the national elections, 26 out of 34 contested seats went to candidates endorsed by the Latvian Popular Front. The elections showed that the Latvian Popular Front had massive support, if not the upperhand in republic affairs. This forced both Interfront and the authorities to
respect the Popular Front and their demands even more than before.

The massive support of the Popular Front caused rumors to spread again of an imminent military crackdown. On April 11 tanks rolled down the streets of Riga to back these claims. Although said only to be a military exercise, the tanks sent a message to the people that violence would not be tolerated. It also was significant since this (as well as the crackdown in Tbilisi, Georgia) coincided with Gorbachev being out of the country, which emphasized that he was vitally important to the reform process.

The tanks, however, did not deter either the Popular Front or the Interfront. The Popular Front coordinated its activities with other unofficial groups and started a citizenship registration drive to call a congress of all legal representatives of Latvia to decide Latvia’s future. The criteria were very strict and did not include most of the migrants who entered Latvia after World War II. Neither the local nor central authorities (not to mention Interfront) thought this was fair, and Gorbachev eventually told Estonia to change its citizenship requirements, which were nearly identical to Latvia’s.

On April 28 Interfront planned a general strike. It wanted to flex its muscles and show that it too had a lot of clout in Latvia. The Latvian Communist Party Central Committee warned Interfront about negative consequences of the strike, probably fearing that the results could be massive. It turned out, however, that the strike was not as successful as the Interfront had hoped. The Popular Front, however, objected to Interfront’s attempted strike very vocally.
The Popular Front's demands in early May indicated that it was serious in its political activities and agenda. Some of the demands, such as a new Latvian constitution, were quite radical, indicating again how the Latvian political activity increased. In June 1988, the main things the groups dealt with were cultural symbols and freedom of expression. Ten months later a new constitution guaranteeing democracy and autonomy were demanded. As far as the Popular Front and the authorities were concerned, these actions were still not as radical as those of the Independence Movement. As mentioned, the Independence Movement took a lot of pressure off of the Popular Front, enabling it to progressively increase the magnitude of its activities and the radicalization of its demands.

On May 13 and 14 the popular movements of all three Baltic states met. Before this time there was little cooperation between the three. By this time, however, the three movements had all been very successful in their political activity, and they thought that coordinated actions would strengthen their demands not only at an all-union level, but in their respective republics as well. The meeting developed a united program for reform in the Baltic states. The program emphasized economic and political autonomy. Although independence from Moscow was not explicitly stated, it is quite apparent that due to the success and the progressive radicalization of demands, it would only be a matter of time until complete independence would be demanded. If and when complete independence became the program of the popular movements, closely coordinated activity between the three states would be useful. The coordination would be necessary not only to oppose Moscow to what the
center would undoubtedly be extremely objected to, but also to benefit the three countries politically and economically if independence was achieved.

The meeting of the Peoples' Deputies in Moscow was a setback for the reform-minded Baltic republics. Although some of the deputies were elected by popular vote and were reform-minded, many parts of the USSR were extremely conservative and elected conservative deputies. Also, the Congress had been created in such a way that the CPSU still had the majority of deputies because of how the candidates were chosen. In other cases conservative deputies ran unopposed, which further hampered the "democratic" congress. The results continued to indicate that change in the USSR would be slow and still somewhat controlled from the center, although less so than it had been before.

Although the results of the congress showed that the Baltic republics had raced ahead of the rest of the USSR in the reforms, it also sent a message to the Baltic people that if results were going to occur, they would not come from the center, but from the Baltics themselves in what would probably result in some sort of confrontation.

Meanwhile, in Latvia, another symbolic victory for the Popular Front and the Latvian nationalists was won when June 14 gained official recognition as a day of mourning. It was, after all, this demonstration in 1986 that began the unofficial movement in Latvia, and now, ironically, it was made official policy.

After June 14, the Popular Front's attention turned to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. An international conference was held from June 30 to July 1 which found the pact a gross breach of international law. The
people of the Baltic republics were so fed up with the official lies about their incorporation into the USSR that they planned a huge demonstration for August 23. The Lithuanian authorities admitted to the secret clauses the day before in an attempt to stifle the demonstration, but if it had any effect, it only strengthened the will of the demonstrators. The demonstration was the biggest in Baltic history, with over one million participants joining hands across the three republics. This was an awesome show of force, which strengthened their national feelings, and extremely frightened the authorities.

What added to the authorities' problems were the events that occurred prior to the August 23 demonstration. On July 25 the Popular Front outlined its plan for how Latvia would become a totally independent country. On August 5 the republic's Supreme Soviet declared its autonomy from Moscow. This gave the appearance to the conservatives in Moscow that the Latvian authorities had come to agreement with the Popular Front in demanding independence.

The central authorities reacted to the events in the Baltic republics by condemning the popular movements on August 29. This was because they were frightened, but also mad, and since Gorbachev was on vacation, it was a good time to stick it to the nationalists. The editorial caused outrage from the people. They believed in what they were doing, and they also thought that by doing it in a non-violent way they were properly working for their goals.

The center, however, continued to show its unwillingness to allow the republics more freedom at the Central Committe Plenum in Moscow on
September 19 and 20. By this time the local Parties were influenced a great deal by the popular movements in their respective countries. They realized that the only way they could keep their legitimacy was to work with the popular movements. Although leaders of all three Baltic republics urged for more political independence from Moscow, Gorbachev made it clear that secession was out of the question, and even regressed to supporting Russian as the official language throughout the USSR.

Conclusion

The popular movements, the local authorities, and the central authorities have all played extremely important roles in the recent events in Latvia and the USSR. The evolution of the groups and their sudden power in the republic was remarkable and unforeseen. This paper has divided the activities into two stages: the emergence, and the mobilization. The emergence stage was the growth of the popular movements. The mobilization stage was when this growth was complete, and the organization began to have an important impact on activities in Latvia.

Even during the latest activities the future status of Latvian groups has been speculative. How much will the center take before putting down its foot? Will force be used if the Baltics continue pressing for independence? What if Gorbachev's reforms lose favor? All of these questions only bring on more questions, and what the future holds for the Baltics is foggy at best.

Gorbachev visited Lithuania in January 1990, after the Lithuanian
Communist Party split from Moscow and asserted its support for secession (the Latvian and Estonian Parties are considering doing the same). He repeatedly warned, urged, and begged the Lithuanian Party not to withdraw from the CPSU, but apparently did not succeed. The Baltics are important to the USSR militarily and economically, but the republics want independence. The center continues to consider policies for secession, but they cannot continue their silence indefinitely, since the Baltics will accept nothing less. Sooner or later the issue must be resolved. Something that Gorbachev is forced to contend with is the fact that secession is legal. The 1936 Soviet constitution points out that any republic can secede, if its people desire it. This was obviously written in a different time, but now Gorbachev will be forced to deal with this issue.

Allowing the Baltics to go their own way, as letting Eastern Europe go, could have extremely significant military, economic, and political ramifications elsewhere in the USSR, such as in the Caucasus and the Ukraine. However, since the Baltics were incorporated in 1940, they could perhaps be treated as a special case. Another important factor at play is the success of Gorbachev in reviving the economy. Initial reports from the USSR indicate that he has not yet succeeded, and that there is growing unrest among the people for consumer goods and food. If Gorbachev falls, there is no telling who would replace him and what his policies would be.

Very important is the fact that with glasnost, the popular movements, and even the local governments supporting secession, could things ever go back to how they were, i.e., a centralized police state with a strong handed dictator? The cost would certainly be high, and it would definitely not
come from Gorbachev. After watching the Berlin Wall and Eastern Europe crumble, it is hard to believe that the USSR would have any legitimacy left in the world and within itself if it was to crush the reformers not only in the Baltics but throughout the USSR. This could prove too high a cost.

One of the problems that the Baltics will have in succeeding is what to do with the non-nationals. So far, much of the nationalism taking place in the Baltics, and the USSR, has been explicit. This means that the indigenous people are taking a superiority stand over the other people. This could cause a lot of problems in the future. Peaceful coexistence will be necessary if secession is to be a success.

Another necessary factor required will be one of cooperation and dialogue with Moscow. Lithuania’s declaration of independence shows how their ultimatum to Moscow has caused them problems. Lithuania’s actions have been criticized by Moscow, because they set a precedent of how a republic could give an ultimatum to Moscow. Moscow cannot allow this to happen in fear that other republics will do the same, and therefore the problems that Lithuania has faced.

Whatever the future holds for Latvia, it is safe to say that things will never be the same, no matter what happens. There are certain things that tanks, guns, and even death cannot erase, and those are hope, love, and belief in one’s nationality. These things may be suppressed at times, but even a few moments of national unity, as Latvia has now experienced again for the first time since 1940, can last generations and keep the hope of freedom alive.
Bibliography


(April), 1.

------. (1988c). "8,000 Attend Astra's Funeral," Latvian Backgrounder
(May), 2.

(July), 2.

1-2.

Backgrounder (December), 3.

------. (1989a). "LNNK Founding Congress," Latvian Backgrounder
(March), 2-3.


Latvian News Digest. (May 1987). "Workers Establish Helsinki '86 Group in

------, (October 1987). "Latvians Protest Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of
1939," 1-3.


Latvian SSR Statistics Board. (1980). "Latvia SSR's Demography of
Inhabitants and Districts by Cities and Regions," Brīvība (November
22), 1.


(May 30), 2.

--------. (June 24, 1988) "LKP CK Plēnums," 2.


