“The Dictator without a Uniform: Kārlis Ulmanis, Agrarian Nationalism, Transnational Fascism, and Interwar Latvia”

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Abstract

"The Dictator without a Uniform: Kārlis Ulmanis, Agrarian Nationalism, Transnational Fascism, and Interwar Latvia" tells for the first time the fascinating backstory of Latvia's period of authoritarian rule (1934-1940) under Kārlis Ulmanis. The son of a former serf in the Russian Empire, Ulmanis rose to national prominence as an agronomist before becoming in 1918 the prime minister of the new Latvian republic. However, despite his earlier commitment to democracy, on May 15, 1934, Ulmanis led a coup d'état, proclaiming himself the *Vadonis* (Leader) of Latvia.

Based on previously unexamined archival materials in Nebraska and Latvia, this dissertation illustrates how many of Ulmanis's programs and much of his legitimizing rhetoric were rooted in his experiences as a student in Switzerland and Germany and as a post-1905 Revolution political émigré in the American Midwest. Pointing to his earlier agricultural training and experiences abroad, this work highlights how Ulmanis used prairie populism-style agrarian nationalism, a Latvian adaption of American 4-H known as *Mazpulki*, a focus on modern agricultural science, and grand agricultural festivals and farming exhibitions to cultivate his image as the authoritarian and progress-bearing *Vadonis* (Leader) and *Saimnieks* (Husbandman) of Latvia. Thus, by contextualizing Ulmanis's rhetoric and policies within a larger transnational and transatlantic narrative, this dissertation argues that rural/agricultural crises in the first decades of the twentieth century and the diffusion of ideas and models of agricultural modernization played a heretofore unrecognized yet substantial role in the sudden rise of authoritarian and fascist regimes during the interwar period, as the case of Latvia attests.

Finally, based on new archival discoveries, this dissertation contends that notwithstanding Ulmanis's frequent celebration of his American ties, and despite the fact that

previous historiography has labeled him as a conservative authoritarian leader, Ulmanis ultimately saw himself as belonging to the group of interwar fascist leaders in Europe. As a result, this work calls for a reexamination of interwar fascism, arguing that it should not be understood as a static, invariable ideology with a checklist of characteristics, but rather as a syncretic, transnational movement that was adapted at the national level to meet distinct socio-cultural conditions.

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Introduction

At its core, this dissertation tells the fascinating and revealing story of Kārlis Ulmanis and the Latvian nation's varying attempts to move from subjugation under tsarist rule to a free and independent member of the European community and Western civilization writ large, all the while dealing with the violent upheavals and conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century that turned the region into a "bloodland."[1] An investigation of Ulmanis – the first prime minister, fascist dictator, and most important politician of the First Latvian Republic (1918-1940), and his efforts to shape the Latvian state and nation speak directly to a number of the era's seminal questions. As this dissertation makes clear, foremost among those was what it meant to be "modern," to belong to the group of "advanced" nations.

For Ulmanis and Latvians, the answer to this question originally centered on democracy and laissez-faire capitalism. Thus, like the rest of the new nation-states of Central and Eastern Europe that arose in the aftermath of the First World War, Latvia, under Ulmanis's leadership, became a parliamentary democracy with liberal protections for its sizable population of ethnic minorities. However, for as much as Ulmanis and Latvians bought into the ideals of Wilsonian democracy that dominated Europe in the early 1920s, ultimately that commitment was eroded by the ultranationalistic and fascist wave that swept over Europe and much of the Western world. Hence, despite Ulmanis's earlier ardent belief in democracy, in May 1934, seeing authoritarianism as the "modern," European way, he orchestrated a coup d'état and subsequently ruled as the dictator of Latvia until he was deposed in 1940 by the Soviet Red Army.

Thus, this work traces the making of an interwar European dictator and authoritarian state, and in following Ulmanis's professional path from an agricultural journalist to the *Vadonis*

[1] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

(Leader) of Latvia, it also contributes to wider historiographical discussions on authoritarianism and fascism. Specifically, the case of interwar Latvia raises questions about the nature of fascism, and at the forefront is the issue of Ulmanis's seemingly paradoxical identity as a peaceful, agrarian fascist. To be sure, for a fascist dictator, Ulmanis had an extraordinary persona, as encapsulated in the following vignette.

On May 1, 1936, William C. Bullitt, the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, arrived at the presidential castle in Rīga, Latvia. Though it is an impressive fourteenth-century castle rising above the dark, mighty waters of the Daugava River, Bullitt had not journeyed to Rīga to see the old medieval fortress. Rather, he was in Rīga to visit the *Vadonis* of Latvia, Kārlis Ulmanis, who had established his authoritarian regime following a bloodless coup d'état on the evening of May 15-16, 1934. During Bullitt's visit, the two men undoubtedly discussed matters befitting a meeting between a diplomat and head of state. However, Bullitt had also come for personal reasons. Bullitt had worked for the Woodrow Wilson Administration at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 before later leaving on a special mission to Russia to investigate the new Bolshevik regime. While seeing to those duties, Bullitt learned of Ulmanis and his work as Latvia's first prime minister.

Now, in spring 1936, Bullitt, ever the socialite, wanted to take advantage of the rare opportunity to chat about American life with one of the few European rulers who had lived in America and spoke English fluently.[2] Ulmanis, who was always happy to reminisce about his earlier years in the American Midwest, mostly in Nebraska, apparently obliged Bullitt's conversational entreaty, for at the end of their meeting, the two men commemorated the event by

[2] Perhaps the most telling example of Bullitt's famous social gatherings is the so-called "Spring Festival of 1935." Bullitt, wanting to host the greatest embassy party ever held in Moscow, invited more than 400 guests to his official residence, the Spaso House, where the alcohol was reportedly so abundant that even a bear, brought in as part of the party theme, became intoxicated on champagne provided to it by an inebriated guest.

posing for an interesting and telling photo. Standing in front of the window in Ulmanis's presidential office, the two men, both dressed in dark business suits, appear quite stately, especially given their sumptuous surroundings. But the men's relaxed posture and smiling faces seem at variance with the standard images of stone-faced, uniform-clad dictators that were ubiquitous in 1930s Europe. Additionally, what makes the photo, which appeared the next day in the Latvian press, even more fascinating is that the two men jointly held for the camera one of Ulmanis's most prized possessions: a University of Nebraska pennant that the chancellor had sent to Ulmanis, an alumnus, the month prior.[3]



Figure 1: Kārlis Ulmanis and Ambassador William Bullitt

As this photograph implies, Kārlis Ulmanis was not a stereotypical interwar European dictator, fashioned in the likes of the bombastic, strutting, militaristic, and xenophobic Benito

[3] This picture was printed, for example, in *Rīts* on May 2, 1936.

Mussolini or Adolf Hitler, to give the two most well-known examples. First of all, Ulmanis's biographical ties to America set him apart from other European dictators. Having fled from political persecution after getting swept up in the bloody and chaotic Revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire, Ulmanis lived as a political exile in the United States for six years, studying agriculture at the University of Nebraska and working in the dairy industry, before eventually making his back to his homeland just prior to the First World War. These experiences in the New World, as this work will show, were seminal to Ulmanis's mental outlook and future political program, which he implemented first as a multi-term prime minister, and then as the authoritarian *Vadonis*. Thus, the photograph with Bullitt and the Nebraska pennant was not a staged, politically motivated photo op. Conversely, it attests to the genuine pride and rare levity that Ulmanis felt when he got a chance to converse about his second homeland.

Another revealing aspect of the photo is Ulmanis's attire. For as much as Ulmanis took pride in his Nebraska pennant, he was equally proud of his unique, decidedly civilian style of dress. Unlike the majority of European dictators in the 1930s, Ulmanis did not wear military uniforms, nor did he appear bare-chested like Mussolini. Instead, Ulmanis almost always appeared in public wearing what he perceived as a plain, American-style business suit, and this choice of clothing was fully part of his identity, both as a private person and authoritarian leader. For instance, amid the hundreds of newspaper clippings that Ulmanis collected during the interwar years, and which now comprise part of the Ulmanis Collection in the Latvian State Archives, he particularly liked an article about himself from a Swiss newspaper whose eye-catching headline was "The Dictator without a Uniform: From Farmer to Statesman." Ulmanis,

the reporter observed in the piece, "is the single dictator in Europe who always goes about in plain clothes – he is the dictator without a uniform."[4]

Much like that Swiss newspaper article, this work investigates that exact, exceptional persona of Ulmanis: as the dictator without a uniform, as the democratic farmer turned dictator, and as the European dictator with Nebraska roots. In doing so, it takes a multifaceted approach. Firstly, it employs a biographical approach. This is imperative because although the historian Edgards Dunsdorfs wrote a biography of Kārlis Ulmanis in the 1970s, and despite the fact that Latvian writers like Edvarts Virza and Žanis Unāms published abridged biographies of Ulmanis in the mid-1930s, no author has previously explained in adequate detail the years of Ulmanis life in America, though the Latvian émigrés Aivars Ronis and Arijs Liepins did write in 1999 a very short article about Ulmanis's years in Nebraska.[5] These biographies fall short in this area because their authors simply did not know very much about Ulmanis's life abroad or about American history in general. Consequently, even when these authors offered accounts of the relatively well-known events of Ulmanis's life in America, their analysis falls woefully short because they fail to place him into the milieu in which he lived and worked, and which so clearly fashioned his mental outlook.

Equally problematic, and this is especially true of Dunsdorfs's work, these biographies were written using a limited number of sources. In Dunsdorfs's case, his access to primary sources was limited by his residency in Australia, as well as by Soviet-era archival restrictions.

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[4] *Latvijas valsts vēstures arhīvs* (hereafter LVVA), 5969. f., 1. apr., 384. l., 44. lp. Unfortunately, the clipping does not include any information about the name of the newspaper or the date of the issue. For many years Ulmanis had a subscription to "Argus" Nachricthen-Bureau G.m.b.H (the "Argus" News Bureau), which sent him German- and English-language newspapers. Presumably Argus had also sent him this Swiss article.

[5] Edgars Dunsdorfs, *Kārļa Ulmaņa dzīve: ceļinieks, politiķis, diktators, moceklis*, reprint ed. (Rīga: Zinātne, 1992); Edvarts Virza, *Kārlis Ulmanis*, reprint ed. (Rīga: Zvaigzne, 2010); Žanis Unāms, "Kārlis Ulmanis, biografiska studija," in *Tautas vadonis Kārlis Ulmanis* (Rīga: Valtera un Rapas akc. sab. apgāds, 1936), 5-50; Lawrence E. Murphy, Aivars G. Ronis, and Arijs R. Liepins, "Karlis Ulmanis: From University of Nebraska Graduate to President of Latvia," *Nebraska History* Vol. 80 (1999): 46-54.

As for Virza and Unāms's works, they were written and published during the years of Ulmanis's authoritarian rule, and thus the regime, in its desire to produce unquestionably favorable biographies of Ulmanis, circumscribed the authors' analysis and access to all of the primary sources. What is more, Virza was a longtime admirer of Ulmanis's, and thus, beyond any issues of censorship, he was careful never to portray Ulmanis in a negative light. Likewise, Alfrēds Bērziņš's biography of Ulmanis, also published (like Dunsdorfs's) in the 1970s, is equally problematic in this regard, for Bērziņš, who served as the minister of public affairs in the Ulmanis regime, clearly set out to write a hagiography and propaganda masterpiece.[6]

Though he was beset with bouts of melancholy while living in Nebraska, later on in life Ulmanis develop a great nostalgia for the place – and indeed for America as a whole – that went straight to the heart of his identity, personally as well as politically. This was evidenced in many ways. Besides cherishing his much-loved pennant, Ulmanis founded Latvian versions of American 4-H – the most prominent agriculture-focused youth organization in American history – and Arbor Day. Known in Latvian as *Mazpulki* (which can be loosely translated as "Clubs") and *Meža dienas* (Forest Days) respectively, these cultural institutions, originally founded in 1929 and 1930, were transformed during Ulmanis's regime from schools of democracy and civic activism into telltale markers of authoritarian rule. What is clear from these examples, then, is that one simply cannot understand Ulmanis's persona, or the nature and culture of his regime, without placing them in a transatlantic narrative. Thus, the first two chapters develop this key, previously unexamined backstory and follow Ulmanis's movements between Europe and America.

Chapter one begins with a brief summary of Latvian history prior to Ulmanis's birth in 1877. This is intended to help readers who know little about Latvian history to develop a sense of

[6] Alfreds Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs.* 2. iespiedums (Brooklyn: Grāmatu Draugs, 1974).

the world into which Ulmanis was born. The rest of the chapter investigates Ulmanis's life up to his arrest in late 1905, when the tsarist authorities sought to suppress revolutionary activity in the restless Baltic Provinces. At its core, this first chapter contends that Ulmanis developed great internal paradoxes and a general uneasiness as he sought to find his place in a rapidly changing country that was nonetheless encumbered by its complicated past. Chapter two begins with Ulmanis's release from prison in 1906 and proceeds to examine his life in political exile, which ended with his decision to return home from America in autumn 1913. It reveals that Ulmanis was greatly influenced both personally and professionally by the lingering legacy of progressive populism in the American Midwest, by the optimistic "can-do spirit" of the inhabitants of the Great Plains, and by what was, in his eyes, the impressive and exemplary modernization of American agriculture.

As these chapters make clear, Ulmanis was a very private person. He also had very few close friends, and he never married. To make matters even more difficult for historians, Ulmanis also never kept a journal, nor did he leave any sort of testament or memoir, save for his statements to Soviet investigators after he was deposed when the Red Army invaded Latvia in June 1940.[7] In other words, it is frustratingly difficult to paint a complete picture of Ulmanis the person because there are few primary sources on his private life.

There are, however, sources that illuminate his work and public life. First, Ulmanis was, as an agronomist, agricultural journalist, and politician, a prolific writer. By one count, he published over 5,000 pages of text.[8] Consequently, parts of his professional biography can be pieced together through a close reading of these publications, as this dissertation does.

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[7] See *Kārlis Ulmanis trimdā un cietumā*, ed. I. Ronis and A. Žvinklis (Rīga: Latvijas vestures institūta apgāds, 1994).

[8] Baiba Rivža and Benjamiņš Treijs, "Kārļa Ulmaņa agrārpolitika šodienas skatījumā," in *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1998), 119.

Additionally, the primary and secondary sources that comprise the *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection* at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are also important. First compiled in the decades after the Second World War by Latvian émigrés living in Nebraska, the collection contains documents, oral histories, correspondences, and newspaper clippings about Ulmanis life and work in Nebraska.[9] Naturally, this collection, much of which had previously never been researched, proved an invaluable resource for chapter two.[10]

However, the most useful and insightful source by far is Ulmanis's letters to Hermanis Enzeliņš, with whom Ulmanis worked periodically as an agronomist and journalist between 1903 and 1915. Although the correspondence is incomplete, and we also do not have Enzeliņš's replies, it is comprised of letters, usually of a professional nature in content, that Ulmanis sent to Enzeliņš over a thirty-seven-year period, thus offering us the best insight of any primary source into Ulmanis's professional and, at times, private life. Parts of this correspondence have been used in nearly every biography of Ulmanis. But the problem is that every previous historian has borrowed from the passages offered in Virza's 1935 work, as Enzeliņš had agreed to let Virza see the letters. The issue, though, as noted above, is that Virza was very biased and hence only quoted the portions of Ulmanis's letter that supported his glorifying slant. With regard to the biographical elements, what is new in this work, then, besides its extensive use of the *Kārlis Ulmanis Collection* at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is that I have used for the first time the entire Ulmanis-Enzeliņš correspondence, which was only made available to researchers in

[9] While many people contributed to the effort to establish the collection, Elsie Thomas, who was originally from Liepāja, Latvia, became the official curator. An amazingly energetic and witty person, I had the distinct pleasure of chatting with her at length on a number of occasions. Thus, it was with great sadness that I learned of her death a few years ago, for I hoped she would see this work come to fruition.

[10] Indeed, the only other historians to use the collection are Ronis and Liepins (who co-wrote a short article) and Dunsdorfs, but he only did so tangentially, receiving some documents via international mail.

the 1990s, after Enzeliņš's granddaughter discovered them and passed them on to the agricultural technical school in Priekuļi.[11]

Perhaps the reader will wonder why this is the first work to fully utilize this most important primary source, especially since it has been available since the late 1990s. First of all, since the renewal of Latvia's independence in 1991, Latvian historians often have focused on other, more immediately pressing historical issues, like documenting the Soviet and Nazi occupations of their country, the massive deportations to Soviet gulags, the renewal of independence, etc. Secondly, and on a related point, the need to produce a new biography of Ulmanis has perhaps seemed less urgent to most Latvian historians since the consensus has long been that Dunsdorfs wrote a rather commendable work, even though his dislike of Ulmanis clearly clouded his analysis at times. Thirdly, since 1991 the trend has been to contextualize and explain the origins and nature of the Ulmanis regime by investigating possible short-term systemic weaknesses prior to the May 1934 coup rather than looking at the *longue durée* biographical experiences that informed his professional decisions.[12]

Hence, with regard to the historiography of Ulmanis and the so-called "Ulmanis Times" (*Ulmaņa laiki*), as Latvians often colloquially refer today to the period of Ulmanis's rule, one of the primary goals of this work is to spark a renewed conversation about the importance of Ulmanis's biographical experiences and personal interests to our understanding of the era. For one thing, it has been nearly forty years since a new, monograph-length biography of Ulmanis

[11] Apparently, before Enzeliņš fled to the West following the outbreak of the Second World War, he gave the letters, or a copy of the letters, to his cousin, Arturs Salaks. In 1984, Salaks's graddaughter, Ausma, was going through her grandfather's items following his death when she ran across files labeled "Hermanis Enzeliņš's stuff." Without even look at the contents, she passed the files on to Enzeliņš's granddaughter, Olita, who subsequently realized the importance of the files. See *Latvijas vēstnesis*, August 28, 1997.

[12] In his excellent historiographical essay on the coup, Valters Ščerbinskis points out that analysis of Latvia's political culture, institutional and social structure, and socio-economic conditions have been the primary areas of concern. See Valters Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis. The Coup d'État of 1934 in Latvia, its Causes and Consequences," in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History Diversity and Inclusion*, ed. Martyn Housden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 187-209.

has appeared—though in the last decade a few fictional biographies of Ulmanis have been published in Latvian, in which there are sensationalistic speculations about his private life.[13] Additionally, prior to what appears in the pages here, not a single fair and balanced biographical study of Ulmanis has been written. Even Dunsdorfs's work, though it is undoubtedly the best biography of Ulmanis to date, is riddled with obvious biases: in this case against Ulmanis and his regime and in favor of the Social Democrats with whom Dunsdorfs identified. Thus, given the fact that Ulmanis remains the single most significant figure in Latvian history – and, indeed, whether as the prime minister or *Vadonis*, he was in power for just under half of the years of the entire "First Republic"[14] – it is time for professional historians to take another look at Ulmanis's life.

However, with all of that being said, this work is, as was noted above, only partly a biographical study. Thus, it focuses in the first two chapters on Ulmanis's pre-First World War experiences in order to set up, and provide necessary context for, the later chapters, which investigate in turn democratic Latvia and Ulmanis's coup, followed by two case studies on the development of his regime's ideological and cultural attempts to legitimize its rule.

Therefore, chapter three serves as a bridge between these modes of analysis. It details Ulmanis's return from America, his experiences during the First World War, and his political rise from agronomist to the office of prime minister of an independent Latvian republic. These are the biographical parts. The chapter also sets up Ulmanis's coup by highlighting the unstable nature of parliamentary democracy in Latvia, before then turning to a discussion of Ulmanis's scholarly investigation in the years prior to his coup of fascism and the New Deal in America.

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[13] The most noteworthy example of this genre of fictional biography is Viesturs Avots, *Kārlis Ulmanis: valstiski un privāti* (Rīga: Jumava, 2010).

[14] Incredibly optimistic, the historian Ādolfs Šilde, writing abroad, already began using this term in the 1980s. See Ādolfs Šilde, *Pirmā republika: esejas par Latvijas valsti* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Grāmatu draugs, 1982).

Specifically, by using Ulmanis's heretofore unexamined personal collection of newspaper and journal clippings, the chapter shows that the previous historiography has only gotten it half right, revealing that the coup was neither about Ulmanis's personality and desire for unchecked power, nor was it about systemic problems in Latvia, as the two main currents of historiography have presented it.[15] Instead, after his careful study of the so-called "Third Way," as it was popularly called worldwide, Ulmanis decided to adopt an external model. Consequently, while there were certainly factors internal to Latvia that indeed must be included in the historical equation, what chapter three illustrates is that it was ultimately Ulmanis's understanding of events abroad – namely in Italy, Germany, and America – that prompted him to upend Latvia's democracy.[16]

Chapter four continues this transnational theme by further linking developments in Latvia with related events elsewhere in Western Europe and America. Using previously unexamined archival sources, it explores the origins of Latvian 4-H, or *Mazpulki*, as a nearly carbon copy of American 4-H. Subsequently, the chapter then analyzes post-coup *Mazpulki* as a microcosm of the Ulmanis regime and the ethnically Latvian, ultranationalistic society that it sought to create.

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[15] Most influential in the school of historiography that emphasizes the role of Ulmanis's personality and personal ambitions have been the following: Edgars Dunsdorfs, *Kārļa Ulmaņa dzīve: ceļinieks, polītiķis, diktātors, moceklis* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1978); Aivars Stranga, *LSDSP un 1934. gada 15 maija apvērsums: demokrātijas likteņi Latvijā* (Rīga: Aivars Stanga, 1998); Fēlikss Cielēns, *Laikmetu maiņā: atmiņas un atziņas. 4. grāmata. Latvijas neatkarīgās demokratiskās republikas uzplaukums un noriets*, *reprint ed.* (Stockholm: Apgāds memento, 1999); Mārtiņš Virsis, "Apvērsuma priekšvakarā," in *Pretstatu cīņā. Latvija 1917-1950*, ed. Viktors Leitāns (Rīga: Avots, 1990), 176-184; Jānis Peniķis, "Latvijas parlamentārais posms: sasniegums vai neizdevies experiments?" in *Akadēmiskā Dzīve: zinātnei, tēvzemei*, Vol. 26 (1984): 3-15. Within the school of historiography that interprets the coup as a consequence of socio-economic problems, the most significant works have been: Indulis Ronis, "Kārlis Ulmanis Latvijas brīvvalsts likteņa stundās un viņa Golgātas ceļš," in *Kārlis Ulmanis trimdā un cietumā: Dokumenti un materiāli*, ed. I. Ronis and A. Žvinklis (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 1994), 9-235; Edgars Andersons, *Latvijas vēsture 1920-1940: ārpolītika. Vol. 1* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1982); Antonijs Zunda, "Kārlis Ulmanis un Zemnieku savienība," in *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1998), 95-109, and "1934. gada 15. maija valsts apvērsuma kritika Latvijas un ārzemju publikācijās," *Latvijas vēsture,* Nr. 3 (2001): 37-53.

[16] In the last few years, a number of prominent Latvian historians have suggested that Ulmanis's coup should be analyzed from this exact approach. See, for example, Ilgvars Butulis, "Daži 1934. gada 15. maija apvērsuma aspekti K. Ulmaņa autoritārajā ideoloģijā," in *Apvērsums: 1934. gada 15. maija notikumi avotos un pētījumos*, ed. Valters Ščerbinskis and Ēriks Jēkabsons (Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs, 2012), 90-99; Valters Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis. The Coup d'État of 1934 in Latvia, its Causes and Consequences," in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History Diversity and Inclusion*, ed. Martyn Housden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 187-209.

Furthermore, the chapter demonstrates what fascism looked like in Latvia, concentrating on both Ulmanis's leadership and image as the *Vadonis* of Latvia and the *Virsvadonis* (Supreme Leader) of *Mazpulki*, and on how *Mazpulki* members understood fascism. In doing so, the chapter employs a transnational approach, analyzing *Mazpulki's* relations with fascists abroad, and ultimately arguing that both post-coup *Mazpulki* and the Ulmanis regime should be viewed as Latvian manifestations of transnational fascism.

The last chapter directly addresses Ulmanis's persona as the farmer turned dictator. Again taking advantage of archival materials that have previously never been analyzed, this chapter focuses on the most popular and widely attended events orchestrated by the Ulmanis regime: the three *Pļaujas svētki*, or Harvest Celebrations. Organized as a blend or hybrid of American state fair and European fascist mass rally cultures, the Harvest Celebrations of 1935, 1936, and 1937 are the most telling examples of Ulmanis's agrarian fascism and his self-cultivated image as the progress-bearing *Saimnieks* (meaning roughly "Husbandman") of the Latvian nation. To more fully flesh out just how significant the *Saimnieks* image was to Ulmanis and his regime, the chapter then concludes with an examination of the Five Year Achievement Exhibitions that were organized in the spring and summer of 1939. With these exhibitions, the chapter argues, we see the full maturation of the legitimizing culture of the regime, which was centered on the celebration of agrarian fascism and on the progress that Ulmanis, as the wise and loving *Saimnieks*, had brought to the nation. Far from merely playing on what Tom Brass has labeled "the agrarian myth" of populist and fascist ideologies of the interwar period, with these celebrations and exhibitions, the Ulmanis regime offered proof that agrarianism and modernism could coexist.[17]

[17] Tom Brass, *Peasants, Populism, and Postmodernism the Return of the Agrarian Myth* (London and Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2000).

Before laying out the main arguments of the work, I need to introduce and define my use of the term fascism, for one cannot use it without addressing its past and present, and this is especially the case when dealing with the countries of the former Soviet Union that were, as the Soviet propaganda instructed, ostensibly "liberated" from fascism at the end of the Second World War. The contentious issue with the term fascism is, of course, that scholars have struggled to agree on a definition. In this sense, our understanding of fascism is analogous to what St. Augustine once reportedly said about time: that he knew the meaning of it until someone asked him to explain it. So it is with fascism. We seem to know it when we see it – think Mussolini observing militaristic parades on the grand piazzas in Rome, or Hitler at the Nuremberg Party congresses – but those instances of scholarly agreement are all centered on examples of so-called "mature fascism" or "radical fascism" or "the fascist maximum," depending upon which scholar one prefers to cite. The drawback of these examples, though, is that they really do not help us gain a wider understanding of fascism, and that is precisely why some scholars have attempted to outline a checklist of the basic features and characteristics of so-called "generic fascism."[18]

However, this approach, too, is problematic, for it encourages scholars to attempt to square the circle of unique national cultures to fit a one-size-fits-all analytical mold. In particular, this methodology does not work well because fascism, as a political latecomer to the modern world, was inherently syncretic, and, moreover, it was always rooted in the local. So while we can almost always identify some common characteristics across multiple case studies – for instance, a promise of rebirth, the use of the Roman salute, ultranationalism, and so on – we

[18] For an excellent overview of the historiography on fascism, see Roger Griffin, "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age. From New Consensus to New Wave?," *Fascism* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–17, and "The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 21–43. Also very helpful is the historiographical essay at the end of Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

should not expect nationally specific instances of fascism to look and function in the same identical manner as elsewhere. Consequently, what I employ in this work is the transnational fascism approach. This analytical model emphasizes the ideas of the leaders themselves – that is to say, did they think that they were fascists? – and brings to the forefront how leaders borrowed and amended fascist ideas to fit their unique national culture.

As for the continued use of the term fascism today, it is obvious that the current Russian-Latvian tensions affect the meaning of the term fascism in this case. Every year with the coming of the Legionaries' Parade, the controversial event held each March that honors those men who served in the German army during the Nazi occupation of Latvia in order to fight against the Soviets, Latvians are accused – usually by Russians, though such interpretations have also appeared in Western media as a result of historical ignorance – of hiding a fascist past, and of harboring present-day neofascist views.[19] Much of this has to do, of course, with the complex history of Stalin's demographic policies – in this case, when he moved in huge numbers of Russian speakers to Soviet Latvia after the war – and the ongoing debate about citizenship and language laws in Latvia. Consequently, the the words "fascism" and "fascists" are tossed around as a terms of abuse in news broadcasts and articles, most of which are emanating from Russia and fanning the flames of dangerous ethnic and linguistic hostilities. Thus, it can be problematic, even unpatriotic for a Latvian historian to use the term fascism to describe Latvia's past, as that would invite accusations of being "pro-Russian." But if we are going to depict the past "as it

[19] For example, see the 2011 article "Anti-fascists rain on Waffen SS parade in Latvia," *RT*, March 16, 2011, accessed on March 29, 2014, http://rt.com/politics/latvia-nazi-veterans-march/; and from 2014, Sabine Balode, "Latvians Honor Nazi Allies from World War II," *ABC News*, March 16, 2014, accessed on March 29, 2014, http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/latvians-honor-nazi-allies-wwii-22930323. Deciding that the Germans were the lesser of the two evils, from 1943 on around 90,000 Latvians served in two ethnically Latvian divisions that were subsumed within the *Waffen-SS*. On the Latvian Legion, see in particular Andrew Ezergailis, *The Latvian Legion: Heroes, Nazis, or Victims? : A Collection of Documents from OSS War-crime Investigation Files, 1945-1950* (Rīga: Historical Institute of Latvia, 1997).

really was," to quote Leopold von Ranke's famous dictum, then we must use the label fascism if the sources call for it.

In total, then, this dissertation argues three main points. To begin with, this work contends that the Ulmanis regime did, in fact, have a complete ideology and ideological system, contrary to the analysis of Hanovs, Tēraudkalns, and Stranga, who have argued that that the regime's ideology was incomplete because of, in Hanovs and Tēraudkalns's words, "its short existence," and because Ulmanis, according to Stranga, could not stick to a long-term plan.[20] Confirming the preliminary observations of Vita Zelče, Ilgvars Butulis, and Aldis Purs, all of whom have argued that the regime had a comprehensive but not yet fully realized ideological system, this work posits that in fact the regime, borrowing heavily from Western Europe and the United States, had a more fully developed ideology than previously realized. They key point is that historians have previously not given enough attention to the authenticity of, and response to, Ulmanis's agrarianism and unique style of agrarian fascism.[21] For example, despite the fact that the Harvest Celebrations brought together, on average, just over ten percent of the entire populace, making it far and away the most significant public event, this is the first work to thoroughly examine them.[22]

Secondly, this work argues that the line between democracy and authoritarianism is often startlingly thin. Few case studies speak to this fact better than does Ulmanis's Latvia. Just recall,

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[20] Hanovs and Tēraudkalns, 5; Aivars Stranga, "Liberālisms, demokrātija un autoritārisms Eiropā un Latvijā (20.-30. gadi), in *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1998), 56.
[21] Vita Zelče, "'Bēgšana no brīvības': Kārļa Ulmaņa režīma ideoloģija un rituāli," in *Reiz dzīvoja Kārlis Ulmanis,* ed. Inta Brikše et al. (Rīga: Zinātne, 2007), 325-350; Ilgvars Butulis, "Daži 1934. gada 15. maija apvērsuma aspekti K. Ulmaņa autoritārajā ideoloģijā," in *Apvērsums: 1934. gada 15. maija notikumi avotos un pētījumos*, ed. Valters Ščerbinskis and Ēriks Jēkabsons (Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs, 2012), 90-99; Aldis Purs, "One Breath for Every Two Strides: The State's Attempt to Construct Tourism and Identity in Interwar Latvia," in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane E. Koenker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 97-115.
[22] In fact, Hanovs and Tēraudkalns are the only other scholars who have discussed these events, but they only devote a mere eight pages to the celebrations in their work.

for instance, Ulmanis's fascinating photo with Ambassador Bullitt. Even more telling, the case of *Mazpulki* – founded on the exact model of 4-H, which the U.S. government has pushed as a school of democracy for well over a century – illustrates just how easily "democratic" institutions can serve authoritarian ends.

Thirdly, this work shows that Ulmanis clearly saw himself as part of the group of interwar fascist dictators. Therefore, we must conclude that although the Ulmanis regime does not meet certain criteria of "generic fascism," and although the regime certainly was a long way away from reaching any sort of totalitarian fascist maximum, Ulmanis and his regime should nonetheless be identified as a Latvian version of transnational fascism. In arguing this point, in no way do I wish to lend credence to the unfounded accusations that all Latvians were or are "fascists" in the most derogatory sense of the word, which has now been detached in its use as a term of abuse from all historical specificity. Instead, I use the term because it helps us better understand Ulmanis and his regime in its time and place. Moreover, and perhaps even more significantly, by placing the regime in its proper historical category, it helps us better understand why and how fascism appealed to so many people, for what proves especially insightful in this regard is not so much cases of radical fascism but those on the fringes. It is to that fringe that we now turn.

Chapter One—Plowing the Land: Ulmanis's Early Life and School Years

Kārlis Ulmanis was a man beset by great internal paradoxes, just like the world and times in which he lived. How he understood and dealt with those paradoxes – both those rooted in his own personality as well as those embedded in the often conflicting historical forces of the era – is the proverbial red thread in his life story.

As a result of those internal contradictions, Ulmanis was – and remains – often misunderstood. But this was primarily his own fault, for he was an incredibly private person who, for all his success as a public figure, seemingly struggled to connect with people on an intimate level. Indeed, even Alfreds Bērziņš, a long-time political colleague of Ulmanis's and the Minister of the Interior for much of the Ulmanis regime, noted in the introduction to his biography of Ulmanis that trying to understand Ulmanis the person is somewhat akin to looking into a house through a foggy window. One can discern certain things here and there, but the room in its entirety remains frustratingly obscure.[1] Ulmanis's political opponents and general detractors have argued that this was because he was an unusual person. For example, he preferred to wear on a day-to-day basis peasant-style clothes that were, in the eyes of some, not befitting of his social and political status; he never smoked and did not drink alcohol, despite the prevalent smoking and drinking culture among Latvian males; and he never married nor ever had in his adult life a girlfriend, a situation which has continued to fuel speculation, especially among his critics, that he was possibly gay, though there is zero evidence to suggest that this was the case. On the other side of the coin, his supporters have argued that these idiosyncrasies only made him a better leader and politician. They maintain that by sacrificing his private life, avoiding unhealthy habits like smoking and drinking, and retaining his simple, farmer-like attire

[1] Alfreds Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs.* 2. iespiedums (Brooklyn: Grāmatu Draugs, 1974), 7.

and way of life, he was better able to connect with the Latvian people and totally dedicate himself to the betterment of society and the state.

Much like his personality, the wider world in which Ulmanis lived and worked was also fraught with paradoxes. It was a world of drastic and shocking change, of unbelievable tumult and upheaval, of peasant unrest, and violent and bloody revolutions and wars. Like so many of the people in the borderlands between Russia and Europe, a region that three notable scholars have recently described as "bloodlands" and "the shatterzone of empires," Ulmanis was directly affected by his milieu.[2] During his early years, in the rural, Latvian-speaking lands of the Russian Empire, that milieu or *Zeitgeist* could be summarized as a guarded hope—or at least that was the case in the Ulmanis household, as we will soon see. That cautious optimism was the result of Tsar Alexander II's so-called Great Reforms of the 1860s, which seemed to promise more autonomy for a nation that had long been under the yoke of others. But to fully understand why these reforms raised the hopes of Latvians, and especially rural Latvians, it is necessary first to craft a long-term historical perspective.

-A Brief History of Latvia-

Latvia has long been a desirable land. With its strategic geographic location on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, with a number of navigable rivers and two historic port cities in Liepāja and Rīga, and with its precious amber that has long been treasured in the Western world as a luxury item, it is no surprise that Latvian-speaking lands have been frequently targeted for occupation by bigger, more powerful neighbors.

One group constantly vying for influence in the Baltics was the Germans. As the trading outpost of Rīga situated on the left bank of the Daugava River began to grow beginning in the

[2] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Omer Bartov and Eric D Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

early Middle Ages, when it was a center of Viking trade, German traders began arriving to do business. Eventually, Christian missionaries journeyed to the area, too. Among the first was Meinhard von Segeberg, who arrived around 1180, with the backing of Archbishop Hartwig II of Hamburg-Bremen, to convert the pagan Latvian Semigallian, Selonian, Latgalian, and Livonian peoples.[3] Meinhard eventually settled upriver from the main trading post, in a village on the Daugava River that would become present-day Ikšķile, where he built a church, one of the first stone buildings in Latvian-speaking lands. Having suffered an attack by the pagans he was attempting to convert, Meihard brought in masons and constructed a small fortress. Thereafter, Meinhard and his successor as the Bishop of Livonia, Bertold von Loccum, abandoned the strategy of peaceful conversion work and turned instead to a crusade. However, this only brought more attacks, and Berthold himself was killed in a battle in 1198. As a result, Pope Innocent III called for a crusade against Livonians, and the Church's mission was carried on by the next bishop, Albert von Buxthoeven, the nephew of Archbishop Hartwig II. Taking into consideration the misson's previous failures, Albert recruited a much larger contingent of crusaders, and in 1201 he moved the bishopric from Ikšķile to the new city of Rīga, which he formally founded when he settled there. The etymology of the city's name remains unclear, but the theory that makes the most sense is that "Rīga" was a borrowing of the Latvian word "rija," meaning a granary or threshing barn, with the "j" becoming a "g" in the German spelling.[4]

To protect the new city and the church's property, the next year Bishop Albert established the Order of Livonian Brothers of the Sword (*Fratres milicie Christi de Livonia*).

[3] Modern-day Latvia was once comprised of four Indo-European Baltic tribes: the Semigallian (zemgaļi), Selonian (sēļi), Latgalian (latgaļi), and Couronian (kurši) tribes. Additionally, there was the Livonian (lībieši) tribe, which is often grouped separately since they spoke a language (Uralic Livonian) that was more closely related to Finnish and Estonian.

[4] On the early history of the bishopric of Livonia and the history of the Baltic Crusades, see Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The Popes and the Baltic Crusades: 1147-1254* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), especially pp. 65-75, 80-91.

And to encourage a permanent military presence, instead of a conquer-and-return-home system wherein crusaders would fight for a specified time and then return to their native homes, Albert and the Church agreed to grant one-third of all newly conquered lands to the Order in the hope of encouraging permanent settlement. As a result of this arrangement, the mission began to succeed, at least militarily and municipally. In 1207, Albert ordered work to begin on Rīga's fortifications. In 1211, the first coins were minted in Rīga. In that same year, Albert also laid the cornerstone for the new Rīga Cathedral. However, the Church did have to cede authority of the city in 1221, after the citizens demanded greater autonomy. Rīga thus became a free city, and a city constitution was duly adopted.[5] Fifteen years later, the Order also ceded away power after its forces were defeated by Lithuanians and Semigallians at the Battle of Saule (*Saules kauja*) on September 22, 1236. As a result of this defeat, the remaining brothers of the Order decided in desperation to merge with the Teutonic Knights, though the Order did remain an autonomous branch, known as the Livonian Order, within the Teutonic Order.

For the next three hundred years the region remained a part of the Livonian Confederation, a loose confederation between the Livonian Order, the city of Rīga, and the Catholic Church (i.e., the archbishop and bishops). Though the Germans would lose their political sovereignty in the sixteenth century, German baronial land and business owners continued to own much of the land of present-day Latvia, and would do so even up into the twentieth century. Indeed, even today, one can still see evidence of the centuries of German dominance in Latvia simply by touring the country's churches, castles, baronial palaces, and guild halls.

The Germans lost supreme power in Livonia – the general name given to the region that included present-day Estonia and Latvia – following the Livonian War (1558-1583). As a result

[5] Fonnesberg-Schmidt, 80–81.

of this conflict between Russia and a sporadic coalition of the Kingdom of Sweden, the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway, the Kingdom of Poland, and the Duchy of Lithuania, today's Latvian territory came under the rule of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During this war the Lutheran faith was introduced in the Livonian lands, though it failed to take hold in the lands of Latgale—the southeastern-most of the now four historical provinces of Latvia (with the others being Vidzeme in the north-northeast, Zemgale in the southcentral, and Kurzeme in the west—though some also argue that Sēlija, the lands of the old Selonian tribe in the far south, should be considered a fifth historical province). Power shifted again some twenty years later, when much of Livonia, including Rīga, was ceded to Sweden as a result of the Polish-Swedish Wars (1600-1629). However, Kurzeme, the lands south of the Daugava River, and much of Latgale remained under Polish-Lithuanian control and formed the Duchy of Kurzeme and Polish Livonia to the east.



Figure 2: Map of the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire[6]

[6] This image is courtesy of Vikipēdija, accessed April 2, 2014, http://lv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Att%C4%93ls:Baltijas_hercogiste_1918.jpg



Figure 3: The historical regions of Latvia[7]

Under the Swedes, the region, known as Swedish Livonia, prospered. Not only was the territory known as the "Swedish Bread Basket" due to its rich agricultural lands, but the cities also grew. For instance, during this time Rīga became the largest city in the Swedish Empire. But this success unfortunately only made the region more prone to invasion, and in 1700 war broke out again. This time, the Great Northern War (1700-1721) saw Russia successfully advance its imperial reach westward, and as a result all of Swedish Livonia and Estonia were integrated into the Russian Empire. Peter the Great (1682-1725), desperately wanting to hold on to the new territories, recognized the Baltic Germans' economic power and thus granted them special privileges and status. This meant that the Baltic German merchants and powerful *Ritterschaften* (aristocratic knighthood corporations) were permitted freedom of religion, use of the German language, and autonomous rule in the new Baltic Provinces.

Furthermore, the conciliatory policies toward Baltic Germans was extended to the lands of Latgale and Kurzeme (which at that time also included Zemgale) when the Russian Empire

[7] The image is courtesy of *Likumi*, accessed April 2, 2014, http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=97429.

annexed the regions in 1772 and 1795. Indeed, the court in St. Petersburg so favored continuing the dominance of the Baltic German overlords that during the reign of Empress Elizabeth (1741-1761) stricter laws on serfdom advocated by the Baltic Germans were passed, declaring that all Latvian- and Estonian-speaking persons would be automatically declared fugitive serfs unless they could fully document their free status.[8] In his seminal study on the region, Edward Thaden argued that these lenient policies stemmed from the empire's need for professional bureaucrats and military officers who could lead the way in carrying out the modernization of the state. In other words, men with European educations and knowledge of modern governmental, scientific, and business practices were in short supply, so the great numbers of skilled, educated men among German circles in the Baltic Provinces prompted the leadership in St. Petersburg to cozy up to these groups rather than suppress them. What resulted was a centuries-long partnership between Baltic Germans and the Russian central government. For example, Erik Amburger has calculated that within the entire Russian Empire from the early eighteenth century up through the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, roughly one-eighth of all high-ranking officials were Baltic Germans, a number that is shockingly high given the fact that at the time of the incorporation of Kurzeme in 1795, the total population of Baltic Germans in the provinces was around 120,000.[9]

Despite the continued supremacy of the Baltic Germans in Latvian lands, here, at the end of the eighteenth century, the modern history of the Latvian nation began. As was the case throughout much of Europe, by the end of the eighteenth century desires for cultural and political autonomy began to develop. Ironically, one of the first men to appeal for Latvians' autonomy was a German from Prussia, Johann Gottfried Herder, whom most consider to be one of the

[8] Edward C Thaden and Marianna Forster Thaden, *Russia's Western Borderlands, 1710-1870* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 15.
[9] Cited in Thaden, 11. On the total population of Baltic Germans, see pp. 96-97.

fathers of German nationalism.[10] A teacher and minister at the cathedral school in Riga, in the late eighteenth century Herder initiated the evolution of ethno-linguistic nationalism by publishing an anthology of Latvian folk songs in his collection *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*.[11] Additionally, Herder and another Baltic German, Garlieb Merkel, spoke out against the abuses of the German lords on the Baltic serfs. This intellectual movement within the Baltic German community – combined with pressure from Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825), who feared any kind of peasant revolt in his empire following the bloody events of the French Revolution – led the Baltic Germans to begrudgingly emancipate the Latvian and Estonian serfs in 1816-19.[12]

This was an important step in the development of Latvian nationalism for a number of reasons. Perhaps most significantly, it prompted the development of the Latvian language itself. The emancipation had created a need for binding legal documents among the freed serfs, and as a result the Latvian language and the use of formal surnames was expanded and more fully systematized in order to meet that need. Scholars such as Juris Alunāns, Atis Kronvalds, Andrejs Stērste, and others were essential to this task.[13] Almost simultaneously, the first Latvian-language publications appeared. Following in the footsteps of Herder, Merkel, and the visionary philosopher Johann Georg Hamann, who also spent time in Rīga and was sympathetic to the plight of the Baltic serfs, in 1822 the Kurzeme pastor K. F. Watson founded the first Latvian-language newspaper, *Latviešu Avīzes* (*The Latvian Gazette*). Ten years later the Rīga pastor Hermann Trey started the newspaper *Tas Latviešu Ļaužu Draugs* (*Friend of the Latvian People*).

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[10] On Herder's ideas, see Vicki A Spencer, *Herder's Political Thought* (University of Toronto Press, 2011); Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking Press, 1976). On Herder and German nationalism, still indispensable is Robert Reinhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966). For a discussion of Herder's thoughts about Rīga and Latvians, see especially A. Gillies, *Herder* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, 1945), particularly pp. 42-43.

[11] Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs,"Latvia: the challenges of change," *The Baltic States: Estonian, Latvia, and Lithuania* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 2.

[12] Pabriks, 2.

[13] Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995), 96–97.

Neither paper lasted long, but it was a step forward, a step toward elevating the Latvian language from a *Bauernsprache* (peasant language), as the Baltic Germans dismissingly referred to it, to a *Kultursprache* (civilized language).[14]

However, despite emancipation and the development of the Latvian language, life remained a struggle for the majority of Latvians. Mostly this was because the Baltic Germans retained their stranglehold on all aspects of life. Administratively, the Russian central government in 1801 created the Office of the General Governor of the Baltic Provinces, whose job was to oversee the civil administration of the provinces of Estonia, Livonia, and Kurzeme (the majority of present-day Latgale was part of Vitebsk province). On the whole, the majority of these general-governors were either of German heritage themselves or were Germanophiles, as was the case with A. A. Suvorov, the Göttingen-educated minister who was appointed to the post in 1848. In fact, the Russian central government saw the region as so thoroughly German that they referred to the provinces or governorates as "*ostzeiskie gubernii*," which obviously came from the German word *Ostsee*, meaing "Baltic" or the Baltic Sea. Consequently, the old system which developed in the sixteenth century continued. It was built on the cooperation of town councils and local parishes (*Kirchspiel*) with the district diets and their executive organ, the Council of the Diet (*Landratskollegium*), whose members, after a reform in the 1750s, came exclusively from the circle of *Rittergütter*, or those possessing manors.[15] Ultimately, what this meant for Latvians was that Germans controlled and wielded at all levels, from the smallest of provincial villages to the grand streets of Rīga, all aspects of social, economic, and political power.

[14] Ibid, 80-89.
[15] Thaden, 6-15, 99.

As a result, Latvian peasants had no peaceful, legitimate way to seek redress against the exploitative agricultural system that followed emancipation. Furthermore, they paid a high price for their ostensible, formal freedom. First, instead of having a somewhat secure right to cultivate land – and in Livonia, beginning in 1804, lease-holding peasants actually had a legal, hereditary right to remain on their land, even if it was sold – now peasants were "free" to enter into contracts with landowners. But the problem here was that the majority of leases were short-term, usually three to six years, and as a result it was impossible for the peasants to plan ahead, for they did not know if the lease would be renewed, or if the terms of the contract might change.[16] Naturally, such a system also frequently discouraged any sort of improvements or innovations to lands or homes since the future was so uncertain. Secondly, since peasants had little to no money to pay rents, the *corvée* system was retained. However, unlike in previous times, now the noble landowner no longer even had the ostensible moral obligation to care for those working his land in times of crop failures and famines. Thirdly, although the peasants were free to enter into contracts, their movement was in fact still limited, as they could only leave their native province with the permission of the landowner and the local officials. As a result, it was often difficult for Latvians to advance socially without adapting to German customs, and thus in many ways life for the average Latvian peasant either remained the same or became even worse following emancipation.[17]

However, following the sequential crop failures in 1838-1840 and the famine and subsequent rural unrest in 1841, the Council of the Diet began discussing further agrarian reforms. These discussions, though, met with stiff opposition on the part of the more conservative members of the nobility, who emphasized the need to maintain tradition, the

[16] Arturs Boruks, *Zemnieks, zeme, un zemkopība Latvijā: No senākiem laikiem līdz mūsdienām.* Otrais, pārstrādātais un papildinātais izdevums (Jelgava: Latvijas Lauksaimniecības Universitāte, 2003), 307-308.
[17] Thaden, 105-108.

superiority of the *Ritterschaften*, and the security of the existent patriarchal order in the countryside. However, after further unrest in 1845 and 1846, discussions were renewed. This time there was additional support for reform among a circle of progressive nobles led by Wilhelm Hamiclar von Fölkersahm, who had earlier studied under Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in Berlin. Significantly, even Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855), who, like his predecessors, rarely meddled in the affairs of the Baltic Provinces, expressed in 1846 to a group of Baltic German nobility his displeasure at the outcome of the emancipation laws. He noted that in his view the systemic poverty and oppression of the Latvian and Estonian peasants was the primary cause of the intermittent but escalating rural unrest. Finally, after a renewed sense of alarm following the 1848 revolutions, the Baltic Germans worked more earnestly to implement reform. They did so in large part because they wanted to maintain a sense of autonomy by acting in advance of the empire-wide reforms that they sensed would probably be coming in light of the upheavals of 1848.

After a temporary reform law was tried out in Livonia beginning in 1849, full agrarian reforms were passed for the province of Estonia in 1856 and for the provinces of Livonia and Kurzeme in 1860 and 1863. Most significantly, the reforms did two things: they eliminated the *corvée* system in favor of money rents; and they granted peasants the legal right to purchase land. These reforms led to dramatic changes. For the first time, Baltic peasants had a chance at social and economic advancement. Soon, the sons of successful farmers would become the leaders of the emerging Latvian nation.

The period from 1850 through the 1880s – known in Latvian history as the Latvian National Awakening (*Latviešu tautas atmoda*) – was key to the development of Latvian national consciousness. At the main regional universities in Tartu (Dorpat) and St. Petersburg, a group of

young Latvian students began to coalesce and discuss nationalist ideas from abroad, such as those expressed by the so-called *Junges Deutschland* (Young Germany) writers, such as Heinrich Heine. In particular, in 1856 there were nine Latvian students at the University of Tartu who comprised a small but influential group. Led by Krišjānis Valdemārs, Krišjānis Baronis, and Juris Alunāns, these students held "Latvian evenings," where the topic of conversation was the education of the Latvian people and the development of the Latvian language and culture. In other words, you might say they were, to borrow Liah Greenfeld's phrase, charting out for the Latvian nation a "road to modernity."[18]

Among their activities, these young scholars, who collectively became known as the Young Latvians (*Jaunlatvieši*) in large part due to their borrowing from the Young Germany movement, devoted much attention to developing the written Latvian language, gathering and preserving artifacts of Latvian folk culture, and raising the national consciousness of Latvians.[19] With regard to the written language, the arrival of newspapers such as *Mājas Viesis* (*The House Guest)* in 1856 and *Pēterburgas Avīzes* (*The St. Petersburg Gazette*) in 1862 was a major milestone, as these were the first Latvian-language newspapers with a "pro-Latvian" viewpoint.[20] In terms of documenting Latvian culture, Fricis Treilands (who went by the pseudonym Fricis Brīvzemnieks) and Krišjānis Barons spent much of their professional lives gathering and publishing collections of the ancient folk songs (*dainas*) which they believed best expressed the essence of Latvian language, culture, and history.

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[18] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[19] On the *Jaunlatvieši,* see Ieva Zake, *Nineteenth-century Nationalism and Twentieth-century Anti-democratic Ideals: The Case of Latvia, 1840s to 1980s* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008); Leo Dribins, *Nacionālais jautājums Latvijā, 1850-1940* (Rīga: Macību apgāds, 1997), especially pp. 11-41; Arveds Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture, 1800-1914* (Uppsala: Daugava, 1958). For a good overview of *Junges Deutschland*, see Helmut Koopmann, *Das Junge Deutschland: eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993).
[20] However, *Pēterburgas Avīzes* was deemed by the authorities to be overly radical and was closed in 1865.

Moreover, in 1868 the civil servant Bernhards Dīriķis, architect Jānis Frīdrihs Baumanis, and industrialist and journalist Rihards Tomsons founded *Rīgas Latviešu biedrība* (the Rīga Latvian Society) in an effort to promote Latvian culture, raise national consciousness, and to stake a claim to Latvian space in the German-dominated metropolis. One of the first Latvian public organizations, the society quickly became the leader in promoting cultural-linguistic nationalism among Latvian speakers. For instance, already in 1868 the society opened the first Latvian theater, and in subsequent years the society's publishing house released the first complete Latvian dictionary. Furthermore, in 1869 the society also erected in Katlakalns, on the southeastern outskirts of Rīga's Pārdaugava (literally "across or over the Daugava") region a monument for the German Garlieb Merkel in honor of his interest in and support of Latvian culture. This was a gesture which speaks to the exclusively cultural and linguistic nature of early Latvian nationalism. Similarly, it should be noted that only five years prior, both Latvians and Germans had supported the construction of a monument and square for Johann Gottfried Herder just west of the Rīga Cathedral. However, such conviviality, as we will see, would not last long.

As a result of the Young Latvians and the Rīga Latvian Society's efforts, in 1873 the first general Latvian song festival took place. While in fact the 1873 event was not the first such festival – for example, there had been a song celebration in Dikļi in 1864 – it was the first general festival, meaning that the organizers aimed to include groups from throughout all Latvian-speaking lands. At that first general festival, more than 1,000 singers and thirty orchestras participated. It is also worth noting that the event was held in Rīga (and to this day, only once, in 1895, has the event been held outside of Rīga), a city that had long been viewed, both by Latvians and Baltic Germans, as culturally German. Therefore, one could say that with such an event, Latvians were making a visual and audible claim to Rīga's "Latvianness," even

though at that time the city was only about one-quarter Latvian.[21] To be sure, it was about more than singing. It was about laying the groundwork for Latvian versions of the political symbolism and mass events that George Mosse described so well for the German case, which became a kind of template throughout Central and Eastern Europe.[22] It is not surprising, then, that the Latvian song festival, which now occurs once every five years at Rīga's impressive amphitheater in the historic *Mežaparks*, has remained to date perhaps the single most significant public celebration of Latvian national identity and culture.[23] Indeed, as Viktors Hausmanis wrote in his work marking the 100 year anniversary of the publication of Barons's collection of folk songs, the Latvian *dainas* continue to be seen as the "deepest essence of our nation and, in a spiritual way, its living, eternal monument."[24]

Beyond the local events in the Baltic Provinces, the policies emanating from St. Petersburg during the period 1850-1880 also aided the development of Latvian nationalism, sometimes deliberately and other times inadvertently. In particular, in response to the revolutions of 1848 and the Russian Empire's defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Romanov tsars recognized that further reform was needed. This led to two at times contradictory trends. First, recognizing the deficiencies inherent in a society and economy built on serfdom, the central

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[21] For example, in 1867 Rīga's population of 102,590 was 43% German, 25% Russian, 23% Latvian, and 9% other. See John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities: Paul Schiemann, 1876-1944* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 15.

[22] George L Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses; Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975).

[23] *Mežaparks* literally means "Forest Park," but it was originally called *Kaiserwald*. As one of the world's first so-called "garden cities," the area has long been a place of residence of the city's affluent citizens. However, the beauty of the area was forever tainted by the Nazi's establishment of the Kaiserwald concentration camp. Tens of thousands of Jews were forcibly relocated there following the liquidation of the Rīga, Liepāja, and Daugavpils ghettos in the summer of 1943. On the Holocaust in Latvia, see especially A. Caune, et al., *Holokausts Latviā: starptautiskās konferences materiāli, 2004.gada 3.-4.jūnijs, Rīgā, un 2004.-2005.gada pētījumi par holokaustu Latvijā* (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2006); Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: The Missing Center* (Rīga; Washington, DC: Historical Institute of Latvia and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996); Bernhard Press, *Judenmord in Lettland: 1941 - 1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 1992).

[24] Cited in Dace Bula, *Dziedātājtauta: Folklora un nacionālā ideoloģija* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2000), 65. For an important book on the singing traditions of Baltic peoples, see Guntis Šmidchens, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).

government orchestrated major reforms. None were more significant than the empire-wide emancipation of peasants in 1861. However, while dictating such reforms from above, at the same time the central government also sought to alter its own power structure by moving away from centralization and toward the empowerment of local government. Here the most fundamental change was the formation of the *zemstva*, or rural assemblies, in 1864. This system of local government, though far from representative given the nobles' continued extreme dominance in the *zemstva*, lasted until 1917, and in fact it did help bring about, through local taxes, improvements in local infrastructure, education, medicine, etc.[25]

However, due to the existing system of local government, the relatively new agrarian laws, and, even more significantly, as a result of the Baltic Germans' lobbying in St. Petersburg, the *zemstvo* system was never implemented in the Baltic Provinces.[26] Instead, the Baltic Germans, desperately wanting to maintain their sense of independence from the center, agreed to the central government's proposal – aimed at tamping down unrest by ensuring some sort of voice for the local populace – to pass a distinct law for the Baltic Provinces. The primary outcome of the 1866 Baltic Provinces County Government Law, as it is called in Latvian history, was that the county farmers' assemblies replaced the baronial estates and parishes as the primary locus of administrative authority at the rural, local level. Like with the *zemstva* elsewhere in the Russian Empire, these assemblies were also far from proportionally representative. Instead, they were mostly comprised of individuals owning land or property, though landless peasants, who comprised the majority of rural residents at that time, also were permitted to elect one representative for every ten local peasants. Additionally, peasants were granted the right to seek

[25] On *zemstva*, still indispensable in the English-language historiography is Terence Emmons and Wayne S Vucinich, *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
[26] Nor was it implemented in the nine so-called "western provinces," though for other reasons. See Thaden, chapter seven.

legal action over rent disputes. The assemblies also gave them a chance to vote on important local developments ranging from road construction, medical services, and the selection of local schoolteachers. All things considered, the 1866 law, which Kaspars Kļaviņš has argued was "the most liberal and intended a greater self-determination for farmers than anywhere else in Russia and Prussia," certainly improved the state of affairs in the countryside and thus gave Latvians cause for hope and greater initiative.[27]

While Kļaviņš is correct in his assessment of the significance of the 1866 law, one should not mistakenly believe that the Baltic Germans or Russian government were, on the whole, in favor of generously granting Latvians greater rights and freedoms. Conversely, Baltic Germans were, for example, opposed to the Young Latvians. Even among those Germans who were interested in Latvian culture, like August Johann Gottfried Bielenstein, who for some time was the editor of *Latviešu Avīzes*, they were frequently against the Young Latvians' call for greater self-determination. Unsurprisingly, the response in more conservative German circles was usually worse. For instance, Pastor Gustav Wilhelm Sigmund Brasche argued in a local newspaper that there was no such thing as a Latvian nation. Thus, he proposed that the Young Latvians be dismissively called the Young Peasants (*Jung-Bauernstand*) instead. Furthermore, a contributor to *Die Zeitung für Stadt und Land* opined that it was outright ludicrous to believe that Latvians could even be educated in the first place.[28]

As for the rationale of the Russian government, certainly the tsar had not pushed for reform merely to alleviate the plight of Latvians and other minorities. Instead, the Great Reforms of the 1860s were implemented to do two things: to quell discontent and sporadic uprisings by

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[27] Kaspars Kļaviņš, "Vēsturiskie mīti: izcelsme un nozīme modernas nācijas attīstībā (I)," *Latvijas Vēstneša portāls par likumu un valsti*, September 18, 2013, accessed October 22, 2013, http://www.lvportals.lv/viedokli.php?id=257835.

[28] Arnolds Spekke, *History of Latvia; an Outline.* (Stockholm: M. Goppers, 1951), 300-318; Alfreds Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 242-257.

moving, ever so slowly, toward greater enfranchisement and democratic representation; and, secondly, to improve the government's dreadfully bad administrative efficiency. At first the government sought to accomplish this by pursuing a policy of decentralization and greater self-representation at the county level. As a result, the empire's minority nationalities were suddenly offered greater liberties and a greater voice. But as Theodore Weeks argues in his excellent study on nationalism and Russification on the western frontier, the imperial government in fact never pursued a coherent nationalities policy, and thus such liberties were only tangential to other policies.[29] Consequently, when the pendulum swung from decentralization back to a hardline pursuit of uniform centralization and Russification under Alexander III (1881-1894), those freedoms were widely revoked.

-Into the World: Ulmanis's Early Years-

Thus, by the time of Ulmanis's birth on September 4, 1877, the contradictory forces in the Russian Empire were rapidly coming to a head. But in the household of Indriķis and Lizete Ulmanis (Līnberģe), things were actually looking up. In addition to their two oldest boys, Jānis (born in 1865) and Indriķis (born in 1868), and a daughter, Emīlija, who had died three months after her birth, Indriķis and Lizete were delighted at the birth of their fourth child, Kārlis Augusts Vilhelms.[30] Beyond now having three strong, healthy boys, the family's financial prospects also looked promising. Indriķis had followed in the footsteps of his father, Kaspers, and became a farmer. However, rather than be a tenant farmer like his father, Indriķis decided in the early 1880s to take out a loan and buy his own farm.[31] The farmstead, an approximately 118-acre property with a wooden, single-story, thatch-roofed, four-room home, was known as "*Pikšas*" (as

[29] Theodore R Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).
[30] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 11-12.
[31] Edgars Dunsdorfs, *Kārļa Ulmaņa dzīve: ceļinieks, politiķis, diktators, moceklis*, reprint ed. (Rīga: Zinātne, 1992), 15.

is the present-day museum of Ulmanis's boyhood home), and it was located in an isolated area of his native Bērzmuiža County,[32] in the heart of present-day Zemgale.[33] The farm was roughly twenty kilometers from the two largest cities in the region – Dobele to the west and Jelgava to the east – and while it was not ideally situated near a railroad stop or any of the region's main roads, it was located amid some of the best agricultural and grazing ground in Latvian-speaking lands. A number of historians have argued that not only did this ideal farming location aid his father's career, but it also had a major influence on Ulmanis's character. In particular, they contend that the fertility of the soil combined with, as compared to other parts of Latvia, the flat, open landscape and the especially strong historical dominance of the German barons made Zemgale Latvians particularly stubborn, hard-working, driven, and progressive men.[34] Whatever the case, certainly it is true that in addition to being the breadbasket of Latvia, Zemgale has also been the cradle of national leaders, as all four Latvian presidents during the first era of independence (1918-1940) hailed from Zemgale.[35]

Regardless of whether there was indeed some sort of geographic determinism at play, by 1880 Ulmanis's father was rapidly becoming one of the most successful Latvian farmers in the county. Wanting to accumulate savings to buy a farm, Indriķis decided to supplement his farming income by also working as a livestock salesman. This secondary career involved buying livestock from farmers in the area and then driving the animals to markets in Dobele and Jelgava, where he would sell them. As a result, Indriķis established a lot of business contacts and was

[32] In 1939 the county was renamed Bērzes County.
[33] M. Stabrovska, *Kārļa Ulmaņa novadā* (Jelgava: Dobeles novadpētniecības muzejs, 1990), 4.
[34] For instance, see Edvarts Virza, *Kārlis Ulmanis*, reprint ed. (Rīga: Zvaigzne, 2010), 14; Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 13; Jānis Stradiņš, "Kārlis Ulmanis—valstsvīra liktenis un mācības," *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: LU Latvijas vēstures institūts, 1998), 17; Viesturs Avots, *Kārlis Ulmanis: valstiski un privāti* (Rīga: Jumava, 2010), 9.
[35] For a good general history of these "four great men of Zemgale," see Arnolds Auziņš and Reinis Ādmīdiņš, *Četri diži zemgalieši: Latviešu rakstnieki un publicisti par mūsu valsts pirmajiem prezidentiem* (Rīga: Jumava, 2000). For an examination of Ulmanis's childhood environs, see M. Stabrovska, *Kārļa Ulmaņa novadā.*

well-known throughout the surrounding counties. In fact, many of Ulmanis's biographers note that it was indeed a marker of Indriķis's success that the much-respected county head teacher, Kristaps Cīrulis, agreed to be Ulmanis's godfather. Furthermore, as another indicator of their rising economic and social status, Indriķis and Lizete were also able to send all of their children to the most prominent middle school in Zemgale, the Alexander School in Jelgava. Lastly, it seems that around the time he purchased *Pikšas*, Indriķis also possibly took on mortgages for other farms in the neighboring counties of Līvbērze and Šķibe with the intent of giving them to his sons when they were ready to manage them.[36]

While the backstory remains unclear, there is no question that his sons went on to own their own farms. Jānis, who married and had five children with Paulīne Bikša, owned the "*Ezerkleišas*" farm in Šķibe County. And Indriķis, who married Vilhelmīne Valdmane and had one son, Indriķis, was the proprietor of a property called "*Brakšķi*," where he had a successful horse farm and a small lumber company.[37] However, following his military service in the First World War, Indriķis moved his family to an apartment on Tērbatas Street in the Central District of Rīga.[38] As for Ulmanis, his personal correspondence in 1906 includes a brief reference to a seven-acre homestead that he owned.[39] But unfortunately he does not give any details, so it remains unclear when Ulmanis acquired this land and who purchased it.

Sadly, just as Ulmanis's father was becoming a successful farmer and livestock man, he died of a heart attack in 1883 or 1884. Naturally, this was devastating to the family, especially for young Ulmanis, who was just six or seven years old at the time, but fortunately his mother

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[36] Žanis Unāms, *Dzīvā Latvija* (Lincoln, NE: Pilskalns, 1964), 12.
[37] His brother Indriķis raised race horses, and at least some of his horses were chosen for races at the hippodromes in St. Petersburg and Moscow. See Stabrovska, 12.
[38] The son, Indriķis, was living at *Brakšķi* when he was deported to Siberia in 1941.
[39] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 6, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, September 10, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https: www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30589

was a strong-willed, intelligent woman, and thus she was able to keep the farm going. She also had help from her oldest son, Jānis, who left high school in Jelgava prior to finishing in order to tend to duties on the family farm. But wanting to continue on with his life, a few years later Jānis married Paulīne and moved with her to *Ezerkleišas*. However, since his farm was only about six kilometers from *Pikšas*, he was often there to help out with work. Moreover, once his son Vilis was old enough, he also helped out his grandmother and in fact eventually took over the farm, which legally became Jānis's property upon his mother's death in 1926.[40]

In the meantime, however, the majority of the work – both in terms of managing the farm and raising the much younger Ulmanis – fell on Lizete. In many ways, though, this was nothing new, as she had managed the farm and looked after the boys when her husband had previously on a frequent basis left to see to his work as a livestock man. As a mother, Lizete could be stern, and she ran a disciplined household, always encouraging in her children a serious-minded personality. But she was also warm and caring and loved to sing to her children. Like her husband, she also placed great emphasis on the value of hard work and a good education. In fact, according to Bērziņš, Lizete had already taught Ulmanis to read and write prior to his attendance at the county school. Presumably, in addition to Latvian, she must have also used German in the household, as it was at that time the primary language of education, administration, and business in their region, and as fluent speakers themselves, it would have been natural for Ulmanis's parents to instruct their children in German, at least to some extent.[41]

As to how Lizete and young Ulmanis got along running the farm after Indriķis's death, this remains somewhat unclear. Without a doubt, Jānis played a big role, even after he moved to his own farm. Having received a secondary education, which was somewhat rare among Latvian

[40] Vilis continued to manage the farm until 1941, when his entire family was deported to Siberia.
[41] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 15.

farmers at that time, he quickly became one of the most progressive farmers in the area and thus must have also helped manage the *Pikšas* farm. For example, he was one of the very first farmers in the region to use modern, industrial farm equipment, and for decades he was the leader of the Šķibe County Agricultural Society. Such societies, whose total number by 1914 was more than 860, played a prominent role in countryside social life, and as a result they were often a primary venue for the promulgation of Latvian national consciousness and, by 1917, of Latvian demands for independence.[42] Beyond Jānis, it seems that the second son, Indriķis, was not around as much, for upon finishing his schooling in Jelgava, he more or less struck out on his own. There was also other family in the area. In particular, Lizete's brother- and sister-in-law lived a few kilometers to the northwest, closer to the village of Bērze, where the cemetery and primary school were located, but it remains uncertain the extent to which they aided Lizete and Ulmanis.[43]

Having been raised in a more or less single-parent home, Ulmanis by all acounts adored and admired his mother. As a matter of fact, following her death, he commissioned a small bronze bust of her that for the rest of his life he kept on his otherwise unadorned work desk. Among those who knew Ulmanis, the shared opinion is that he especially admired her courage in dealing with the death of her husband and taking on the role as the manager of the family farm. Consequently, it is not surprising that Ulmanis, having had such a dedicated mother and having seen firsthand the important role that women played on the farm, went on to establish during his authoritarian regime, as will be discussed in chapter five, special awards and national celebrations for mothers, farm wives, and female farmers.[44]

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[42] Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History*, 106.
[43] For biographical details on Ulmanis family, see the biographical dictionary: Žanis Unāms, *Es viņu pazistu* (Rīga: Biogrāfiskā arhīva apgāds, 1939).
[44] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstvīrs*, 15-16.

-The School Years-

For Ulmanis, school was also a formative experience. He began primary school just after his ninth birthday. The Bērzmuiža School was located just to the west of Bērze – by foot some five minutes down the road from the church where Ulmanis was baptized as a child – in a relatively new 1860s, two-story brick building that for today's visitor seems surprisingly large given the sparsely populated region. However, at that time it was the main primary school for a seven-county district, so if anything the school was too small when Ulmanis began his education. When one visits the region today with the goal of seeing the important locations in Ulmanis's life, besides being struck by the beauty of the lush, green landscape and the immense "Ulmanis oak tree" in front of the school that Ulmanis planted there in 1937 as part of his sixtieth birthday celebration, the first thing that strikes one's imagination is just how far Ulmanis had to travel to and from school. In total, it would have been roughly fifteen or sixteen kilometers roundtrip, and for that reason he often stayed with his aunt and uncle, who resided on the "Gardas" farm, which was much closer to the school. And as Ulmanis apparently also attended summer school, for which his mother had to pay a separate tuition, he ended up spending quite a lot of time with them. Unfortunately, there remains little information about the kind of people they were, but quite a number of acquaintances, including Jānis's daughter, Mirdza, later recalled that this aunt and uncle, who themselves did not have a son, legally adopted Ulmanis so that he could avoid compulsory military service in the imperial Russian army, as first-born sons were not required to serve.[45]

The headteacher at the school was Ulmanis's godfather, Kristaps Cīrulis. Born in 1845 to peasant-serf parents, Cīrulis attended primary school at the Zaļā Estate (and later Zaļā County) school in present-day Zemgale. He completed his secondary schooling at the Irlava Teachers'

[45] For a helpful explanation of the conscription law, see Dunsdorfs, 40.

Institute, at which point, in 1866, he began teaching at the Bērzmuiža School, where he remained until he retired in 1913. Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to describe Cīrulis as a nationalist, but certainly he supported the development of the Latvian language and was an active member of the nascent Latvian society. In particular, he wrote articles for the newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnesis* (*The Baltic Courier*), the newspaper of the Rīga Latvian Society, and he for many years directed the Bērmuižas County Choir, which, while under his leadership, participated in the first four general song festivals.[46] According to Ulmanis's sister-in-law, Vilhelmīne, who had attended the school just prior to Ulmanis, all of the students "had a great respect for this teacher [i.e., for Cīrulis] … even though he never yelled at us in anger or severely punished anyone." Furthermore, as to Cīrulis's influence on Ulmanis, Vilhelmīne was of the opinion that besides Ulmanis's mother, he was the person who "had strongly influenced Kārlis Ulmanis's character and given him an enthusiasm for knowledge."[47] To be sure, Ulmanis certainly valued his former teacher's opinion and sought to make him proud, for whenever he published a book, he always requested that the publishers send a signed copy to Cīrulis. In addition, at his sixtieth birthday celebration at his former school, Ulmanis also praised the education he received there and encouraged people, as part of his so-called "Friendly Challenge" (*Draudzīgais aicinājums*) initiative aimed at raising donations for Latvia's schools, to materially express their gratitude for the education they had received.[48]

There was one part of school that Ulmanis, Vilhelmīne, and others did not like as much, however: the compulsory Russian language instruction that was part of Tsar Alexander's

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[46] Žanis Unāms, *Es viņu pazistu*, reprint ed. (Grand Haven, MI: Raven Printing, 1975), 117.
[47] Quoted in Žanis Unāms, "Kārlis Ulmanis, biografiska studija," in *Tautas vadonis Kārlis Ulmanis* (Rīga: Valtera un Rapas akc. sab. apgāds, 1936), 9.
[48] On Ulmanis's correspondences with publishers, see his letters to Enzeliņš published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, especially those written in the years 1907-1910. For a good summary of *Draudzīgais aicinājums*, see Jānis Graudonis, "Ministru prezidenta Kārļa Ulmaņa Draudzīgais aicinājums," in *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: LU Latvijas vēstures institūts, 1998), 137-146.

Russification program. It seems that Ulmanis and the others disliked Russian class not so much because they were already at such a young age brimming with nationalistic sentiments – though one of Ulmanis's earliest biographers, the renowned poet Edvarts Virza, claimed that was the case[49] – but because of course it was a difficult class, as Latvian and Russian are very disparate languages. To make things worse, the students also generally disliked the Russian-language teacher, Štolcers, whom Vilhelmīne described as a "nervous and cross person."[50]

According to the imperial law, Russian was supposed to be the primary language of instruction in all schools, but in reality it did not work out that way for a variety of reasons. First, the language law was difficult to enforce, because to do so required a huge bureaucracy, which the imperial government still lacked. Second, most of the bureaucracy in the Baltic Provinces was comprised of Baltic Germans or Germanophiles, and naturally they were apathetic about pushing the law. Lastly, as a corollary of the first two reasons, the enactment of the law essentially came down to the teachers in the schools. For instance, at the Bērzmuiža School, Cīrulis was not a fluent Russian speaker, and therefore the majority of the material was taught in Latvian or German, with the latter being particularly prevalent during summer courses, when the student body, whose families had to pay a summer school tuition, was comprised of a higher ratio of German-speakers.[51]

As for the curriculum, beyond the obligatory Russian-language course, Ulmanis's school work at the Bērzmuiža School consisted of Latvian, geography, history, religion, and music. Additionally, although it was not a formal part of the coursework, agriculture was also a topic

[49] Virza, 15-16
[50] Unāms, "Kārlis Ulmanis, biografiska studija," 9.
[51] Dunsdorfs, 16-19.

that Cīrulis and his colleagues would have discussed, for in addition to their teaching duties, teachers were typically given as part of their salary a small plot of land to farm.[52]

In the autumn of 1889, at the age of twelve, Ulmanis entered the Jelgava city school system and began classes at the Alexander School, where his brothers had also previously attended. But unlike during his brothers' schooldays there, when German was the primary language of instruction, by the time Ulmanis entered Alexander School, the new, very pro-Russian administrator, Radčenko, had reformed the curriculum to meet the goals of the imperial government, meaning that, among other things, the teachers were required to instruct in Russian. According to a number of his former classmates at the school, this caused some problems for Ulmanis, whose Russian was lacking. As a result, Ulmanis first and foremost struggled to keep up academically. In particular, he struggled with math courses, and he received help from one of his math teachers, Bohonko, with whom he lived in a boarding house room when he first arrived in Jelgava, as well as from schoolmates. Furthermore, in addition to perhaps not always fully understanding the material, at least one of his former classmates later recalled that Ulmanis was not always a diligent student, and consequently some of the teachers also gave him extra attention in order to keep him engaged.[53]

Even more significantly for young Ulmanis, it seems that he did not fit in, or perhaps had a mild social anxiety problem. Dāvids Smiltnieks, a former Jelgava classmate and the founder of the Krimūnas County Dairy and Savings Bank Society, remembered that Ulmanis was always friendly to everyone, and he even regularly joined his schoolmates for adventurous evening and weekend outings in and around Jelgava. "[B]ut at the same time," Smiltnieks noted, "Ulmanis didn't let himself get too close to anyone." In fact, as a result of Ulmanis's serious personality,

[52] Ibid.
[53] Unāms, *Dzīvā Latvija*, 13-14; Dunsdorfs, 20.

perceived aloofness, and social hesitancy, many of his classmates were, according to Smiltnieks, actually afraid of him.[54]

There has been much speculation about this particular aspect of Ulmanis's personality. Those who supported Ulmanis's political party and authoritarian regime posited that this was an early sign of his strength of will, of his burgeoning greatness as a leader. For example, Edvarts Virza, whom Ulmanis selected to write his first complete biography, explained that, on the one hand, Ulmanis avoided "the illusion that is friendship" so as "to be completely free" to both follow his will and "prevent those disappointments and conflicts that always result from overly close relations." On the other hand, though, according to Virza's analysis, Ulmanis understood the power and necessity of social niceties, and therefore, despite his reticence and tendency to avoid conversing about trivial things, Ulmanis was always friendly to everyone and was a very likeable person. Indeed, this particular narrative in the historiography has been so prominent and influential that it has seeped into the memories of people like Smiltnieks. For instance, in his concluding comments about Ulmanis as a student in Jelgava, Smiltnieks theorized that "even at that time Ulmanis was already different than us, than the rest of the boys," thus suggesting that Ulmanis was already destined for greatness.[55] Conversely, for Ulmanis's political opponents and those critical of his regime, they saw this facet of his personality as evidence of something else: narcissism. And no one has contributed more to this second, extremely critical narrative than has Ulmanis's most ardent attacker, the Social Democrat Fēlikss Cielēns, who maintained in his memoir that Ulmanis's main personality trait was "brutal egocentrism."[56]

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[54] Unāms, *Dzīvā Latvija*, 13. For biographical information on Smiltnieks, see Unāms, *Es viņu pazistu*, 450.
[55] Virza, 17-18; Unāms, *Dzīvā Latvija*, 13.
[56] Fēlikss Cielēns, *Laikmetu maiņā: atmiņas un atziņas. 4. grāmata. Latvijas neatkarīgās demokratiskās republikas uzplaukums un noriets, reprint ed.* (Stockholm: Apgāds memento, 1999), 189. Prior to the coup, Cielēns was serving as the Latvian ambassador to France. After Ulmanis's coup, he refused to return to Latvia, and instead worked against the regime from abroad. Cielēns returned during the period of German occupation in the Second World War, but left again in 1944 for Sweden, where he died in 1964.

Like with so many of the debates and rumors regarding Ulmanis's character and personal life, the truth of the matter resides somewhere beyond the polarized narratives. In truth, Ulmanis did not have many dear friends – both as a schoolboy and an adult – and this was probably because he had a quiet, serious disposition and generally shied away from participating in casual talk or joining in on frivolous fun. Instead, Ulmanis preferred the solitude of books, the countryside, and work.[57] It is therefore one of the great ironies of Ulmanis's life that he, a man of such introverted character, became the celebrated *Vadonis* of Latvia.[58]

The standard education in the Jelgava school system was four years. Students completed this initial education at the Alexander School. For those interested in attending afterwards a trade school, technical university, or university, the Jelgava system also offered a *reālskola* and gymnasium. Ulmanis chose the former, and he began there in 1894. Based on the German higher education system, the *reālskola* (or *Realschule* in German) was a two-year school for those planning to study agriculture, the sciences, and other subjects outside of the humanities. The school week at the Jelgava *reālskola* was thirty hours, and that total was comprised of: six hours of math; four hours of history; four hours of physics; three hours of Russian; three hours of German; two hours of a second foreign language; two hours of geography; two hours of drafting; two hours of technical drawing; and two hours of religious studies.[59]

Beyond Ulmanis's struggles at Alexander School with Russian, mathematics, and with interacting in a meaningful way with his schoolmates, there are two other topics from his school

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[57] For a good discussion of the main trends in the analysis of Ulmanis's private life, see Anita Bormane, "Pazudušais laiku atspulgos – Kārlis Ulmanis," *Latvijas avīze*, September 3, 2012, accessed December 7, 2012, http://www.la.lv/pazudusais-laiku-atspulgos-karlis-ulmanis%E2%80%A9-2/.

[58] However, those historians interested in psychoanalysis might say that this was not a surprising development. A number of historians have argued, for example, that Hitler and Stalin were driven as politicians, and in particular craved adulation, as a result of troubled personal lives. For a good example of this branch of historiography, see Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Knopf , 1992).

[59] Ādolfs Klīve, *Brīvā Latvija, Latvijas tapšana: Atmiņas, vērojumi un atzinumi* (Brooklyn, NY: Grāmatu draugs, 1969), 34-36; Dunsdorfs, 20.

days in Jelgava that historians have frequently discussed. The first is the question of just how much Ulmanis was influenced by the wider intellectual trends of that era and the specific intellectual life in Jelgava. With regard to the broad *Zeitgeist* of his student days in Jelgava, the most significant development was the emergence of an intellectual response to, or divergence from, the ideas of the Young Latvians. Without a doubt, their celebration of the Latvian nation and Latvian culture was deeply rooted in a Germanic-style romanticism that in many ways idealized rural, peasant life. However, as the level of political consciousness grew among young, educated Latvians, a section of that group began to revolt in turn against the Young Latvians' worldview. In particular, in response to the rise of realism in Western European literature, a group that became known as "*Jaunā strāva*" ("New Wave") demanded that Latvian writers should do away with overly rosy discussions of national awakening in favor of depicting real life in all of its oppression and hardships. Furthermore, they argued that literary works should serve to help people understand and improve their lives rather than serve some sort of abstract purpose.

At first, the members of the New Wave, known as *jaunstrāvnieki*, espoused their ideas through literary circles at universities and in major cities. But when the *jaunstrāvnieki* extended their discussions into the social and political realms, they decided in 1886 to found the newspaper, *Dienas Lapa* (*The Page of the Day*). The paper promoted demands for Latvian cultural autonomy, but unlike the earlier Young Latvians, it also championed workers' rights. Eventually, under the editorship (1888-1891, 1895-1897) of Pēteris Stučka, who later became the head of the Latvian Bolsheviks, and (1891-1895) Rainis (whose real name was Jānis Pliekšāns), who became Latvia's most celebrated literary figure, *Dienas Lapa* became a political paper whose primary agenda was to promote Marxism and Social Democracy. This shift, gradual at first, took a dramatic turn following Rainis's trip in 1893 to a congress in Zurich, where he met

August Bebel and gathered the German-language Marxist literature that he reportedly hauled back to Rīga in suitcases and subsequently used in his writings. All told, the paper met with great success, and by 1897, when the Russian authorities temporarily shut down the paper and arrested Stučka and Rainis for revolutionary activities, it had become the center of intellectual life for progressive young Latvians.[60]

This was also the case in Jelgava, where among the faculty and students in the city school system there were a number of *Jaunā strāva* supporters. One such proponent was Kārlis Viļķeris, who taught in the Jelgava *reālskola* before later becoming an editor for *Dienas Lapa*. While at the school, Viļķeris wrote for the paper under the pseudonym "Zvanpūtis," and he encouraged students to discuss the ideas and purpose of *Jaunā strāva*. Certainly Ulmanis participated in these discussions and became familiar with *Jaunā strāva*, but he ultimately turned against the movement. In large part this was due to the writings of Juris Māters. Born in 1845 in Valtaiķi in Kurzeme province, Māters was a self-educated member of the emerging Latvian intelligentsia, and by the 1870s he had landed a job in Jelgava as a copyist and translator for the Kurzeme government's printing house. But by 1875, when he became an active member of the Young Latvians, he left that job and started the newspapers *Baltijas Zemkopis* (*The Baltic Farmer*) and, five years later, *Tiesu Vēstnesis* (*The Courier of Truth*), both of which carried a plethora of articles about the awakening of the Latvian nation. Yet, it was not until Māters's response to *Jaunā strāva* that he became a household name. What particularly upset Māters was the lack of attention that *jaunstrāvnieki* and their supporters in the Rīga Latvian Society paid to the residents of the countryside, who, Māters continually pointed out, comprised the majority of the Latvian nation. Furthermore, Māters was upset that *jaunstrāvnieki* were tearing apart the nation's

[60] Dribins, 42-47; E. Buceniece, *Ideju vēsture Latvijā: no pirmsākumiem līdz XIX gs. 90. gadiem* (Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1995), 372-489.

newfound unity by encouraging class consciousness and revolutionary activism over national solidarity. As an author, Māters of course disseminated his rebuke through newspapers and books, but in an attempt to weaken the power of the Rīga Latvian Society, he also founded the Jelgava Latvian Society, though it never unseated the former as the main institution of Latvian national cultural life.[61]

According to Ulmanis's own acknowledgement in his September 12, 1937 speech – one of the very few in which he spoke in detail about his personal life and intellectual development – these discussions in the 1880s and 1890s about the nation, class, and an urban-rural divide were perhaps the single most important factor in the crystallization of his stance on the national question. As he explained that September afternoon in the Bērze schoolyard, where a belated sixtieth birthday celebration for him was being held, it seemed already by the 1880s "that the wonderful era of awakening had more or less been forgotten," and as a result "triviality and discord had begun." Explaining just how this had happened, Ulmanis noted that in part this was due to the nation's uncertain and divided response to the "Russian influence" that was forced upon Latvians as a result of Alexander III's policies.[62] Even more significant, according to Ulmanis, was the importation of "foreign, one-sided teachings about class conflicts, class struggles, and class wars." This greatly hindered national unity, and in fact led, in Ulmanis's words, to "the receding of our nationalism, when nationalistic feelings got ripped apart." Therefore, Ulmanis explained, during his student days in Jelgava he came to disagree with the message that "there is only one class; [and] that there should be support for the factory workers in the cities while the others get nothing." In contrast to this agenda, he said he arrived at the

[61] Unāms, *Es viņu pazistu*, 328; Dunsdorfs, 21.
[62] For example, Juris Māters controversially argued that Latvians could not realistically hope to become a state within a state, and thus he believed that it was ultimately in the best interest of Latvian cultural autonomy not to fight Alexander III's policies.

conclusion – perhaps after reading Maters's works in the Jelgava schools' libraries[63] – that "there is a need for people to fight for the nation, for nationhood, for the country, for unity, for the strength and force of the nation, for those tasks whose struggle-filled obtainment would bring benefits for everyone and would be a blessing for all."[64] In other words, as a result of the debates prompted by *Jaunā strāva*, Ulmanis decided that he wanted to devote himself to the betterment of the nation, to representing and furthering the interests of the rural population, who were, in his eyes, all too often ignored or overlooked in visions of the future. Consequently, Ulmanis decided the best way to achieve these goals was to become an agronomist and agricultural journalist.

-Marija Sproģe: Ulmanis's One True Love?-

But before Ulmanis left Jelgava and took the next step in his professional life, there was a development in his personal life that has since generated ample discussion and speculation. Although Ulmanis apparently had a difficult time making close friends during his years in Jelgava, he ostensibly began in the last years there, when he was seventeen or eighteen years old, a romantic relationship with a young woman named Marija Sproģe.[65] There had been rumors about Marija even during Ulmanis's lifetime, and in 1997 they prompted Pauls Putniņš to produce the sensationalist and speculative play, "*Kā sapanā…*" (*Like in a Dream…*), which portrays the young couple has having been torn apart by Ulmanis's professional ambitions when Ulmanis refused Marija's demands to give her his undivided love and attention. Additionally, in 2001, following the unveiling ceremony of a Kārlis Ulmanis memorial at the *Pikšas* museum, Tamāra Veinberga-Stūris added a new twist to the story when she claimed in a piece published in

[63] Dunsdorfs, 21. It is also worth noting that in 1935 the Ulmanis regime unveiled a monument for Maters at the Kazdanga Agricultural School. See Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 20-21.
[64] For a transcript of Ulmanis's September 12, 1937 speech, see "Mana dzīve: Vienības svētkos Bērzmuižā Prezidents runāja par savu dzīvi," *Rīts*, Nr. 251, September 13, 1937, 1-2.
[65] There is some confusion about her surname. Quite often she is mentioned as "Marija Veinberga," but her maiden name was Marija Sproģe. Although she did later take on the surname Veinberga when she married Fricis Veinbergs, at the time Ulmanis met her she was still Marija Sproģe.

the newspaper *Lauku Avīze* (*The Country Gazette)* that she is the niece of the now-deceased Andrejs Veinbergs, who, she maintained in her story, was in fact Ulmanis's only son.

It is unfortunate that no one has been able either to authenticate or disprove Veinberga-Stūris's claims, for her account, which is based on stories told within the Veinbergs family, offers the most details yet on a story that has long fascinated many Latvians. Indeed, her story became so widely discussed that even the *Pikšas* museum now has an exhibit titled "Andrejs Veinbergs and Kārlis Ulmanis."[66] It seems that Ulmanis met Marija by chance. While a student at the *reālskola*, Ulmanis at one point was looking for a room in a boarding house. A colleague at school named Fricis Veinbergs recommended to Ulmanis that he rent a room from his uncle, Jēkabs Veinbergs, a railroad worker and local property owner in Jelgava. Based on this recommendation, Ulmanis indeed took a room at Veinbergs's boarding house, and it was there that he apparently met Marija, an aspiring actress who was working for Veinbergs (as was her mother, who managed the boarding house) to make ends meet. The two hit it off, and some months later Marija was expecting their child. As was a common social practice at that time in such situations, Ulmanis responded to this news by proposing marriage to Marija. But she ultimately said no. In her piece, Veinberga-Stūris did not venture a guess as to why Majija did so; but she did explain that once Marija had rebuffed Ulmanis and he was out of the picture, Fricis – the same classmate whose advice led to Ulmanis and Marija's relationship, and who had previously been Marija's boyfriend – offered to marry Marija, in part so that she could avoid the socially unacceptable status of being a single mother. Marija agreed to marry Fricis, but there was one problem: Fricis's father, Pēteris, forbade him from marrying a woman who had a child born out of wedlock. It was ostensibly at this point that Jēkabs Veinbergs stepped in. He had a

[66] A digital version can be found at: "Kārļa Ulmaņa piemiņas muzejs Pikšas," accessed October 31, 2013, http://www.piksas.lv/lv/izstades/izstades_04/.

soft spot for Marija and her family, so when Fricis's father – his own brother – objected, Jēkabs decided to adopt Marija's son, Andrejs. Subsequently, not long after, Marija and Fricis were married.[67]

As for Andrejs, who was born in 1897,[68] he grew up a full-fledged member of the Veinbergs family, and thus he went along with the rest of his family when they evacuated to Moscow during the First World War. Following the declaration of Latvian independence, Andrejs returned to Latvia and served in the 10th Infantry. It is unclear if Ulmanis and Andrejs were on the same page in terms of Ulmanis's past relations with Marija – and for that matter, it is not even clear if Andrejs knew that Marija was his birth mother – but whatever the reason or explanation, Ulmanis wanted to help Andrejs. As a result, by 1920 Andrejs was serving as Ulmanis's second adjutant. However, Andrejs soon thereafter entered the diplomatic corps, where he worked as a courier in Italy and Germany. Then, during Ulmanis's authoritarian rule, he worked in the state health insurance office. Following the invasion of the Red Army, Andrejs was deported to Siberia, but he eventually returned to his homeland and died there in 1985.[69]

It is unknown why Marija rebuffed Ulmanis and instead married Fricis. Even Veinberga-Stūris did not venture a guess, though she did claim that Ulmanis proposed to Marija a second time – and was again turned down – after Fricis was killed during the tumultuous days of revolution in 1905.[70] Perhaps Ulmanis's love for her was originally unrequited because Marija still had had feelings for Fricis; but such a theory has never been proposed by anyone familiar

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[67] Tekla Šaitere, "Kas bija Andrejs Veinbergs?" *Diena*, Feburary 24, 2001, accessed December 6, 2012, http://www.diena.lv/arhivs/kas-bija-andrejs-veinbergs-10949921; Inese Priedīte, "Kārļa Ulmaņa romantisko attiecību diskurss," *Reiz dzīvoja Kārlis Ulmanis*, ed. Inta Brikše, et al. (Rīga: Zinātne, 2007), 110-114.
[68] Of all the details that cast a shadow of doubt on Veinberga-Stūris's story, the date of Andrejs's birth is the most significant. According to Veinberga-Stūris, Andrejs was born in December 1897. But in the autumn of 1896, Ulmanis went to East Prussia to attend classes at a dairy institute. It is not known if perhaps Ulmanis returned home for a short stay in the early spring of 1897, but obviously that would have to be Veinberga-Stūris's assumption.
[69] Tekla Šaitere, "Kas bija Andrejs Veinbergs?".
[70] Veinberga-Stūris claimed that following Fricis's death, Marija decided that she would not remarry.

with their story. Instead, the account believed by most is that Ulmanis was simply unwilling to live a simple life in devotion to Marija and their family. Consequently, despite the fact that they loved each other, Marija ostensibly ended their relationship because she could see that she would always come second, behind Ulmanis's work. What is more, other stories told by family friends attest to the fact that Ulmanis continued to care deeply about Marija. For example, in addition to ostensibly sending Marija gifts, it was said that when her mother died, Ulmanis sent a wreath so big that it had to be delivered with a truck. Similarly, Dainis Rudzītis, whose father Dāvids Rudzītis was Latvia's first director of the chancery and a member of the so-called "small cabinet" during the Ulmanis regime, recalled in his memoir that his mother told him that she had repeatedly tried to set Ulmanis up with one of her friends, but it never went anywhere because "Ulmanis had just one eternal love … Marija Veinberga."[71]

Regardless of the veracity of this explanation, it seems that Latvia's modern-day artists and general public prefer something akin to it. In addition to Putniņš's 1997 play, in 2009 Zigmars Liepiņš and Kaspars Dimiters's musical drama "*Vadonis*" ("The Leader") opened the Latvian National Theatre's 2009-10 season, selling out every night it was performed. Taking up Putniņš's interpretation, Dimiters, who wrote the script, portrayed Marija and Ulmanis as love-struck yet ultimately doomed to heartache and solitude as a result of Ulmanis's destiny. As Dimiters explained the play in a press interview, on a personal level Marija loved Ulmanis and wanted to be with him. However, she ultimately pushed him away because, as a nationally conscious Latvian, she realized that she could not selfishly keep him all to herself. Thus, in an

[71] Quoted in Priedīte, 117. On Dāvids Rudzītis's life and career, see Līga Peinberga, "Dāvida Rudzīša un Roberta Bulsona stāsts," *Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets*, accessed November 2, 2013, http://www.mk.gov.lv/vk/apraksts-vesture/Davida-Rudzisa-un-Roberta-Bulsona-stasts/.

interesting twist, in Dimiters's narrative Marija is ultimately the one who helped – or even forced – Ulmanis to recognize his mission as the "*Vadonis*."[72]

Dimiters's *Vadonis* offered a number of interesting commentaries on both Ulmanis's private life and on major issues in present-day Latvia that continue to resonate with Ulmanis's legend. First, the play presented an explanation for the number one question about Ulmanis's private life: why did he never marry? This was a question that plagued him throughout his adult life, and it continues to complicate his historical memory today. There are a number of reasons for this. For one, in addition to the fact that marriage was and remains a social norm, there was and is added interest because Ulmanis was, in the words of Anita Bormane, "the number one bachelor in Rīga during the 1930s."[73] As a result, it was assumed that Ulmanis must have had no shortage of choices. Furthermore, as the number one bachelor, commentators have intimated that such women would have all been, of course, fantastically beautiful as well, a point rooted in a long-held belief in Latvian society that Latvian women are, to quote a recent English-language tourist guide produced by the Latvian Institute, "not only smart and caring, but also extremely beautiful."[74] Thus, given the combination of Ulmanis's celebrity and the alluring nature of Latvian women, to observers – both then and now – Ulmanis's lack of a wife or girlfriend seemed quite strange, and maybe even "un-Latvian."

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[72] Līga Blaua, "Četras versijas par Kārli Ulmani," *Ievas stāsti*, August 2009, and as republished on the blog *Nebruks*, August 28, 2009, accessed December 6, 2012, http://www.blogs.krustaskola.lv./archives/6365.
[73] Anita Bormane, "Pazudušais laiku atspulgos – Kārlis Ulmanis."
[74] "Latvians," *The Latvian Institute*, accessed October 31, 2013, http://www.latvia.lv/library/latvians. On this topic, see also Monta Karaļūnaite, "Kā latviešu sievietes izskatās ārzemnieku acīs?" *Delfi sievietēm*, November 14, 2011, accessed October 31, 2013, http://www.delfi.lv/sievietem/relationships/couple/ka-latviesu-sievietes-izskatas-arzemnieku-acis.d?id=41711641. As another noteworthy example of this celebration of beautiful Latvian women, the Latvian Blondes Association, led by former Mrs. Universe, Marika Gederte, founded in 2009 an annual "Go Blonde" festival in response to the horrific economic crisis that hit Latvia in 2008-09. The signature event of the festival, whose purpose was to boost the spirits of Latvians and raise money for charities, was a parade in Old Riga. The parade-goers, dressed in trendy, provocative pink outfits, quickly became an international sensation, and in subsequent years the festival drew a significant number of predominantly male tourists. As a consequence, the festival organizers were criticized for "promoting" Latvia's sex tourism. The organizers thus decided after the 2011 events to focus on other charity work. But in 2013 the association again held the festival, though in Jurmala rather than in Rīga.

What is more, Ulmanis only increased the rumors by offering next to no details about his private life. For example, once, when he was asked why he chose to never marry or have a significant other, his response was: "I am married to Latvia, and that is enough for me."[75] But such a statement did little to quell whispers—and there were plenty. The two most prominent ones, both of which were spread by political opponents like Fēlikss Cielēns, were that Ulmanis either was impotent or a homosexual. There was and remains next to no evidence for either of these claims – save for rumors that Ulmanis suffered from a physical disability as a result of a botched hernia surgery, which he indeed had – but given the mystery surrounding his love life, such hearsay fell on curious, receptive ears.[76] Furthermore, for some people, such rumors made sense, for they believed that they explained some of Ulmanis's other "quirks," like his equally "un-Latvian" disavowal of alcohol and cigarettes, or, to some, his desire for public adulation despite his reticent social behavior.[77]

What is so significant about Dimiters's plot in *Vadonis*, then, and what made the play a huge success, is that it addressed head on the question of Ulmanis's love life and did so in a way that made Ulmanis seem normal, almost like a typical present-day Latvian male. Primarily, Dimiters did this by empowering Marija, by giving her all of the agency. Consequently, what Dimiters's audiences saw was an Ulmanis who would have been just an ordinary man had it not been for the wisdom and prodding of two great women: his mother and Marija. Thus, in

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[75] Priedīte, 107.

[76] For a discussion of the rumors about Ulmanis's possible physical disability, see especially Tekla Šaitere, "Kas bija Andrejs Veinbergs?"; Avots, 10; Anita Bormane, "Pazudušais laiku atspulgos – Kārlis Ulmanis"; Dunsdorfs, 213. But as I argue later in the chapter, while Ulmanis indeed had hernia surgery while in Nebraska, it more than likely would not have left him with a physical disability. As for rumors about Ulmanis as a homosexual, see Cielēns, 185. Additionally, in a provocative interview published in November 2011 in the prominent women's magaize *Lilit*, Arkādijs Pancs, a psychologist and psychotherapist, said that based on what he knew about Ulmanis's personality and behavior, he would conjecture that Ulmanis was a homosexual. For commentary on Pancs's statement, see "Pētījums: Kārlis Ulmanis esot bijis gejs," *Delfi: Izklaide*, November 2, 2011, accessed October 27, 2013, http://www.delfi.lv/izklaide/archive/petijums-karlis-ulmanis-esot-bijis-gejs.d?id=41510063.

[77] For a great discussion of the anti-alcohol movement during the "Ulmanis Times," see Guntis Vāveris, "Latviešu pretalkohola kustība 1934.-1940. gadā: Bezalkohola biedrības 'Ziemeļblāzma' piemērs," *Latvijas Arhīvi* 3 (2012): 179-205.

Dimiters's hands, Ulmanis's love life was turned into a sad story of a man who was spurned by his one true love as a result of her unyielding discipline and nationalistic conviction. Not only does such an interpretation offer a more acceptable explanation – in the eyes of those who would prefer not to see Latvia's most famous historical figure be defamed – for Ulmanis's lack of a love life, but in positing this narrative Dimiters was also able to comment on a key topic in modern-day Latvian society: the dominance of women.

In Dimiters's *Vadonis*, Ulmanis appeared as a typical, modern-day Latvian male if for no other reason than because he was dominated by the women in his life. This topic – the, for the Western world, unusual dominance of women in the household, higher education, the workplace, and in the public sphere[78] – has been a continuous topic of conversation over the last ten years, and especially during and after the sharp economic downturn in Latvia that began in 2008, as Latvian men have struggled to adapt to a post-Soviet, post-industrial economy. In particular, scholars and analysts have questioned why Latvian men have such low life expectancies and one of the highest rates of suicide in the European Union.[79] The answer that has been cited most often is that Latvian men have embraced a "macho culture" of risky behavior, such as reckless driving, and a health-deteriorating lifestyle of heavy drinking and smoking due to feelings of failure, frustration, and inadequacy as they watch Latvian women acclimate more successfully to the economy of the twenty-first century. What has resulted from this situation is a social and education gap – for instance, there are now more than fifty percent more women than men at Latvia's universities – that has caused a lot of problems for younger women seeking a male

[78] For an informative discussion of Latvian women and their dominance in the public sphere, see Tove Lindén, "Explaining Civil Society Core Activism in Post-Soviet Latvia" (Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, 2008).
[79] There is a nearly eleven-year gap between the life expectancies of Latvian men and women—the highest in the European Union. See Damien McGuinness, "Latvian man shortage leaves women lost for love," *BBC*, October 12, 2010, accessed November 1, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11493157; Nina Kolyako, "Average life expectancy in Latvia continues to gradually increase," *The Baltic Course*, May 21, 2011, accessed November 1, 2013, http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/analytics/?doc=41230.

partner. As the notable author and journalist Dace Ruksane has explained it, either "the smartest girls … and most beautiful girls are alone" because they cannot find a man on their own social and educational level, or they end up in an all too often unhappy relationship with a man who feels inferior, thus leading him to believe that he has no say in the relationship or in society as a whole.[80]

Hence, seeking to speak to both Ulmanis's historical memory and this particular aspect of Latvian society, Dimiters cleverly made a previously "unmacho" Ulmanis very relatable to his male audience simply by portraying interwar Latvian society as just as female-dominant as that of today, and in doing so he further suggested that this social phenomenon has deeper roots than simply the collapse of an economic system. Finally, by addressing stories and rumors about Ulmanis's private life, Dimiters and others have attempted to show, as Priedīte has eloquently put it, that "Ulmanis was not only a statesman, but also a human being … [who had] identifiable weaknesses or perhaps shortcomings or vulnerabilities that do not quite fit into the artificially created image of Ulmanis or in his similar story of the hero's epic."[81]

-An Emerging Agronomist-

Following his schooling in Jelgava and his breakup with Marija, during the summer of 1896 Ulmanis worked on the family farms with his brother Jānis. That autumn Ulmanis then left to pursue further studies at the Kleinhof-Tapiau dairy farm in Tapiau (modern-day Gvardeysk in the Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia), in what was then the Wehlau District (*Kreis*) of East Prussia. In addition to being a famous producer of cheese, especially Tilsit (or Tilsiter), from 1887-1910 the farm was also the location of a state-of-the-art dairy institute and test station, which was

[80] Damien McGuinness, "Latvian man shortage leaves women lost for love."
[81] Priedīte, 121.

equipped with electricity and electric lighting.[82] According to agricultural yearbooks published around the time of Ulmanis's arrival, there were actually two separate programs there. One was an October-April dairy school run by the East Prussia Dairy Association in Königsberg (*Ostpreussischer Milchwirtschaftlicher Verein zu Königsberg*). To be admitted, students had to be at least twenty years of age, and had to have at least two years of experience at a dairy. The other program was founded by Prof. Dr. Fleischmann (who later accepted a position at the University of Göttingen) in cooperation with the three Agricultural Central Unions of East and West Prussia. Instead of being only a technical school, Fleischmann's dairy institute also functioned as a test station and an information office for local farmers. Lastly, unlike the East Prussia Dairy Association's program, Fleischmann's institute accepted students of all ages, with the simple stipulation that they have some practical experience in dairying, and as the tuition fees were based on per-month basis, the students were thus permitted to attend as long as they saw fit.[83]

Since Ulmanis did not meet the admission requirements for the East Prussia Dairy Association's school, he attended Fleischmann's program, which was directed by Dr. Hittcher. The other faculty in the program included: Geisthoff, who taught chemistry; Prylewski, who served as a teaching assistant; and Gosch, who was the administrator of the dairy farm, which consisted of approximately 1,000 hectares of land and 1,200 cows. Over the first eleven years of its existence, the program averaged roughly thirty students per year, and over that same duration 116 of the 370 students were "foreigners," which suggests that the program was internationally renowned. Although there are no records on the length of Ulmanis's stay or on what he studied

[82] Hermann Pölking, *Ostpreußen: Biographie einer Provinz* (Berlin: be.bra verlag GmbH, 2011), 275.
[83] "Landwirtschaftliche Jahrbücher," *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Landwirtschaft und Archiv des Königlich Preussischen Landes-Ökonomie-Kollegiums*, ed. Dr. H. Thiel (Berlin: Verlagsbuchhandlung Paul Parey, 1901), 213-214.

and did there, we know that, as a foreigner, he would have had to pay around fifty marks per month (plus room and board), and as a young man and recent *reālskola* graduate, such a monthly fee would have been a substantial amount for Ulmanis, even with the financial help that his mother and brothers presumably would have given him.[84]

One possible reason why Ulmanis's brothers might have funded his studies in Tapiau is because upon his return, Ulmanis and his brother Indriķis founded in 1898 one of the very first modern dairy stores in Rīga called "*Kurzemes pienu iestāde*" ("The Kurzeme Milk Office").[85] The facility, situated in the culturally and architecturally historic Grīziņkalns neighborhood of Rīga, was located on Krāsotāju Street, in the courtyard and lower floors of a two-story wooden building that was equipped with a large cellar.[86] When the store first opened, Indriķis, the primary proprietor, was still living on his horse farm in Līvbērze County, so he hired Ulmanis to manage the business. Based on a November 1898 advertisement in *Zemkopis* (*The Farmer*), one of the most prominent agricultural journals at that time, the Ulmanis brothers had high expectations for the business because Ulmanis announced that he was still looking to secure contracts for 1899 for at least an additional 1,229,600 liters of milk.[87] Although there is little information on the business, it is safe to assume that it did quite well, since it remained open until the onset of the First World War, after which it was renamed "*Centrālā moderniecība*"

[84] Ibid. Although it is not certain that his brothers helped finance his studies in Tapiau, in the introduction to his first book, Ulmanis thanked his brother Jānis for supporting his education. See Kārlis Ulmanis, *Ienesīga piensaimniecība: rokas grām. piensaimniecības kursu dalībniekiem, saimniecēm, saimniekiem un citiem, kas pienu izstrādā krējumā, sviestā, un biezpienā* (Valmiera: Kauguru Lauksaimniecības biedrība, 1907).
[85] It was sometimes also called "Kurzemes moderniecība Rīgā" ("The Kurzeme Dairy Plant in Rīga) in the newspapers.
[86] Since the neighborhood was unique in its high propensity of wooden buildings, the area has since been renovated and given the new name "Koka Rīga" ("Wood/Wooden Rīga"). Thanks to E.U. Regional Development Funds, there is also a new website devoted to the history of this part of Rīga. See http://www.kokariga.lv/.
[87] See the advertisement in *Zemkopis*, Nr. 45, November 11, 1898, 10. Ulmanis actually gave the number 800,000 "stopu piena." "Stops" is an old unit of measurement equal to approximately 1.537 liters.

("The Central Dairy Plant") and expanded to include butter-making and milk bottle-washing and -filling facilities.[88]

As a result of Ulmanis's rising profile in the dairy industry through his work at Indriķis's store, the organizers of the first Congress of Latvian Farmers, led by a special action committee of the Rīga Latvian Society comprised of Juris Kalniņš-Prātkopis (the editor of *Baltijas Vēstnesis*), Aleksandrs Vēbers (the editor of *Balss*), and Jānis Bisenieks (the editor of *Zemkopis*), invited him to give a talk at the congress, which was held on December 17-18, 1899. Apart from the song festivals, the congress was perhaps the largest gathering of Latvians up to that point in the nation's history, as at least 750 farmers from Vidzeme, 330 from Kurzeme and Zemgale, and a handful of farmers from Latgale and from Latvian settlements in Russia proper were in attendance. Consequently, for the merely twenty-two-year-old Ulmanis, it was quite an honor to be invited to address such a large and important gathering of Latvian farmers.[89]

Ulmanis's opening-day talk at the congress, which was later published in a number of newspapers and journals, was titled "*Peena razchojumi un winu izleetoschana*" ("Milk Products and Their Utilization"). It was roughly fifteen to twenty minutes in length and primarily centered on explaining modern dairying techniques. By way of opening, Ulmanis noted that despite the fact that humans have been raising and benefiting from cows "since ancient times," until recently, he pointed out, "very little attention has been given to dairying due to the fact that cows have been kept primarily for their manure, and because very little has come from selling milk products." Noting this state of affairs, Ulmanis set out to explain why changes in dairying practices could improve the farmers' profits.

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[88] Andra Kolberga, "Iepazīsti pilsētu un tās apkārtni Rīgas austrumu izpilddirekcija, Krāsotāju iela: Koka ēku renovācijas centra apbūves vēstures arhitektoniskais ekskurss" (Rīga: Lejnieku projektēšanas biroja, undated), 37-38, accessed November 2, 2013, http://www.rigasaustrumi.lv/Dokumenti/faili/tourism/krasotajuiela/Turisms_Krasotaju_iela.pdf.
[89] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 22.

First, Ulmanis argued that Latvian farmers ought to follow in the footsteps of farmers in Western Europe, who were using advanced practices to improve the quality of their products, which in turn raised consumer demand and, ultimately, the market price of their goods. Second, Ulmanis laid out how this could also happen for Latvian farmers. He stated that first and foremost farmers had to pay more attention to their cows, for even though it meant an increase in labor and input costs, the herd's higher milk production would more than offset those costs. Beyond that, the next most important modern dairying method, he declared, was the use of clean equipment and mechanical centrifuges and separators. After briefly explaining their functions and current prices, Ulmanis turned to the question that, he lamented, "I have quite often heard…[W]here is the necessary money going to come from?" Here, then, is where Ulmanis got to the proverbial meat of his talk—the collective benefits of dairy cooperatives. As an example for his audience, Ulmanis explained that if twenty to thirty farmers each chipped in a bit of money, they would be able jointly to buy a mechanical centrifuge and butter churn and start a cooperative creamery. Therefore, by pooling resources, Ulmanis instructed, Latvian farmers could ultimately increase production and quality to the point that their products could be sold abroad.

Lastly, as he brought his talk to a close, Ulmanis also noted that if the farmers were able to establish such cooperatives, it would also ease concerns about how, as he put it, a lack of "representation under a reasonable government" might affect their farm work. Although it was only one sentence in a twenty-minute talk, and despite the fact that it apparently did not provoke any response from the provincial authorities, it is nonetheless clear that Ulmanis saw agricultural and political questions as intrinsically intertwined—a stance that would later become even more clear during the period of his authoritarian rule. Consequently, regardless of the fact that it was

merely one sentence, given the venue and large audience, Bērziņš was correct in his statement that this speech marked the beginning of Ulmanis's public life and political career.[90]

There was at least one important group of people who thought highly of Ulmanis's remarks at the congress, the leaders of agricultural societies. Hence, in addition to his work at his brother's store – including at a second location in Liepāja – Ulmanis began to receive requests from agricultural societies to give guest talks or lead short, one or two-week dairy courses. His first significant teaching job came in 1902, when the Bērzmuiža Agricultural Society, known as "*Druva*" ("Grain Field"), organized dairy courses at the Bērzmuiža Test Farm, which was run by the Jelgava Agricultural Society (founded in 1893), and specifically by the agronomist Jānis Bergs, who was also later the editor of *Zemkopis* and a professor of agriculture at the University of Latvia. As there was not yet an agricultural college in Latvian-speaking territory, in 1901 the Jelgava Agricultural Society reached an agreement with the provincial government to rent 441 hectares of land for a test farm, where students would be able to enroll in a year-long program – with a tuition fee of 50 rubles – where instructors would guide them through field work in the summer and academic courses in the winter.[91]

The dairy courses organized there in the summer of 1902 featured a number of lecturers, though Ulmanis and Bergs were the two main ones. For his part, Ulmanis gave six lectures, all of which were subsequently published in *Zemkopis*. Using the scientific knowledge he had acquired in Tapiau, along with the practical experiences of managing a dairy store, Ulmanis gave an overview of modern dairying practices that, in the first few lectures, began with fundamental topics. For example, he lectured on: various breeds of dairy cows; how to use select the proper bull for improving the herd's genetics; the benefits of a comfortable, dry, and clean cow shed for

[90] For a transcript of the speech, see Kārlis Ulmanis, "Peena razchojumi un winu izleetoschana," *Zemkopis*, Nr. 5, February 2, 1900, 61-62. On Bērziņš's assessment, see Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 23.
[91] Dunsdorfs, 27-28.

a cow's health and milk production; and the best milking schedule and practices. Subsequently, in his later lectures, he moved on to more advanced topics, like: the exact contents of milk; how to handle, process, and store milk using state-of-the-art equipment; the different types of equipment and their current prices; how to produce butter and other dairy products; and, lastly, how to establish and operate a cooperative creamery. In these latter talks, Ulmanis referenced often Dr. Hittcher's research, and offered clear, concise scientific evidence for his points about current best practices. Likewise, to further his claim about the feasibility and potential outcomes of his advice, Ulmanis also continually made comparisons to dairy industries in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. Lastly, in addition to elucidating how these practices would increase production and quality, he concluded his six-part series by making two final points about cooperatives. The most important thing to take away, he told the students, is to understand that "[t]he very first thing that is needed in order to obtain this goal [i.e., starting and maintaining a successful cooperative] is unity. Without unity nothing good will ever be obtainable!" And as for that "good" thing, in his second and very last point, Ulmanis explained that, ultimately, the real purpose of a farmer-owned cooperative is to ensure that profits will be spread among the members themselves rather than ending up with "some middleman."[92]

Without a doubt, this term was used as a euphemism for the Baltic German estate and business owners in the dairy industry, who, like in every other sector, had a hegemonic hold on the infrastructure and market. For example, Baltic Germans owned eighty-five percent of all of Latvia's pre-war industries, and of those, in 1900, thirty-one of the thirty-seven firms with an

[92] For the complete transcript of Ulmanis lectures, see *Zemkopis*, Nr. 36-41, 1902. The primary quotes here can be found in Kārlis Ulmanis, "Priekschlasijumi par lopkopibu un peensaimneezibu," *Zemkopis*, Nr. 41, October 9, 1902, 542, 544.

annual turnover of half a million rubles or more were owned by Baltic Germans.[93] Indeed, in a private letter a few years later, Ulmanis expressed his frustration at a Latvian agricultural union's proposal to work with German barons on a new cooperative creamery, writing, "We haven't ever seen any good from the [German] estate owners – and to hope for anything different from them in the future is nothing but the simplest of mistakes."[94] As in his earlier address at the 1899 congress, here again Ulmanis ended his lectures at the Bērzmuiža dairy course by hinting at agri-political positions that would later become the foundation of both his democratic and authoritarian political platform: unity and an agrarian nationalism rooted in a self-initiative that stood opposed to the centuries of deference shown to Baltic Germans. To be clear, it is not that Ulmanis was anti-German – for example, one need not look any further than his educational choices or agricultural writings to see that Ulmanis had great admiration for German ingenuity – rather, he simply wanted to eradicate the self-defeatist, submissive attitude that had become a part of Latvian culture over the centuries of serfdom.

In addition to his work with the society *Druva* and with the agronomist Bergs, Ulmanis also began a professional relationship with Hermanis Enzeliņš, whom he met at the 1899 congress. Enzeliņš, Ulmanis's senior by ten years, in many ways became the most influential person in Ulmanis's adult life. Professionally, it could be said that Enzeliņš was Ulmanis's role model. The son of a Vidzeme farmer who, like Ulmanis's father, had managed to purchase his own farm, known as "*Mičkēni*," Enzeliņš managed to blend his agricultural interests with his desire to serve the public. Having gained his education and agricultural training through the family farm and as an apprentice at the "*Lenči"* estate, Enzeliņš eventually became one of the

[93] John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities: Paul Schiemann, 1876-1944* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 63; David Kirby, *The Baltic World 1772-1993: Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change* (London and New York: Longman Group, 1995), 166.
[94] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, February 10, 1904, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 214, August 29, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=52119.

most well-known farmers in Vidzeme. Enzeliņš was, however, much more than just a farmer. He was also one of the earliest and most enthusiastic agronomists and rural activists. Most notably, in 1896 he founded the *Kauguru bezmaksas bibliotēku* (Kauguri County Free Library) in Valmiera, and two years later he established the *Kauguru lauksaimnieku biedrība* (Kauguri Farmers' Society). Furthermore, in addition to serving as the primary editor for the Kauguri Farmers' Society's publications, he was one of the first, in 1903, to organize an agricultural exhibition in Latvian-speaking territory.[95]

In the years to come, Enzeliņš also went on to be one of Ulmanis's few close friends as a result of their professional collaboration over a number of decades. To be sure, Ulmanis corresponded with Enzeliņš more than with anyone else in his life, and thanks to Enzeliņš's amazing secretarial skills and foresight, today we still have at least 300 of Ulmanis's letters to Enzeliņš, most of which were written between 1903, when Enzeliņš invited Ulmanis to contribute to the Kauguri Agricultural Society's efforts, and 1915, when the First World War brought the society's work to a halt. As the reader will see, these letters, which have never before been analyzed in their entirety, are a key source for understanding Ulmanis's early professional life.

However, before Ulmanis began working with Ezeliņš in 1903, the previous autumn Ulmanis left for Zurich, Switzerland to attend courses at the *Eidgenössisches Polytechnikum* (ETH Zürich), one of the most notable technical colleges in Europe (for example, Albert Einstein studied there from 1896-1900). This period in Ulmanis's young adult life remains somewhat vague, though. For one thing, Ulmanis never fully explained later why he left his brother's store and his burgeoning career as an agricultural instructor – jobs which gave him a decent income, at

[95] Hermanis Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas," *Sējējs*, Nr. 9, September 1937, 921; Hermanis Enzeliņš, "Autobriogrāfija," *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 268/269, October 15, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45375.

least 150 rubles per month[96] – only to return to life as a poor student. The only public comment that Ulmanis made on this decision came in the same exceptionally revealing September 12, 1937 speech that was discussed earlier. While talking about his education, Ulmanis remarked:

> In 1902 I already began to see my life more clearly and to discern more clearly my life's work, of course not in detail, but in terms of a general direction. I had the opportunity already at that time to decide what my life path should be and to come to a clarification about what I would have to be, even if at that time the end goal still was not apparent. At any rate, it [i.e., the end goal] was so far off that I didn't permit myself to say anything about it to anyone, because when I would have begun to talk about it, then all of my friends and well-wishers would have tried to talk me out of it, though they wouldn't have been able to. And then, almost as if a test or trial of whether or not I had decided and chosen correctly, in the summer of 1902 the first dairy courses came about right here in Bērzmuiža's "Druva."[97]

Obviously, Ulmanis decided during that summer course that he had made the correct decision. Consequently, it seems that he left his positions because he thought he needed to add more academic qualifications to his resume. Indeed, as he later wrote in a letter to a fellow agronomist, he thought that this advice would be followed more closely if he could add "Professor K.U." to his resume and publications.[98]

Conversely, Miķelis Valters argued years later in his memoir that perhaps Ulmanis might have pursued university studies not only because he thought it might lend him a larger and more receptive audience, but even more so because he wanted to be accepted into higher academic and social circles, and he feared that this would not happen otherwise since he was merely the youngest son of a farmer. Indeed, Valters wrote that he came to believe, as a result of his relations with him, that Ulmanis sometimes showed "an indication of a subconscious feeling of inferiority" when he was among people of a higher social birth.[99] This is an especially interesting

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[96] See Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, October 15, 1904, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 215, September 2, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30496.
[97] "Mana dzīve: Vienības svētkos Bērzmuižā Prezidents runāja par savu dzīvi," 1.
[98] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 20, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 225, September 12, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=44842.
[99] Quoted in Dunsdorfs, 98.

and controversial statement because Valters was one of only a small number of people who knew Ulmanis quite well on a personal level. The two originally became friends in Zurich, where Valters was studying at the University of Zurich. Not only did they provide each other with much-appreciated companionship while abroad, but they also learned about each other's differing political beliefs, as even during his student days Valters was already an important figure in the Latvian social democratic movement. As an indication of just how thoroughly they must have hashed out their political viewpoints, it is interesting to note that Ulmanis wrote a series of articles, more than likely on Valters's initiative, on the question of landless farmers in the Baltics for the journal *Proletārietis* that appeared in 1903. To be sure, although the two men always had differing political beliefs, they nonetheless often cooperated professionally, becoming two of the most important actors in the formation of the independent Latvian state. Likewise, on a personal level, they remained friends throughout the interwar period. In fact, it has been said that Valters was one of only two people (Enzeliņš was said to be the other) to continue addressing Ulmanis with the informal "Tu" (you) during the period of his authoritarian rule.[100]

The controversial aspect of Valters's comment stems from the fact that following the loss of Latvian independence, Valters became a harsh critic of Ulmanis's authoritarian regime, saying that the May 15 coup was the single greatest crime against the state (a bold claim given that there had been communist and German-backed coup attempts in the state's early years), that Ulmanis had been power hungry, and other such statements that flew in the face of the fact that Valters had served the Ulmanis government throughout the entire authoritarian period, and in 1940 was serving as the Latvian ambassador to Belgium. Somewhat surprisingly, Valters' sudden about-

[100] Andrievs Ezergailis, "Valtera pēdējā vēstule Ulmanim 1940. gada 20. janvāri," *Jaunā Gaita*, Nr. 183, August 1991, accessed November 4, 2013, http://zagarins.net/jg/jg183/JG183_Ezergailis.htm.

face has actually drawn more commentary than his interesting argument about Ulmanis's ostensible inferiority complex—for one, the prominent interwar journalist and author Žanis Unāms thought that Valters's turn came out of his anger that Ulmanis granted another diplomat, Kārlis Zariņš, and not Valters, the extraordinary powers to lead Latvia's consular and diplomatic work abroad in the case of Latvia's occupation.[101] Still, despite the lack of reaction to it, Valters was at least somewhat correct in his assessment of Ulmanis, for as we will see in Ulmanis's personal letters from America, he indeed had a type of inferiority complex and was often preoccupied with what people thought of him.

Beyond why Ulmanis went in the first place, still another puzzling aspect of his studies in Switzerland, and especially since he got very good grades during his year there, is why he returned home that summer and then that autumn transferred to the University of Leipzig. Perhaps Ulmanis, knowing that he wanted to specialize in dairying as opposed to getting more of a general technical education, simply decided to transfer to the University of Leipzig, where he had more flexibility – as opposed to the strict and demanding curriculum at ETH[102] – to spend his time studying under Dr. Wilhelm Kirchner, one of the most renowned dairy experts in Central Europe whose dairying textbook, first published in the 1880s, was reprinted six times prior to the First World War.[103]

When Ulmanis began courses at the University of Leipzig Agricultural Institute in fall 1903, there were 182 students enrolled there: 127 from Germany, twenty-nine from Russia, eighteen from Austria-Hungary, and a small number from a slew of other countries, including by the end of his schooling there six students who apparently understood at least some Latvian. Somewhat surprisingly, of the six, Ulmanis only mentioned two specific names: Jānis Vidiņš, a

[101] Žanis Unāms, *Laiku atspulgā* (Oldenburg: Loga apgāds, 1953), 55-61.
[102] See Dunsdorfs, 32-33.
[103] See Dunsdorfs, 28-29, 36.

native of the Kurzeme village of Ķoniņi who studied agriculture and journalism and prematurely died in 1921; and Jānis Roberts Dēliņš, a Rīga native who studied agriculture and journalism and, among other positions in his career, worked from 1936-1938 for the Ulmanis regime's agricultural publication, *Sējējs* (*The Sower*).[104] Within the institute curriculum, Ulmanis had the choice of two distinct programs: 1) farming and animal husbandry, or 2) machinery and land amelioration. He chose, of course, the former. The program was three years in duration, but in light of his studies in Zurich, he was permitted to graduate in two years. According to records at the University of Leipzig Archive (*Universitätsarchiv Leipzig*), besides agricultural coursework, Ulmanis also took: "Introduction to the Economic and Social Understanding of the Present"; "The Social Question of the Present"; "German Colonial Politics"; "Trade, Exchange and Sea Law"; "The Folk Economic Discovery: From the French Revolution to the Present"; "Economic Crises;" and a few other courses.[105]

There was yet another portion of the program in Leipzig that Ulmanis seemed to enjoy: weekend field trips to local farms and agriculture-related businesses. For instance, in a November 1903 letter to Enzeliņš, Ulmanis noted that he very much enjoyed the class' recent visit to a livestock sale barn and slaughterhouse.[106] Additionally, Ulmanis also noted in his correspondence with Enzeliņš a trip that he took in late summer 1904, though it is unclear from the letter whether it was a formal part of his coursework. Among other possible places that he might have visited, Ulmanis specifically told Enzeliņš that he had learned a lot on a trip through the southern Rhine region, where he was especially interested in the work of an agricultural

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[104] On Latvian-speakers in Leipzig, see Ulmanis's comments about Latvian-language publications at the university library in his April 29, 1905 letter to Enzeliņš. See *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 217, September 4, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30547.

[105] A copy of this document, obtained through a correspondence with the University of Leipzig Archive staff, is in the author's possession. Unfortunately, the copy does not include any citation information.

[106] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 14, 1903, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 213, August 28, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30469

Kontrollverein (inspection union). Additionally, Ulmanis became unusually animated when describing his visit to Holland, where he saw "the famous cows" and meadows. However, what really impressed Ulmanis were the farmers themselves, whom he found to be incredibly efficient and productive. There, he told Enzeliņš, the farmers often get two crops a year – potatoes in the spring and cabbage in the fall – and they are able to sustain more livestock per hectare than he previously thought possible. To give Enzeliņš an example, he cited one farm, roughly twenty hectares in size, that had seventeen milk cows, four bulls, seven calves, thirty-two sheep, twenty-six lambs, eight pigs, and a horse. Ulmanis went on, comparing Holland and his homeland, in a passage that is also noteworthy for his usage of German phrases mixed in with his Latvian. "And what about us?" Ulmanis began the comparison. "Sometimes doubts linger in me when I am walking along our marshes and sand dunes in a certain 'mindset'—but then I clinch my fist [and say]—'And if you won't come along willingly, then I'll use force.' I only withstand it [thinking] the victory is ours. Although [it will only happen] with great effort and sacrifice, and slowly."[107]

Although Ulmanis's opponents may claim that such a passage is proof of his inherent authoritarian nature, and that he was determined all along to become a dictator, he was of course talking about land amelioration and reclamation, or what David Blackbourn has aptly termed "the conquest of nature."[108] Indeed, as Blackbourn brilliantly shows in his investigation of Germans' transformation of their landscape, perhaps there was no better place for Ulmanis to gather the knowledge he needed to alleviate those doubts. And as we will see with the so-called

[107] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 17, 1904, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 215, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30496. In the original: "Un pie mums? Man tā dažreiz paliek bail, kad es tādā 'garā' pastaigātos pa mūsu purviem un smilšu kāpām – bet tad atkal es sakniebju dūri— : 'und komst du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt'. Tikai uzturēt – der Sieg ist unser. Lai gan ar lielām pūlēm un upuriem. Un pamazām."

[108] David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: Norton, 2006).

"*Uzvaras līdums*" ("Victory Clearing") project discussed in chapter five, Ulmanis certainly applied that knowledge during his authoritarian rule.

Besides being occupied by schoolwork and educational trips, while in Leipzig Ulmanis also continued working as an agronomist. This came about as a result of his correspondence and work with Enzeliņš. Following the provincial government's decision in June 1903 to allow the Rīga Latvian Society's Agricultural Section to organize a dairying course, Enzeliņš asked for and received the same permissions for his Kauguri Farmers' Society. Subsequently, he asked Ulmanis to participate in the course, and that is why Ulmanis returned from Switzerland during the summer of 1903. The course took place that September in Valmiera, save for the concluding festivities, which were held at the Rīga Latvian Society's Grand Hall. There were sixty-one students in the course, and Ulmanis lectured on both dairying and general animal husbandry. Enzeliņš was pleased with the outcome, and thus he and Ulmanis agreed to organize another Kauguri Farmers' Society dairy course, which occurred the following summer in Rencēni, located north of Valmiera in far northern Vidzeme. [109]

Having gotten to know Ulmanis during these two summer dairy courses, in 1904 Enzeliņš extended an offer to Ulmanis for more regular work with the Kauguri Farmers' Society. In particular, Enzeliņš invited him to contribute two articles per month to the society's journal, *Valmieras Lauksaimnieks* (*The Valmiera Farmer*, which was later shortened to just *Lauksamnieks*), in addition to answering letters from readers who needed agricultural advice. Ulmanis enthusiastically agreed to Enzeliņš's offer, despite the fact that he was already a full-time student, and he continued this work throughout the remainder of his time in Leipzig.[110]

[109] Hermanis Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņās," *Sējējs*, Nr. 9, September 1937, 921-922.
[110] Ibid, 922-923.

It seems that part of the reason why Ulmanis agreed to add extra work to his already full load is because he was short on funds. In fact, while Ulmanis only rarely discussed his personal life in his letters to Enzeliņš, money – and specifically Ulmanis's lack of it – was a recurrent topic of correspondence. Sometimes Ulmanis asked for money because he was short on rent or tuition fees, but other times it was because Ulmanis had an idea for an article that required him to do some preliminary travel research. For example, in the fall of 1904, following his return to Leipzig from the dairy course in Rencēni, Ulmanis asked for, and received, money to cover two trips.

First, Ulmanis went to Hildesheim, Germany to discuss with Ed. Ahlborn, whose business employed representatives in the Baltic Provinces, how best to set up and manage a cooperative factory. His rationale, as he explained to Enzeliņš, was that if the society could purchase the best modern equipment from a German factory, then the society would be able to establish the best dairy cooperative in the Baltic Provinces, thus ultimately breaking the Baltic Germans' stranglehold on the industry. As he put it in his letter, "Still nothing will come of it [i.e., of his idea to found a cooperative] today or tomorrow, but to just hand over such things to the cold-calculating Germans would be a foolish thing."[111] Again, it is not that Ulmanis was a rabid Germanophobe. Rather, he was against the Baltic Germans' economic domination and oppression of Latvian farmers, a situation that he was determined to rectify.

Additionally, Ulmanis also thought that the Latvian farmers could help themselves by adopting new, modern farming practices. To help them pursue that agenda, he devoted many of his articles in *Valmieras Lauksaimnieks* to overviews of agriculture abroad. For instance, the second trip that Ulmanis took in 1904 was through southern Germany and Austria-Hungary,

[111] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 27, 1904, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 215, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30496.

where he gathered observations for articles on dairy cooperatives, dairying, and animal husbandry.[112]

Furthermore, Ulmanis was also sometimes financially destitute because he had helped someone in need. For example, in his March 17, 1905 letter to Enzeliņš, Ulmanis asked him for an additional 100 rubles – Enzeliņš had already recently given him 200 rubles – citing that he would soon have to pay tuition and other expenses that he did not have the funds to cover. Ulmanis told Enzeliņš that he was hesitant to ask because "it truly isn't easy or pleasant for me to beg." Additionally, he explained that the decision to ask was even tougher for him since he was himself hesitant to loan people money. Then, both to explain why as well as perhaps tug on – in Ulmanis's words – Enzeliņš's "good heart," Ulmanis noted that five years ago he loaned someone 1,000 rubles. But, as he lamented, the recipient, who remained nameless in the letter, still had yet to pay back a single ruble, despite his numerous appeals. Still, rather than get angry about it, Ulmanis simply summarized his plight by quipping, almost nonchalantly, "Well, what I am to do?"[113] Obviously, Ulmanis's disclosure of such a huge loan and financial loss – nearly his entire year's salary at the time he loaned the money – provides an explanation for his monetary troubles in Leipzig. But even more, it offers an interesting insight into one of the seeming contradictions of his personality.

Although Ulmanis was described, almost universally, as a withdrawn and solitary person, and despite the fact that he often failed to return a favor or recognize someone's help when proper social etiquette advised that he should, his willingness to risk and ultimately lose such a huge amount of money for a friend or family member suggests that those arguably negative parts of his personality certainly were not the result of any cold-heartedness. In fact, besides the many

[112] See Ulmanis's October 5 and October 15, 1904 letters to Enzeliņš.
[113] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 17, 1905, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 216, September 4, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30524.

stories of Ulmanis giving money to organizations or poor families while he was the *Vadonis* of Latvia, there are other, lesser-known stories about Ulmanis's generosity, such as when he took out a personal loan while living in Nebraska in order to help out an old Leipzig classmate who had lost his job. In other words, Ulmanis simply struggled to show in a relatable or typical way that he cared, and thus he was often misunderstood.[114]

Ulmanis's letters include yet another interesting aspect in terms of his professional development: his struggle to find his writing voice, and to figure out how best to communicate his message. Most enlightening here is Ulmanis's discussion of a professional feud with Augusts Kirchenšteins (or Kirhenšteins), a University of Tartu-educated veterinarian, microbiologist, and agronomist who had begun working as a veterinarian in Valmiera in 1901, before he later became a professor at the University of Latvia. Taking into consideration Kirchenšteins's interests and qualifications, it was only natural that Enzeliņš recruited his collaboration on the society's journal. But unfortunately for Enzeliņš, Kirchenšteins did not want Ulmanis to write for the journal, as he argued that Ulmanis was "only a student." Additionally, Kirchenšteins was also critical of Ulmanis's essays, pointing out that they were poorly written and lacked intellectual sophistication. Having caught wind of these criticisms through another colleague, Ulmanis wrote to Enzeliņš, explaining that his goal was not to examine every little detail. "That is not what stirs me to write," he clarified. "The single thing that drives me … [is] to disseminate information and help find the correct path towards knowledge and agricultural prosperity." Continuing on with the topic of his writing style, Ulmanis responded to Kirchenšteins's critiques, writing, "I would not make L.'s [i.e., the journal's] purpose to carry some sort of completely incomprehensible professor's wisdom—but to carry articles which in as much as possible give material assistance

[114] On Ulmanis's philanthropy, see Unāms, *Laiku atspulgā*, 36. For the story about the schoolmate in Leipzig, see Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 4, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 236/241, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45006.

and good advice to its readers." However, all of that being said, Ulmanis did not think that Kirchenšteins would change his mind. Rather, Ulmanis assumed that "K. is just going to find my answers to be complete hogwash."[115]

While Ulmanis sounded secure in his belief that it was imperative to write in a way that was comprehensible to the average Latvian, and although he indeed continued to denounce Kirchenšteins in his letters from Leipzig, in fact Ulmanis worried about coming off as a simpleton.[116] Thus, responding to Enzeliņš's comment that his brother Jānis Endzelīns, a prominent linguist, had thought that Ulmanis's articles were respectably well-written, Ulmanis wrote in a rare moment of candor, "About that [i.e., about Jānis's assessment], of course I am pleased, because I had always worried about my straightforward language."[117]

Also straightforward were Ulmanis's thoughts about another hot topic during his last year of study in Leipzig: the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). The conflict had originated as a result of rival imperial aims in Manchuria and Korea after the region had been destablized by the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). What Russia sought was an ice-free port, as Vladivostok, its existing major Pacific port, became unnavigable in the winter. Wanting to defuse tensions, Japan offered to formally recognize Russia's control of Manchuria in return for their own free rein in Korea. Russia refused, and after a further increase in diplomatic tensions, in February 1904 Japan attacked Russia's eastern fleet at Port Arthur (also known as Lüshun Port). In what was a shocking turn of events to western observers, the Japanese soundly defeated the Russians in a number of battles on land and sea. Wanting to focus on domestic issues, which had become more

[115] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 14, 1904, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 214.
[116] Although Ulmanis and Kirchenšteins did not get along well early on, the two did improve their relationship to the point that Kirchenšteins invited Ulmanis to collaborate with him on a project. See Ulmanis's June 7, 1909 letter to Enzeliņš. Thus, apparently it was merely coincidental that Kirchenšteins, a one-time nemesis of Ulmanis's, was selected in 1940 to head the new pro-Soviet Latvian government following Ulmanis's removal.
[117] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 27, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 230, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=44904. Hermanis's brother Jānis, who went by the surname "Endzelīns," became a distinguished linguist and philologist at the University of Latvia.

urgent in nature as a result of the revolutionary unrest, Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917) decided to pursue a peace settlement. With U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt meditating, a role that earned him a Nobel Peace Prize, the Russians agreed to evacuate Manchuria, give up their claims to Port Arthur and the Liaodong Peninsula, and recognize Japan's control of Korea. All told, it was a disaster for the tsar. Not only had any hopes of bolstering dynastic rule with a successful war in the East come crashing down with the imperial army and navy's surprisingly swift defeat – an outcome that gave further rise to fears in the West of a "Yellow Peril"[118] – but even worse, the strategy and outcome were viewed within Russia, and especially among the government's opponents, as proof of the "backwardness" of the imperial government, which seemed more interested in foreign wars than seeing to domestic reforms at home.

Interestingly, Ulmanis followed the war rather dispassionately, though in support of the Russian side. Of all the letters Ulmanis wrote to Enzeliņš in 1904-1905, he mentioned the war with Japan only twice, and both were within the war's first two months. For example, in a letter dated February 10, 1904, Ulmanis mentioned in the conclusion that he had been following the war in the newspapers in Leipzig. He asked Enzeliņš for his take on the war, noting that he had read that Russia had lost five battleships on the very first day. "What a horrible start!" he exclaimed. "Still, the battle will continue," he presumed.[119] Some two months later, when the war still had not turned in Russia's favor, Ulmanis concluded his April 12, 1904 letter to Enzeliņš by writing, "For Japan, everything is going dreadfully well. Port Arthur is blockaded and is being besieged by land. If only things would begin to go better for us."[120] As these

[118] On the topic of the "Yellow Peril" in international politics, colonialism, and the culture of the West, see especially Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die gelbe Gefahr: Geschichte eines Schlagworts, Studien zum imperialistischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962); Ute Mehnert, *Deutschland, Amerika und die "gelbe Gefahr": zur Karriere eines Schlagworts in der grossen Politik, 1905-1917* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995).
[119] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, February 10, 1904.
[120] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, April 12, 1904, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30496.

comments about the war suggest, Ulmanis was not a radical revolutionary who was cheering for the end of the Russian Empire or a workers' revolution. At most, as his previous political commentary in agricultural speeches and writings attest, by the end of his stay in Leipzig, Ulmanis hoped for greater cultural, linguistic, and economic autonomy. Yet, even these aspirations were tempered by a political pragmatism and primary concern for agricultural affairs that set him apart from other emerging Latvian national leaders.

-1905 Revolution-

In hindsight, the revolutions of 1905 were all but inevitable given the contradictory policies of the Russian government – and for that matter all of the empires of Central and Eastern Europe – during the long nineteenth century. Seemingly like a great pendulum, the political trends of the century moved back and forth between pro-democratic reform and a conservative crackdown aimed at preserving the "Great Powers" system that arose out of the Congress of Vienna.

In the Baltic Provinces, for much of the nineteenth century the swings of this pendulum had not been felt as much as elsewhere in the empire, due in large part to the special privileges that had been granted to the Baltic Germans, whose chief concern was to maintain the status quo.[121] But as we saw early in the chapter, this all changed under Tsar Alexander III, who sought to "Russianize" the Baltic Provinces and bring them in line with the rest of the empire.

[121] On the Baltic Germans and the 1905 revolution, see especially Katja Wezel, "Loyalty, Minority, Monarchy: The Baltic German Press and 1905," in *The Russian Revolution of 1905 in Transcultural Perspective: Identities, Peripheries, and the Flow of Ideas*, ed. Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal, et al. (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2013), 213-224; Anders Henriksson, *The Tsar's Loyal Germans: The Riga German Community, Social Change and the Nationality Question, 1855-1905* (Boulder; New York: East European Monographs ; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1983), and *Vassals and Citizens: The Baltic Germans in Constitutional Russia, 1905 - 1914* (Marburg: Verl. Herder-Institut, 2009); Raimonds Cerūzis, *Vācu faktors Latvijā (1918-1939): politiskie un starpnacionālie aspekti* (Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2004), chapter 1; Wilfried Schlau and Bastian Filaretow, *Die Deutschbalten* (München: Langen Müller, 1995); Gert von Pistohlkors, *Ritterschaftliche Reformpolitik zwischen Russifizierung und Revolution: historische Studien zum Problem der politischen Selbsteinschätzung der deutschen Oberschicht in den Ostseeprovinzen Russlands im Krisenjahr 1905* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1978).

Consequently, like elsewhere in the empire, the Baltic Provinces also became a hotbed of unrest under Tsar Nicholas II.

It could be said that of all the century's tsars, none embodied and typified the contradictory forces of the era more than did Nicholas II. Known by his opponents as "Bloody Nicholas" for all of the people who were killed as a result of revolts, pogroms, and executions during his reign – not to mention the nearly 1,400 people who died in the human stampede that marred his official coronation celebration at Khodynka Field in Moscow in 1896 – Nicholas II certainly did not refrain from defending the monarchy or the European autocratic system. Most famous and significant among those conservative actions was the army's massacre in St. Petersburg on "Bloody Sunday," January 22, 1905 (new calendar), of workers and citizens who were concluding their day of demonstrations over poor working conditions by attempting to deliver a petition to Nicholas II, who was not even at the palace that day. Estimates on the number of people killed vary wildly, from less than 100 to over 1,000, but in terms of the backlash, the number of victims was less consequential than the fact that unarmed and peaceful demonstrators had been killed for seemingly no reason.

In stark contrast to such violent oppression, Nicholas II and his regime had also promised meaningful democratic reforms. For example, in August 1905 Prime Minister[122] Sergei Witte announced the creation of the Duma, which was to be an advisory body. Additionally, in his "October Manifesto," Nicholas II went further, decreeing that the Duma would be a broad, representative body with legislative powers. As a further indication of democratic pressures,

[122] In fact, the actual title of Witte's position was chairman of the Council of Ministers, though colloquially the position has been referred to as the prime minister post. In part this is because the chairman, appointed by the tsar, headed the Council, which oversaw the agenda of the Duma, meaning that the Council essentially acted as a buffer between the tsar and the Duma. Like the Duma, the Council of Ministers came about as a response to the revolutionary activity of 1905. For a helpful general history, see Francis William Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, and National Politics, 1855-1914* (Princeton, NJ: 1990); Peter Waldron, *Between Two Revolutions: Stolypin and the Politics of Renewal in Russia* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

Nicholas also promised in the speech protections for freedoms of religion, speech, and assembly, and an easing of press censorship.

The main problem with such contradictory policies and actions, though, is that they only set people up for even greater frustration than before. Indeed, in the Baltic Provinces the violence and revolts only intensified as the year went on, to the point even that by December martial law was in effect in all three provinces. Originally, following the Bloody Sunday massacre, socialists – who, in the Latvian territories, had met illegally in June 1904 and founded *Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku partija* (the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party) – organized meetings and strikes in Rīga and other cities. The first general strikes occurred in Rīga on January 25-26 and over a twelve-day period spread to Liepāja, Jelgava, Ventspils, and Daugavpils. The participants demanded: an end to the war with Japan; a representative government; more secure civil rights; an eight-hour workday; and a minimum salary of one ruble per workday. The first day of strikes in Rīga ended peacefully, but the next day a battalion of imperial soldiers fired, without provocation, on a group of protestors marching along the banks of the Daugava River, killing seventy-three and injuring more than 200.[123]

Within a few weeks, the strikes had spread to the countryside, where farmers (usually landless peasants), called to action by members of the rural intelligentsia, especially schoolteachers, seemingly unleashed centuries of built-up anger and frustration. Like with the city strikes, originally the goal was to demand land reform and better working conditions from estate owners: a ten-hour workday in the summer and eight-hour workday in the winter, as well as a minimum wage.[124] But unlike in the cities, these countryside strikes quickly morphed into very violent and destructive actions. Indeed, what made the events of 1905 in the Baltic

[123] Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture, 1800-1914*, 591-592.
[124] Ibid, 593-594.

Provinces distinct from the rest of the empire is that all of the anger, frustration, and violence were typically aimed more at Baltic Germans than at local representatives or institutions of the central Russian government. To be sure, nothing speaks to that inclination more than the fact that the German manor house was the most frequent site of violence and destruction. In the Latvian area of Livonia, for instance, it is estimated that 183 estates and seventy-two manor houses, many of which were grand palaces, were partially or completely burned to the ground. Similarly, in Kurzeme 229 estates and forty-two baronial homes were burned. All told, the Russian government calculated that destruction to rural property was approximately 3.8 million rubles in Livonia and 5 million rubles in Kurzeme.[125]

Another reason for this destruction of property, besides the history of Baltic Germans' oppressive treatment of Baltic peoples, was the response of the Baltic German community to the onset of rural strikes. Already in the early spring of 1905, provincial authorities called for a military alert, and baronial self-protection (*Selbstschutz*) groups were thereafter formed. But as the members of these groups sought to defend their property or led punitive expeditions aimed at arresting revolutionaries, quite often the goal seemed to be exacting revenge rather than initiating legal justice, and this, of course, only flamed the embers of hatred among the local populace. It is not surprising then, given this cyclical violence, that the number of revolutionaries was quite high, with perhaps more than 316,000 in Livonia and Kurzeme alone. Out of that total, perhaps as many as 9,000 received some form of serious punishment, including the approximately 2,600 alleged revolutionaries who were extrajudicially executed. Additionally, wanting to avoid

[125] Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture, 1800-1914*, 628-629; Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 270-271; Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History*, 104-107. See also *Latvijas stādnieki un zemnieki 1905.-1907.g. revolucijā*, ed. A. Bīrons and A. Puļķis (Rīga: Zinātne, 1986).

punishment or fearing a wrongful conviction, more than 5,000 people fled westward in 1905-1905, with the majority of them ending up in North America.[126]

As we will see in the next chapter, Ulmanis, too, was among that last group. Having accepted an instructor and editor job at the Kaugui Farmers' Society in Vidzeme rather than take the job offer that he apparently got from a dairy cooperative in Germany, Ulmanis arrived back in his homeland in November 1905.[127] His ambition for this job, as he put it in his reply to Enzeliņš, was to raise the general well-being and prosperity of the nation by focusing on agriculture, which was the foundation of the economy and Latvian cultural life. Ulmanis wrote, "I am convinced that … by working together for the general good, and by working, striving, and struggling hand in faith and hand in hand with the famers themselves, we soon might be able to achieve our common goals: to raise and secure our economic and spiritual (*garīgās*) well-being."[128] Upon his return, Ulmanis took up his duties as the new editor of the society's journal, *Lauksaimnieks* (previously *Valmieras Lauksaimnieks*), and it was in that capacity that he became entangled in the authorities' response to the local, provincial turmoil.

One article in particular got Ulmanis in trouble—his November 23 article in *Lauksaimnieks*. Titled "*Pēdējo dienu notikumi*" (The Developments of the Last Days), Ulmanis offered in the piece his opinions about three important recent events: a national teachers' congress, a congress of county delegates, and the proclamation of martial law in Livonia. The two congresses were in fact two of the most significant events of the year in regard to democratic activism and calls for reform. Taking advantage of the freedoms and promised reforms that the tsar announced in his October Manifesto, on November 10-14, thousands of teachers met to discuss educational reforms. The program that emerged called for the use of the Latvian

[126] Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History*, 105.
[127] On the job offer in Germany, see Ulmanis's December 28, 1904 letter to Enzeliņš.
[128] Quoted in Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas," 923-924.

language in the classroom, and a mandatory and free six-year education for all Latvian children. A few days later, on November 19-20, and under the leadership of the Social Democrats Jānis Asaris and Jānis Brigaderis and the politically unaffiliated Jānis Kroders, over 900 county (*pagasts*) delegates from Livonia and Kurzeme gathered in Rīga for a congress on local government. The key piece of the new proposed system was the county council, whose members were to be elected on December 10 by all citizens, both male and female, over the age of twenty. These county councils, in collaboration with the new Central County Council Bureau, whose members were to be chosen by the congress delegates, were to oversee all local legislative and administrative affairs in the areas of education, business, agriculture, social programs, and law enforcement. Additionally, among other notable declarations, the congress passed a motion calling for Latvians to boycott the Rīga Latvian Society for its leaders' refusal, based on the fact that the society was focused only on cultural initiatives, to enter the political fray, denounce the imperial and provincial governments, and call for democratic rights. Moreover, some leaders in that society also argued that such democratic reforms would only lead to a loss of national unity, and, in a worse-case scenario political violence, because the populace was not yet culturally and politically mature enough to prosper from a democratic system.[129]

Besides these gatherings, what seems most of all to have prompted Ulmanis to write the article was the enactment of martial law in Livonia on November 22, an action that seemed to Ulmanis and others to run contrary to the tsar's October Manifesto. As a matter of fact, many thought the martial law was implemented *only* because Latvians had taken steps in the spirit of the manifesto, something which the local Baltic Germans did not like. Writing in *Lauksaimnieks*, Ulmanis opined:

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[129] Švābe, *Latvijas vēsture, 1800-1914*, 614-616; Dunsdorfs, 43-44; Indulis Ronis, "Kārlis Ulmanis Latvijas brīvvalsts likteņa stundās un viņa Golgātas ceļš," *Kārlis Ulmanis trimdā un cietumā*, ed. I. Ronis and A. Žvinklis (Rīga: Latvijas vestures institūta apgāds, 1994), 45.

> *The congress spoke about a wide initiation of (autonomous) local government* in Latvia. In my opinion, this decision by the congress is very important, as going forward, then, there wouldn't be any longer in the Russian state the governorates of Vidzeme[130], Kurzeme, and Vitebsk, but instead actually a wide province of Latvia, which would include the Latvian parts of Vidzeme, Kurzeme, and Inflantija[131] [Vitebsk] … But as it would be superfluous to wait for a granting of autonomy from the current government, then the congress further decided to organize the gathering of a *constitutional convention*, which would discuss both the question of the future form of the entire Russian state and government and also the question of the autonomy of the provinces. After that then a Latvian constitutional convention would convene and work out particular laws applying especially to the local governments of Latvia and would define the forms of local government and their executive offices … [Latvia] would be attached to the Russian state, or perhaps it would be better to say to the union of the Russian state (because the Estonians, Lithuanians, Poles, and others are also demanding autonomy), with regard to such affairs as the postal service, telegraphs, railroads, [and] customs, along with representation abroad (envoys), but would be completely autonomous and independent in terms of domestic policies (the administration of taxes, schools, courts, villages, cities, etc.) Only by adhering to autonomy and through wide, local self-rule (in the villages and cities) is it possible to hope that for us also peace will again reign and orderly life and vigorous development will begin anew.[132]

Turning specifically to the martial law, Ulmanis concluded angrily that it "will demand perhaps thousands of victims." He went on:

> Well, in this regard the oppressed but freedom-craving nation that is struggling for its rights will be able to feel the Russian government's great "care and mercy." We can thank for the state of war the Governor of Vidzeme Zvegincevs, the estate owners of Vidzeme, and in its own way also "Rīgas Avīze," which can't seem to finish slandering and denouncing the Latvian nation in front of the Russian government. On November 3 Governor Zvegincevs telegraphed to St. Petersburg, without any basis, … and asked for permission to implement martial law in Vidzeme also (it is already in force in Kurzeme). The Vidzeme estate owners themselves had ensured that the unrest in the countryside wouldn't end—and then in a shady way turned for help. The government has also carried out their [i.e., the estate owners'] will – and now for the government and estate owners' pleasure the blood of thousands of people will flow! But for them, nothing good will come of it, because the implementation of martial law still will do nothing more than encourage the nation to stick to their justified and correct demands, and will push them to use still more definite means.[133]

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[130] Although it was officially called the Province (or Governorate) of Livonia, in Latvian the territory was often called "Vidzeme" instead.

[131] Like with Livonia, with regard to Vitebsk, Latvians instead often called the region "Inflantija," from the Polish "Województwo inflanckie," or sometimes "Polish Livonia" ("Poļu Livonija"). The current name for the Latvian territory – Latgale – was not used until 1900, when Francis Kemps, an intellectual and emerging political figure from the region, began using it.

[132] Quoted in Ronis, 45-46.

[133] Ibid, 47-48.

Without a doubt, this article was the most overtly political piece that Ulmanis had written up to that time. On the one hand, in his assessment of what Latvian autonomy within the Russian Empire would look like, Ulmanis displayed an astute political pragmatism that later proved to be one of the reasons for his subsequent successful political career. Indeed, given the aim of the tsar's October Manifesto – to quell the revolutionary unrest and promote social and economic development – there was actually nothing particularly rebellious about Ulmanis's opinions on the nationality question. However, on the other hand, in terms of inflammatory language, Ulmanis's assessment of the causes and possible consequences of martial law were perhaps the most seditious lines of his entire career as an author and agricultural journalist, and not only because he was seething about the hypocritical and deceitful actions of Baltic German estate owners and their *Selbstschutz* groups, but also because he was calling out Latvian journalists and cultural leaders – including, in another part of his article, those in the Rīga Latvian Society – who were providing one-sided, pro-government coverage of the revolutionary events.

Even taking into consideration the tsar's recently proclaimed freedom of speech, it is not surprising that Ulmanis's article provoked a response from the local authorities. In fact, according to Enzeliņš, it was Baltic Germans in and around Valmiera who actually demanded that Ulmanis be arrested. But there remains speculation about how exactly Ulmanis was taken into custody. According to one account, an expeditionary team led by General Major Orlovs arrested Ulmanis and other revolutionaries upon arriving in the region on December 20-21. Enzeliņš, though, later recalled that he had been told that Ulmanis was actually arrested in advance of Orlovs's arrival by local Valmiera police. Interestingly, in this version, Ulmanis was arrested not just for punitive reasons, but also because the regional deputy chief, von Gutzeit, a local Baltic German who reportedly respected Ulmanis for his German education and

agricultural knowledge, had him taken into custody to protect him from bodily harm, given the notorious reputation for brutality that expeditionary teams like Orlovs's had.[134]

Whatever the case, Ulmanis was arrested on December 21 and charged with inciting revolutionary behavior. He was sentenced to six months in jail, but because the Valmiera facility was already full, he was taken to a prison in Pleskava (Pskov), roughly two hours by train to the east of Valmiera, on a southern inlet of Lake Peipus.[135] There, on the boundary of the Baltic littoral, Ulmanis began to traverse a different sort of frontier, the intellectual one between life as a free citizen and agronomist and that of a committed political leader.

[134] Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas," 924; Ronis, 48-49; Dunsdorfs, 44-45.
[135] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 30-31.

Chapter Two—Harrowing the Soil: Ulmanis the Exiled Agronomist and Dairyman

With his November 23 article and subsequent arrest and imprisonment, Ulmanis took on a new identity, that of a political revolutionary, for he proved that he was willing to endure incarceration for those democratic rights and principles of fairness that he believed were being unjustly denied to the Latvian nation. However, prison did not harden Ulmanis; and since he was abroad for much of 1905 and was thus not intimately involved in the revolutionary events, he did not come to see himself as part of a "generation of 1905," to adapt the title of Robert Wohl's classic study on the generation of 1914.[1] But it interrupted his life in a dramatic way, causing him to lose his job, and forcing him to wrestle, especially in regard to his identity as an agronomist and citizen of the Russian Empire, with the consequences of his political beliefs.

As for his day-to-day life in the Pleskava (Pskov) prison, he passed the months by reading and playing chess, a game he learned there and came to love, with his fellow inmates. Indeed, Bērziņš later recalled that chess was actually the only social amusement that Ulmanis permitted himself, though he played less and less as the years went on.[2] What Ulmanis apparently did not do while in prison, however – more than likely because he was not permitted to do so – was write letters, for the collection of letters from Ulmanis that Enzeliņš saved for posterity does not contain a single letter from Ulmanis's time in Pleskava. Conversely, Ulmanis could receive visitors, and Enzeliņš visited him once, bringing along a stack of agricultural literature.[3]

Although Ulmanis had originally been sentenced to a six-month prison term, he was released early in April 1906. This came about when Volkovs, a gendarmerie captain, reviewed

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[1] Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
[2] Alfreds Bērziņš, "Pēdējais posms," *Kārlis Ulmanis 75*, ed. Latviešu Zemnieku savienība (Apgāds "Brīvā zeme", 1952), 107.
[3] Dunsdorfs, 44-45.

Ulmanis's case and determined that there was insufficient evidence to prove the charges against him. Based on Ulmanis's discussion of his own case in a later letter to Enzeliņš, it seems that a judge approved Volkovs's ruling.[4] From Pleskava, Ulmanis returned to his childhood Zemgale, where he took up residence at his brother Indriķis's farm, for it was yet uncertain whether he would be able to resume his duties at the Kauguri Farmers' Society in Valmiera.

It was truly one of the great ironies of Ulmanis's life that despite the fact that he was extremely passionate about the emerging field of agricultural science, he seemed to dislike actual farm work, at least the manual labor aspects of it. As Ulmanis noted in a June 1906 letter to Enzeliņš, his life was certainly different now that he was working "as a true apprentice." But he optimistically commented that although "my hands are now all calloused," my brother is a "smart husbandman" (*prātīgs saimnieks*) and working alongside him "I am learning about 'practices' that will come in handy later on."[5] Still, when Ulmanis learned only a few days later from Enzeliņš that he would be able to get back his previous job with the society, he wrote of this news, "Perhaps nothing could make me happier than to go back to Valmiera and take up my old work and place."[6] There was yet one major problem for Ulmanis, though: he did not have a travel passport, and martial law was still in effect due to continued unrest. In fact, in this same letter, Ulmanis told Enzeliņš, "Frightening things are now occurring near us: 3 people were shot by some scoundrels, [and] a monopoly store was burned."[7]

Ulmanis never did resume this old job. For one thing, as Ulmanis sought to resolve the issue with his passport, he became concerned that the prolonged violence and continued enforcement of martial law would greatly impede the society's work, for they had already had to

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[4] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, December 13, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, September 10, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30589.
[5] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, June 7, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, op. cit.
[6] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, June 11, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, op. cit.
[7] Ibid.

cancel the society's big agricultural exhibition, an annual event that Enzeliņš had organized beginning in 1903. Furthermore, there was little chance that they would be able to offer any courses until the martial law was lifted. Additionally, he was also concerned that there would not be anything for him to do on his brother's farm during the winter months. As a result, by mid-July 1906, Ulmanis was considering going abroad again, this time to Denmark. His goal, as he explained it to Enzeliņš, was to use this "imposed free time" to further his knowledge. But instead of attending more courses, he wanted to find a job on "some outstanding farm," where "I could completely familiarize myself with all aspects of Danish agriculture, and not just through books alone, but also through practical work." Of course, he realized that his inability to speak or read Danish would probably mean that he would have to work as an unpaid apprentice (he used the German word *Volontär*). Thus, to fund this trip abroad, Ulmanis proposed to sell his seven-acre property to Enzeliņš, to whom Ulmanis also still owed money. Ulmanis believed that such experiences, even if he had to work without pay, would be especially useful for his later work as an instructor, because Denmark's climate and topography were akin to conditions in Latvian lands.[8]

However, these plans did not come to fruition. Instead, Ulmanis's legal status prompted him to take a third route—fleeing to America by way of Germany. The circumstances remain somewhat unclear, but it would seem that when Ulmanis attempted to resolve in late July or early August the issue with his passport, which was being held by the provincial police, his request prompted yet another review of his case. As Ulmanis's explained it in a letter to Enzeliņš, despite the fact that the trial judge had already rendered "the correct determination," the prosecutor and local police ignored the ruling and "since they have been told horrible things

[8] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 16, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, op. cit.

about me … the main thing is that they want to capture me."[9] However, Ulmanis managed to flee the country prior to being arrested a second time because of the prosecutor's inability to read Latvian. Wanting to gather evidence against Ulmanis, the prosecutor had ordered his clerk, Cirītis, a Latvian, to translate into Russian the contents of a letter that Ulmanis had written to Enzeliņš, and which apparently had been copied or kept by government censors (and Ulmanis was aware that his letters were perhaps being read, as he complained twice to Enzeliņš in April and May 1905 about overzealous censors). However, in a move that attests to the fluid nature of ethno-linguistic borderlands and the central government's inability to garner loyalty from civil servants who could leverage their linguistic skills to both make a decent living while at times also working against the government, Cirtītis instead went straight to Enzeliņš so that he could forewarn Ulmanis of his impending arrest.

Ulmanis indeed managed to flee ahead of the police, but according to stories told within the Klieģis family, it was a close call. The Klieģis and Ulmanis families knew each other well, as Jūris Klieģis and his family lived just down the road from Indriķis's farm. Although Enzeliņš did in fact send word to Ulmanis, it must not have made it to him in time, because he was still at his brother's place when the police, looking to arrest him, arrived in the area. Fortunately for Ulmanis, though, they mistakenly went to the Klieģis farm instead. Klieģis, whose two oldest sons had already fled to America as a result of their revolutionary actions the previous year, managed to hold up the arrest party just long enough for his daughter to run down to warn Ulmanis, who, as the story goes, slipped out the back just as the police were arriving at the front gate.[10]

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[9] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, December 13, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, op. cit.
[10] Juris Silenieks, *Nebraskans from Latvia: A Sociohistorical Study* (Lincoln: The Zommers Fund, 1979), 34; Val Kuska, letter to Theodore A. Kleege, December 21, 1959, Folder 14, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries; Theodore A. Kleege, letter to

From his brother's farm, Ulmanis made his way to Leipzig, Germany via Jelgava, Rīga, St. Petersburg, Helsinki, and Stockholm. As he explained in his letter to Enzeliņš, he was surprised that he made it to Germany without ever being asked to present a passport or any other documents. But he was less fortunate with regard to his pocketbook, as by the time he arrived in Leipzig he was completely out of funds. Consequently, he called on an old German friend and Leipzig University colleague (whose name he never mentioned), who kindly let Ulmanis stay with him until he could find a job. Considering that Dēliņš and possibly other Latvians were still in Leipzig, Ulmanis's decision to rely on the help of a German colleague is yet another indication of his fluency in German and Germanic culture.[11]

One interesting aspect of Ulmanis's familiarity with German culture can be found in his December 13, 1906 letter to Enzeliņš, wherein he asked to have a colleague send him his copy of Gustav Frenssen's 1901 book *Jörn Uhl*.[12] Interestingly, this was the only time during his stay in Germany that he asked for an item to be shipped to him, so clearly he was fond of the book. It is difficult to say why exactly Ulmanis liked *Jörn Uhl* so much since he never divulged anything about the book in any subsequent letters or speeches, but surely he must have in some way saw himself in the book's main character, Jörn Uhl. Like Ulmanis, Jörn Uhl was the youngest son of a farmer, and in the book, which is a good example of a German *Bildungsroman* (a novel of character development), Frenssen depicts the trials and tribulations of a farmer's son and youngest brother who struggles to come of age in the marshy countryside near Dithmarschen, where Frenssen himself was born and raised.

Val Kuska, January 9, 1960, Folder 14, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries. It should be noted that upon arriving in America, the Klieģis brothers changed the spelling of their surname to "Kleege."

[11] Dunsdorfs, 46; Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 4, 1909, op. cit.

[12] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, December 13, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, op. cit.

In addition to portraying the paradoxical "backwardness" and scenic beauty of this part of his native Holstein, depictions which made him quite popular among folkish nationalists and followers of *Heimatkunst* (a popular art and literature genre around the turn of the twentieth century that depicted local, rural life), Frenssen uses Jörn Uhl to investigate the surprisingly complex – at least for his urban audience – life of a farmers' son. As was often the case for youngest sons in real life, Jörn Uhl realizes that he probably will not inherit any of his father's land, so he decides at an early age that he will go off to university. However, as he matures and sees that his older brothers are lazy and prone to drunkenness, he gives up his real passion in life – learning – to help his father, who also drinks too much and can be overly callous. But with the onset of the Franco-Prussian, as the youngest son, Jörn Uhl has to leave for the war. Upon returning, he finds that the farm has badly deteriorated in his absence. Determined to turn things around, following his father's completely debilitating stroke, he convinces the creditors to exclude his lazy older brothers from any possible inheritance and begins modernizing the farm thanks to a new line of credit. However, after a promising start, Mother Nature and fate turn against him and his crops fail, his new barn burns to the ground after being struck by lightning, his father dies of poor health, and his young wife perishes during childbirth. Having had enough of the unpredictable life of a farmer, Jörn Uhl then establishes a cement company with a former military comrade. Thus, in the end he becomes a successful business man whose primary goal is to modernize the countryside, particularly by using cement to reinforce canals and dikes and improve rural roads.[13]

There are a number of reasons why Ulmanis might have seen himself in Jörn Uhl. For one, he probably drew inspiration from Jörn Uhl's persistence. Ulmanis was sometimes prone to bouts of melancholy, particularly if forces beyond his control foiled his plans, and this was

[13] Gustav Frenssen, *Jörn Uhl,* trans. F. S Delmer (Boston: D. Estes & Company, 1905).

exactly the case in autumn 1906. Felling somewhat sorry for himself and complaining about the pointlessness of his new job (which based on his comments was probably some kind of manual labor) and the uncertainty of his future, Ulmanis concluded his letter to Enzeliņš, writing, "Don't you think then that for the courts it wouldn't be desirable to forget me! Really, do you suppose that I might ever be able to work in my home!" Furthermore, in his subsequent reply to Enzeliņš's next letter, Ulmanis admitted that his tendency to think negatively was not helpful, writing:

> You are correct. It doesn't suit me to grumble so much and be melancholic … when those difficult days set in. Your situation is much, much more difficult, and I always wonder where you get your courage and persistence to fight all those adversities. What you have not had to endure because of "L" [i.e., the journal], whose soup I nonetheless stirred up—and then I disappeared. You say troubles clarify one's character, and you are also correct about this. How much better it would have been if I would have maintained that conviction which had always led me, and which I also last fall took along to Russia [i.e., to prison in Pleskava]. But one can't change the past. Your treatment of me and the way you have stuck by me is for me like a healing balm to a wound. I will never forget that![14]

Beyond wanting to emulate Jörn Uhl's mental outlook, Ulmanis probably also admired the type of *Alltagsheld*, or everyday life hero, that Frenssen portrayed. For example, Jörn Uhl abstained from alcohol, was loyal to his family and agricultural upbringing yet knew where to draw the line, was fond of his rural surroundings but did not hesitate to use scientific knowledge to "improve" nature, and in the end was successful despite a life of constant hardship.

As Ulmanis noted for Enzeliņš, what was eating away at him, at least at the beginning of his second stay in Germany, was the fact that he had stirred up trouble for Enzeliņš and then took off, leaving his friend and colleague to deal with the consequences. In particular, Ulmanis was worried that Enzeliņš might be arrested as a result of their professional collaborations. Consequently, Ulmanis was relieved and his spirits began to improve once he found out that

[14] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 20, 1906, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 223, op. cit.

Enzeliņš only had to pay a small fine since, as he explained to the authorities, Ulmanis had been the sole editor of the journal when his incendiary article appeared.[15]

What raised Ulmanis's spirits the most, though, was finding intellectual work. Perhaps relying on the help of his former professors there in Leipzig, by late autumn he found temporary work as an instructor for the short course at the Rhine Provinces First Winter School, which he described as "for the most part the worst in Germany."[16] After Christmas, which he celebrated with Dēliņš, Ulmanis then assumed teaching duties at an agricultural school in Annaberg-Buchholz, some 100 kilometers south of Leipzig in the heart of the Erzgebirge Mountains, whose rich mineral deposits made the region an important site of mining and early industry. Ulmanis, however, said next to nothing in his letters about his life and work in Annaberg. More than likely this was because he had already decided to depart for America.

Perhaps nothing attests to Ulmanis's reticence in divulging personal information more than the fact that apparently even those who knew him relatively well did not know exactly how Ulmanis ended up going to America, and specifically to the Midwestern state of Nebraska. Bērziņš, for instance, explained that Ulmanis went there only because he knew that it was a rich agricultural state. Others, including Dunsdorfs and Enzeliņš, simply said nothing about how he ended up there. Perhaps it is possible that these authors, all of whom were supporters of Ulmanis's, were carrying on the "cult of Ulmanis," which portrayed him as a leader who did not need the help or, for that matter, the personal company of others, and thus chose not to divulge all of the details of the story. But a careful reading of Ulmanis's letters suggests that although there might have been some consideration of Ulmanis's legacy by writers like Bērziņš, in this case Ulmanis simply said surprisingly little about his connections in America, even taking into

[15] See Ulmanis's November 6, 1906 and December 13, 1906 letters to Enzeliņš. See also Dunsdorfs, 46.
[16] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, December 13, 1906, op. cit.

consideration the fact that, with regard to the letters, Enzeliņš probably already knew at least some of the details.

As it happened, Ulmanis decided to go to America because of his friendship with Kārlis Klieģis. The son of Jūris Klieģis, who, as was explained above, had helped Ulmanis escape arrest, Kārlis Klieģis had grown up near the Ulmanis family in Bērzmuiža County. Based on a letter that Ulmanis wrote in 1903 – in which Ulmanis asked Enzeliņš to send complimentary copies of his first articles in the Kauguri Farmers' Society's journal to his brother Indriķis and to Kārlis Klieģis – apparently he and Kārlis Klieģis were good friends.[17] Undoubtedly, following his release from prison, Ulmanis would have learned upon arriving at his brother's place that Kārlis Klieģis and his brother Teodors had immigrated to the United States, where they were working in Nebraska as farmhands, in order to escape punishment for their involvement in the 1905 revolution. Consequently, when things were not going well for Ulmanis during the first months of his political exile in Germany, he offhandedly commented in a letter to Enzeliņš that he was going to write to Kārlis Klieģis to see if he, Klieģis, could help him out.[18]

Although Ulmanis never updated Enzeliņš on this front in any of the letters that now comprise the Ulmanis-Enzeliņš correspondence, the circumstances of Ulmanis's immigration to the United States suggests that Kārlis Klieģis and his relatives helped arrange things for Ulmanis. For one thing, not long after Ulmanis mentioned that he was going to write to Kārlis Klieģis, Ulmanis suddenly announced in his January 1, 1907 letter to Enzeliņš that he was "intensively studying English," in part because he was beginning to realize that he was going to have a hard time finding permanent work due to "local customs," a vague statement that he never clarified,

[17] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 14, 1903, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 213, August 28, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30469.
[18] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 6, 1906, op. cit. In the letter, he actually says that he is going to write to "Kl." As I never encountered any other mention of a surname that started with "Kl." in any of the letters, it seems safe to assume that he was talking about Klieģis.

but which seems to suggest that he was worried that he would be passed over for jobs since he was not German. He went on in the letter:

> I am thinking about temporarily arranging my work and life in such a way that I will be free of affairs at home… So then I have thought about traveling to yet a further home. I am considering taking off to Canada. I am really intensively studying English…I hope, however, that I won't have to remain abroad the rest of my life, for I hope still to be able to return to my fatherland and realize at least one part of my dreams and aspirations. Maybe someday! Until then though, I don't want to be without work. I want to work, to learn and collect things that might be useful and exportable to our fatherland. What this word means, one only learns to understand it then, when one is exiled from one's homeland.[19]

Indeed, Ulmanis's trouble with the geography of the New World speaks to the extent of Kārlis Klieģis's assistance with his immigration – a fact that Kārlis Klieģis's son Theodore later confirmed[20] – for in all of the letters to Enzeliņš prior to his departure, Ulmanis erroneously thought that Nebraska was in Canada, an error that he only cleared up in his first letter from Nebraska. He wrote, "I didn't actually go to Canada—but it's all the same—everything here is part of North America."[21]

By February 1907, Ulmanis was already tying up loose ends in preparation for his departure for America. More than anything else, that work involved procuring travel money, and, as he did so many times during his young adult years, for that he turned to Enzeliņš. The request on this occasion was for 100 rubles, and Ulmanis promised that he would pay it back soon, writing, "I hope there, across the ocean, better days will dawn for me, and then I will pay all of my debts." He went on, pleading, "Please don't get angry at me as a result of the loan request. My intentions are good: to be somewhere where I finally won't have to be undercover."[22] Enzeliņš, as he often did, came through, and as a final preparatory task before he made his way

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[19] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 1, 1907, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis,* Nr. 223, op. cit.
[20] See Kleege, letter to Val Kuska, op. cit.
[21] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 30, 1907, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 224, September 11, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30621.
[22] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, February 1, 1907, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 224, op. cit.

to the ship in Bremen, Ulmanis traveled to Freiberg, where he picked up the 190 rubles that Enzeliņš sent him. In his thank you letter – the last note that he sent from Germany – Ulmanis wrote, "I hope that in America I will have enough luck to obtain some decent position…What a pity, what a shame that everything had to turn out this way—but well nothing can be changed now—so therefore it's better not to talk about it."[23]

-To America-

On April 30, 1907, Ulmanis boarded in Bremerhaven the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, a twenty-ton passenger steamer that entered service in 1903. He arrived at Ellis Island on May 9, where the immigration officials recorded that he had all of fifty dollars to his name. From New York City, Ulmanis went by train to Nebraska, where he finally met up with Kārlis and Teodors Klieģis (now going by the name Karl and Theodore Kleege), who were working as farmhands on the Charles Warner farm.[24]

Save for a very short, unsuccessful trip to New York, where he thought he had lined up work as a dairy instructor or laboratory assistant, Ulmanis spent that first summer in America working on Warner's farm, located just outside of Waverly, Nebraska, where he assisted with hay cuttings, the wheat harvest, and helped look after the cattle.[25] How fortuitous it was for Ulmanis that he ended up there, because given his interests in agricultural science and modern farm practices, there was perhaps not another farm in the entire state that could match the advanced practices and state-of-the-art equipment of the Warner farm. Additionally, in terms of education, Warner was not a typical Nebraska farmer. The son of Swedish immigrants, Warner

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[23] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, April 20, 1907, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 224, op. cit.
[24] *Kaiser Wilhelm II* manifest, The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., accessed November 18, 2013, http://ellisisland.org/search/shipManifest.asp?MID=20923230780877716640&FNM=KARL&LNM=ULMANN&PLNM=ULMANN&first_kind=1&last_kind=0&RF=1&pID=101963020295.
[25] See Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 224, op. cit.

wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and take over the family farm, but he also dreamed of being a politician, so he attended college in Nebraska, followed by law school at Columbia University in New York. When he entered politics and successfully won a seat in the Nebraska Legislature in 1901, he consequently had to spend quite a lot of time away from the farm, which he had taken over for his father. Thus, to keep the farm going, he continually employed a number of overseers and hired men. In fact, according to the family history, he specifically preferred to employ recent immigrants from Northern Europe, as Warner apparently still spoke Swedish and presumably at least some German and wanted to help these new Americans get on their feet in their new home.[26]

As a farmer, Warner was a proponent of modern agronomy, and he was always looking to try out new ideas that he picked up from his avid reading of agricultural publications. Throughout his career, he was thus cited as an example of the ideal modern farmer, and in truth his farm gained such fame that it was subsequently made a historic landmark by the state of Nebraska. As a cattleman, Warner raised purebred Hereford cattle, and they were praised as among the best in the state. Similarly, Warner was one of the first farmers in the state to use tractors, and, as a result of his agreement with International Harvester to test new tractors and equipment, he and his farmhands always used the most modern farm equipment.

Warner was equally successful in his political career. Winning his first seat in 1901, Warner served in the Nebraska House of Representatives from 1901-1907, as a senator in the Nebraska Senate from 1919-1937, in the Nebraska Unicameral from 1937-1939 (when he also

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[26] Lawrence E. Murphy, Aivars G. Ronis, and Arijs R. Liepins, "Karlis Ulmanis: From University of Nebraska Graduate to President of Latvia," *Nebraska History* 80 (1999): 48; Charlyne Berens, *Leaving Your Mark: The Political Career of Nebraska State Senator Jerome Warner* (Seward, NE: Nebraska Times, 1997), 15-27; "Sen. Charles Warner," Nebraska Legislature: The Official Site of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature, accessed November 19, 2013, http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/education/cwarner.php; "Sen. Jerome Warner," Nebraska Legislature: The Official Site of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature, accessed November 19, 2013, http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/education/warner.php.

served as the first speaker of the unicameral), and as lieutenant governor on four occasions, including at the time of his death in 1955. During the decades that he was in public office, Warner had ample opportunity to shape Nebraska's development in a variety of ways. But what interested him the most was agriculture and education, and, combining these interests, he did more than possibly any other public leader in the history of Nebraska to establish advanced agricultural institutes and programs of higher education. For example, in 1919 Warner and Wilmot Crozier, a farmer and legislator from Polk County, successfully sponsored the "Nebraska Tractor Test Law." It mandated that every model of tractor sold in Nebraska had to be tested at the University of Nebraska's tractor test laboratory, established in 1919 as the world's first tractor laboratory, to ensure that farmers would not be misled on horsepower, functionality, etc. by false advertising, a business practice that was all too common during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Likewise, despite his residence in Waverly, situated in the eastern part of the state just a few miles to the northeast of Lincoln, the state capital, Warner was concerned about the lack of universities in the state's lesser-populated western regions, so in 1903 he spearheaded the legislative work to found the Kearney State Teachers College, known today as the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

It is surprising and perplexing that Ulmanis never discussed his relationship with Warner. The two men were nearly the same age –Warner was just two years older – and they shared almost identical interests and beliefs, and not only in terms of their professional commitment to agriculture and their conviction that political and agricultural problems had to be approached jointly, but also with regard to personal behavior, as both men abstained from alcohol and cigarettes and subscribed to a philosophy of positivism – something which Ulmanis became interested in while residing in Nebraska – that was popular around the turn of the twentieth

century. It seems that they would have gotten to know each other well, too, because just as Ulmanis arrived in Nebraska, Warner was beginning an extended break from politics that enabled him to spend all of his time on the farm, meaning that he would have interacted with Ulmanis on a daily basis. Furthermore, they apparently got along well, for Ulmanis continued to regularly visit the farm – and more than likely also helped out during the busy wheat and corn harvest seasons – during his years in Nebraska, and, according to testimony from his wife and granddaughter, Warner "thought a lot" of Ulmanis and years later chuckled at the fact that "a benevolent dictator from Europe used to work on my farm."[27] To be sure, Warner indeed admired Ulmanis so much that in 1911 he lent Ulmanis quite a bit of money for a business venture, and decades later, when Ulmanis had been deposed by the Soviets, spoke at a commemorative event held in 1954 for Ulmanis at the University of Nebraska.[28]

Perhaps Ulmanis never publically discussed his relationship with Warner out of consideration for his friend's political career and reputation. With such a long and illustrious career, by the time Ulmanis suspended Latvia's democracy in 1934, Warner was already known as "the Grand Old Man of Nebraska Politics."[29] Hence, Ulmanis might have refrained from mentioning Warner because he was concerned that references to their earlier friendship or any political lessons that he learned from Warner might somehow appear in the Nebraska press and cause controversy. What is more likely, though, is that Ulmanis never publically mentioned Warner because Latvians simply had no idea who he was.

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[27] Quoted in Liane Guenther, "NU Grad Became Latvian President: Karlis Ulmanis Was 'The Premier from Nebraska,'" *The Lincoln Journal Star,* May 8, 1975; the last quote is quoted in Jordan Kuck, "The Legacy of 'Vadonis' Ulmanis: Kārlis Ulmanis, Past, Present, and Future" (M.A. dissertation, University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2007), 124.

[28] On the event at the University of Nebraska, when a plaque for Ulmanis was unveiled, see especially "Honor Planned for Karlis Ulmanis, NU Graduate and Later President of Latvia," *Lincoln Journal Star*, May 20, 1954; "Piemiņas plāksni K. Ulmanim Linkolnā atklāj Nebraskas vicegubernātors," *Laiks*, May 29, 1954.

[29] "Sen. Charles Warner."

What is yet more curious is the fact that Ulmanis never told Enzeliņš anything about Warner, at least not in the surviving letters. For the most part, the correspondence between Ulmanis and Enzeliņš was a professional one, and the topic of conversation rarely strayed beyond the work of Enzeliņš's society, Ulmanis's agricultural writings, and the general state of affairs for Latvian farmers and among other agricultural societies. Only rarely did Ulmanis open up about events in his personal life. Still, in those instances, one would assume that Warner's name would come up, especially since Ulmanis surely must have learned a thing or two about modern agricultural practices while working on Warner's farm. Nevertheless, the most Ulmanis ever said in his letters was that he was "going to the countryside," or "going to Waverly." Presumably Ulmanis thought that the names of individuals were irrelevant, since Enzeliņš did not know them and presumably never would, but still, the lack of details about even the most important people in his life speaks to Ulmanis's extremely private character.

Even more telling in this regard is the case of the Klieģis brothers. Not only did Kārlis Klieģis help Ulmanis immigrate to the New World and line up for him an immediate job at the Warner farm, but they were old friends. Furthermore, the Klieģis brothers were Ulmanis's only Latvian companions in Nebraska. However, in his first letters from America, Ulmanis never said anything about them, though perhaps he was concerned about government censors and protecting the Klieģis family. Whatever the reason, in the extant letters, Ulmanis only specifically mentioned the Klieģis brothers for the first time in December 1909, when he asked Enzeliņš to send them a year's subscription to *Sadzīve,* a Jelgava-based Latvian-language newspaper that focused on society, politics, and literature, as a gift on his, i.e., Ulmanis's, behalf.[30] Yet,

[30] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, December 29, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 246/247, September 25, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45124; Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 26, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, September 26, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30685.

throughout his entire correspondence with Enzeliņš while in Nebraska, Ulmanis never once described in detail any social activities with the brothers, despite the fact that it is certain that he saw them on a regular basis.[31]

In point of fact, sometimes Ulmanis actually made it sound like he was all alone in Nebraska, a tendency that might be attributed to his occasionally gloomy temperament. For example, in his thank you note for the Christmas card Enzeliņš sent him in 1907, Ulmanis wrote to Enzeliņš (in German), "Surely you can imagine how nice it is to receive such cards when one has to live completely alone in a remote, foreign land."[32] Equally odd was his aside in a June 1908 letter, when he remarked to Enzeliņs, "It seems to me that I really might be starting to forget the Latvian language," whereupon he asked Enzeliņš to send him some new literature so that he could brush up on his Latvian.[33] Of course, living in Nebraska, Ulmanis would have used English or German in his daily life (at the turn of the twentieth century, Germans were far and away the largest ethnic group in Nebraska and, prior to the First World War, German was often used in both private and public spaces, especially by first-generation immigrants), and thus to some extent his concern is understandable. But on the other hand, it was not as if he was completely isolated from the Latvian language. After all, he surely would have conversed with the Klieģis brothers in Latvian, and he continued to write journal and newspaper articles for Latvian publications, in addition to using Latvian in his steady correspondence with Enzeliņš.

Not only is it peculiar that Ulmanis never said anything of substance to Enzeliņš about the only other Latvians he knew in Nebraska, but it is even stranger since Ulmanis and Kārlis

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[31] For instance, see Val Kuska's letters to Theodore A. Kleege, Folder 14, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.
[32] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, February 2, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 225, September 12, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=44842.
[33] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, June 19, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 226/229, September 16, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=44879.

Klieģis were lifelong friends. As a matter of fact, when in 1913 Kārlis Klieģis's girlfriend, Zelma Veinberg, agreed to marry Klieģis and come to America, Ulmanis helped pay her way. The couple, who were married in Warner's house and continued to live on the farm for a number of years, remained close to Ulmanis.[34] Thus, despite the fact that by that time the couple had purchased their own farm in Denton, Nebraska and had welcomed three children into the world, Ulmanis regularly entreated Klieģis to come back to Latvia in the years after the First World War. For more than a decade Klieģis refused, saying that he had made a new life for himself in America. However, when in the 1930s farming became unprofitable due to the acute drought of the Dust Bowl years, Klieģis finally accepted Ulmanis's invitation and returned to Latvia in 1936-1937 with Zelma and their youngest child, Robert, a young teenager at the time. However, as was the case with most of Ulmanis's closest friends and all of his relatives, Klieģis did not get a prestigious, high-paying cabinet post. Instead, he worked at the port of Rīga, where he oversaw grain imports and exports. He held this post until the Soviet invasion in June 1940, when he reportedly suffered a stroke as a result of extreme anxiety, ultimately dying from the side effects a little more than a year later.[35]

It would make sense for Ulmanis's hagiographers – like Virza, Bērziņš, or Unāms – to leave the Klieģis family out of Ulmanis's life story since they were careful to portray him both during and after the era of Ulmanis's regime as omniscient and always self-reliant. But such a

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[34] The other brother, Teodors, remained on the Warner farm until 1926, when he moved to the Syracuse, NY area to take over the farm of his younger brother, Hermanis (Herman), who had tragically died in a construction accident. See Silenieks, *Nebraskans from Latvia: A Sociohistorical Study*, 35.

[35] Ibid, 35-37. Certainly some of the anxiety was because he and his wife decided, on the advice of the U.S. Consulate in Rīga, to send Robert back to the U.S. just prior to the Soviet invasion. According to the family history, they give Robert sixty dollars and a loaf of bread and put him on a fishing trawler. After returning to the States, Robert served in WWII in the 94th Infantry, and in Patton's 3rd Army during the Battle of the Bulge. He chose to stay in Europe, working for *The Stars and Stripes* and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. When he returned to the U.S. in the 1960s, he took up work in real estate, becoming one of the most successful agents in the San Diego, CA area. Robert Kleege died in August 2011. See the obituary, "Robert Karl Kleege," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 20, 2011, accessed January 4, 2013, http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/utsandiego/obituary.aspx?n=robert-karl-kleege&pid=153181745&fhid=9461.

depiction did not stem only from the unique "cult of personality literature" that arose during the era of European dictatorships, for Ulmanis, even before his 1934 coup, wanted to think of himself as successful and self-reliant, and was thus concerned about how others perceived him. In particular, this seemed to plague him during his first few years in Nebraska, when he struggled to make this image a reality. For instance, Ulmanis apparently did not write a single letter to anyone back home – beyond perhaps a simple "I made it to America" note – for months because things did not exactly go as he had hoped. Following his unsuccessful trip to New York, he finished the summer working on the Warner farm along with the Kliegis brothers and Val Kuska, who went on to become a prominent agronomist and ardent supporter of 4-H, an agriculture and rural life-focused youth organization that Ulmanis came to admire, as will be discussed in chapter four. It is not clear whether there was perhaps not enough work for Ulmanis on the Warner farm as the 1907 growing season was coming to a close, or if he just instead wanted to work in the dairy industry, but late that summer he began working at the Alamito Sanitary Dairy Company, located just west of Omaha, Nebraska, or about forty-five miles northeast of the Warner farm.

Only a few weeks after he was hired by Edward Martin, the dairy's general superintendent, to manage the milk house at the Alamito farm, Ulmanis began suffering from a mild hernia brought on by his daily lifting of heavy milk cans, as he was in charge of processing the milk from the farm's 300 dairy cows, plus a significant amount of milk from neighboring farms. Recognizing that Ulmanis needed a physically less-demanding job, after Ulmanis rested for a couple of weeks on the doctor's orders, Martin transferred him to the company's "Sunlight Dairy" creamery located at 26th and Leavenworth in Omaha. There Ulmanis worked in the buttermaking facility, where he was an inspection specialist. But apparently ignoring the doctor's

advice, Ulmanis regularly lifted heavy casks of butter, and his hernia expectedly worsened as a result. Worried that he would have to stop working or, even worse, have to seek medical treatment when he was already short on funds, Ulmanis became very despondent. As he put it in his first letter from Nebraska to Enzeliņš, "I was living all the time in a state of uncertainty, and so of course I didn't write a single letter. I always walked around with clenched teeth and fists!"[36] Despite, or more likely because of, Ulmanis's stubborn persistence to keep working, within a short time the hernia became so acute that Ulmanis sought treatment at Immanuel Hospital in Omaha, where he underwent an operation.[37]

During his three-week stay in the hospital, Ulmanis became, in the words of Martin's wife, "very bitter."[38] He was bedridden, in pain, and did not have any money to pay the hospital bill, which was, Ulmanis noted in a letter, equivalent to 300 rubles. However, as was often the case throughout his life, Ulmanis managed – despite or maybe even as a result of his reserved and frequently gloomy nature – to gain the sympathy and support of an acquaintance. In this case, Dr. John Fossler, who was interning at the hospital, took an interest in Ulmanis. Fossler's family came from the Baltic Sea region, and after hearing Ulmanis's story, he wanted to help him get back on his feet. So he arranged a payment plan for Ulmanis, talked to Martin about finding Ulmanis more suitable work, and also advised Ulmanis to enroll at the University of Nebraska, even promising to lend him money if he decided to attend.[39]

It was only at this point, when Ulmanis was out of the hospital and working again at the Alamito creamery in Omaha, that he penned his first letter from America to Enzeliņš. It was

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[36] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.
[37] On Ulmanis's work at the Alamito Sanitary Dairy Co. and his subsequent medical problems, see Catherine Martin's January 2, 1954 letter to Osvalds Akmentiņš, in *K. Ulmanis Amerikā*: *pētījumi un materiāli*, ed. Osvalds Akmentiņš (Dorchester, MA: Osvalds Akmentiņš, 1986), 160. Akmentiņš's self-published volume is part of the *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection* at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Love Library Archives & Special Collections.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid; Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.

short – one paragraph in length – and Ulmanis gave only the most basic details: that he was living in Omaha, Nebraska and working at a butter plant; that he had decided to continue working in the private sector; and that he was still struggling to learn English. As for his health issues, he gave only one vague statement: "Oh, here in America things have really gone differently for me than expected—but always—keep your head up [*Kopf hoch*]!"[40] Enzeliņš apparently was upset that Ulmanis would send such a short letter after failing to write him for such a long time, for in his next letter to Enzeliņš, Ulmanis stated that he was writing in response to Enzeliņš's rebuke that the first letter was "rather American" in its tardiness and "American curtness."[41] In fact, as these criticisms suggest, it seems that part of Enzeliņš's ire was directed not only at Ulmanis, but also at the supposed negative influences of American frontier culture that turned, in the eyes of many Europeans, previously cultured and well-mannered persons into crass, money-hungry, self-centered brutes whom one European traveler described as "half-civilized and half-savage."[42]

Thus, seeking to assure Enzeliņš that living in America had neither changed him nor their friendship, Ulmanis displayed more sincerity and candor in his next letter. He began by telling Enzeliņš that he had not written him for so long because, as he put it, "my disposition was not the best." However, before explaining everything that had led up to his hospitalization, he asked Enzeliņš not to say anything about the details of the letter to anyone else, because he did not want his old nemesis Kirchenšteins to find out about his troubles. Of course, such health issues should not have made Ulmanis feel like a failure and, what is more, he had actually been quite

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[40] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 30, 1907.
[41] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.
[42] Quoted in Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery/land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1981), 176. For an important discussion of how these images of the American West influenced Western Europeans' (and especially the Germans') images of the East, see Vejas G. Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

successful in gaining decent employment and in meeting helpful, successful, and prominent Nebraskans. But obviously Ulmanis was so self-conscious about his image that for months he refrained from writing to his closest friends and family, which says something about the severity of his inferiority complex. Having outlined his first few months in Nebraska, and summing up his reasons for not writing, Ulmanis concluded, "Look how everything went for me—of course it wasn't possible for me to write to you from a hospital bed, because what would I have written? How I was lying in bed sick in America? No sir! (*Nein, mein Herr!*)"[43]

Not only do such comments tell us about Ulmanis's self-image, but they also suggest, quite interestingly given his future ultranationalistic regime, that Ulmanis seemed to think and write in German, at least at this point in his life, whenever he sought to muster his courage and determination or wanted to emphasize a point. In his letters, he did not write a vast number of lines in German, and quite often when he did switch to German it appears completely at random, and usually as single words and whole phrases rather than complete sentences. However, when his use of German is examined on the whole, a pattern of use appears: when he wanted to sound more emphatic, he would occasionally slip into German. One should be careful not to read too much into Ulmanis's occasional use of German, but this language pattern speaks broadly to the complex relationship in the borderlands of Central and Eastern Europe between emerging nationalists and their use, often for intellectual justification, of a "foreign" but hegemonic language, as was the case with the German language in Latvian lands. Ulmanis's use of German, then, seems to intimate just how much he associated Germans and the German language with power, fortitude, doggedness, and enterprise—traits that he admired and desperately wanted to

[43] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.

emulate, and which he subsequently attempted to cultivate in the Latvian people during his authoritarian rule.[44]

-University of Nebraska Student-

By the onset of the 1907-1908 winter season, Ulmanis decided to change his plans. Having realized, as he put it to Enzeliņš, that "my [European] degree has really done nothing for me [in America]," he took up Dr. Fossler's offer and, with his financial assistance, moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, where he enrolled in the Department of Animal Husbandry's two-week winter dairy course at the University of Nebraska.[45] Upon hearing the now thirty-one-year-old Ulmanis speak "with a heavy foreign accent," Professor Howard R. Smith, who was teaching the course, asked Ulmanis to chat with him following the very first day of class. When Smith found out from their conversation about Ulmanis's previous studies in Europe, he advised Ulmanis to enter instead the four-year course so that he could earn an American bachelor's degree. Ulmanis agreed, and Smith worked with Dr. Bessey, the Dean of the Industrial College, to ensure that Ulmanis's previous coursework transferred.

Ulmanis thus entered the University of Nebraska with the rank of senior in the spring semester of 1908. In regard to coursework, Ulmanis took as general electives rhetoric, American history, and political science, while the courses in his major were divided into two categories: dairying under the mentorship of Professor A. L. Haecker, and animal husbandry with Professor

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[44] In the last decade, the topic of linguistic borderlands has been an active subfield within the historiography of nationalism, especially with regard to Central and Eastern Europe. See especially *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Eric D. Weitz and Omer Bartov (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); David Blackbourn and James Retallack, *Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place: German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Pieter M Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Oliver Zimmer, *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761-1891* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Stephen Barbour and Cathie Carmichael, *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[45] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.

H. R. Smith. In his major courses, Ulmanis quickly established himself as a top student, respected by both his professors and classmates. Professor Haecker, for instance, later described Ulmanis in a 1938 article on the "former ag student… [turned] European dictator" as "a thoroughly fine fellow, a brilliant student and unusually diligent."[46] Likewise, one of Ulmanis' classmates, Otto H. Lievers, who went on to serve as a Nebraska state senator, recalled Ulmanis as "a man with great mental capacity. A deep and sharp thinker who wasted no time on minor problems."[47] Another classmate, Howard J. Gramlich, always remembered that Ulmanis got "a great kick out of familiarizing himself with the way we do things in the United States."[48]

While on the one hand the novelty of life in America apparently excited Ulmanis, on the other hand it at times gave him mental distress. For one thing, the language barrier caused him difficulties at the university. For that reason, Ulmanis apparently would often recruit Kārlis Klieģis's help with his coursework, since Klieģis had been in America some eighteen months longer and thus generally had a better grasp of English than Ulmanis. It was also quite easy to take public transportation between Lincoln and Waverly, which was only ten miles from the university campus.[49] Secondly, and more significantly, Ulmanis still had not been able to get out of his negative mental rut because, despite the fact that he had told Enzeliņš that he was going to America primarily to leave the troubles of his homeland behind him, Ulmanis nonetheless continued to publish back home, and he became quite upset at the poor response to some of his works.

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[46] Harold Benn, "Former Ag Student Now European Dictator," *Cornhusker Countrymen*, March, 1938, Folder 12, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.
[47] Guenther, "NU Grad Became Latvian President: Karlis Ulmanis Was 'The Premier from Nebraska.'"
[48] Ibid; H.J. Gramlich, letter to J. Mierkalns, June 6, 1954, Folder 15, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.
[49] Osvalds Akmentiņš, "Kas bija Kārlis Klieģis," *Laiks*, January 19, 1983, reproduced in *K. Ulmanis Amerikā*: *pētījumi un materiāli*, op. cit., 84.

In particular, Ulmanis was angry and dejected about how his first book, *Ienesīga piensaimniecība* (*Profitable Dairying*), was received.[50] Following up on his successful speech at the 1899 congress in Rīga and subsequent lecturing at dairy courses, Ulmanis had begun working on the manuscript while studying in Leipzig, envisioning the work as a helpful manual for farmers who could not attend formal courses, or as a general textbook for dairy course instructors. Of course, Ulmanis's frequent travels during his student days in Leipzig and his time in prison hindered his progress on the book, and thus it was not until December 1906, when he was living in exile in Germany, that he sent off to the publisher the final draft. Then, by the time the book appeared in mid-1907, Ulmanis was halfway around the world, a surprising turn of fate that was not lost on him. As he wrote to Enzeliņš when he received word that his book had finally been published, "Yeah, who would have imagined it, that I would have to celebrate my book while living in America."[51] What especially perturbed Ulmanis, though, was that his book was not selling well. Having gotten word from Enzeliņš in January 1908 that the members of the Kauguri Farmers' Society had only purchased around 100 copies of his book, Ulmanis, exasperated, wrote back to Enzeliņš, "So then, members of K.L.B. have purchased only some 100 copies of "Ien. piens"? Who knows whether they might not still might look at me with hate-filled eyes and hearts and don't want to learn anything from me. Maybe, but I wouldn't wish for a single one of those people to experience what I went through in 1906-1907!" Furthermore, perhaps to emphasize what he had endured as a result of the hearsay, he penned the last few words – "what I went through in 1906-1907" – in German.[52]

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[50] The full title is: *Ienesīga piensaimniecība: rokas grām. piensaimniecības kursu dalībniekiem, saimniecēm, saimniekiem un citiem, kas pienu izstrādā krējumā, sviestā, un biezpienā* (Valmiera: Kauguru Lauksaimniecības biedrība, 1907).
[51] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.
[52] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 20, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 225, September 12, 1997, op. cit.

What is more, although Ulmanis had tried to convince himself as he boarded the *Kaiser Wilhelm II* that he would create a new life for himself in America, in reality he continued to hope that a general amnesty would be announced, enabling him to return home. But by the end of 1907, Ulmanis was beginning to realize that the 1905 revolution had steeled the Russian government's resolve to stamp out revolutionary activity. Thus, in a closing passage of a letter to Enzeliņš, he dejectedly wrote, "But so, well, everything has been cleaved like with an axe, and probably that amnesty for still many years will be only a mirage."[53] However, months later Ulmanis again sounded more hopeful as he discussed with Enzeliņš his plan to earn instead an individual pardon. As Ulmanis explained it in a series of letters in 1908, he was convinced that if he could become a famous agronomist, whom agricultural societies were constantly appealing to the authorities for permission to employ, then perhaps the governors of the Baltic provinces would expunge Ulmanis's criminal record.[54]

To make this happen, Ulmanis thought that he first and foremost had to become a household name, and he went about this primary task in two ways. First, he followed Enzeliņš's advice and began writing short lectures on dairying and farming for the Kauguri Farmers' Society and other similar organizations. These agricultural societies held educational meetings throughout the year – but especially during the winter months, when the farmers had more time for such activities – and Ulmanis was sure that farmers would come to respect and hopefully demand more of him as a result of his lectures. Additionally, since Ulmanis still owed Enzeliņš and the Kauguri Farmers' Society a significant amount of money, he often used the remuneration for these lectures to slowly pay down his debts.

[53] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 3, 1907.
[54] See especially Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 20, 1908.

The second way that Ulmanis sought to raise his public profile was by continuing to publish articles in agricultural journals. Hence, when Enzeliņš floated to Ulmanis an idea to found a new publication called *Zeme* (*The Land*), Ulmanis responded positively, enthusiastically promising that he would contribute as many articles as he could. Over the coming years, Ulmanis would indeed go on to write often for *Zeme* (which first appeared in 1910) and other publications, and in fact at one point he was writing so many articles for *Zeme* that he decided to also publish under the pennames "K. U." and "A. Ulmanis" (his middle name was Augusts), because, as he explained to Enzeliņš, he did not want readers to think less of the publication for relying so much on one author.[55] However, despite this plan, in 1908 and early 1909 Ulmanis was simply too busy with university studies and continuing to adjust to life in America to fully implement it.

From an emotional and mental perspective, Ulmanis's first few months in Lincoln did not go particularly well. For one thing, his view of the future seemed to swing wildly from optimistic hope to forlorn despair. Additionally, the linguistic difficulties he encountered at the university on a daily basis were mentally exhausting. To make matters worse, over the span of a couple of months in 1908, Ulmanis received some upsetting news. Just as he was beginning his student career at the University of Nebraska, Ulmanis had informed Enzeliņš that part of the reason why he had decided to enroll there was so that he could add the title "Professor K. U." to his lectures and publications, an addition to his resume that he thought would advance his career and thus further his chances for an amnesty, ultimately permitting him to return to his old job in Valmiera.[56] Consequently, although it should not have come as a surprise, when in 1908 Enzeliņš wrote to Ulmanis that he was considering hiring an agronomist for the Kauguri

[55] See Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 4, 1910, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 246/247, op. cit.
[56] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 20, 1908.

Farmers' Society since there was no indication that Ulmanis would be returning anytime soon, Ulmanis was nonetheless crushed by the news. In his response to Enzeliņš, Ulmanis seemingly tried to remind Enzeliņš of his stellar qualifications for the position, while also reluctantly admitting that his legal status probably was not going to change in the foreseeable future. He wrote:

> Well, if it wouldn't be both sad and laughable, then I would advise you to wait for my "rehabilitation" (izveseļošana). I will tell you what I know—from the very beginning I managed quite well animal husbandry and dairying. While as a student in Germany, I completely familiarized myself with field work, with grain production and pasture management, and here in America I am working in new butter and cheese facilities. But as I already said—such a fantasy is sad (bēdīgi) and laughable at the same time.[57]

As it turned out, this update from Enzeliņš perhaps was only the proverbial last straw, for just a few weeks prior Ulmanis had received a letter from an unnamed friend, who wrote with news concerning Ulmanis's reputation as an author and agronomist. Ulmanis had recently written a series of lectures on pigs for the Piebalga Agricultural Society, and this friend wrote to inform him that someone had harshly criticized these lectures in a local Piebalga paper, claiming that the lectures were so abstract that not even a specialist in pig farming could have made sense of them. Recognizing that it would be difficult for Ulmanis to defend himself from abroad, the friend notified him straight away out of concern that such negative opinions might discourage people from buying the second edition of *Ienesīga piensaimniecība*, which was set to come out soon. In passing along word of this unfavorable review to Enzeliņš, Ulmanis wrote, "What do you think about my lectures? In the beginning I never imagined that such a ruckus would come of them." In particular, Ulmanis struggled to understand why his lectures had gotten such bad

[57] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 30, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr.231, September 18, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30657.

reviews, as he assumed it could not be because of a lack of knowledge.[58] Thus, he wondered out loud – and here we see again evidence of Ulmanis's inferiority complex – whether it might be his style, asking Enzeliņš for his opinion on whether there was too much "folksy language," a question that suggests that Ulmanis, as a farmer's son, felt at times uncertain of himself and his linguistic abilities when in academic settings.[59] Although Enzeliņš responded reassuringly about Ulmanis's writing style, pointing out that even his brother, a university-trained linguist, could not find any reason to criticize Ulmanis's literature, it is clear from the letters that Ulmanis continued to be overly sensitive to, or at times defensively dismissive of, negative feedback. For instance, when the second edition of his dairying book came out, he wrote to Enzeliņš, "We will see what those almighty men of criticism will say about its contents."[60]

What with the bad news from home, his frustrated hopes for an amnesty, his overloaded schedule with schoolwork and lecture- and article-writing, not to mention his continued difficulty with the English language, for a short while during 1908-1909 academic year Ulmanis apparently became extremely depressed. Years later, old friends and former university colleagues even admitted to being concerned that Ulmanis might attempt to take his own life. Consequently, for a number of months his colleagues went out of their way to converse with Ulmanis and give him positive reinforcement.[61] This of course helped, but what seems to have eased Ulmanis's depression the most was his success in the agriculture courses. For example, by the end of his first semester, Ulmanis had so thoroughly impressed Professor Haecker with his

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[58] For example, see Ulmanis's comments of exasperation in his August 8, 1908 letter to Enzeliņš, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 230, September 17, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=44904.
[59] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 27, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 230, op. cit.
[60] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 18, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 231, op. cit.
[61] Juris Silenieks, "Karlis Ulmanis Revisited," speech given on November 18, 1982, Box 2, Folder 1. *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries; Edward Morrow, "Former Husker Student's Dairy Goes Bankrupt; Tiny Latvia Gains Dictator," *Sunday World-Herald*, April 12, 1936.

knowledge of dairying and, in particular, buttermaking and cheesemaking that Haecker arranged for Ulmanis to work during the next academic year as a laboratory assistant, whose duties were to oversee students' buttermaking and cheesemaking methods. In particular, what apparently had especially impressed Haecker was a Russian cheesemaking chart that Ulmanis had drafted in Haecker's course. As Ulmanis later told Enzeliņš in a letter, Haecker had actually been so amazed by Ulmanis's chart that he had Ulmanis make an extra copy so that he could send it to his father, T. L. Hacker, a renowned professor of agriculture at the University of Minnesota. Ulmanis then noted in his letter that "the old man [i.e., Haecker's father] wrote back that he had never seen such a comprehensive and great chart in all his life."[62]

Additionally, Ulmanis also began late in the summer of 1908 to sound more upbeat in his letters to Enzeliņš. More than likely this was because Ulmanis was happy that he had finished the manuscript for his new book, *Ienesīgas cūkkopība* (*Profitable Pig Farming*), which he sent off to Enzeliņš in mid-August. As was the case with his book on dairying, *Ienesīgas cūkkopība* was published by the Kauguri Farmers' Society as part of its special "Farmer's Library" series, which Ulmanis had first proposed to Enzeliņš three years prior. In his original proposal, Ulmanis stated that the goal of the series was to provide good, comprehensive books for an affordable price, because, as he put it, "our Latvian farmer never will be able nor will want to pay 20 kopeks for one book."[63] Thus, with this book, too, Ulmanis regularly reminded Enzeliņš that they had to make aesthetic sacrifices with paper, the cover, etc. in order to make it as affordable as possible.

Furthermore, Ulmanis also talked excitedly about two other events that summer. Just after finishing the manuscript on pig farming, Ulmanis took a short, two-week trip to Wisconsin. As he explained to Enzeliņš, before beginning my work at the university this fall, "I want to see

[62] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, May 3, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 226/229, op. cit.
[63] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 25, 1905, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 218/219, September 5, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=44799.

some cheeseries in America, and the state of Wisconsin is the closest and best place to do that."[64] Surprisingly, though, upon returning, Ulmanis never followed up with any information in his letters about how this trip went or what he learned. Additionally, he also apparently never published any of his observations. Instead, he turned his attention to the 1908 Nebraska State Fair.

Even among the many states with rich histories of state fairs, Nebraska has long been known for its state fair tradition. Like Arbor Day, another Nebraska cultural institution that so greatly impressed Ulmanis, the history of the Nebraska State Fair goes back to the visionary leadership of one of the state's most prominent early citizens, J. Sterling Morton.[65] Having moved to the Nebraska Territory in 1854 after graduating from the University of Michigan, he soon became an important leader in journalism and in politics, serving in the Nebraska Territorial House of Representatives, as the Secretary of the Nebraska Territory, and as the Governor of the Nebraska Territory prior to the territory becoming a state in 1867. In addition to his efforts, most famously epitomized in the Arbor Day Foundation, to forest Nebraska's treeless prairie, Morton, a respected agriculturalist who went on to serve as secretary of agriculture in President Grover Cleveland's second administration, played the lead role in organizing in 1859 a territorial and mechanical fair, the first such territory fair in American history.[66]

Much of the Nebraska State Fair's continued success is due to the balance struck between a focus on agriculture and a celebration of American enterprise. While at the time many farmers in the audience might have feared the societal repercussions of American ingenuity and industry,

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[64] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 24, 1907, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 230, op. cit.
[65] Of course, his son, Joy Morton, continued the family's legacy. Joy Morton was the founder of the famous Morton Salt Company. What is not as well known, though, is that Joy Morton was also the co-founder (along with the inventor Howard Krum) of the teletype company Morkrum. As a result of these endeavors, Joy Morton became an incredibly wealthy and much-respected citizen of Illinois and Nebraska.
[66] Betty Stevens, *Bright Lights and Blue Ribbons: 125 Years of the Nebraska State Fair* (Lincoln, Neb.: Journal-Star Print Co., 1994), 9-10.

most notably the flood of rural folks migrating to the country's burgeoning metropolises, at that first fair Morton, speaking from the back of a farm wagon, presaged the agricultural revolution and improved quality of life in the countryside that would result from the intertwining of agriculture and industry. As he eloquently put it in his speech, "We stand today upon the verge of civilization, riding upon the head wave of American enterprise, but our descendants, living here a century hence, will be in the center of American commerce—the mid-ocean of our national greatness and prosperity."[67] But in fact it did not even take a century for Morton's prediction to come true. Already by the 1870s and 1880s Nebraska saw a huge influx of settlers, thanks to the westward development of railroad and the inventions of the steel plow, barbed wire, and windmill, all of which suddenly made Nebraska's virgin prairie ripe for cultivation and livestock grazing. Naturally, when the state's farms flourished, so, too, did its cities, and this onset of prosperity was reflected in the growth of the state fair.

Put another way, what Morton had really done was invent a state fair model that offered a little bit of something for everyone, for it celebrated agriculture – the state's main industry – while also highlighting other areas of advancement in local, state, and national life. Although such a model was certainly not unique to Nebraska, the special importance of the state fair to Nebraska's cultural calendar –Nebraskans statewide typically gathered together for only this one occasion due to the state's size (nearly 500 miles from east to west), its widely dispersed towns and farms, and because discounted public transportation and special lodging arrangements in private homes made the trip very affordable – combined with the funds generated by its increased cultural importance meant that the organizers were routinely able to put on a fair that garnered national acclaim. For example, as part of the attractions for the 1910 fair, which Ulmanis more than likely attended, the organizers hired the Wright brothers at the steep cost of

[67] "Monster State Fair," *The Nebraska State Journal*, September 2, 1908, 1.

$10,000 to fly four flights per day for the duration of the fair.[68] A further indication of the Nebraska State Fair's national reputation of excellence is also evident in the original 1939 movie adaption of Frank Baum's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, first published in 1900, wherein the words "State Fair Omaha"[69] appear in bold print on the hot air balloon that had delivered the Wizard to the Land of Oz, speaking to the wide association of Nebraska with agriculture and state fairs among the general movie-going American public.[70]

The 1908 fair did not depart from this impressive tradition. In fact, 1908 was a banner year in the fair's history, for with the introduction of illuminated night sessions for the very first time that year, the previous all-time attendance record was easily surpassed. With regard to entertainment, there were at various times during the fair a forty-five minute fireworks display, a pantomime on the eruption of Vesuvius, musical performances by Liberati's Band and Grand Opera Concert Company of New York, horse races, a track meet, and more. As for the agricultural exhibits, there were a record number of county exhibits that year as well, where prize-winning crops and livestock where on display, attesting to the rich Nebraska soil and the benefits of modern farming practices. Additionally, there was also the always-popular exhibition of the newest farm machinery, tools, and other agricultural items that were physical manifestations of industry and progress. Furthermore, highlighting the celebration of abundance that marked the milieu of the early industrial agriculture era, at the dairy section where Ulmanis

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[68] Mary L. Maas, *Nebraska State Fair* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Pub., 2011), 12. Unfortunately, the flight demonstrations ended mid-week, when the airplane was damaged during a crash landing.

[69] Between 1872 and 1901 the location of the Nebraska State Fair rotated between Lincoln and Omaha. Following the Nebraska Legislature's decision to name the Lancaster County Fairgrounds as the fair's permanent location, the fair was held in Lincoln every year until 2010, when the fair was relocated to Grand Island in order to preserve its agricultural focus, and to make it easier for people in western Nebraska to attend.

[70] Furthermore, this association has continued in modern times, as evidenced, for instance, by a recent article in *The Economist*, in which the Nebraska State Fair is cited as a pristine example of American rural culture and unique in its continued focus on agriculture, despite the fact that the number of people involved in agriculture has continued to dwindle since the beginning of the twentieth century. See David Rennie, "Farming as Rocket Science: Why American Agriculture is Different from the European Variety," *The Economist*, September 7, 2013, accessed November 25, 2013, http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21584994-why-american-agriculture-different-european-variety-farming-rocket-science.

worked as a dairy expert and served as a member of the 4-H dairy cow judging panel, fairgoers were encouraged to guess the weight of beautiful statues of a young heifer and milkmaid that had been impressively carved from a giant block of butter.[71]

Unsurprisingly, Ulmanis was impressed by the fair's size, and it lifted his spirits that he had been invited, presumably on Professor Haecker's initiative, to take part in such an extraordinary event. For instance, soon after the fair ended Ulmanis described it for Enzeliņš, reporting:

> Our fair was really big. In five days there were 110,000 visitors—and in the whole state of Nebraska there are only 1 ½ million people. The individual exhibitions of each section were good and quite rich. I was an expert at the dairy section. Additionally, I ran the milk cow competition. As you can see, my situation is slowly but surely becoming more secure![72]

There is yet one more thing worth mentioning about the 1908 fair, and that is William Jennings Bryan's appearance during the last afternoon of the festivities. Bryan, a native of Illinois and a lawyer by training, had moved to Lincoln, Nebraska in the late 1880s. He soon thereafter entered politics and already in 1890, at the age of thirty, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming, at the time, only the second Democrat to represent Nebraska in the House. After winning reelection in 1892, Bryan subsequently lost a bid for the Senate in 1894, whereupon he took up journalistic work in Nebraska. A prolific writer and an even better orator, Bryan used his editorials and speaking engagements to highlight the plight of the common man in the Gilded Age, an era that saw a dramatic rise in income inequality as families like the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts accumulated unimaginable wealth while the average American often struggled to make ends meet. In particular, as a son of the Great Plains, Bryan railed against what he saw as the systematic corporate oppression of the small farmer, especially

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[71] This overview of the 1908 fair is based on reports offered in *The Nebraska State Journal* from August 31-September 5, 1908. For a fascinating history on crop and dairy art in the U.S., see Pamela H Simpson, *Corn Palaces and Butter Queens: A History of Crop Art and Dairy Sculpture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
[72] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 18, 1908.

on the part of banks, the railroad, and big industrial trusts like Standard Oil and U.S. Steel. As a result of his demands for progressive reform, Bryan quickly became a darling of the Democratic Party, earning an invitation to deliver an address at the party's 1896 national convention in Chicago.

It was at this convention, of course, where he delivered his "Cross of Gold" speech, considered by many historians to be his most famous speech and one of the best political speeches in American history. Arguing that the recent financial panic of 1893 and the increased suffering of the common man had in part been the result of America's monetary gold standard, in his closing passage he chided the Republican Party, whose platform included continued support for the gold standard, and other gold standard supporters that "you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." Having made vivid comparisons throughout his talk between hard working but powerless common folks and the money-hungry, oppressive urban elite, Bryan had emotionally primed his audience for this closing line, which he delivered in a most dramatic way. As he passionately bellowed those closing words, in a passage that one historian has argued propelled Bryan "into the headlines of American history," Bryan stood rigidly and extended his arms, theatrically portraying himself as the whole of mankind in a way that would have surely brought to the mind of many in the audience the crucifixion of Jesus.[73] Bryan held the pose for a number of seconds, despite the dead silence in the huge Chicago Coliseum. For a moment Bryan thought his speech had failed, but then, as he descended from the podium, the crowd erupted in an uncontrollable applause that lasted nearly half an hour. Though he had been considered, at best, a longshot for the nomination, Bryan's speech helped propel him to the front, and he was

[73] Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 61.

named the presidential candidate for both the Democratic Party and the People's Party (better known as the Populist Party).[74]

Although Bryan lost the 1896 election to William McKinley, Bryan's campaign made him a national celebrity. In many ways a forerunner of the modern-day whirlwind campaign, Bryan traveled extensively, becoming the first presidential candidate to campaign by automobile. All told, Bryan gave more than 500 speeches that election season. As a result of these efforts to endear himself to the average voter, Bryan became, to quote the title of Michael Kazin's biography of Bryan, a "godly hero" in the eyes of much of the American populace. To be sure, rather than focus on the specifics of his policies, people came to adulate and revere Bryan for his captivating persona and reputation as an awe-inspiring speaker. Hence, Bryan can be regarded, as Kazin correctly points out, as the first "celebrity politician" of the twentieth century, an age demarcated by massive political gatherings and charismatic men who sought to win the hearts, minds, and souls of their people.

It is indeed this aspect of Bryan's career that makes his visit to the 1908 Nebraska State Fair worth mentioning. For Ulmanis, who was likely in attendance during that last afternoon since his duties as a dairy expert had ended earlier that morning, it must have been fascinating to witness the hoopla surrounding Bryan's much-anticipated visit, including the crowd-pleasing stunt during the fair's opening firework show which involved a huge image of Bryan that was illuminated with fire.[75] In fact, it seems highly plausible – given the image that he would later build for himself as the *Vadonis* and *Saimnieks* of Latvia – that Ulmanis, observing the native-

[74] For an outstanding treatment of the speech and convention, see Kazin, chapter three.
[75] See "Fair in Full Blast," *The Nebraska State Journal*, September 1, 1908, 1.

son hero worship that much of the crowd showed Bryan, dreamt about one day becoming a Latvian version of Bryan.[76]

Bryan had come to the fair because he had been invited to dedicate the new state fair auditorium. Of course, the organizers also hoped that Bryan would be a big draw since he was again running for the White House, after having lost a second time to McKinley in 1900, and in fact politics was indeed on the mind of many fairgoers since the state primary elections had coincided with the first day of the fair. Bryan arrived just after one o'clock in the afternoon on September 5. The new auditorium was packed to capacity, and the crowd cheered loudly as Bryan entered through the back. The governor of Nebraska, George L. Sheldon, a republican, greeted Bryan at the rear entrance, and the two men, along with Bryan's entourage, made their way down the main aisle and to the podium, greeting people along the way, as the New York-based Liberati's Band and Grand Opera Concert Company played a number of befitting patriotic songs.[77]

Not only would Ulmanis later replicate as the *Vadonis* of Latvia the pomp and circumstance and festival-like nature of Bryan's appearance at the fair, but even Bryan's speech that day contained ideas and lines that would turn out to be remarkably similar to those Ulmanis would later deliver at the huge, state fair-like Harvest Celebrations or *Pļaujas svētki*, as will be shown in Chapter 5. What is especially interesting about Bryan's speech that day is that on the whole he abstained from campaigning. Understanding that listeners were probably expecting a political speech, Bryan began his remarks by explaining that he would not be fulfilling this expectation, for he thought it unethical for a politician to give a partisan speech in such

[76] For a helpful examination of Nebraska politics, including Nebraskans' response to William Jennings Bryan's presidential campaigns, see Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969).
[77] "Bryan at the State Fair," *The Nebraska State Journal*, September 5, 1908, 3.

conditions where listeners had paid an entrance fee, as was the case here with the Nebraska State Fair. Bryan went on:

> And then, too, I have so many opportunities to speak along political lines, that I rather gladly embrace an opportunity to speak on lines not political. I have spoken so often on themes that separate us into hostile parties, that I am glad to have a chance to speak upon those that unite us as citizens. I so often have occasion to emphasize the questions about which we differ that I am gratified when I have an opportunity to speak about the things that unite us and hold us in common. And it is well that we should meet on occasions like these occasionally where we have the head of your republican party in this state and a high private in the democratic party just to show you that the debates and discussions that men like Governor Sheldon and myself have in the campaign do not really touch the great fundamental principles that govern our lives and our society.[78]

Bryan then proceeded to discuss those shared themes and principles that united Nebraskans and unified Americans. First, he pointed to the patriotism that had led him to volunteer for the Nebraska militia during the Spanish-American War. Drawing on his experiences in the militia and the fact that he had served alongside Sheldon and many other men with differing political views, Bryan urged his audience to remember that in America "there is a patriotism that will be sufficient for every time of need." Bryan then turned to a discussion of agriculture. As the source of income for the majority of Americans and, in his eyes, the bedrock of American culture, Bryan believed that agriculture could, and should, unite Americans. But the problem, Bryan pointed out, was that farmers were being divided and systematically discriminated against due to inadequate representation in the halls of power of state capitals and in Washington, D.C. Citing the example of the Department of Agriculture, Bryan lamented:

> My friends, we are more stingy in making the appropriations for the farmer than for any other large class of our people. Why, it was a century after our government was organized – or about that – before we succeeded in getting a department of agriculture established. We are the greatest agricultural country in the world, and agriculture is the greatest industry in our country, and yet almost a hundred years elapsed before the farmer got a seat around the president's council chamber. How backward we have been in recognizing the farmer's place in our government and among our institutions![79]

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

Furthermore, Bryan laid out for the audience the damaging consequences of this unjust underrepresentation. He contended that, first and foremost, this was the primary reason why the countryside had fallen behind the cities, an unnatural imbalance that had prompted the rural youth to flock to America's towns and cities. "And what is the menace of the centralization of the population in our great cities?" Bryan asked. He answered this rhetorical question thusly:

> I believe the farm is the great training school and I know that the people from the farm have strengthened every branch of business, but my friends, I believe as we get away from the country, as we get farther from the soil, we are less and less impressed by these great laws of nature that ought to have a controlling influence in our lives… And on these farms we have been rearing the men and the women whose influence have helped to keep this country great and to promote the movements which have for their objects the welfare of the world. But there is another reason why I am anxious that the farmer shall have a great influence. As I have been studying the causes of evil, as I have been studying the causes that need to be remedied, I have found that the fundamental trouble is a mistaken understanding of the law of rewards. The farmer more than any one [sic] else is brought into close touch with the Divine law of rewards. The farmer knows that … it must be by diligence and intelligence; and the farmer is impressed, day by day, year by year, with the idea that his reward is to be in proportion to his merit. As I traveled around the world the conviction grew upon me that the great root of all the trouble was that the rewards of society were not adjusted to the work that the people did. In the world you will find an aristocracy, you will find men who through their families have for hundreds of years been living upon others. As one person has expressed it, "A robber for a life time [sic] and a baron for a thousand years."[80]

Having spent the majority of his speech explaining the origins and consequences of rural flight and the oppression of the family farmer, Bryan brought his speech to a close with praise for the Nebraska State Fair's celebration of agriculture and rural life. In an eloquent closing passage representative of his brilliance as an orator, Bryan remarked:

> On this occasion, therefore, where we meet under the auspices of a great fair in a great state and dedicate a building like this … I cannot impress upon your minds a more important lesson than this: Recognize the dignity of this great industry [i.e., agriculture] of which you are a part, insist here and everywhere that this industry shall have its share of attention from those who act for the people. Give them the help that you can, and let every man help to uplift this occupation and teach the world a respect for its dignity. Let them not point the finger of scorn or ridicule against the one who on the farm earns his daily bread. Be not content until there is established a public opinion which will put the badge of disgrace not

[80] Ibid.

> upon the farmer's son, whose hands are brown and whose clothes are soiled by contact with the earth, but will put the badge of disgrace upon the man who is willing to squander in a life spent in idleness what somebody else has earned.[81]

Despite Bryan's typically eloquent speech that afternoon, whose passages on the European aristocracy, democracy, and the virtues of rural life surely would have struck a chord in him, surprisingly, Ulmanis never mentioned in his letters to Enzeliņš anything further about the Nebraska State Fair, Bryan, or for that matter even American politics in general. As for the fair, it is odd that Ulmanis never again discussed it, for he almost certainly would have continued to attend, if for no other reason than the event, which he certainly seems to have enjoyed, was always held in Lincoln, where he continued to live. What is more, Warner was a major supporter of the fair, even serving on the Nebraska State Fair's executive board for thirty years.[82] Thus, Warner likely would have given the Klieģis brothers and his other hired men time off to take in the sights and sounds of the fair. In fact, it is even more probable that Warner arranged for the Klieģis brothers, Ulmanis's only close friends in Nebraska, to display at the fair some of his farm's newest machinery or best Hereford cattle, thus making it even more likely that Ulmanis would have attended.

As for Bryan and American politics, although Ulmanis never discussed these topics in his letters, there is little doubt that he must have been fascinated by Bryan's 1908 campaign and his much-celebrated appearance at the fair. Of course, Ulmanis had experienced the culture of democratic politics before while living in Switzerland and Germany, and of course he had surely read in his earlier years about the grand public celebrations, or "scenarios of power," organized

[81] Ibid.
[82] "Sen. Charles Warner."

by the tsars.[83] However, the societal attention in America devoted to the race for the White House was something entirely new. This was especially true of Bryan's campaigns, for his celebration of the virtuous "common man" – which earned him the moniker "the Great Commoner" – and oft-mentioned distrust of big business made him a polarizing figure who garnered both quasi-religious levels of adulation and vehement hatred. Hence, while we likely will never know what exactly Ulmanis made of Bryan and the Nebraska State Fair, what is clear is that the *Pļaujas svētki* (Harvest Festivals), the week-long, state fair-like celebrations of agriculture and rural life that were one of the most significant annual events in the Ulmanis regime's quasi-liturgical calendar of rituals, bear a remarkable resemblance in purpose, content, and aesthetics to what Ulmanis experienced at the Nebraska State Fair.

To add further context to Ulmanis's discussion, or the lack thereof, of the fair and American politics, it should be noted that Ulmanis almost never discussed issues of his daily life in his correspondence with Enzeliņš. The two men shared a passion for agriculture and agricultural science, and hence almost the entirety of Ulmanis's letters to Enzeliņš was devoted to his thoughts about agriculture and the work of agricultural societies in the Baltic Provinces. Therefore, while it seems odd that Ulmanis never shared stories with Enzeliņš about his work on the Warner farm, for instance, or of new knowledge that he was gaining while studying at the University of Nebraska, he nonetheless chose, perhaps because he feared that Enzeliņš would not be interested, not to expound on many of his personal experiences in the New World.

Returning, then, to the state of Ulmanis's spirits during his first year in America, beyond his work at the Nebraska State Fair, what surely must have boosted his confidence and raised his morale the most was receiving a department assistantship for the fall 1908 semester, when for

[83] Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. Vol. 2. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

two afternoons per week he helped instruct students on cheesemaking.[84] If that were not enough, that semester Ulmanis was also selected to the team that represented the University of Nebraska at the 1908 National Dairy Show. This was the university's first national dairy show team, and besides Ulmanis, Professor Haecker also selected for the team Vere S. Culver and Howard J. Gramlich.

The 1908 National Dairy Show, the third in its history, was held on December 2-10 at the Coliseum in Chicago. All told, more than 100,000 people attended.[85] The overall purpose of the show, according to a press release from the National Dairy Show Association, was:

> to make this Dairy Show a strong representative of all dairy interests, to bring together dairymen, butter and cheesemakers, farmers and manufactures of dairy products from all parts of the country, for educational purposes; also to present at this gathering the best and most up-to-date makes of dairy machinery, and to show choice herds of cattle representing all the different dairy breeds; in fact, it is desired to make the occasion the big event of the year for dairying, and to so exhibit the different branches of the dairy industry that the people of the country will realize the importance and magnitude of this great industry.[86]

In addition to showing cattle, while there, Ulmanis and his colleagues took in the sights, visiting the exhibits and learning about new dairy machinery and breeds of cattle. There was plenty of entertainment, too. Although of course the show was first and foremost devoted to disseminating information about modern dairying, such expositions were also intended to be fun family events. Thus, while the men were looking at new separators, women could attend cooking sessions with Mrs. Elizabeth O. Hiller, who, in her "model dairy kitchen," prepared a number of dairy-rich dishes.[87] Even the children had fun things to do and see. In particular, the Kerry-Dexter cows from Ireland – billed as the smallest cattle in the world – proved to be popular.

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[84] On Ulmanis's department assistantship, see Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 24, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 230, op. cit.
[85] "Dairy Show a Big Success," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 11, 1908, 8.
[86] Quoted in National Dairy Show Association, "A National Dairy Show," *Pacific Rural Press* 76, no. 5 (1908): 73.
[87] "Milkmaids Who Are Numbered among Star Attractions at National Dairy Show in Coliseum," *The Inter Ocean*, December 3, 1908, 5.

Other big draws included the milking competitions and the performances of a chorus of dairymaids who, garbed in Old World peasant costumes, sang idyllic pastoral songs in a number of European languages.

Finally, not to be overlooked, the show also was meant to shore up demand for dairy products among urban residents. In particular, much attention was paid to milk. Of course, humans had long consumed fresh cow's milk, but as urban dwellers lost their cultural and gastronomic connections to the countryside, quite often they came to view milk as unsanitary, as a peasant drink, or, as Barbara Orland has shown in the case of German males, as "unmanly."[88] As a result, coffee, tea, and alcoholic beverages became the drinks of choice among the majority of urban residents, most especially males, during the nineteenth century. But as improved "scientific" dairying practices and faster transportation from farm to urban table ensured better, cleaner, and safer milk, dairy farmers and their associations began to propagandize the many benefits of drinking milk. Thus, at the 1908 National Dairy Show, visitors were encouraged to try, for fifteen cents a glass, milk from the world's highest priced dairy cow, Colantha Fourth's "Johanna," which was on display throughout the show. And if that price were too steep, thirsty patrons could instead get a glass of milk from "the ordinary dairy cattle" for five cents. Additionally, to promote butter and cheese sales, 468 pounds of butter and 3,000 pounds of fresh cheese were given out as complementary samples.[89]

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[88] Barbara Orland, "Bad Habits and Liquid Pleasures: Milk and the Alcohol Abstinence Movement in late 19th Century Germany," *Food & History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007): 153-169.

[89] "Dairy Show a Big Success"; "Milkmaids Who Are Numbered among Star Attractions at National Dairy Show in Coliseum." For especially insightful works on the history of milk consumption, see especially E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Carin Martiin, "Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty: Dairy Marketing in the 1920s and 1930s," *Rural History*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2010): 213-232; Barbara Orland, "Bad Habits and Liquid Pleasures: Milk and the Alcohol Abstinence Movement in late 19th Century Germany," *Food & History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007): 153-169.

As for Ulmanis and his teammates' experiences at the show, in a letter written many years later, Gramlich, who went on to become the head of the Department of Animal Husbandry at the University of Nebraska, recalled their trip and Ulmanis's involvement:

> In the fall of 1908, Ulman,[90] Vere S. Culver and myself were hastily assembled into the University's first dairy judging team to compete at the National Dairy show in Chicago's Coliseum. Professor A.L. Hacker [sic], Head of the Dairy Department, was our coach. We made several short trips in the vicinity of Lincoln, then got to Chicago a day early and visited one or two dairies nearby for practice judging.
>
> Ulman was a very pleasant companion on occasions such as this. The team had a large room at the Hyde Park Hotel on Chicago's south side. My most vivid recollection of the contest and events pertaining thereto was one which occurred early on the morning after. I was awakened by Ulman, who was talking to himself as he sat up in bed playing the air with his arms. He was "damning" the class of Gurnsey [sic] cows which he had in the contest and which had proved to be our downfall. While our team ranked second among the nine competing, we would have been an easy first had Ulman seen the Gurnseys [sic] just a little better.[91]

Unfortunately, Ulmanis never discussed the dairy show in Chicago in any detail in his letters to Enzeliņš. He mentioned that he had been chosen to go to "the big annual cattle show in Chicago," that the university was paying for the trip, and that perhaps he should write a piece about agricultural fairs and expositions in America, but upon his return he did not discuss the event any further.[92] The same is true for the 1908 National Corn Exhibition held in Omaha, Nebraska. Ulmanis mentioned to Enzeliņš that the dairy team would be stopping on their way home from Chicago at, as he put it, the "special corn exhibition" in Omaha, but did he not explain any further just how significant the event was, nor did he write later about his observations. [93]

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[90] In America, Ulmanis went by "Ulman" or "Ulmann."
[91] Gramlich, letter to J. Mierkalns.
[92] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 10, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 231, op. cit. As far as I know, he never wrote this piece, for he never again mentions such an article in his letters, and I did not locate any such article in my research.
[93] Ibid.

Clearly, though, for Ulmanis such events would have been quite impressive and memorable. To be sure, being selected – despite being in America only a little more than a year – as an expert for the state fair and for a trip to two national expositions did much to soothe his angst and constant fear of failure. What is more, on December 17, 1908, the university chancellor, E. Benjamin Andrews, held a special dinner, attended by Nebraska Governor-elect Ashton C. Shallenberger, Dean Burnett of the Agricultural College, and Professors Haecker and Smith, for Ulmanis and the other members of the national dairy and stock show teams. All the students were invited to give some remarks, and Ulmanis gave a brief description of agriculture in Russia, Germany, and Denmark.[94] Additionally, beyond improving his psyche, experiencing such huge agricultural expositions with their Progressive Era culture of positivism, reform, and scientific progress must have also had an enduring impact on Ulmanis, who had long been interested in the advancement of agriculture and rural life.

For example, the 1908 National Corn Exposition was quite an impressive event. Intended both as a scientific-based industry show for farmers and agronomists and as an educational exposition for the general public about corn's vital place in the world's food supply, the ten-day exposition held in December 1908 was described by one observer as "the greatest educational farm crop exposition ever held in the world."[95] In all, there were 7,731 exhibitors, and more than 100,000 people attended. There were also a number of dignitaries among those visitors. Most notably, President Teddy Roosevelt, a good friend of Gurdon W. Wattles, the Omaha businessman and civic leader who had played a lead role in bringing the event to Omaha, sent members of his newly formed "Commission on Country Life" to the event, where over a two-day period they gathered materials for their report. President Roosevelt formed the commission

[94] "Andrews Honors Winners," *The Nebraska State Journal*, December 18, 1908, 7.
[95] "National Corn Exposition," *The Cincinnati Price Current: Exponent of Trade Interests in Grain, Provisions, Crops, Live Stock, Etc.* 65, no. 53 (1908): 839.

because he was concerned about the future of the American countryside – just as Ulmanis was with the Latvian counterpart – and he asked Liberty Hyde Bailey to head the commission, whose goal was to study ways of making country life more attractive and hence stemming the dramatic and increasing flow of rural inhabitants to the cities. A horticulturalist, botanist, co-founder of the American Society for Horticultural Science, and a leading member of the "Country Life Movement" that sought to preserve the family farm as the basis of American life, culture, and civilization, Bailey was a prominent figure among progressive thinkers and agronomists at that time, and his team's appearance at the corn exposition added to the pomp and circumstance of the already grand event. Furthermore, during their two days at the exposition, the attending commission members held hybrid academic/town hall-style discussions, where they gleaned information about rural life from both family farmers as well as political and academic leaders, such as Governor Sheldon, representatives of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents and agricultural faculty, and Alice Tyler of the Iowa Traveling Library Commission, who, along with many others, spoke about the pressing need to provide farm children with a better education.[96]

In addition to exhibits from throughout the United States, the exposition also took on an international scope. For instance, Mexico sent a large contingent, including the prominent agronomist, political figure, and wealthy estate farmer Zeferino Dominguez, who at the time was thought to be a potential successor to President Porfirio Díaz. As a matter of fact, Dominguez, who spent during his career a significant amount of time traveling in the United States and

[96] "National Corn Exposition," *Nebraska State Historical Society*, accessed November 26, 2013, http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/timeline/national_corn_expo.htm; "National Corn Show a Splendid Success," *The Kearney Daily Hub*, December 23, 1908, 2; "Clore Wins First Again," *The Kearney Daily Hub*, December 10, 1908, 1. On the commission and Bailey see especially L. H Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911); L. H Bailey and Zachary Michael Jack, *Liberty Hyde Bailey: Essential Agrarian and Environmental Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Allan C Carlson, *The New Agrarian Mind: The Movement toward Decentralist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000); Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, "The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agricultural History," *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (2004): 289-316.

lecturing about farm practices in Mexico, remained for two weeks in Omaha, and at the end of the exposition gave a silver bust of Díaz to the students of the Iowa College of Agriculture as part of their prize for winning the student exhibit competition. Consequently, not only did Ulmanis learn about progressive farm practices in the United States, but, even more significantly, by attending such an event, he was introduced to international networks of "technology transfer," tools of modernization, and a language of progressivism and progress that would later become one of the hallmarks of his political program.[97]

One month later, Ulmanis got a chance to contribute his expertise to another such professional network when he participated in the twenty-fourth annual meeting of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association. The 1909 meeting took place on January 20-22 in the livestock pavilion of the University of Nebraska Experiment Station. Impressively, Ulmanis did not just passively attend the annual gathering. Rather, at the urging and encouragement of Professor Haecker, who happened to be the president of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association that year, Ulmanis gave a talk titled "Profits of Farm Cheese Making" during the opening morning session. Predictably, Ulmanis was nervous about giving a talk in English. Telling Enzeliņš about the upcoming occasion, Ulmanis wrote in a letter, "And what is the craziest thing is that I am on the list of speakers! I still haven't been in America for two whole years, and I already have to give a talk at a meeting—and in English, of course! I protested this development, but those men truly know better than I, so I have to heed their invitation."[98]

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[97] Jeri L. Reed, "The Corn King of Mexico in the United States: A South-North Technology Transfer," *Agricultural History* 78, no. 2 (2004): 155-165. Like Reed, a number of other scholars have begun to investigate these international networks and, in the case of U.S. history, to point out the significance of the Mexican example for American agricultural reformers. Most impressive and comprehensive here is Tore C. Olsson, "Agrarian Crossings: The American South, Mexico, and the Twentieth-Century Remaking of the Rural World," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2013).

[98] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 18, 1908, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 231, op. cit.

The aim of Ulmanis's talk was to convince Nebraska dairy farmers of the profitability of making cheese on their farm. To do so, he examined and compared the profit margins of: a) selling fresh milk; b) using fresh milk to produce and sell butter and leftover whey; c) separating fresh milk and selling cream and skim milk; d) using fresh milk to produce and sell cheese and whey; e) using fresh milk to produce and sell butter, along with cottage cheese made from the remaining whey. Based on his research of market prices, Ulmanis concluded that a dairy farmer could make the most money from a gallon of fresh milk if it were used to produce butter and cottage cheese, as opposed to the then normal practice of selling the whey on the market or simply mixing it into animal feed. Furthermore, he highlighted the fact that Nebraska dairy farmers could gain a strong foothold in the local cheese market because they would be able to sell their cheese at a lower price locally than the producers in Wisconsin, Michigan, and New York, whose products made up the majority of the cheeses sold in Nebraska, since those producers had higher input costs, as they quite often purchased cattle feed from Nebraska and the surrounding states, before of course also paying to ship the final product to stores in Nebraska and beyond. Consequently, surveying the state of American agriculture and dairying – which was rapidly being changed by, as Deborah Fitzgerald has put it, an "every farm a factory" mentality that emphasized the use of technology, regional product specialization based on the fit between technology, geography, and weather, and the rapid transportation of perishable goods[99] – Ulmanis's contribution, as someone who retained an outsider's perspective, was to remind Nebraska farmers that diversifying their sources of income and producing staple products for the

[99] Deborah Kay Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). For an especially insightful analysis of how the commoditization of agricultural crops led to this "every farm a factory" mentality and to regional specialization, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), particularly chapters 2 and 3.

local market was, despite all the promise and wonders of modern technology, the surest way to ensure their financial stability.[100]

-Ulmanis and the Influence of American Literature-

It was also during his days in America that Ulmanis came to find solace and inspiration in the New Thought Movement, whose principles meshed well with his philosophy of agrarian progressivism. Hence, the ideas of the movement had a strong and lasting influence on his worldview, and they, too, shaped his political convictions and the way he presented them to the Latvian public. Like the global reach of modern agricultural science and the expositions expounding the message of progress, the New Thought Movement was similarly derived from a globalization of intellectual trends and religious thought. As was the case with many intellectual movements in American history up to that point, the New Thought Movement had its roots in the old colonial Northeast, where diverse intellectuals were responding to the rapid social and environmental changes brought on by industrialization and urbanization and to the continued "democratization of American Christianity," as Nathan Hatch so aptly put it in his seminal work.[101]

Rooted in the legacy of Martin Luther's Reformation and the impact of the Biblical criticism of Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and others, which eventually developed into the modern-day field of hermeneutics, the democratization of American religious life led to new Protestant churches and to an increased emphasis on the personal nature of religious life, a line of thought that was also heavily influenced by the earlier legacy of German Pietism. To be sure, as these transatlantic linkages suggest, scholars like Peter Watson are correct in pointing to the dominant influence of German culture on American intellectual and religious

[100] See K. A. Ulmann, "Profits of Farm Cheese Making," *Annual Report of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association for the Year 1908*, ed. S.C. Bassett (York, NE: York Blank Book Co., Printers, 1909), 27-31.
[101] Nathan O Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

life; and perhaps no single idea or cultural phenomenon was more influential than the German concept of *Bildung*, or a drive for self-cultivation and enlightenment rooted in a Kantian metaphysical sense of being.[102] Out of this intellectual tradition, which still dominated pedagogical thought in America's universities at the turn of the twentieth century, American thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson turned away from the messages of the mainstream churches, most especially the Calvinist idea of predetermination, and towards a transcendentalist focus on the individual and his or her metaphysical place in the world. Indeed, stemming directly from transcendentalist thought, the New Thought Movement arose in the mid-nineteenth century as a reinterpretation – and one which was also heavily influenced by German Romanticism – of Christianity as a romantic, mystical personal relationship with a God who manifests himself in all things, including within an individual's intuition or will.[103]

But by the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the New Thought Movement came to encompass more than just religious thought. Advancing the movement's focus on an individual's spirituality, intuition, and will, many New Thought thinkers began to write inspirational books focused on the power of the human mind and will. These works, which today might be categorized under the genre of self-help literature, were still heavily indebted to American religious thought, but in discussing the power of positive thinking and the conviction of one's will, the authors of these later books also borrowed from Hinduism a focus on meditative thought, and from Friedrich Nietzsche and others the ideas of existential philosophy,

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[102] Peter Watson, *The German Genius: Europe's Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper, 2010), see especially chapters 2 and 15.

[103] For an overview and general history of the New Thought Movement and its intellectual roots, see Horatio W Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement* (New York: T. Y. Crowell Company, 1919); Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Gail M. Harley, *Emma Curtis Hopkins: Forgotten Founder of New Thought* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002). For a general history of American religious thought which also includes a good collection of primary source excerpts, see Charles Capper and David A. Hollinger's two-volume work, *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook*, 5th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

especially the making of the self and "the will to power." It was these later works, then, that made the New Thought Movement popular, and especially among the "self-made" magnates and barons of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, and J. P. Morgan. In fact, as Satter points out, the New Thought Movement became so associated with the success stories of American capitalists that historians have frequently misinterpreted it as an ideology of capitalism and consumer culture rather than as a religious or philosophical movement.[104]

As for Ulmanis, he particularly admired two prolific New Thought authors: Orison Swett Marden and Ralph Waldo Trine. Marden, who apparently was Ulmanis's favorite New Thought writer, had a personal story that would have resonated with Ulmanis. During Marden's childhood in New Hampshire, he lost both of his parents by the age of seven, and he and his siblings had to work as hired help at a very early age in order to earn their keep at their various foster homes. But through hard work and stubborn persistence, he eventually overcame those hardships. For example, he worked at a number of hotels in Boston to pay for his tuition at Boston University, where he earned three degrees, and at Harvard Medical School, where he obtained a Doctor of Medicine degree. However, Marden's true passion was writing, and in his free time he began working on a manuscript about the power of positive thinking. But not long after he concluded the work, the manuscript was lost in a fire. To make matters worse, Marden soon thereafter also lost his job. Seeking to start over, he moved to Chicago and began rewriting his book. During this time he also obtained employment as the manager of a hotel, including during the 1893

[104] Satter, 7-8. Historians interested in the intellectual origins of fascism and totalitarianism have often discussed the seminal importance of Nietzsche's philosophy. However, it seems that the message of economic Darwinism inherent in the ideas of the New Thought Movement, and in the model of business espoused by men like Henry Ford, was also appealing to nondemocratic leaders. See for example Stefan Johannes Link's fascinating dissertation, "Transnational Fordism. Ford Motor Company, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union in the Interwar Years" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012).

Chicago World's Fair (or World's Columbian Exposition, as it is also known), which drew more than 27 million visitors.[105] Perhaps the fair's emphasis on advancement and progress gave a distinctive motivation to Marden, for when he finished rewriting the work, which was published in 1894, he titled it *Pushing to the Front.*

It is not known when exactly Ulmanis first read *Pushing to the Front*, a title that sounds very similar to one of the most ubiquitous slogans of his authoritarian regime, "*uz priekšu*," which depending on the context might be translated as "onwards" or "forward," and which generally connotes a determined, positivistic push, both mentally and physically, to advance. More than likely, Ulmanis discovered the works of Marden and Trine, a Boston-based journalist, while at the University of Nebraska, for Marden's *Pushing to the Front* and Trine's *In Tune with the Infinite* (1897) were both very popular in learned circles around the turn of the century. These books, in addition to his academic success, surely must have helped Ulmanis battle through the depression that he seemed to suffer from during his first few months in Lincoln, for they are true manifestos of positive thinking. For instance, Trine begins *In Tune with the Infinite* with this pointed explanation:

> The optimist is right. The pessimist is right. The one differs from the other as the light from the dark. Yet both are right. Each is right from his own particular point of view, and this point of view is the determining factor in the life of each. It determines as to whether it is a life of power or of impotence, of peace or of pain, of success or of failure.
>
> The optimist has the power of seeing things in their entirety and in their right relations. The pessimist looks from a limited and a one-sided point of view. The one has his understanding illumined by wisdom, the understanding of the other is darkened by ignorance. Each is building his world from within, and the result of the building is determined by the point of view of each. The optimist, by his superior wisdom and insight, is making his own heaven, and in the degree that he makes his own heaven is he helping to make one for all the world beside. The pessimist, by virtue of his limitations, is making his own hell, and in the degree that he makes his own hell is he helping to make one for all mankind.

[105] On the 1893 fair, see Norm Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Joseph Alan Gustaitis, *Chicago's Greatest Year, 1893 the White City and the Birth of a Modern Metropolis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013).

> You and I have the predominating characteristics of an optimist or the predominating characteristics of a pessimist. We then are making, hour by hour, our own heaven or our own hell; and in the degree that we are making the one or the other for ourselves are we helping make it for all the world beside.[106]

Furthermore, in a concluding point and analogy that was perfectly suited for a dairy expert like Ulmanis, Trine urged his readers, "We can be men and women of power or we can be men and women of impotence." He went on, "The moment one vitally grasps the fact that he can rise he will rise, and he can have absolutely no limitations other than the limitations he sets to himself. Cream always rises to the top. It rises simply because it is the nature of cream to rise."[107]

Similarly, Marden offered a blend of quotable passages and discussions of agriculture that Ulmanis found especially appealing, so much so in fact that even in the 1930s Marden's *Pushing to the Front* remained one of Ulmanis's favorites.[108] In fact, in his biography of Ulmanis, Virza claimed that Ulmanis always turned to the book during tough times.[109] Marden's overarching message, ironically enough, was one that mirrored Ulmanis's *modus operandi* in Dimiters's *Vadonis* play discussed in chapter one. Just as in the play Marija spurned Ulmanis to push him to accept his fate as the *Vadonis*, so Marden offered a similar line. "The greatest thing you can do," he wrote clearly and concisely, "is to be what you ought to be."[110] Along this line, Marden examined in the book great men and women in history like Joan of Arc, Napoleon,

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[106] Ralph Waldo Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite, or Fullness of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2007), Project Gutenberg e-book, 3-4, accessed November 28, 2013, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23559.
[107] Trine, 58.
[108] Unāms, *Laiku atspulgā*, 48-50. In his work at the state publishing company, Grāmatnieks, Unāms often conversed with Ulmanis about literature, and Ulmanis also on occasion would lend Unāms books from his own personal library. It was during these discussions, as well as when Unāms was granted access to what was left of Ulmanis's personal library after it had been raided following the invasion of the Soviet Red Army in 1940, that Unāms learned about the works that had influenced Ulmanis's worldview. For the full discussion of Ulmanis's love of books, see pages 44-52.
[109] Virza, 61.
[110] Orison Swett Marden, *Pushing to the Front* (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2007), Project Gutenberg e-book, 68, accessed November 28, 2013, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/21291.

Frederick the Great, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, Ben Franklin, etc. to spotlight what he saw as the keys to success: "Go-at-it-iveness is the first requisite for success. Stick-to-it-iveness is the second. Under ordinary circumstances, and with practical common sense to guide him, one who has these requisites will not fail."[111] In other words, Marden concluded, "The giants of the race have been men of concentration, who have struck sledgehammer blows in one place until they have accomplished their purpose. The successful men of today are men of one overmastering idea, one unwavering aim, men of single and intense purpose."[112]

Finally, and perhaps most importantly with regard to Ulmanis's later political career, Marden believed that further developing a "charm of personality" through education and selflessness was the true secret to success, as this, Marden posited, "is a divine gift that sways the strongest characters, and sometimes even controls the destines of nations."[113] Ulmanis apparently followed this portentous advice, for he was known on occasion during his authoritarian rule to employ his charming personality to win people over to his side. For instance, the journalist Žanis Unāms once described an unusual incident that took place in 1939, when, as the director of the new state-owned publishing firm *Grāmatnieks*, he was ordered to escort a certain Latgalian man, whom he did not know (and Unāms never gives the man's name in his recollection), with him for a meeting with Ulmanis. Confused throughout about the actual point of the meeting, Unāms watched in silence as Ulmanis used his warm and kind personality to befriend this complete stranger who, Unāms assumed, must have sympathized with Francis Kemps's "*Dzelžu leģions*" (Iron Legion), the organization that he founded in 1939 to drum up support for the autonomy of Latgale, and which the Ulmanis regime viewed as a threat and quickly disbanded, imprisoning

[111] Ibid, 80.
[112] Ibid, 96.
[113] Ibid, 122.

Kemps for a few weeks, in April 1939.[114] Later, when Unāms asked about the purpose of the meeting, Ulmanis would not discuss the reason why this particular Latgalian was chosen. But Ulmanis did inform Unāms that he, i.e., Unāms, had been selected as the one to bring the man because Ulmanis had heard that Unāms was at times overly rough with workers at *Grāmatnieks*, and he thus wanted to show Unāms that nothing is more useful as a leader than the ability to charm someone.[115]

What is more, *Pushing to the Front* must have also validated for Ulmanis the value of his rural upbringing, while also reaffirming his decision to further his agricultural studies at the University of Nebraska. Indeed, throughout the book Marden praised the wonder of modern agricultural science, as well as the intrinsic value of countryside life to the fabric and work ethic of American society as a whole. For example, in his chapter on "the country boy," Marden wrote:

> One of the greatest boons that can ever come to a human being is to be born on a farm and reared in the country. Self-reliance and grit are oftenest country-bred. The country boy is constantly thrown upon his own resources, forced to think for himself, and this calls out his ingenuity and inventiveness. He develops better all-round judgment and a more level head than the city boy. His muscles are harder, his flesh firmer, and his brain-fiber partakes of the same superior quality.
>
> The very granite hills, the mountains, the valleys, the brooks, the miracle of the growing crops are every moment registering their mighty potencies in his constitution, putting iron into his blood and stamina into his character, all of which will help to make him a giant when he comes to compete with the city-bred youth.
>
> The sturdy, vigorous, hardy qualities, the stamina, the brawn, the grit which characterize men who do great things in this world, are, as a rule, country bred. If power is not absorbed from the soil, it certainly comes from very near it. There seems to be a close connection between robust character and the soil, the hills, mountains and valleys, the pure air and sunshine. There is a very appreciable difference between the physical stamina, the brain vigor, the solidity and the reliability of country-bred men and that of those in the city.[116]

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[114] On Francis Kemps, see Jānis Paukšte et al., *Latgales kultūras darbinieki* (Rīga: Jumava, 2008), 246.
[115] Unāms, *Laiku atspulgā*, 34-37.
[116] Marden, 36.

Emphasizing the pedagogical value of practical work, Marden concluded the chapter by praising this aspect of life on the farm in an overly romanticized passage that sounds identical to the later ideology of Latvian *Mazpulki*:

> The drudgery of the farm, the chores which we hated as boys, the rocks which we despised, we have found were the very things which educated us, which developed our power and made us practical. The farm is a great gymnasium, a superb manual training school, nature's kindergarten, constantly calling upon the youth's self-reliance and inventiveness. He must make the implements and toys which he cannot afford to buy or procure. He must run, adjust and repair all sorts of machinery and farm utensils. His ingenuity and inventiveness are constantly exercised. If the wagon or plow breaks down it must be repaired on the spot, often without the proper tools. This training develops instinctive courage, strong success qualities, and makes him a resourceful man.[117]

Given how much Ulmanis was inspired by Marden's works in particular, it is not surprising that they were translated into Latvian. In total, six of his books were translated into Latvian, with the first appearing in 1923. It is also interesting to note that three of the six books appeared during the period of Ulmanis's authoritarian rule, thus suggesting that Ulmanis must have played a significant role in bringing about the translations. As for Trine's works, *In Tune with the Infinite* was never translated into Latvian, but a German edition did appear in Latvian lands in 1905 and again in 1920.

There was yet one more publication, or in this case a periodical, which Ulmanis came to admire while in America, and which he continued to read for the rest of his life: *Wallaces' Farmer*. As a matter of fact, Ulmanis thought so highly of the farm journal that he seemed to think that every American surely read it. For instance, Irena Wiley recalled in her memoir tracing her late husband John Wiley's career as a United States Foreign Service officer, her and John's first meeting with Ulmanis in 1938. Arriving at the presidential castle in Rīga for the formal ceremony that commenced John's tenure as the new United States ambassador to Latvia, a position that he held until the Soviet invasion in June 1940, they were both taken aback by

[117] Ibid, 38.

Ulmanis's first question. Upon exchanging greetings, Ulmanis asked them suddenly, "Have you read the last number of *Wallace's* [sic] *Farmer*?"[118] Not knowing anything about the journal, and wondering why the leader of Latvia was such an avid fan of this American publication, they subscribed via cable and "read it religiously" going forward. Thus it was only through the Latvian president, Wiley remembered amusingly, "that John and I were given a very lively, if fleeting and synthetic, interest in agriculture."[119]

Wallaces' Farmer was the family farm-focused agricultural journal run by the Henry C. Wallace family. Better known by his readers as "Uncle Henry," Henry C. Wallace had graduated from the theological program at Monmouth College in Illinois and served as a Presbyterian minister Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa, before accepting a chaplain position in the Union Army during the last months of the Civil War. But due to poor health, Henry C. Wallace left the ministry, moved back to Iowa, and took up work as an agricultural journalist. After working for a number of publications, in 1894 Henry C. Wallace and his son, Harry, founded their own farm journal, *Wallaces' Farm and Dairy*, which was subsequently renamed in 1896 to *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman*, and in 1898 to simply *Wallaces' Farmer*. With this more streamlined title, the Wallaces also adopted a simple and clear maxim that always appeared on the front page of the publication: "Good farming, clear thinking, right living."[120]

As the slogan of their journal suggested, the Wallaces aimed to produce a publication that would speak to every type of countryside reader—man, woman, or child. Writing articles for and about farmers, and publishing in every addition a large number of farmers' letters to the editor, the journal's calling card was its commitment to agricultural reform, to using agricultural

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[118] Irena Wiley, *Around the Globe in Twenty Years* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1962), 89.
[119] Ibid, 88-89.
[120] John C Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace* (New York: Norton, 2000), 19.

science to improve farm practices and raise a farm's profitability. Additionally, wanting to reach the entire farm family, the elder Wallace also recruited his wife Nancy, known in the journal as "Aunt Nancy," to author a "Hearts and Homes" section devoted to homemaking advice, recipes, and inspirational stories and poems. Furthermore, there was also a regular "Sleepy Time Stories" section that parents were encouraged to read to their children. What truly made the journal a household name, however, especially in the early years of its existence, was "Uncle Henry's Sabbath School Lessons," a feature that offered a folksy, practical interpretation of Christian morality.[121]

By the time of Henry C. Wallace's death in 1916, the success of the journal had exceeded the family's wildest expectations, having become perhaps the most popular farm journal in the Midwest. Consequently, the Wallaces became a family dynasty not only in Iowa and throughout the rest of the Corn Belt, but also within power circles in Washington, D.C. For example, on President Teddy Roosevelt's invitation, Henry C. Wallace served on the aforementioned Country Life Commission devoted to "saving" the family farm. Likewise, it was on Henry C. Wallace's advice that President William McKinley tapped Tama Jim Wilson, a fellow Iowan and good friend of Wallace's, for the secretary of agriculture post in 1897, a cabinet position that he held until 1913, serving under three presidents. What is more, in 1921 Harry Wallace assumed this same office, serving under Presidents Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge.

Following Henry C. Wallace's death gone and Harry Wallace's departure for Washington, Henry A. Wallace, Harry's eldest child, assumed the editorship of *Wallaces' Farmer*. Under his leadership, by the mid-1920s the journal reached its apex, with the number of

[121] Ibid, 19-21; "A Magazine Called *Wallaces' Farmer*," *Iowa Pathways: Iowa History Resources for Students and Teachers*, accessed December 3, 2013, http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath.cfm?ounid=ob_000035&h=no.

subscriptions growing to over a quarter of a million. In many ways, Henry A. Wallace, whom Ulmanis deeply admired, was as paradoxical of a man as Ulmanis. For instance, like Ulmanis, the youngest Wallace had a deep passion for agriculture, but he did not particularly like manual labor, and he never actually engaged in farm work, save for his famed test plots and vegetable garden, beyond his childhood years, when his father still owned a farm.

What animated Wallace was agricultural science, especially botany, and as a result of his own research on corn hybridization in his family garden test plots, in 1926 he started the Hi-Bred Corn Company, later renamed Pioneer Hi-Bred. Over the course of the century, Pioneer became the most prominent seed company in America, and in 1999 it was sold to DuPont for $9.4 billion. Today, DuPont Pioneer remains the largest producer of hybrid seed in the United States. Thus, certainly it was an ironic outcome that Wallace, who was just as passionate a defender of the independent family farm as had been his grandfather, started the company that marked the beginning of the biotech industry that converted American agriculture over to hybrid seeds. While this industry and his own company brought to fruition Wallace's dream of vastly increased yields, it paradoxically also led to the end of the average American farmer's independence and right to grow and replant his or her own seed, as patent rights on hybrid seeds have since made farmers legally dependent on the often expensive products of agribusiness companies, including not only hybrid seed, but eventually also synthetic fertilizer, herbicides and fungicides, and more. It should be noted, though, that Wallace did not envision or desire the complete corporatization of American agriculture. Rather, he wrote often in the 1920s about his

hope that hybrid seed would someday be distributed by some type of nonprofit national institute.[122]

Moreover, while Wallace's grandfather and father had been devoted Presbyterians, in his adult life Wallace drifted away from the church, and became, in his words, "a practical mystic." Like Ulmanis, Wallace had also been greatly influenced by the New Thought Movement, especially the works of Ralph Waldo Trine, and from that origin he took up an interest in mysticism, Eastern occultism, and the search for divine spirits. This part of Wallace's life, however, did not appear in the pages of *Wallaces' Farmer*, and in fact it was not until much later in his life that he publically discussed his long quest for spiritual happiness and divine truth.[123]

Still, evidence of Wallace's heightened passion for morality and human decency can be seen in his political career. Although his grandfather and father had been ardent progressive Republicans, and he began in this camp as well, Wallace switched his allegiances, publically supporting Roosevelt over Hoover in the 1932 election. Following Roosevelt's landslide victory, Wallace accepted Roosevelt's offer to serve as secretary of agriculture. Consequently, due to his burgeoning political career and the journal's declining financial outlook as a result of the Great Depression, it was also at this time that he sold *Wallaces' Farmer*. The title had such prominence, though, that the new owners retained it, and even today *Wallaces' Farmer* remains a hallmark of rural Iowa life. Through his efforts in this post, Wallace became arguably the second most powerful person in the Roosevelt administration during the New Deal era, before officially assuming the number-two-in-command position when he served from 1941-1945 as

[122] Culver and Hyde, 83; Laura Sayre, "'Good Farming, Clear Thinking, Right Living': The Wallaces of Iowa May Have Done More than Any Other Single Family to Shape the Nature of Agriculture in the United States," *NewFarm*, September 13, 2004, accessed December 3, 2013, http://www.newfarm.org/features/0904/wallacecenter/bio.shtml.
[123] On Wallace's religious life, see Culver and Hyde, 29-32, 76-82.

Roosevelt's vice president. What made Wallace a particularly powerful figure was his zealous commitment and proactive approach to improving the state of American agriculture. And since Roosevelt believed that the recovery of the national economy depended on the strengthening of farms and the rural economy, he frequently turned to Wallace, whose ideas and tireless energy were vital to the success of the New Deal's rural programs.

For Ulmanis, *Wallaces' Farmer* was appealing and influential for a number of reasons. First, in the midst of Ulmanis's struggles during his first year in Nebraska, the journal must have been for him a good companion and an enjoyable way of improving his English vocabulary. Indeed, for as much as the journal was a trade publication devoted to a discussion of the benefits of modern farm practices, at its core *Wallaces' Farmer* was envisioned as a source of wholesome entertainment—it was about religious and civic education, of friendships with Uncle Henry and Aunt Nancy, and a way for rural readers, who might be miles away from their closest neighbor, to feel part of a community.

Additionally, for Ulmanis the journal proved to be a key source for ideas about possible new farm journals back home. For instance, early in 1909 Ulmanis wrote a letter to Enzeliņš, suggesting that the *Baltijas lauksaimniecības biedrība* (by that time the Kauguri Farmers' Society had been renamed to *Baltijas lauksaimniecības biedrība*, or The Baltic Agricultural Society, to reflect its growing membership beyond Kauguri County) should consider producing a journal for farm wives and daughters. Proposing that the journal be called "*Samnieču avīze*" (*The Housekeepers' Paper*), Ulmanis envisioned the paper as a Latvian version of Aunt Nancy's "Hearts and Homes" section. He explained that the publication should include columns on handicrafts, sewing, cooking, literature, etc. Interestingly, he even argued that the paper should have a special "Sunday Afternoon" section. Unfortunately, Ulmanis did not explain any further

what he envisioned for this section, but since Uncle Henry's "Sunday Sabbath School Lessons" feature was normally a Sunday tradition for the whole family, it can be presumed that Ulmanis hoped to use this feature to start a similar cultural tradition among Latvian families. However, despite Ulmanis's argument that "such a paper is necessary considering that our women do more work than women in other countries," Enzeliņš did not think such a paper would be profitable. Still, while "*Samnieču avīze*" never came to fruition, Ulmanis's proposal nonetheless speaks to his admiration for *Wallaces' Farmer*, and years later he would use many of the ideas for "*Samnieču avīze*" to improve those sections of *Mazpulks*, the official periodical of *Mazpulki*, or Latvian 4-H, intended for female readers.[124]

Finally, *Wallaces' Farmer* was an important part of Ulmanis's professional life because it introduced him to the youngest Wallace, Henry A. Wallace, whom Ulmanis came to greatly admire. Indeed, as will be discussed in a later section on Ulmanis's reading habits prior to his May 1934 coup, perhaps no single politician in the Western world influenced the agricultural policies that Ulmanis enacted as *Vadonis* of Latvia more than did Wallace, whose New Deal rural programs became a model that Ulmanis studied carefully and sought to emulate.

-A Cheesemaking Instructor-

Because Ulmanis had proven himself to be an excellent student and an expert in cheesemaking, upon his graduation at the winter commencement of 1908-1909, Professors Haecker and Smith convinced the dean to hire Ulmanis, who desperately needed a source of income. Records from the Board of Regents indicate that Ulmanis was hired as a temporary instructor of cheesemaking for a salary of seventy-five dollars per month.[125] As an instructor,

[124] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, unknown date, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 236/241, September 23, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45006.
[125] AD INTERIM APPOINTMENTS: Regents Meeting February 15, 1909. Folder 11, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

Ulmanis learned very quickly the challenges of classroom management, in particular keeping the attention of the students. For instance, Ulmanis once noted in a department publication that the "students take much more interest in the quality of the cheese when I distribute a few samples to illustrate my point regarding the manufacture and curing of the article. While this makes it necessary to sacrifice quite a quantity of cheese, it has the desired effect of proving the old axiom, which is, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating.'"[126] To be sure, it is impressive and a sign of Ulmanis's stubborn determination that he managed to succeed as an instructor, despite the fact that he had only had roughly eighteen months to improve his English and adapt to a new culture. Still, by the start of his teaching duties in February 1909, his English was far from perfect, but in some ways this was for the students one of Ulmanis's most endearing traits. For example, John E. Erickson later recalled of his time in Ulmanis's class that:

> Mr. Ulmanis was a good instructor and the boys liked him in the class room [sic]. He was keen and full of dry humor, and though his English was not too good, yet he was able to hold his own in any group he found himself. Cheese making was Mr. Ulmanis' favorite work; as we worked with him in those classes we learned to appreciate his personality more than just from his lectures.[127]



Figure 4: Kārlis Ulmanis as an instructor at the University of Nebraska[128]

[126] Quoted in Elsie Thomas, "The Kārlis Ulmanis Collection at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln," talk given given at AABS Conference, Minneapolis, MN, 1989, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, Box 16, Folder 17, 3-4.
[127] John Erickson, personal recollections, Folder 14, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.
[128] This image is courtesy of Archives & Special Collections, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Unfortunately for Ulmanis, just as he was becoming accustomed to teaching in an American academic setting, not to mention that he had published an article on cottage cheese in *The Nebraska Farmer*, his first publication in English, the Nebraska state legislature passed a new budget in the spring of 1909 that drastically cut funding for the university. As a result, Ulmanis found out that he would no longer have a job once his current duties came to an end. This news came at a particularly bad time, too, because Ulmanis had a bank loan that was set to mature at the end of May. He had taken out the loan to help out his old German friend and University of Leipzig classmate – the one who had housed him when he fled to Germany in 1906 – who had recently fallen on hard times after losing his job as an engineer at a coal mine. Unsure how he would ever come up with the funds to meet the deadline, Ulmanis turned in desperation, as he did so often during his years abroad, to Enzeliņš, who wired Ulmanis the money to cover the loan.[129]

Broke and unemployed, Ulmanis took the first job he could find. But it was only a temporary job laying railroad tracks at a new dairy creamery in Lincoln, so by June 1909 he was again looking for work.[130] In an unusually personal letter to Enzeliņš, one which began with Ulmanis's request that Enzeliņš not discuss the contents of the letter with anyone else, Ulmanis explained what had happened at the university. Somewhat surprisingly, given Ulmanis's previous tendency to become overly dejected about such setbacks, in the letter he sounded rather optimistic. Perhaps it was because he had taken Trine and Marden's message of positivism to heart. The likelier reason for Ulmanis's positive outlook, though, is that Professor Haecker,

[129] For the story about the schoolmate in Leipzig, see Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 4, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 236/241, op. cit.; On Enzeliņš sending him money, see Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, May 17/21, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 236/241, op. cit.
[130] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, June 7, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 242/245, September 24, 1997, accessed August 21, 2013, https://vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45073.

feeling awful about what had happened, was helping Ulmanis find employment. In fact, in the letter Ulmanis said that Haecker was corresponding with a university in California about a possible opening. Ulmanis never revealed his thoughts about such a potential uprooting; instead he just said that he hoped to find something soon. Nothing came of the California job, however, and he did not find any intellectual work in Lincoln either, at least not that summer. Instead, Ulmanis ultimately worked as a hired hand on the Warner farm. But since Warner did not need his help until the beginning of the wheat harvest, Ulmanis had the entire month of June to work on articles for Latvian publications.[131]

Despite having told Enzeliņš in 1907 that he was moving to America "to be free of affairs at home," in fact nearly the entirety of Enzeliņš and Ulmanis's correspondence while Ulmanis was in America centered on affairs in the Baltic Provinces.[132] More specifically, they discussed the work of the Kauguri Farmers' Society/Baltic Agricultural Society, the work of competing agricultural societies and publishers, and the plight of Latvian farmers. Likewise, Enzeliņš regularly sent Ulmanis copies of the society's journal, along with newspaper clippings on new books in the field of agricultural science, on reviews of Ulmanis's books, and on key political developments. It also seems likely that Ulmanis subscribed to *Rigasche Rundschau*, the predominant (German-language) newspaper in the Baltic region, from 1909 on, as once he finished his studies, and thus perhaps could afford a subscription to the paper, he began to mention it in his letters.

All told, then, Ulmanis remained remarkably abreast of agricultural developments, or the lack thereof, back home, and such news about the snail-paced rate of change stood in stark contrast to what Ulmanis was observing in America. Consequently, Ulmanis periodically

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 1, 1907.

expressed his great frustration with conditions in the Baltic Provinces. For example, having just participated in the 1908 Nebraska State Fair that drew over 110,000 visitors, Ulmanis was aghast when he learned the following month in a letter from Enzeliņš that only a little more than fifty people had attended the Kauguri Farmers' Society's ten-year anniversary exhibition. "Unbelievable apathy!" Ulmanis wrote to Enzeliņš, in response to news of the surprisingly poor turnout.[133] Appalled and upset that Latvian farmers were not taking advantage of opportunities to learn new farming methods and ways to turn a bigger profit, and suspecting that such a failure was due mostly to an unfamiliarity with, or even a distrust of, agricultural science, in 1909 Ulmanis began writing agricultural articles for Latvian publications with a renewed conviction and sense of urgency. That year he published at least twenty-two articles in agricultural journals. Additionally, he also wrote a considerable number of pieces for *Zeme*, a new bimonthly journal published by the Baltic Agricultural Society that Enzeliņš and Ulmanis had been discussing since 1908. As evidence of his productiveness, during the journal's first year in 1910, Ulmanis had no less than thirty-four articles attributed to his name.[134]

Ulmanis also went about his lectures in the same vigorous way, producing new talks at a rapid rate. Enzeliņš and Ulmanis hoped that if these lectures, intended for use at Latvian agricultural society meetings, could raise Ulmanis's public profile as an in-demand, notable agronomist, perhaps he might be able to obtain an amnesty from the provincial authorities, enabling him to safely return home. Such a plan was based on two hopes. First, recognizing that even the most advanced provinces in the Russian Empire were behind many Western states in terms of farming practices and the development of agricultural science, both men hoped that if it became blatantly obvious to the authorities that Ulmanis was a preeminent expert who could help

[133] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 10, 1908.
[134] Dunsdorfs, 58.

modernize the industry and thus prove useful to the state, then perhaps they would wipe away his outstanding criminal charge. Secondly, and related to this first line of thought, both men thought that if enough people clamored for Ulmanis's services, then public pressure might add an extra incentive for the authorities to reconsider his case. Consequently, when Ulmanis found out in March 1909 that members of an agricultural society in Straupe County had expressed to Enzeliņš their wish to hire Ulmanis to teach courses, Ulmanis responded in his reply by reminding Enzeliņš that he should have those people "turn to the Ministry of the Interior of somewhere else," so as to make their wish known to the government.[135]

Having caused considerable trouble for himself by venturing into overt political discussions in his agricultural writings in 1905, and desperately wanting a chance to safely return home, for the first two years of his time in America, Ulmanis shied away from making comments that could be viewed as radical or revolutionary. But in June 1909, when Ulmanis had more time to think and write after he lost his position at the university, he penned a lecture for agricultural societies titled "*Grūtie laiki*" ("The Difficult Times"). At its core, the lecture, which was read out loud at Latvian agricultural society meetings and was eventually published in *Zeme* in 1912, was a clarion call for unity and change among Latvian farmers. In essence, it was, in the style of Marden or Trine, a manifesto of positivism and self-initiative.

Ulmanis began the lecture by discussing legacy of serfdom, the poor state of agriculture, the often miserable living conditions in the countryside, the general poverty and lack of education among the rural populace, and the societal ills of passivity, drunkenness, etc. Having painted a bleak picture of the current state of affairs, Ulmanis then launched into a treatise on the benefits of agricultural science and the need to think about farming as a business.

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[135] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 29, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 236/241, op. cit.

In other words, he attempted to convince Latvian farmers that they could – and must – help themselves first and foremost by realizing that farming was no longer the occupation of the stereotypical uneducated, "backwards" country bumpkin, or "*tālumnieks*" (meaning roughly one who either literally lives in an isolated, far-off place, or who looks or acts like that is the case), as such people were often referred to.[136] Within that overarching argument, Ulmanis laid out an eight-point program for rural reform, whose primary aim was to turn peasants into farmers[137]: 1) gain a right to participate in the local government; 2) promote education; 3) start agricultural schools and test farms; 4) encourage cooperative work; 5) make better use of farm labor; 6) acquire and use farm machinery as much as possible; 7) focus on developing the profitable agricultural sectors; 8) always be sure to consider carefully the financial ramifications of every decision when managing the fieldwork, livestock sheds, and farmyard.[138]

For as much as Ulmanis placed the onus of action in this lecture on his fellow Latvians, he also understood that the political and sociological conditions in the Baltic Provinces were only fortifying that apathy which he had criticized in an earlier letter to Enzeliņš. Indeed, as we have seen, Ulmanis had long understood that political and agricultural conditions were linked, and living in America, where he observed how political freedom, equality under the law, and social mobility fostered innovation, progress, and an open-mindedness to change rooted in the dynamics of the open market, only bolstered this central pillar of his intellectual and professional convictions. To be sure, Ulmanis once commented to Enzeliņš that the "wider, bigger, and freer

[136] *Tālumnieks* – from the adjective "tāls," meaning distant, far-off, or remote, was generally used, at least by the Ulmanis regime, not as a pejorative term, but simply as a name for that group of people whom the regime wanted to bring within the realms of the state and modern agricultural industry.
[137] Here I have amended, of course, the title of Eugene Weber's definitive work. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976).
[138] Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas," 927.

world" in America made farming a true private business "with boundless possibilities."[139] Hence, feeling that he had a uniquely keen sense of how Latvians were being held back by the powers that be, he concluded his lecture with the following salvo:

> Yes, how lovely that sounds: test farms, schools, instructors! But our hands are tied, our small power is weak. The reason is simple. We will only be able to begin to think about these things when, and only when, we will take giant steps forward, when we will have gained our power and there is proper participation for our numbers in the local government. That cannot be forgotten! And by struggling for our rights on this correct and legitimate path, we will achieve them…
>
> It's difficult, of course, quite difficult, but all the work would be made easier if we would cheer up, if we would rub the sleep from our eyes and throw off this heavy, old curse of serfdom [*dzimtbūšanas lāstu*] – this fatal abandonment of all assiduity to fate, this lack of courageousness, this absence of initiative and bravery, this servile: I don't know, I can't, I'm not able, I'm not capable… We will draw up courage, rise up and will begin to work, and may one recognition maintain our strength, may it give us new energy when we begin to tire, may it sustain us as we walk down unbending and unchangeable new roads, and may this recognition be: that the coming times belong to us.[140]

Much attention has been begin given to these passages within the historiography on the rise of the Latvian state and on Ulmanis's political career, and rightfully so since Ulmanis's resounding promise that the future belongs to the Latvian people indeed came true within the next ten years.[141] Likewise, the lecture, which was to be read at various Latvian agricultural society gatherings, is also significant because it was perhaps his most complete pre-1918 elucidation of the positivistic, "can-do mindset" that he later espoused and sought to develop in Latvian culture during his authoritarian rule. Yet, for as much as Ulmanis's "*Grūtie laiki*" has been analyzed, very little has been said about how the events in his personal life informed the

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[139] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 30, 1907; Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 29, 1910, Nr. 246/247, op. cit.
[140] Quoted in Unāms, "Kārlis Ulmanis, biografiska studija," 27-28.
[141] For example, see Unāms, "Kārlis Ulmanis, biografiska studija," 26-28; Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 45-46; Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas," 926-927; Virza, 57.

timing and contents of the work.[142] Of course, it was not merely a coincidence that Ulmanis wrote a lecture titled "The Difficult Times" just after he lost his job at the university and was struggling to find work. Consequently, this key work, which appeared in print in 1912, should also be viewed as a personal statement, as evidence of a fundamental turning point in Ulmanis's life, when he was seemingly reminding himself that this time he was not going to let difficult times in his professional life drag down his spirits, as had always been the case in the past.

After spending all of June 1909 working on articles and lectures, for the remainder of the summer he worked as a hired man on the Warner farm. That year he worked alongside the Klieģis brothers and Val (Valentine) Kuska, a twenty-two-year-old University of Nebraska agriculture student and son of first-generation Czech immigrants who later went on to become a powerful supporter of 4-H and one of the Midwest's most prominent agricultural development agents through his job with the Burlington Railroad. Ulmanis and the other hired men spent the summer harvesting and threshing wheat and working in the hay fields. Decades later, Kuska recalled that the summer of 1909 was unusually hot and humid, and the work and unpleasant weather was difficult for Ulmanis to physically withstand. But as Kuska put it, "Karl held up his part of the work as a common laborer on all of these jobs..." Kuska also fondly remembered the stories told at night in the sleeping quarters, when Ulmanis and the Klieģis brothers shared tales with him about "life under the Czarist rule in Russia." In particular, Kuska recollected that Ulmanis "was bitterly opposed to the regime and its policies, and felt that the people had little or no chance to improve their economic condition."[143] In other words, as Kuska's memories

[142] Only Bērziņš, in his biography of Ulmanis, suggests that this article was partly informed by "Ulmanis's personal struggles," but he does not offer any details or explanation as to what those struggles might have been. See Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 45.
[143] Quoted in "Honor Planned For Karlis Ulmanis, NU Graduate Later President of Latvia." *Lincoln Star*, May 20, 1954.

suggest, for much of the rest of that summer, Ulmanis continued to think about and discuss the ideas he expounded in "*Grūtie laiki*."

When the summer fieldwork on the Warner farm came to an end, Ulmanis still had not found permanent employment. As a result, sometime in September or early October, Ulmanis moved to Omaha, presumably to work at the Alamito Dairy creamery where he had worked in 1907, though he does not specify in his letter to Enzeliņš. However, if he indeed worked there, it was only for a very short time, because just after he had gotten settled, Professor Haecker offered him his old position, as the department had managed to come up with some extra money to hire him again. Ulmanis happily accepted the offer and moved back to Lincoln.[144] Conversely, although he was relieved to be back at the university, the frustrating job search and time spent talking and thinking that summer about his homeland made him yearn for a chance to return to Vidzeme. Thus, in the concluding lines of his letter informing Enzeliņš that he was now back at the university, Ulmanis wrote, "I truly am beginning to long for an amnesty because although things are getting better for me now, still my conviction is that my true place is in Vidzeme, not America. But the signs of the time suggest that I should sooner expect a blackout of the sun."[145]

-Democratic Backsliding of the Tsarist Regime-

While Ulmanis promised himself that moving to America would enable him to leave the Old World behind, of course that was anything but the case. For example, in this same letter, Ulmanis expressed his exasperation at the democratic backsliding of the Russian government. In particular, Ulmanis mentioned to Enzeliņš that he had read in *Rigasche Rundschau* about the government's decision to rescind the legislation for the religious freedom of conscience that Tsar Nicholas II had announced in the October Manifesto of 1905. By way of ending his letter,

[144] See Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 17, 1909, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 242/245, op. cit.
[145] Ibid.

Ulmanis summarized the Russian imperial government's return to conservative repression with this one-word sentence: "Deplorable."[146]

As was discussed in chapter one, from the 1860s on the Russian government pursued policies that were frequently contradictory, and thus attempts to modernize the empire moved forward, at best, at a snail's pace, though even then with zigzagging to the left and right. For example, the central government vacillated in its policies toward the masses, especially with regard to the rural population. Believing that the majority of citizens would maintain their allegiances with the tsar and empire, the central government on the one hand began slowly to implement democratic reform, as embodied most notably in the *zemstvo* system of local self-representation, in the hopes that it would quell unrest and bolster support for the tsar. On the other hand, though, the government and nobility did not entirely trust the masses, and consequently they continually built into the system hedges against the, in their eyes, unpredictable nature of the lower classes. Hence, with the case of the *zemstva*, the voting procedures were shaped in such a way as to ensure the dominance of the local nobility, despite the fact that they comprised only a small fraction of the overall population.

Such contradictory policies at the imperial level, along with centuries-old hostilities between the landed nobility and landless peasants at the local level, came to a head during the chaotic and bloody revolutionary activity in 1905. Recognizing that the empire might crumble if the pressure for change from below was not diffused, Count Sergei Witte convinced Nicholas II that political reforms were necessary. Even during Witte's appointed work negotiating the Treaty of Portsmouth that ended the Russo-Japanese War, he wrote often to Nicholas II about the dire need for change. Having subsequently been appointed, following his successful negotiations on the treaty, as chairman of the Committee of Ministers, an advisory committee for the tsar that

[146] Ibid.

was formed in the early nineteenth century as part of Alexander I's reforms, Witte had Nicholas II's ear, and by autumn 1905 he persuaded him to proceed with those basic democratic reforms first announced in the October Manifesto. Among the most important reforms that were to be enshrined in a new constitution (known as the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire) were new civil liberties that promised greater equality under the law, religious freedom of conscience, and greater freedoms of speech and assembly. Additionally, the government promised universal male suffrage and self-representation through the Duma, the new parliamentary body that was to ostensibly represent the will of the people and work as a check on the tsar's power.

Desperate to put an end to the unrest, Nicholas II agreed to these reforms. However, when months later the details of the reforms needed to be ironed out, Nicholas II and others on the right began retreating. In some small part this was perhaps because Nicholas II and his courtiers were beginning to realize the details of what they had promised in generic terms during a time of weakness. But mostly they began to retreat because by the end of 1905 repressive and punitive measures had stamped out most of the revolutionary upheaval and strengthened the central government's position. Consequently, as Witte attempted to realize the reforms, a chasm opened within the central government. For one, Witte believed firmly that the old system of government was too disjointed. Thus, he sought to transform the Committee of Ministers, which was subsequently renamed to the Council of Ministers, into the upper legislative body of a bicameral legislature and main government pivot point, around which all executive and legislative work would advance. However, Nicholas II soon became suspicious of what to him appeared to be a power grab, and though he permitted the formation of the Council, viewing it as a useful institutional hedge against the Duma, he nonetheless succeeded in ensuring that he would retain control. For example, Nicholas II retained the right to appoint and dismiss the

chairman of the Council of Ministers, and he also wielded the authority to appoint half of the Council's ministers, while the other half were to be voted into office by members of the nobility, Orthodox Church, universities, and business community through elections organized by their special-interest organizations. Likewise, prior to the installment of the new constitution and the inauguration of the Duma, in his February 20, 1906 manifesto in which he announced the new Council of Ministers, Nicholas II also further limited the purview of the Duma by decreeing that it would not be permitted a say in the sizable budget for the court, internal security, or the military, entries on the ledger that accounted for around forty percent of the entire budget.[147]

Ultimately, Witte, the architect of the October Manifesto, resigned from his post as chairman of the Council of Ministers in early 1906. His decision was prompted by two factors. First, although he had managed to convince Nicholas II to issue the October Manifesto, as the months went by he realized that Nicholas II had only agreed to the reforms out of desperation, and because they were so vaguely defined. Yet, despite Nicholas II's return to conservative tsarism, Witte remained convinced that the government had to fulfill at least the most basic level of public demands if the empire were to move forward. Secondly, in an attempt to gain Nicholas II's approval, Witte had to tack further to the right than he would have liked, and as a result he lost the support of moderates and the left, who saw his policies as falling short of the changes that had been promised. Thus, left without any supporters, Witte left the post in spring 1906.

With Witte's exit from the political stage, Nicholas II appointed Ivan Goremykin as the next chairman, a position that is often colloquially referred to by historians as the office of prime minister. Goremykin was certainly much more conservative than his predecessor. Having spent his entire career within the apparatus of the central government, Goremykin was an unabashed supporter of absolutism, and he made this position abundantly clear in his address to the First

[147] Waldron, 34-36.

Duma, when he warned the presiding ministers that the tsar and Council would not tolerate the Duma overstepping its authority. Naturally, Goremykin's hostile stance towards the Duma made for icy relations between the Duma and the Council. However, despite Goremykin's warning, the Duma took up discussions during the very first session on issues that had already been rejected by the government, including on the expropriation of private land, a general amnesty, and the elimination of the death penalty. At an impasse, that July Nicholas II dismissed the Duma. Goremykin, frustrated with the political situation, also resigned during the stalemate, though Nicholas II would later reappoint him to the post in 1914.[148]

Wanting someone dynamic and cunning who could amend the untenable situation, Nicholas II decided to turn to Pyotr Stolypin, the minister of interior under Goremykin. A descendent of a prominent Russian aristocratic family whose estate was located in the heart of present-day Lithuania, Stolypin became famous for two things: his desire for empire-wide agrarian reforms based on the system of land ownership and single-family farmsteads that he observed in the Baltic Provinces, and his brutal actions to suppress revolt. Indeed, some historians have speculated that it was Stolypin's success as the governor of Saratov in stemming revolutionary disturbances in 1905 that launched his political career from a relatively unknown governor to the second most powerful man in Russia.[149]Whether or not that was indeed the case, certainly Stolypin took, among his colleagues, a unique approach to preventing and quelling unrest. Using what today would be considered standard police practices, Stolypin sought to avert trouble in the first place by firstly identifying and harshly prosecuting ringleaders, and secondly

[148] Ibid, 42-45.
[149] For a good discussion of this historiographical debate, see Abraham Ascher, *P.A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 94-96.

by placing policemen and soldiers at strategic locations, where they could serve as agents of preemptive crowd control rather than as last-resort executers of violent repression.[150]

As prime minister, Stolypin extended these practices to the imperial level, for although he understood the reasons for the discontent and was himself committed to reform, he was convinced that Russia could never move forward while plagued with recurrent strikes and general anarchy. Hence, to put an end to the revolutionary activity that was again on the upswing during the first half of 1906 – and that August Stolypin himself was the target of a bombing at a public gathering that killed his daughter – Stolypin established a new temporary military field court system in 1906 that expedited the prosecution of "known" revolutionaries and agitators. Between August 1906 and April 1907, when the law authorizing these courts lapsed, so many men were sent to the gallows that the hangman's noose took on the colloquial moniker "Stolypin's necktie."[151]

But as Abraham Ascher argues in his excellent biography, Stolypin was more than just a firm repressor. He was, as Ascher put it, "an authoritarian reformer" with a clear agenda.[152] Thus, beyond simply ensuring law and order, Stolypin wanted to introduce land reforms modeled on the land tenure system in the Baltic Provinces, and he believed that democratic reform should be facilitated through the extension and further empowerment of the *zemstvo* system. In other words, while Stolypin was an unwavering supporter of the established system, he also believed that the only way to ensure its continued existence was to implement reforms aimed at producing an engaged citizenry that could advocate for change through a political process.

However, like his predecessors, Stolypin was stymied by the Duma, as the Second Duma turned out to be even more radical that the first, despite the imperial authorities' efforts to

[150] Ibid, 54-55.
[151] Waldron, 1; Ascher, 141-149.
[152] Ascher, 11.

manipulate the outcome by repressing "untrustworthy" parties and curbing the political activities of "revolutionary" peasants, workers, and intellectuals during the electoral campaign in late 1906 and early 1907. Consequently, despite the fact that, in his first speech to the Second Duma on March 6, 1907, Stolypin laid out a program that essentially called for a monumental overall of Russian society – from finally issuing legislation to enact the promised freedoms in the October Manifesto, to agrarian reform, an overhaul of the court and local police systems, and to cracking down on the rampant misconduct of civil servants – ultimately the liberal ranks of the Duma refused to cooperate with Stolypin, whom they viewed as the tsar's tyrannical agent of continued conservatism and absolutism.

The showdown between the tsar and Council of Ministers in one camp and the Duma in the other thus continued. It eventually came to a head in May 1907, when the Duma refused to take up a discussion of the institutionalization of Stolypin's agrarian reform, which had originally been announced by imperial decree (*ukase*) on November 9, 1906. On May 10, Stolypin delivered a formal address to the Duma. He argued that his reform – whose primary main was to slowly move away from the *mir*, or commune model of farming and rural life, and towards a Western-style one built on single-family farms and private holdings, much like what he observed as a youth in the Baltic Provinces – was the only sensible way to achieve what he thought were the two primary and interrelated tasks of the government: securing the peace and improving the peasants' lot. Despite Stolypin's appeal to at least put the legislation to a vote, the left-of-center members, who constituted the majority, refused, citing both their unmet demands for nationalization and redistribution of private lands, as well as their concern that a no vote would prompt Stolypin to dismiss the Duma. In the end, though, that is exactly what happened. Ostensibly, Stolypin and Nicholas II dismissed the Second Duma due to allegations that fifty-

five Social Democrats in the Duma were plotting to overthrow the monarchy, but in reality the allegations were simply used as a pretense; in truth, the Second Duma was sent packing in June 1907 because it was simply too radical to find common ground with Stolypin and the imperial government.[153]

Moreover, there was a second part to Stolypin's actions that are often referred to in the historiography as "Stolypin's Coup." This involved a highly controversial change to the election law. Having believed the peasants to be inherently conservative and loyal, and that those who participated in the 1905 Revolution were either anomalies or had been led astray by conniving revolutionaries, the imperial government originally sought to ensure that the Duma would be conservative by designing an indirect election system that gave the peasants a significant voice. But to the imperial authorities' dismay, in the first two Dumas the representatives of the peasantry and the workers, two of the four *curiae* (along with the nobility and propertied city men[154]) represented in the parliament, consistently voted in the subsequent provincial electoral assemblies for left-leaning candidates and party lists. Consequently, to end the years-long impasse and bring about their desired outcome of a Duma controlled by a moderate-to-conservative majority, Nicholas II made by decree a change to the election so as to guarantee that "the more cultivated strata of the population," as Stolypin put it, controlled the Duma.[155] Acting in violation of the new constitution, which stated that electoral laws could not be altered without the Duma's approval, Nicholas II's decree reduced the size of the Duma by 100 to 442 members, drastically cutting the representation for the borderland regions, i.e., for non-Russians. His decree also reworked the proportions of each *curiae*, cutting the number of representatives of the peasantry in half and thus ensuring that the nobility and property owners would comprise the

[153] Ibid, 191-202.
[154] While not a separate *curia*, 26 large cities were also afforded direct representation.
[155] Ibid, 203.

absolute majority. In spite of the clear illegality of the move – and hence the reason why many historians have called it a coup – the change to the election law stood, for there was nothing the Duma could do, since it had already been dismissed prior to Nicholas II's decree. To be sure, despite the hopes for democratic reform that the October Manifesto had prompted, by June 1907 it was clear that absolutism was still the order of the day.[156]

However, while Nicholas II had successfully put an end to what many historians have concluded was the "First Revolution," over the coming years he overplayed his hand, walking back his promises of reform in steps that eventually led to the fall of the imperial government in 1917. In taking this route, it could be argued, as does Ascher, that Nicholas II failed to take advantage of Stolypin's brilliance as a pragmatic politician but firm supporter of monarchism. Indeed, Ascher categorizes Nicholas's relations with Stolypin as comprising a Greek tragedy, for in the end ironically "Stolpyin could not retain the support of those he was trying to save."[157] But while their relationship certainly was strained by disagreements over Stolypin's proposed reforms, nonetheless he continued to serve as prime minister until his assassination on September 5, 1911.

Returning, then, to Ulmanis's mention in his letter of the annulment of legal protections for religious freedom of conscience, this about-face on religious reform is but one example of the tsar and other conservatives' democratic backsliding, and of Stolypin's strategic attempt to build political capital for his preferred initiatives – such as his agrarian reform that was finally approved by the Third Duma in spring 1910 – by bending to conservatives' stances on other

[156] Ibid, 202-207; Waldron, 147-155; Leopold H. Haimson, "Introduction: The Russian Landed Nobility and the System of the Third of June," in *The Politics of Rural Russia, 1905-1914*, ed. Leopold H. Haimson (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), 9-21.
[157] Ascher, 12. "

issues.[158] In this case, under extreme pressure from the tsar, the Russian Orthodox Church, and conservative members of the two legislative houses to maintain the ties between the state and the Orthodox Church, Stolypin tacitly announced in May 1909 that while he still believed in the need to provide civil protections for non-Orthodox religions, he would going forward no longer push for the Duma to discuss the legislation on religious reform, which due to the slow wheels of government, was only coming up for discussion in 1909. What resulted, naturally, was the languishing of the bills. Then, October 1909, the conservative-leaning Third Duma officially pulled the legislation on mixed marriages and religious freedom, and it was this move, of course, that had prompted Ulmanis's remarks. A few months later, the Duma then overturned the religious freedoms afforded in the tsar's manifesto in 1905, passing legislation that imposed new, even harsher restrictions on the rights of religious minorities and non-Orthodox churches.[159]

Ulmanis thus viewed the imperial government's abandonment of religious freedoms with utter disdain, for it was emblematic of the wider return in the Russian Empire to the conservatism and repression that he and so many others had sought to weaken during the 1905 Revolution. To be sure, reading from afar, on the Great Plains of America, about the legislative entrenchment of absolutism in his native land, it was becoming increasingly clear to Ulmanis that there was little chance that he would be going home anytime soon. Thus, it was with

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[158] Much of the historiography on the Stolypin agrarian reform is comprised of local studies of implementation. For a good, concise general history of the Stolypin's agrarian reform in the English language, see Ascher, 153-164; David Kerans, *Mind and Labor on the Farm in Black-Earth Russia, 1861-1914* (Budapest, Hungary; New York: Central European University Press, 2001), part four; Richard Hennessy, *The Agrarian Question in Russia 1905-1907: the Inception of the Stolypin Reform* (Giessen: W. Schmitz, 1977); David Macey, "Reflections on Peasant Adaptations in Rural Russia at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: the Stolypin Agrarian Reforms," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, No. 3-4 (2004): 400-426. For a fascinating look at the various ways that the peasants themselves interpreted Stolypin's program, see Judith Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia, 1906-1917: Peasant Responses to Stolypin's Project of Rural Transformation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Even though the Stolypin agrarian reform did not have much of an effect on the Baltic Provinces, since, after all, it was modeled on the land tenure system there, it is interesting and somewhat surprising that Ulmanis never once mentioned Stolypin's agrarian program in his letters to Enzeliņš.

[159] Ibid, 295-302.

renewed resolve to build a stable career in America that Ulmanis began his second stint as an instructor at the University of Nebraska.

-The Dairy Man-

As before, in his second stint at the University of Nebraska, Ulmanis again worked as an instructor and assistant of dairy husbandry in the university's agriculture experiment station. Only this time his salary was raised to 100 dollars per month.[160] However, while Ulmanis was happy to be back at the university, he remained concerned about his future, for the Board of Regents approved his position for only the 1909-1910 academic year.[161]

In addition to working in the experiment station with the students and lecturing on dairying and producing butter and cheese, in January 1910 Ulmanis once again participated in the annual meeting of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association. But rather than give a talk, as he had done the previous year, during the 1910 gathering, which took place in January at the University of Nebraska, Ulmanis supervised the dairy exhibit. It was comprised of entries in four competitions: creamery butter, dairy butter, cheese, and best package display. As the superintendent of the exhibit, Ulmanis was responsible for displaying the entries, some of which weighed in at more than twenty pounds, and ensuring that they did not spoil during the convention. Additionally, Ulmanis oversaw the judging session, wherein entries were evaluated on flavor, texture, color, and style of package.[162]

More interesting still are the people whom Ulmanis surely met at the two meetings he attended. Naturally, as a speaker at the 1909 meeting and the superintendent of the dairy exhibit in 1910, Ulmanis would have had the opportunity to meet and converse with some of the top

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[160] Murphy, et al., 49. Ulmanis also confirmed this salary in his November 17, 1909 letter to Enzeliņš.
[161] University of Nebraska Board of Regents Meeting, November 11, 1909, Folder 11, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.
[162] *Annual Report of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association for the Year 1909*, ed. S.C. Bassett (York, NE: York Blank Book Co., Printers, 1910), 19, 101-102.

dairymen in Nebraska. What is more, his advisor, Professor Haecker, remained the president of the association in 1910. Surely Haecker must have also introduced Ulmanis to noteworthy men in attendance. For example, the Fairmont Creamery Company, one of the most successful dairy companies in the entire country at that time, was headquartered in Omaha (the company headquarters was moved there from Fairmont, Nebraska in 1907), and the company's head expert, Edgar F. Howe, was listed on the convention program both years.

By the time Ulmanis possibly met him, Howe was already very well known in the dairy industry. First arriving at the Fairmont Creamery in 1886, Howe oversaw the establishment of local skimming stations where farmers could take their fresh milk, separate and deposit the cream, and then haul home the skim milk to either consume or mix into animal feed. A little more than a decade later, when small separators came onto the market, Howe reorganized his acquisition system, handing out new separators to farmers who signed a contract to deliver cream to Fairmont Creamery. The local farmers liked this low-input-cost arrangement, and as a result Fairmont Creamery began to expand, first to Crete, and by 1895 to six other locations in southeast Nebraska.

Not only did Howe know how to build good relations with local dairy farmers in an effort to grow the company, but he was also a superb butter man. This was confirmed in 1889, when his Fairmont Creamery butter, which he had made personally, won first prize at that year's American Dairy Show in Chicago. Later that same year, his butter also took the top prize at the National Buttermakers' Convention, held, that year, in Dubuque, Iowa. With Howe's skills as a businessman and buttermaker, the company soon expanded beyond the borders of Nebraska, and by the 1930s, when Howe had advanced to the president of the company, Fairmont Creamery had almost 3,000 cream stations located throughout the entire United States. Dealing with the

vast geographic reach of their products, Fairmont Creamery became an industry leader in production, shipping, and preservation methods. For instance, they were reportedly the first dairy company in America to use parchment paper packaging, one of the first to build a full laboratory devoted to testing and ensuring uniformity in the cream's acidity (which affected pasteurization) and butterfat content (and to do that they were the first in the country to adopt the Babcock test that eventually became the industry norm), and the first company to use a refrigerated dairy truck, built to deliver ice cream to remote retail stores.[163]

In other words, Ulmanis certainly must have benefited greatly from what he learned and who he met at the meetings of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association. At the 1910 convention, he also would have had the chance to chat with prominent dairymen in a more informal setting at the association's twenty-fifth anniversary banquet held at the Lincoln Hotel. Indeed, it quite possibly could have been at this event that Ulmanis met James Russell (J. R.) Roberts, the owner of a Lincoln-based dairy. Roberts proved to be an important professional contact, for he gave Ulmanis his next job.

It is unclear why exactly Ulmanis became unsatisfied with academic work. Perhaps he had tired of the uncertainty of his position, which he had lost already once, and which had only been funded through the 1909-1910 academic year. Certainly, Enzeliņš for years had been advising him to go give up academia for the lucrative promises of the private sector. In fact, just as Enzeliņš apparently believed the stereotypes about the uncivilized nature of American frontier culture, as we saw in his criticism of Ulmanis's first letter from America, so he also bought into the images of America as the "land of fortune" and the "land of opportunity."[164] Hence, not only

[163] Janet Jeffries Spencer, "'To Make a Good Product Better': The Fairmont Creamery Company, 1884-1984, *Nebraska History* 65 (1984): 387-391; "Fairmont Foods," Nebraska State Historical Society, accessed January 9, 2014, http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/timeline/fairmont-foods.htm.
[164] On this aspect of the European image of America, see Ray Allen Billington, 219-240.

did Enzeliņš probably hope that Ulmanis would find a higher-paying job so that he would stop asking for money, which Ulmanis did periodically throughout his years in America, but even more importantly he was convinced that if Ulmanis started his own business, he would certainly make "a lot of money." In fact, Enzeliņš had even expressed his hope that one day Ulmanis would be able to fund back home an agricultural university for Latvians.[165]

Whatever the precise reason for Ulmanis's change in career plans, by March 1910 he had already decided to pursue other options once the academic year was through. Ulmanis wrote in his only letter that month to Enzeliņš about his new plan:

> You see, well, I have already been in America for three years. I have seen and experienced a lot; I have learned a lot; and in some good ways I have changed my earlier views. And now I am of the opinion that actually a professor's salary in America isn't much. Gainful work in business [Geschäft] is completely another thing. And well I've been offered and could get a couple of good jobs, but I instead will do something totally different. I'll go and rent a farm and start a dairy. I will attempt myself to do what I have learned about for so long, and I feel and hope that I won't remain a mockery [ka es nepalikšu apsmieklā]. Truly, dairying here in America is an inexhaustible source of income, and even more so if the operator has learned what not to do. I hope that in such work I can find peace. Up to now, my soul has resembled a frightened and agitated bird. I desire to sit down and catch my breath. And then, on the other hand, if I at some point return to Latvia, then my practical experiences might come in handy for me in a variety of ways. Do you recall how you advised me long ago to go into the "business sector" ["Geschäfts branche"]? Agriculture in America is also a "business" with boundless possibilities.[166]

This is an interesting passage in a number of ways. First, despite the fact that he was only a lecturer and assistant in the experiment station, Ulmanis portrays himself ambiguously as either a professor or on track to become a professor. Of course, since he only had a bachelor's degree, and never mentioned any desire or plans to attend graduate school, this was not at all likely to happen. Why, then, would he reference "a professor's salary"? On the one hand, perhaps Ulmanis, in an attempt to simplify things for Enzeliņš, who knew next to nothing about the

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[165] Ulmanis discusses Enzeliņš's hopes and earlier comments in his January 10, 1911 letter to Enzeliņš. See Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 10, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.
[166] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 29, 1910.

structure of the American academe, used the word professor merely as a stand-in for his actual title, which would have required a lengthy explanation. On the other hand, though, it also speaks to his continued self-image problems, to his inferiority complex. Indeed, Ulmanis had earlier even admitted to Enzeliņš when he was explaining his decision to enroll at the University of Nebraska that he wanted to be able someday to add the title "Professor K. U." to his writings.[167] But by spring 1910, when he perhaps might have learned that his position at the university had again been cut from the budget for the upcoming academic year, it was apparently becoming clear to Ulmanis that he most likely would not actually gain this title, hence his pessimistic comment that he hoped "he would not remain a mockery."

Additionally, the passage also intimates that Ulmanis decided to pursue his own business because he had come to appreciate and desire the prestige of successful independent farmers and dairymen. To be sure, Ulmanis had certainly met some of Nebraska's finest farmers in his years with the university and through his work at the Warner farm and various local dairies. Thus, when he wrote that "in some good ways I have changed my earlier views," it would seem that part of this change must have come from his realization that in America farming was, as he put it to Enzeliņš, a business. Of course, this should not have been too shocking for Ulmanis, because after all his main ambition as an agronomist was to turn peasants into farmers. Yet, while he certainly cared deeply for the well-being of Latvian farmers and the countryside as a whole, he also seems to have hoped that he and other agronomists would be celebrated and financially rewarded for their efforts to bring science and industrial methods, or in other words "progress," to the rural areas that where rapidly falling behind the industrialized cities. Perhaps what surprised him then about this initiative to modernize agriculture, described by historians Peter Moser and Tony Varley as "the second agricultural revolution," was a particular aspect of

[167] And indeed Ulmanis was later given in 1934 an honorary doctorate from the University of Latvia.

its outcome.[168] What he observed in America, which was much further down the "every farm a factory" path than was Europe, and especially Russia, was the celebrated heroes in this story of progress were not the agronomists but the hugely successful farmers. Thus, wanting to make more money, gain additional practical experience that he might draw from if he returned home, and emulate the accomplishments of the notable Nebraska farmers he had met, Ulmanis ventured out into the private sector.

As was noted above, Ulmanis's first step in this new direction was, however, not actually on his own. Rather, he worked for J. R. Roberts, who was just one year Ulmanis's senior. It remains unclear why Ulmanis changed his mind, and whether Roberts approached him or vice versa, but a little more than two weeks after Ulmanis had written to Enzeliņš about his plans, he subsequently wrote Enzeliņš again to let him know that he would instead remain in Lincoln, where he had accepted a job as a creamery manager for Roberts Sanitary Dairy Company, known later as simply Roberts Dairy.[169]

For as pessimistic as he often was about his life in America, actually Ulmanis had had an amazing string of good luck when it came to meeting and ingratiating himself with prominent Nebraskans. So it was, too, with J. R. Roberts. The founder of Roberts Dairy, J. R. Roberts became the head member of perhaps the most recognized diary family in Nebraska history. However, he actually got his start thanks to his father, Artemus Roberts, a leading architect in Lincoln. Artemus Roberts specialized in public architecture, and his projects included, among many other notable buildings, the University of Nebraska's Agriculture Experiment Station, built in 1899. Additionally, Artemus Roberts also designed a number of Lincoln's earliest residential

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[168] Peter Moser and Tony Varley, "The State and Agricultural Modernisation in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in Europe," in *Integration through Subordination: The Politics of Agricultural Modernisation in Industrial Europe*, ed. Peter Moser and Tony Varley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 16.
[169] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, April 14, 1910, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 246/247, op. cit.

mansions, and in this latter field his most notable commission was "Fairview," the Lincoln home of William Jennings Bryan. As a result of these large, lucrative commissions, Artemus Roberts quickly became one of Lincoln's wealthiest citizens, and with his fortune he established a countryside estate just to the southeast of the city.[170] J. R. Roberts was thus aided by his father's success, for it was on the pasture grounds of his childhood home that he started his dairy herd in 1903.[171]

Slowly but surely, J. R. Roberts built up his business. At first he worked as a milk supplier, selling his fresh milk to a local creamery. Then, in 1906, he decided to retail his milk, incorporating his business and buying quart bottles, a horse, and a milk wagon to deliver fresh milk door-to-door. However, this decision did not sit well with the owner of the creamery, who thereafter refused to purchase Roberts's surplus retail milk. The question of what to do with the extra fresh milk thus prompted Roberts, perhaps with his father's financial assistance, to establish his own processing facility. The new creamery opened in 1910 at 1524 N Street, and, using state-of-the-art equipment, that year Roberts Dairy became the first company to offer pasteurized dairy products in the Lincoln area.[172]

It was as the manager of this new creamery, then, that Roberts hired Ulmanis, and right away this hire paid dividends. Specifically, late that summer Ulmanis's academic credentials

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[170] The farm was located near present-day 61st and South Street. In 1930, the family gave sixteen acres of their estate to the city for the purpose of founding a family park. The park, Roberts Park, still remains today. Artemus Roberts died in 1944.

[171] "Roberts & Woods Architects," UNL Historic Buildings, accessed January 9, 2014, http://historicbuildings.unl.edu/people.php?peopleID=20&cid=14; "Agriculture Experiment Station," UNL Historic Buildings, accessed January 9, 2014, http://historicbuildings.unl.edu/building.php?b=24; Roberts Park historical marker, photo of the marker was accessed January 9, 2014, http://odysseythroughnebraska.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/story-behind-roberts-park-pillars.jpeg; Emily Nohr, "After More than 100 Years, Roberts Dairy Name is Disappearing," *Omaha World Herald*, April 12, 2013, accessed October 13, 2012, http://www.omaha.com/article/20130411/MONEY/704129949/1697.

[172] "Dairy Employee Became a Prime Minister," in *K. Ulmanis Amerikā*: *pētījumi un materiāli*, op.cit., 101; Matt Olberding, "Roberts Dairy Name to Disappear from Stores," *Lincoln Journal Star*, April 12, 2013, accessed January 9, 2014, http://journalstar.com/business/local/roberts-dairy-name-to-disappear-from-stores/article_3beb3816-4535-5462-bf13-3f7de04d8258.html.

were touted by the company to ease costumers' concerns following an outbreak in Omaha of typhoid fever that was reportedly caused by infected milk. In an advertisement that ran for multiple days in a handful of newspapers in and around Lincoln, the Roberts Dairy explained that all of their milk was 100 percent safe and guaranteed not to be contaminated with typhoid or other diseases because their products, as the advertisement boasted, were pasteurized under the careful supervision of Mr. Ulman, formerly of the University of Nebraska.[173]

As would be expected, Ulmanis had many responsibilities at Roberts Dairy. Not only did he have to oversee the handling and processing of the milk, which came in seven days a week, but for the first time in his career he also had to supervise employees. It would seem from a tale told by J. Gordon Roberts, J. R. Roberts's son who eventually took over the company, that it was this latter task that often caused Ulmanis the greatest trouble and anger. As J. Gordon Roberts remembered the story that his father told him about the incident, early on Ulmanis had a couple of route drivers who incessantly teased him about his accent. Seeing that Ulmanis was a quiet, serious-minded person who did not like such bantering, the two workers could tell that they had struck a nerve. For weeks they continued in their teasing; but when Ulmanis had finally had enough, the men discovered that Ulmanis, as J. Gordon Roberts put it, "possessed more than intellectual strength." Having had his patience tested one too many times, Ulmanis apparently snapped. In J. Gordon Roberts's words:

> Solemnly, the Latvian picked up the two men—one under each arm. Very deliberately, as though performing a necessary but painful duty, he took one man in each hand by the overall straps and determinedly submerged the two [in a vat of milk]. When the clowns finally surfaced gasping for air, the Latvian regarded them with no trace of expression upon his face, turned, and went about his business. Needless to say, Ulmanis was treated as a man of distinction from that time forward.[174]

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[173] *The Nebraska State Journal*, September 22, 1910, 7.
[174] J. Gordon Roberts, letter to Mr. John Mierkalns, May 20, 1954, Folder 14, *Kārlis Ulmanis and Latvian/Baltic History Collection*. Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

On the whole, however, J. R. Roberts always thought that Ulmanis got along quite well as the manager of his creamery. In fact, years later he recalled, when thinking back to the company's earliest period, that Ulmanis had fit in well and "helped out during a critical period," when the company was adopting new practices and going through a transition from a start-up dairy with door-to-door sales to a prominent local business with a creamery and retail store.[175] Indeed, although Ulmanis would soon leave the business, he played an important early role in building what would later become by the 1950s the largest Midwest dairy company outside of the Chicago metropolitan area.[176]

For his part, Ulmanis enjoyed his work at Roberts Dairy. Without a doubt, Ulmanis benefited mentally from the stability of a permanent job, not to mention the pay, which he described as "relatively good," a statement that was actually quite positive considering Ulmanis's often pessimistic nature.[177] Perhaps another reason for Ulmanis's high spirits during his employment at Roberts Dairy is that Roberts liked Ulmanis and appreciated his hard work. In fact, at some point during the summer of 1911 Roberts even named Ulmanis vice president of the company.[178]

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[175] "Dairy Employee Became a Prime Minister."

[176] To be sure, by the 1960s the dairy and the Roberts family had become such a household name and major national player in the industry that they were selected for a fascinating government research project. Prompted by concerns about an escalation in the Cold War, and with an aim to ensure the existence of America's dairy industry in the scenario of a nuclear attack, in 1963 the Office of Civil Defense, at that time an agency within the Department of Defense, constructed a fallout shelter for cattle under the Roberts Dairy farm near Elkhorn, Nebraska. It was equipped with special preserved feed, a 10,000 gallon water tank, and auxiliary generators to run ventilation fans. To test the large-scale feasibility of such an animal fallout shelter, Roberts Dairy agreed to conduct a two-week experiment with thirty-five of their Guernsey cows and a bull. Two observing farmhands lived in the adjacent living quarters of the shelter and cared for the cows during the test. In the end, they reported that while the animals did lose some weight, they adjusted fairly well to confinement, leading the Office of Civil Defense to conclude that animal fallout shelters could be feasibly used to safeguard America's livestock. On this story, see "The Family Fallout Shelter: Sheltering Cattle," *Nebraska Studies*, accessed January 9, 2014, http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0900/frameset_reset.html?http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0900/stories/0901_0134.html.

[177] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, May 25, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.

[178] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 14, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit. But as was typical of Ulmanis, after telling Enzeliņš about this good news, he then went on to say that perhaps he should have declined this "honor" because it has only added more responsibilities and work.

On the whole then, the work at Roberts Dairy helped Ulmanis move on from the frustration that he had expressed in earlier letters and writings, most notably in his lecture "The Difficult Times." For instance, in one letter written to Enzeliņš during his employment at Roberts Dairy, Ulmanis explained that he was working at a "big milk company" that produces sweet cream and milk for the marketplace. He then stated, in a rare display of optimism, "In terms of my health, everything is good, and I am all the time beginning to feel a more secure foundation under my feet. The outlook is truly good so long as I don't run out of energy!"[179]

However, at times the work load was too much for Ulmanis, who after the first few months grew tired of the grind of continuous seven-day work weeks. Likewise, the demands of the job also took their toll on Ulmanis's correspondence with Enzeliņš, as suddenly Ulmanis found himself lacking the energy and free time to write. Consequently, from May through the end of 1910, for instance, Ulmanis penned only three letters to Enzeliņš, as opposed to previous years, when he would send that many or more each month. Recognizing the lapse in their correspondence, Ulmanis began the second of the aforementioned three letters, writing, "Well, I haven't written in so long that I really don't know from which end to begin. For me, things have been going thusly: working 7 full days and sometimes even a bit more in a week, and, if I can't fall asleep, then I write in the evenings."[180] As for what he was writing, Ulmanis went on to say in the letter that he was enclosing a new article for *Zeme*, Enzeliņš's newest journal, on selecting milk for cheesemaking. He also asked Enzeliņš to republish in this same issue his, i.e., Ulmanis's, old piece on how to produce clean milk, for he was afraid that farmers might have already forgotten about this article, which he believed to be a seminal piece.

[179] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 19, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.
[180] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, October 10, 1910, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.

Lastly, admitting that he did not envision being able to find the time or energy in the foreseeable future to produce many journal articles or lectures for agricultural societies, Ulmanis closed the letter by broaching the, in his mind, important question of when to release new editions of his books on dairying and pig farming. From his point of view, Ulmanis thought it wise to release new editions as soon as possible. For one thing, Ulmanis pointed out, he had been working over the past year on expanding the section on cooperative dairies in his dairying book to include all of the things that he had learned in America. For another thing, Ulmanis wanted to promptly release the new editions while he still had a strong reputation. On this second reason, Ulmanis wrote an interesting passage in his November 25, 1910 letter to Enzeliņš. Further elucidating why he was concerned about capitalizing on his as yet prominent reputation as an agronomist, Ulmanis wrote that it would be a good idea to release new editions now since "in the coming few years I will probably fall into complete 'oblivion' because after years of protracted uncertainty and 'fluctuation' [here he uses the German word *Schwanken*], now I have been seriously considering going about dropping anchor here in America, so then it really would be better to print some 4,000 copies of *Profitable Pig Farming*."[181]

As was discussed above, since arriving in America, Ulmanis had written books, articles, and lectures for two primary reasons. First and foremost, Ulmanis wanted to disseminate information about modern farm practices so as to improve yields and, ultimately, improve farmers' profits and quality of life. Without a doubt, Ulmanis's ambitions in this regard were sincere. Indeed, in his willingness and personal sacrifice to use what would later be called the space of an emerging Habermasian public sphere to push for those aims – even while Latvian-

[181] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 25, 1910, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.

speaking lands remained socially and economically under the thumb of prominent local Baltic Germans and politically under oppressive tsarist rule – Ulmanis often acted selflessly.[182]

Undeniably, Ulmanis also wrote for selfish aims as well. Most importantly, as evidenced in their correspondence, Ulmanis and Enzeliņš had for years hoped that Ulmanis might be able to earn an amnesty. The question thus arises, if Ulmanis was thinking about staying permanently in America, why then was he so persistent in demanding that new editions of his books be published straight away, while his reputation as an agronomist was still at its apex? There are a couple of logical explanations. Speaking to Ulmanis's chief professional aim, it made sense to publish the new editions quickly, before he lost the attention of the public eye, in order to capitalize on his public image, thus ensuring that the new dairying knowledge he had accumulated in America found an audience. Of course, making the most of his eminence also meant higher books sales and greater royalties for himself, or so Ulmanis hoped. Thus, Ulmanis's push to publish was also driven by financial incentive, as he believed the new editions would generate revenue for Enzeliņš's Baltic Agricultural Society while providing him with some of the capital he needed to buy into a creamery in Texas that he had become interested in.

Ulmanis never explained in any detail what prompted him to return to the plan, first expressed in his March 1910 letter to Enzeliņš, to run his own creamery, but suddenly in January 1911, Ulmanis wrote Enzeliņš, telling him about a business opportunity that he had decided to pursue. To make clear the urgent nature of the situation, Ulmanis began his letter not with the typical friendly, casual opening, but instead with a forewarning. "This time," Ulmanis began, "I want to talk with you about some extremely serious matters." He continued:

> Do you still recall how you once tried to convince me not to remain as an instructor in America but to instead enter the business world in order to make a lot of money—and then

[182] Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

> donate money for a university for Latvians? Do you remember that? Well, now I have the chance to stand on my own two feet in the business world, because no one has gotten rich by working for others. But, well, the trouble is that my capital still isn't sufficient.[183]

Thus, Ulmanis, as he had done many times before, turned to Enzeliņš for financial assistance. Only this time Ulmanis did not ask for a loan. Instead Ulmanis offered to sell the rights to his books for 1,500 rubles, pleading, "I want to ask you to not refuse giving me help on this affair. We have been friends and have worked together for a lot of years, and you already have done so much for me."[184]

Naturally, Enzeliņš was not interested in this deal. After all, 1,500 rubles was a lot of money for the rights to two books that had already been in the marketplace for quite some time. As well, Ulmanis had also failed to provide any details about this business opportunity, and that certainly did not help his cause. Two months later, Ulmanis was still waiting for a reply to his proposal. He thus wrote to Enzeliņš, "You must not have liked my last letter, in which I talked about selling the rights to my publications, because I am to this day still waiting in vain for a reply."[185] Sensing that perhaps it was simply not the right time to push it any further, Ulmanis then closed the letter by announcing that he would postpone for a few months any additional discussion of his proposal.

Another two months passed before Ulmanis wrote again. This time, Ulmanis offered some details about his plans. Since they had not corresponded much in recent times, Ulmanis began his letter by informing Enzeliņš that he was still at Roberts Dairy. Ulmanis acknowledged that this was a good job, but he then proceeded to explain that he was interested in moving on because, as he put it, financially "I have come to realize that things would be better if I stood on

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[183] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, January 10, 1911.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, March 19, 1911.

my own two feet."[186] As for the specifics of his plan, Ulmanis for the first time informed Enzeliņš that he was looking to start a dairy company in Houston, Texas, a city, Ulmanis explained, that had 100,000 inhabitants but only one small diary company. "Therefore the prospects are outstanding," Ulmanis urged him, emphasizing that he needed a decision on the money by July.[187]

How Ulmanis discovered this business opportunity, or for that matter even became interested in the Texas dairy industry in the first place, is unclear. However, circumstantial evidence points to Professor Haecker and Ulmanis's coursework at the University of Nebraska. For example, Ulmanis's interests in Texas dated back at least to 1909, for an article he wrote on the dairy industry in Texas titled "*Moderneecibas Teksas Valstī*" ("Cooperative Creameries in the State of Texas") – a piece that reads like perhaps it was originally submitted for an assignment in one of Professor Haecker's courses – was published back home in *Zemkopis* in May 1910. Explaining in the article the importance of cooperative creameries and how to go about establishing one, Ulmanis cited Texas as a telling example of how rapidly these cooperative creameries were advancing America's dairy industry. For instance, Ulmanis pointed out to his Latvian readers that although the Texas Cooperative Creamery Association was formed only four years ago by a mere five members, at present there are sixty-five operating member creameries, with another twenty set to open soon.[188]

Why as a student Ulmanis chose to write about Texas is more of a mystery, however. It could be that Professor Haecker simply assigned or advised Ulmanis to research and write about the Texas dairy industry. Given Ulmanis's later business in Houston, there is yet another more intriguing explanation for his interests in Texas. As will soon be discussed in greater detail,

[186] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, May 25, 1911.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Kārlis Ulmanis, "Moderneecibas Teksas Valstī," *Zemkopis*, Nr. 20 (May 19, 1910): 383-384.

Ulmanis entered a business partnership with Charles H. Alvord, a renowned professor of agriculture at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (known today as Texas A&M University) who specialized in dairying. It seems highly unlikely that such a business partnership would form between complete strangers, and therefore one has to assume that Ulmanis had met Professor Alvord during his student days. For example, Professor Haecker – who at the minimum would have known Alvord through his own father, T. L. Haecker[189] – might have introduced Ulmanis to Alvord while at the 1908 National Dairy Show. Additionally, since Alvord was also employed in the Midwest, it is also plausible that Haecker could have invited Alvord to visit the University of Nebraska, where he would have met Haecker's students, including Ulmanis. However Ulmanis's academic interests and professional connections in Texas might have developed, what is obvious is they had existed years before he wrote to Enzeliņš about his plan to open a business in Houston.

In early July 1911, Ulmanis got an answer from Enzeliņš. It was no. Interestingly, Ulmanis, in his reply to Enzeliņš's refusal, seemingly tried to guilt Enzeliņš into agreeing to an alternative proposal. Of course it had primarily been Ulmanis's fault that their correspondence had lessened over the previous year, yet Ulmanis began his letter by writing, "Thanks for your letter and beautiful card. It always makes me happy when I see that you still remember me." He then segued to the money. "So then there cannot be any discussion of selling [the rights to my books]," Ulmanis continued. "Well, that puts an end to one part of my plans. But still, in the end, it isn't so terrible. It only means that things will get delayed a bit."[190] Ulmanis then offered a

[189] As was noted above, T. L. Haecker was a notable professor of agriculture at the University of Minnesota. Hence, he likely would have met Alvord at some point at a regional conference or dairy society meeting during the latter's days at the Michigan Agricultural College (known today as Michigan State University), where he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture and subsequently worked until September 1899 as an assistant agriculturalist in the Michigan Agricultural College Experiment Station.
[190] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, July 14, 1911.

counterproposal: releasing new editions of his books that would pay him the same honorarium as the previous editions, 200 rubles for each new edition. Again hoping to tug on Enzeliņš's conscience, Ulmanis remarked that he had been getting up at 5:00 a.m. every morning, despite his already grueling work schedule, to work on revising his books for new editions. Finally, in bringing the letter to a close, Ulmanis, in a somewhat snide and cynical tone that revealed the frustration he tried to conceal earlier, wrote, "Do as you like, but obviously when I want to start my own company, I can't ever have too much money."[191] The problem for Ulmanis, though, was that Enzeliņš knew all too well the financial strains of building a business. In fact, just a few months prior he had moved his Baltic Agricultural Society into a new building in Valmiera – a development that Ulmanis was aware of – and hence neither Enzeliņš nor the society were in a secure enough financial situation to provide Ulmanis the help that he was pleading for.[192]

By contrast, Ulmanis had better luck procuring financial assistance from mentors and former employers in Nebraska. Naturally, Ulmanis turned to his former professors at the University of Nebraska, Smith and Haecker. They had always thought highly of him, so when Ulmanis explained to them his business plan, Professors Smith and Haecker readily agreed to co-sign on a $1,000 loan from the First National Bank of Lincoln.[193] J. R. Roberts kindly agreed to co-sign on another loan even though he surely was disappointed that Ulmanis wanted to leave the company, and particularly after Roberts had recently promoted him to vice president.[194] Warner, too, also contributed, writing Ulmanis a check for $500. As Warner's wife recalled

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[191] Ibid.
[192] On the new Baltic Agricultural Society building, see Ulmanis's May 25, 1911 letter to Enzeliņš; and Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas."
[193] Murphy, et. al., 50.
[194] Duane L. Alstadt, "The Latvian Leader Took A Little Bit of Nebraska Back Home with Him," *Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands*, March 30, 1986, 15. Unfortunately, the sources do not indicate the amount of this loan.

years later, "Charlie thought a lot of him," so when Ulmanis approached him for a loan, he gladly acceded, telling his wife that "the money went for a good cause."[195]

To be sure, Ulmanis's success in convincing such notable Nebraska citizens to invest in his business idea speaks to the paradoxical nature of Ulmanis's personality. Indeed, although Ulmanis went through life without the companionship of a romantic partner or close friend, examples like this suggest that it was not because Ulmanis was an unlikeable person. On the contrary, as Unāms's aforementioned story about Ulmanis's lesson on the power of persuasion suggests, Ulmanis could be quite charming and convincing. Certainly that was the case here, as Ulmanis managed to persuade a number of very intelligent men to take a risk on his business plan even though he had, save for any lessons he might have learned as the manager of the Roberts Dairy creamery, no prior experience as a business owner.

With the money that he secured during June and July from his Nebraska contacts, by August 1911 Ulmanis felt more confident in his prospects, so he agreed to a business meeting in Houston. Before departing for the trip, Ulmanis, having not yet heard from Enzeliņš in regard to his second proposal, penned a brief note to him on August 2. Noting that discussions on the business had recently proceeded more rapidly than he had earlier envisioned, he reminded Enzeliņš of his earlier plea before subsequently writing, "And I hope and trust that you won't refuse to listen to my request, because very soon I will need that money and so I cannot wait for an answer. But I hope that, taking into consideration our friendship of many years, I can count on that money as if it were already in my pocket."[196]

Remarkably, three days later Ulmanis wrote Enzeliņš from Houston, telling him that he had agreed to the deal, even though, of course, he still was not sure if Enzeliņš would send the

[195] Quoted in Guenther, "NU Grad Became Latvian President: Karlis Ulmanis Was 'The Premier from Nebraska.'"
[196] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 2, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.

money he needed. In the letter, written on the official stationery of the Hotel Bristol & Annex of Houston, Ulmanis informed Enzeliņš that he had agreed to pay $5,000, though he does not say to whom.[197] In this and later letters dated August 10, August 14, and August 18, Ulmanis then cajoled and begged Enzeliņš to send money, saying first on August 5 that he needed 1,200 rubles, followed in the other letters by general, unspecified entreaties.

It was thus out of sheer panic and desperation about a possible lack of funds that Ulmanis mailed one letter after another to Enzeliņš, using in each one a different angle of persuasion. For example, in one letter Ulmanis stated that if Enzeliņš did not come through, he stood to lose the substantial amount of money that he had already paid.[198] In another letter, Ulmanis attempted to assuage any possible fears that Enzeliņš might have had about the prospects of starting a dairy company in Texas by citing the example of a successful dairy company located 250 miles from Houston that, though it had only been in business ten years, he noted, was reportedly already making more than 200,000 rubles per year. Ulmanis thus assured Enzeliņš that, based on success like that, "the money will come in heaps."[199] Finally, in still one more letter, mailed only a few days before he planned to leave for Texas, Ulmanis tried once again to convince Enzeliņš, writing:

> As I already said, I will be traveling to Houston in a few days. But still to this very day not a single bit of information has come from you on the money issue. Already for around two weeks I have waited every day for a telegram from you, but nothing. Still, my confidence in you is so great that I hope that the money will come from you in short order. If that doesn't happen, then I will have a huge mess on my hands as never before, because that would mean a huge loss of my money and time… [and] yet not a single sentence has come from you. But nonetheless I am hoping for the best.[200]

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[197] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 5, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 248, op. cit.
[198] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 10, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, September 30, 1997, accessed on August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=52136.
[199] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 14, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.
[200] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 9, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.

Unfortunately, without the other half of the correspondence, it remains unclear how Enzeliņš responded to Ulmanis's many appeals. Ulmanis's next letter to Enzeliņš, dated September 20, 1911, suggests that Enzeliņš did send him money. Noting firstly that he was now residing in Houston, Ulmanis informed Enzeliņš that he had received his telegram just prior to leaving Lincoln. Ulmanis then commented on Enzeliņš's answer, writing, "Really, it seemed like that for you it wasn't going to be possible, so then maybe it was in God's hands."[201] But since in the letter Ulmanis never actually offered a word of thanks – which he had previously done whenever Enzeliņš sent him money – and instead posed questions about the honorarium for the third edition of his dairying book, it seems that if Enzeliņš did indeed send money, it must have been far less than Ulmanis had requested. Hence, a little more than a month later, Ulmanis wrote Enzeliņš again, asking why he had not heard from him. At this point Ulmanis had become frustrated with Enzeliņš. Thus, even though Ulmanis had just begun a new period in his life, he did not say anything at all about his new business or life in Texas. Ulmanis also neither asked Enzeliņš about his wellbeing nor inquired about the Baltic Agricultural Society. In fact, the letter was only six sentences long – all of them focused on the question of money – and Ulmanis ended it by saying, "If you would know how desperately I need the money, then of course you would at the very least send to me the remainder of my honorarium for the books. But I am waiting in vain."[202]

Although Ulmanis and Enzeliņš had been corresponding on a fairly regular basis for eight years, Ulmanis's constant badgering for money and the hard work of starting a creamery were detrimental to their friendship, at least for a period anyway. In mid-November 1911, Ulmanis got Enzeliņš's final word on the matter. While it remains unknown what Enzeliņš

[201] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 20, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.
[202] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, October 30, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.

suggested, Ulmanis responded in his November 27 letter that he accepted Enzeliņš's "proposals," though he still expressed his hope that Enzeliņš could send the rest of the honorarium "because the new business requires a lot of money, work and more work, and still a lot of other things."[203] If Enzeliņš did at some point send additional letters or money, Ulmanis evidently did not write back, for the surviving correspondence indicates that Ulmanis's next letter to Enzeliņš was not until April 1913.

Since there are no letters to Enzeliņš to help fill in the historical record, our understanding of Ulmanis's life and work in Houston is incomplete. Prior to the break in his correspondence with Enzeliņš, Ulmanis did inform him to write going forward to his business address: 1918 Gray Avenue. Additionally, a number of Ulmanis's letters from Houston were written on the company stationery. Thus, we know that the company located at that address was called Purity Creamery Co. Beyond that, however, much remains unknown.

For one thing, Ulmanis's role with the company is unclear. Although he had certainly pooled a sizeable amount of money from his contacts in Nebraska, and despite the fact that he told Enzeliņš that he had to pay $5,000, other sources indicate that Ulmanis was not actually the owner, or at least not at the company's outset anyway. For example, *The Galveston Daily News* of Galveston, Texas reported on September 9, 1911 that the Purity Creamery Co. of Houston had been incorporated with a capital stock of $10,000 by Charles H. Alvord, Roy O. Bullock, and John J. Clark.[204] Based on the fact that Ulmanis did not leave Lincoln until September 13 or 14 (Ulmanis noted in his September 9 letter that he would be leaving Lincoln in "four or five days") and had been up to that time anxiously awaiting Enzeliņš's answer on the money issue, the most logical explanation why Ulmanis was not listed as one of the proprietors is that he simply had

[203] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 27, 1911, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.
[204] *The Galveston Daily News*, September 9, 1911, 5.

not yet contributed the agreed-upon $5,000 investment when the incorporation of the creamery was announced.

Secondly, while it seems certain that Ulmanis did in fact become a co-owner of Purity Creamery Co., the picture is much less clear when it comes to how the co-owners operated the company and apportioned the responsibilities related to both the day-to-day operations and the long-term business plan. Part of the problem here is a dearth of information about Roy O. Bullock and John J. Clark. Research on Bullock yielded no notable information. As for Clark, born in 1879, he was of a distinguished Texas family. His father Randolph, for example, was the co-founder of AddRan College, known today as Texas Christian University. Although research on Clark's career also yielded few results, it seems that he spent most of his career in the dairy industry, for in the 1930s he was working as a salesman for the Metzger Creamery Company of Dallas, Texas.[205]

While it is impossible to ascertain from extant sources whether Bullock or Clark were involved in the daily operations of the creamery, it is certain that Alvord was not. This is because Alvord, born in Michigan in 1872, was residing in Portland, Texas, located approximately 200 miles down the coast from Houston, where he worked as the superintendent of the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company's farms. Sometimes also known as the Taft Ranch since Charles P. Taft, the brother of U.S. President (1909-1913) William Howard Taft, became the majority owner in 1900, the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the largest agricultural and ranching operation in southern Texas, owning at one point more than 265,000 acres of land. Looking for someone to manage the new company farms that were among the first agricultural developments in the arid and seemingly uncultivable

[205] "Randolph Clark," Hood County Texas Genealogical Society, accessed January 18, 2014, http://www.granburydepot.org/z/biog/ClarkRandolph.htm.

region, in 1911 Taft and the company manager, Joseph F. Green, hired Alvord away from the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, where he had advanced to the chair of the Department of Agriculture. Thus, not only was Alvord living some 200 miles away from the Purity Creamery Co., but his job overseeing the cultivation of more than 12,000 acres would have left him little free time to devote to the creamery, which he apparently viewed merely as a good investment opportunity.[206]

However, it turned out that Alvord was wrong in that regard, because the Purity Creamery Co. floundered. Due to a paucity of sources on the matter, it is impossible to determine Ulmanis's share of the blame for the company's struggles, though anti-Ulmanis historians like Dunsdorfs would have us believe that the failure of the creamery was indicative of Ulmanis's ostensibly poor management skills.[207] The most informative source on the Houston creamery comes from an article that the Omaha World Herald columnist Edward Morrow wrote in 1936. Based on interviews with Warner and Haecker, Morrow concluded that the creamery ran into financial difficulties because the decision maker(s), whether that was Ulmanis alone or a combination of the four men, exhausted the company's capital too quickly. In other words, the creamery was most likely undercapitalized at the start, as Morrow reported that the up-front costs of installing equipment, buying milk cans, etc. put the creamery in a difficult financial situation.

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[206] On Alvord and the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company, see "Charles H. Alvord," in *Michigan Official Directory and Legislative Manual for the Years 1907-1908*, ed. George A. Prescott (Lansing, MI: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1907), 706; Walter Hines Page and Arthur Wilson Page, *The World's Work*, Vol. XXV (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), 272; Keith Guthrie, "Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company," Texas State Historical Association, accessed on January 22, 2014, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/aqc02. Also very useful is the testimony that Alvord gave to the Commission on Industrial Relations on the land question in the Southwest. See, U.S. Senate, 64th Congress, 1st Session, *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, Vol. X (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), 9214-9221.

[207] Dunsdorfs, 60-62.

As a result, there was not enough money left to advertise the new creamery, and therefore the business also suffered from a lack of patronage.[208]

The so-called American "Wild West" had by the start of the twentieth century gained a reputation as a land of opportunity with its famed boom towns and businesses. In reality, however, the region was really a land of risk, and many businessmen in the West, lured by the promise of fast and easy money, failed dramatically because they believed that the unexploited prospects of the still-developing region would compensate for rash, poor business planning. While we do not know the thoughts of Alvord, Clark, or Bullock, in his letters Ulmanis certainly expressed thoughts along these lines, telling Enzeliņš that "the money will come in heaps," all the while never offering any explanation of the business plan.[209]

Despite Ulmanis's incessant hard work, the Purity Creamery Co. never generated the heaps of cash that he had envisioned. Predictably, Ulmanis, who had long struggled with self-doubt, had a difficult time dealing with the creamery's financial troubles. As a result, Warner made a trip – and more than likely on his own initiative since Ulmanis was typically too stubborn and proud to ever ask for help – to Houston in early 1913 to see if he could help. When Warner arrived, he was surprised to discover that Ulmanis's hair had turned grey, presumably from stress. Likewise, Warner found that Ulmanis was mentally worn out and suffering from bouts of melancholy. Surely part of the problem must have been that Ulmanis was without friends and, for the first time, was completely isolated from Latvians and the Latvian language. Hence, Warner's visit must have surely helped alleviate feelings of loneliness. Of course, Warner, as an astute businessman, likely also offered Ulmanis some business advice. However, we will never know whether that advice would have helped turn around the creamery's fortunes, for soon

[208] Morrow, "Former Husker Student's Dairy Goes Bankrupt; Tiny Latvia Gains Dictator."
[209] Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 14, 1911. On the European image of the Wild West, see Ray Allen Billington, chapters 9-10.

thereafter Ulmanis received word that his long-imagined dream of an amnesty – a dream that by 1910 he had reluctantly given up after years of frustration – had come true.[210]

-Amnesty and Returning Home-

Although Ulmanis had once said that he should just as soon expect a blackout of the sun as await an amnesty, in early April 1913 he in fact received word that the tsar had proclaimed a general amnesty as a gesture of benevolence that coincided with the grand celebrations marking the 300 year anniversary of Romanov rule.[211] Throughout his life Ulmanis was a voracious reader, and especially of newspapers. However, his work at the creamery had evidently become so demanding and exhausting that he no longer had time or energy to read the news, for he first found out about the general amnesty from a colleague at *Rīgas lauksaimniecības cēntralā biedrība* (the Central Agricultural Union of Rīga) who wrote him to offer a job. Not only does Ulmanis's ignorance of the general amnesty, which was reported in newspapers throughout Europe and North America, speak to his dogged determination to make the creamery a success, but the fact that he first found out about this long-hoped-for news from someone other than Enzeliņš is indicative of the severity of the falling-out that had developed between them.[212]

Still, despite the souring of their friendship over the previous two years, once Ulmanis learned about the amnesty, he wrote to Enzeliņš, wanting to find out more details. But of course Ulmanis had to first begin by explaining why he had not written for nearly a year and a half. His rationalization was reminiscent of the letter he had penned six years earlier, when he had to

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[210] Morrow, "Former Husker Student's Dairy Goes Bankrupt; Tiny Latvia Gains Dictator."
[211] On the amnesty and the celebration of the 300 year anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, see especially Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Lindsey Hughes, *The Romanovs: Ruling Russia, 1613-1917* (London; New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2008).
[212] On Ulmanis first hearing about the amnesty, see Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, April 12, 1913, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.

explain the long lapse in his correspondence after arriving in America. In this instance, Ulmanis began:

> We haven't written one another now in such a long time that we have become nearly strangers. The reason for that is that I have been swamped with work [*es biju bezgala apkrauts ar darbu*], and yet my work has not shown the hoped for and expected successes. In other words, success and progress is coming really slowly. And therefore I was quiet.[213]

Obviously, Ulmanis again let his inferiority complex creep into his relationships, as he was too embarrassed about the creamery's failings to correspond with Enzeliņš and others. Nonetheless, Ulmanis trusted that Enzeliņš would forgive his silence, and therefore he went on in the letter to ask him about the amnesty and whether Enzeliņš might be willing to employ him again at the society since he was not interested in accepting the Central Agricultural Society's job offer. Then, to emphasize his eagerness to return home, even though he had earlier announced that he would remain in America, Ulmanis told Enzeliņš, "Of course, if I would be able to come back, I wouldn't linger a single hour … [and] my first journey would be to Valmiera, to your place."[214]

Roughly a month later, Ulmanis received a telegram from Enzeliņš, who informed him that he indeed could return home as a result of the general amnesty. Upon getting this news, Ulmanis wrote back, "Your telegram arrived a few days back—and I cannot even begin to say how happy I am that I really can return."[215] Ulmanis then reported that he had already looked into travel options and hoped to leave America sometime in June, "when things at the business will be more or less settled." Finally, as Ulmanis brought the letter to a close and penned the last words he would write to Enzeliņš from America, he expressed his hope, as a true workaholic,

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[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, May 12, 1913, published in *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, Nr. 249, op. cit.

that Enzeliņš would have plenty for him to do, asking, "Will you have sufficient future work for me? With the journal, courses, and so on, I suppose so!"[216]

Slightly more than six years after Ulmanis had boarded a U.S.-bound ship in Bremerhaven, Germany in the hopes of both gaining new and valuable educational and professional experiences, in addition to leaving the troubles of the Old World behind, he embarked for Europe aboard a New Orleans-based freighter.[217] Financially, life in America had not proved as lucrative as he had hoped. Having arrived in America with fifty dollars, Ulmanis left with even less due to the debts he incurred in connection with the Purity Creamery Co. In fact, while none of the existing sources give any information about how Ulmanis, to use his words, settled things at the company, he must have suffered quite a loss, because he did not finish repaying Professors Haecker and Smith until 1921.[218]

Similarly, despite his stated hope that relocating to America would enable him to be free of affairs back home, Ulmanis never showed any inkling that he was beginning to assume an "American" identity. Although many years later, as will be discussed in later chapters, Ulmanis began to view himself, when he nostalgically looked back on his time in Nebraska, as a son of America, while actually living there he was unwaveringly committed to retaining his Latvian identity, language, and culture. Likewise, though he had claimed in his rationale for leaving Europe that his political convictions had caused him enough grief, once in America Ulmanis nonetheless continued to follow closely events in the Baltic Provinces. To be sure, he even let developments in his homeland affect his frame of mind, as evidenced most tellingly in his lecture/article "The Difficult Times." Moreover, as this example intimates, Ulmanis also

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[216] Ibid.
[217] Morrow, "Former Husker Student's Dairy Goes Bankrupt; Tiny Latvia Gains Dictator." While his account seems much less likely given Ulmanis's residence in Texas, Virza claims that Ulmanis returned home by way of a passenger ship that left from New York. See Virza, 62-63.
[218] Murphy, et. al., 50.

remained an active member of the rural, agricultural, and intellectual circles of Latvian society, contributing while in America books on dairying and pig farming and, by one count, no less than 131 articles on agriculture and sociocultural topics.[219]

Conversely, though Ulmanis never accumulated the vast wealth that he and Enzeliņš associated with America as "the land of opportunity," and despite the fact that he also never achieved his supposed aim of creating a new life and identity for himself in the New World, in terms of his third chief reason for moving to America – gaining new knowledge – Ulmanis succeeded fantastically. For a man whose life and identity revolved around agriculture, and whose primary professional aim was to modernize Latvian agriculture and improve rural life, there was perhaps no better place for Ulmanis to be than the Great Plains of America, where the combination of scientific knowledge, industrial methods, modern machinery, wide and open fields, and farmers' progressive belief in progress were rapidly transforming every aspect of agriculture and rural life.

Ulmanis learned much about modern agricultural and dairy practices from prominent Nebraskans like Warner and Roberts and from academic leaders like professors Haecker and Smith. However, what surely must have lingered in Ulmanis's mind the longest was the ways in which politics and agriculture intersected. Ulmanis, of course, had long believed this to be the case, but never before had he witnessed the likes of men like Bryan, a politician celebrated for his devotion to agriculture and commitment to the common man. Similarly, never before had he witnessed events like the Nebraska State Fair or National Corn Exposition, where country met city and agriculture intertwined with politics as country folk and city dwellers and agronomists and leaders all assembled to pay homage to the rural way of life and marvel at the wonders of

[219] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 55. This number is almost certainly inflated since it was compiled in 1937, in connection with Ulmanis's 60th birthday celebration, for a brochure on Ulmanis's life and works, but nonetheless it speaks to Ulmanis's continued commitment to his homeland.

modern agricultural science. To be sure, Ulmanis deeply admired this aspect of American life and therefore, as much of the rest of this work will show, with his May 1934 coup, Ulmanis paradoxically set out to unite Latvians though an agricultural nationalism whose most noteworthy institutions and public manifestations were not just invented but borrowed traditions.[220]

[220] E. J Hobsbawm and T. O Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Chapter Three—Planting the Seeds: Ulmanis, Democratic Latvia, and the Authoritarian Turn

For Ulmanis, it must have been a bad omen. Having just spent more than six years in political exile, upon reaching the border of the Russian Empire in late summer 1913, any optimism or hopes that he might have had about a governmental and societal sea change in his homeland following the announcement of the general amnesty were abruptly shattered by his very first experience back home, when the border police detained him. Though it is not clear just how long he was held at the border, Ulmanis eventually had to petition Enzeliņš's help before the border guards allowed him to proceed.[1]

Similarly, Ulmanis also encountered problems with the authorities when he was set to begin his employment at the Baltic Agricultural Society. After first visiting his mother and brothers in Zemgale for a few weeks, by early autumn Ulmanis was in Valmiera, ready to renew the work that he had been forced to abandon eight years prior. However, the governor of Vidzeme, Nikolajs Zvegincevs, had caught wind of the Baltic Agricultural Society's decision to employ Ulmanis and, contrary to the spirit of the amnesty, threatened to shut down the society if Ulmanis's services were retained. Hoping to change his mind, Enzeliņš met with Zvegincevs and requested that he have a conversation with Ulmanis before making a final decision, promising Zvegincevs that he would see for himself that Ulmanis was not a revolutionary or troublemaker. Zvegincevs agreed to the proposal, and in early November he met with Ulmanis, who, as Bērziņš put it, "captivated him with his poise and way of speaking."[2] Thus charmed, and seeing for himself that Ulmanis could prove an asset in the agricultural development of the region,

[1] Dunsdorfs, 62; Hermanis Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas (Beigas)," *Sējējs*, Nr. 10 (October 1937): 1024.
[2] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 56.

Zvegincevs reversed his original stance, permitting Ulmanis to work at the Baltic Agricultural Society.

Conversely, while the authorities may not have warmly greeted him upon his return, Ulmanis must have been pleased to discover that Latvian farmers did not harbor the ill will against him that he had suspected and written about in his earlier letters to Enzeliņš. In fact, between November 1913 and February 1914, Ulmanis gave talks at no less than twenty-eight different agricultural meetings, and he received positive feedback from his thousands of listeners about his discussions on modernizing the farmyard, animal husbandry, fieldwork, etc.[3] In particular, what resonated well with his audiences was his use of anecdotes and examples of life and agricultural work in America. Of course, one of the primary reasons for Ulmanis's decision to move to America had been to acquaint himself with modern agricultural practices in the New World in the hope of passing on his knowledge to Latvian farmers, so naturally Ulmanis did not shy away from referencing his experiences abroad. Moreover, as Jānis Lapiņš, a writer and the director of Rīga's First Gymnasium, pointed out in his 1936 chapter on Ulmanis's social thought, Ulmanis's biographical ability to frame his ideas on sensitive topics like land tenure and cultural and national autonomy within a, to use present-day terminology, transatlantic perspective enabled him to avoid accusations of revolutionary subterfuge, for rather than directly attacking the Baltic German overlords or the political authority of the Russian imperial government, Ulmanis instead simply praised the progressive nature of American agriculture and society.[4]

[3] Virza, 69; Enzeliņš, "Manas atmiņas (Beigas)," 1026.
[4] J. Lapiņš, "Skats uz Kāļa Ulmaņa sociālām domām," in *Tautas vadonis: Kārlis Ulmanis*, ed. Ž. Unāms (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1936), 52-53; Dunsdorfs, 71; Unāms, *Dzīvā Latvija*, 15-23.



Figure 5: Kārlis Ulmanis (middle) with a group of people in the Vidzeme countryside in autumn 1913[5]

Besides giving public talks, Ulmanis was involved in many other aspects of the society's work. For one, he took over the editorial duties for *Zeme*, the society's main periodical, in November 1913. In addition to overseeing the journal, he also published in its pages fifty-six of his own articles on various agricultural topics in 1914-1915. Moreover, during that time period, Ulmanis's short booklets on modern cattle and pig husbandry methods also appeared.[6] Even more time-consuming for Ulmanis was the preparatory work for the society's 1914 regional exhibition, which took place on June 22-24 in Valmiera. Determined to put his experiences at American state fairs and national expositions to good use, Ulmanis conversed and worked with local farmers and businesses to ensure that it was the largest and best exhibition in the society's history. All told, he arranged and supervised the presentation of more than 200 exhibits, which included more than 200 local livestock, modern agricultural machinery from ten

[5] This image is courtesty of the Latvian National Library's "Zudusī Latvija" digital archive project, acccessed on May 22, 2014, http://www.zudusilatvija.lv/objects/object/255/.
[6] Dunsdorfs, 63.

companies, and booths devoted to home industry and housework. The turnout was impressive too, with more than 5,000 visitors in attendance during the first day alone.[7] In fact, the society's exhibition was such a success that one newspaper correspondent from Rīga reported that Ulmanis "has been the one who has brought to this society a new energy and enthusiasm…. Let us hope that his energetic and reforming work will lead to good things not just in the district of Valmiera, and not only in Vidzeme, but surely in all of Latvia."[8]

-The First World War-

However, just as Ulmanis was hitting his stride as an agronomist and agricultural journalist, yet another hardship befell him. Only this time it was not a personal tragedy. Instead, this time it was a national, regional, and continental calamity that brought much of the world to the brink of madness. This catastrophe, of course, was the First World War, which began in August 1914.

As throughout the Russian Empire, within the first few weeks of the war, men in Latvian lands were called up for military service. Comprising around 25,000 in total, they were sent, usually as part of the Third and Twentieth Corps, to eastern Prussia. However, the infamously ill-trained and ill-equipped Russian Imperial Army proved no match for the Germans, who rapidly progressed eastward in the autumn and winter of 1914-15 following notable victories at Tannenberg, and in the region of the Masurian Lakes. This trend continued after the spring thaw, and by early summer it looked like the Germans would soon reach Rīga, a major port city, and the Daugava River, one of the last significant natural defenses on their road toward St. Petersburg, or Petrograd, as it was called during those years of rabid anti-German sentiment. Desperate to hold this strategic line, in July 1915 the Russian government and military high

[7] "Baltijas Lauksaimneeku Beedribas izstade Walmeerā no 22.-24. junijam sch. g.," *Jaunās Latweeschu Awizes*, Nr. 50, 2.
[8] Ibid.

command took up consideration of Jānis Goldmanis's suggestion, which he had previously introduced during a session of the *Duma*, to create Latvian-only regiments. Goldmanis's argument, which ultimately proved persuasive, was that the best way to defend the Daugava was to permit Latvians to join together, for they would surely fight more vigorously for their homeland than would a soldier from mainland Russia, who had no meaningful connections to the area. The tsar agreed to this proposal and on August 1 signed a decree that created two brigades (each comprised of four regiments) of Latvian infantry, subsequently known as the *strēlnieki*, or Latvian Riflemen.[9]

There must have been little doubt on the part of the tsar and other top decision-makers that permitting such Latvian-only regiments was akin to creating a Latvian national army, for that was exactly how the Latvians saw the *strēlnieki*. Consequently, the mere existence of the *strēlnieki* speaks to how badly the war had gone for the Russian Empire—that notions of autocracy would be so tempered. Yet, though it might not have assuaged their fears about potential nationalistic uprisings in the months and years ahead, for the tsar and top brass, the *strēlnieki* decision yielded positive results on the battlefield. In fact, the *strēlnieki* fought so fiercely to hold the Rīga-Daugava line up through the spring of 1917 that Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, who rose to fame following his leadership at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914, later allegedly commented that Rīga would have easily fallen by Easter 1916 had it not been for the eight *strēlnieki* regiments.[10]

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[9] Plakans, *The Latvians*, 114-115; Alfreds Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 278-279.

[10] Bilmanis, 278. On the *strēlnieki* during the First World War, see especially Arvids Memenis, *Strēlnieki: Latviešu strēlnieki I pasaules kaŗā* (Rīga: Iespiests apgāda "Junda" tip., 1995); V Bērziņš, *Latviešu strēlnieki: drāma un traģēdija* (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1995); I Andersons, *Gaitu sākums: Latviešu strēlnieki Rīgas frontē, 1915-1917* (Rīga: Latvijas Žurnālistu savienības komerccentrs, 1991); *20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture I: Latvija no gadsimta sākuma līdz neatkarības pasludināšanai, 1900-1918*, ed. Valdis Bērziņš et al. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2000), 566-581.

Though he was only thirty-eight years old, and thus still of an able-bodied age, Ulmanis was not called to military service, nor did he volunteer to join the *strēlnieki*. Instead, the Central Agricultural Union of Rīga, the governor of Vidzeme, and the Twelfth Regiment collectively asked Ulmanis to lead the newly founded livestock requisition committee. This committee, one of many that comprised the Central Committee for the Provisioning of Refugees (*Bēgļu apgādāšanas centrālkomiteja*), was formed in the summer of 1915 in response to the wave of refugees – already numbering more than 600,000 by autumn 1915 – who were fleeing north and east of the Daugava River, and by leading this committee, Ulmanis was tasked with solving one aspect of the growing refugee crisis and the war effort at large: the livestock problem.[11]

As farmers from Kurzeme and Zemgale fled in advance of the war, they brought the majority of their livestock with them, as indeed the government had asked them to do. But as the war dragged on, it became obvious to everyone involved that there was no way that these refugees could continue to care for their animals. Consequently, Ulmanis set up livestock requisition points, where farmers could sell their animals, wagons, and carts to the government for a reasonably fair price given the extraordinary and difficult situation. Recognizing that it would be difficult for the farmers to part with their livestock and goods at a price below their market value, the Russian authorities granted Ulmanis and other Latvians the power to handle things as they saw fit, for they thought that Latvian farmers would be more apt to trust that they were being offered a respectable price if the offer came from a fellow Latvian instead of from a Baltic German or Russian bureaucrat.

Ulmanis thus spent the rest of 1915 supervising the work of the livestock requisition committee. Part of the time he worked at a requisition center in Rīga, but mostly he spent his days in the countryside of Vidzeme at the larger requisition centers in Suntaži, Priekuļi, and at

[11] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 60.

the old Riktere manor near Mālpils. The biggest trouble Ulmanis faced in this work was not uncooperative farmers, haggling about requisition prices, but sick livestock. For example, in an August 1 letter from Suntaži, Ulmanis explained to Enzeliņš that he was currently trying to deal with more than 10,000 sick livestock. Twelve days later, Ulmanis wrote again, this time from the Riktere manor, where, he lamented, more than 15,000 cows, pigs, and sheep had fallen ill because of the cramped conditions and constant exposure to the cool, rainy autumn weather. Frustrated and sad that he was losing large numbers of livestock to illness, Ulmanis wrote to Enzeliņš that he was no longer reading the newspapers because, as he put it, "I see enough suffering with my own eyes."[12]

A month later, and despite his best efforts to save the animals, Ulmanis received word from the provincial authorities that he was to set up slaughtering facilities. The decision, as it was explained to him, was made based on the poor condition of the animals and the need for meat for refugees and soldiers. Unsurprisingly, Ulmanis found this new task incredibly depressing, and it took its toll on him. Indeed, by the end of September, Ulmanis had written Enzeliņš again, commenting that "with each day I am getting greyer and older."[13] In particular, Ulmanis was frustrated that much of his hard work to help Latvian farmers improve the quality of their herds was now being eradicated, as he looked on, with the slaughter of every young registered cow or pig.[14]

By the beginning of 1916, Ulmanis had finished his work for the livestock requisition committee and had returned to Valmiera. There he served as a main leader of the Valmiera Committee for the Provisioning of Refugees, headed by Enzeliņš. Additionally, after his work

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[12] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, August 1, 1915, published in *Latvijas vēstnesis*, Nr. 250, October 1, 1997, accessed on August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=30713.
[13] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 16, 1915, published in *Latvijas vēstnesis*, Nr. 250, op. cit.
[14] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, November 10, 1915, published in *Latvijas vēstnesis*, Nr. 250, op. cit.; Dunsdorfs, 68.

with the livestock, Ulmanis also served on the leadership committee of the Central Committee in Rīga. But during 1916 and the beginning of 1917, Ulmanis spent nearly all of his time in Valmeria and Cēsis, another major Vidzeme city located approximately thirty kilometers from Valmiera and ninety kilometers from Rīga.

Ulmanis's primary goal during this time was to provide refugees with adequate food, shelter, and work, so as to prevent them from leaving for the interior of the empire. His anxiety – and it was not an unfounded one at that time, since the number of Latvians fleeing beyond Latvian lands neared one million by March 1917 – was that the refugees would not return quickly enough to help those remaining recover from the war once it ended, or, in the worst case scenario, might choose not to return, having established a new life elsewhere.[15] Thus, hoping to stem the growing number of Latvians fleeing even beyond Vidzeme, Ulmanis played a leading role in the establishment of temporary wartime factories. Of special note are the refugee sewing industries, which were the most numerous places of temporary employment for women. As for finding gainful employment for the men, this proved more difficult, as suggested by the fact that Ulmanis published in April 1917 an article in the Valka newspaper *Lihdums*, pleading for Vidzeme farmers to help out their compatriots and fellow farmers from Kurzeme and Zemgale by offering them some type of work.[16]

Ulmanis's entreaty for Latvians to band together brings up an important aspect of the war, and that is that it presented a quandary, one of identity and loyalties, for the people residing in the Baltic littoral. Most apparent of all, the Baltic Germans were immediately forced to choose sides. As citizens in the Russian Empire, they had to decide whether to fight for the tsar in hopes of maintaining their privileged status in Baltic society or to side with the German Reich, the land

[15] Plakans, *The Latvians*, 116.
[16] Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis: cilvēks un valstsvīrs*, 60-61.

of their ethnic and cultural heritage. While there were of course exceptions, most Baltic Germans chose the latter. In part they did so because they were taken aback by the anti-German sentiments that had developed in the empire. More significantly, however, the majority of Baltic Germans were convinced that the Reich would win the war, whereupon, they reasoned, the Baltic Provinces would be colonized and incorporated into the Reich. Indeed, in July 1915 an organization of prominent Baltic Germans formally petitioned the German chancellor to do as much.[17]

For Latvians, the war also forced them to choose between, at least at the beginning, the lesser of two evils. The absolute majority of Latvians sided with Russia because they believed that the greatest chance for national autonomy was within a Russian Empire that seemed to be moving ever so slowly toward some type of democratic federalism. However, the Bolsheviks proved to be the wildcard in the war.

They promised land, bread, and peace. Yet, perhaps even more significantly for Latvians and the other multifarious border nationalities of the empire, the Bolsheviks talked positively about the principle of national self-determination. Certainly this principle became a rallying cry of sorts for minorities throughout the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires, for their unexpected taste of national autonomy via war relief work only whetted their desire for self-determination, as Aviel Roshwald has shown in his seminal study on ethnic nationalism during the Great War.[18] Hence, even before the October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power, many Latvians had transferred their support. For example, by August 1917 the Bolshevik party had gained a strong foothold in the Latvian parts of the Russian Empire. In municipal elections that month, the Bolsheviks managed to win forty-one percent of the popular

[17] Bilmanis, 280.
[18] Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires Central Europe, the Middle East and Russia, 1914-23* (London: Routledge, 2000).

vote in Rīga and upwards of seventy percent in the northern cities of Valmiera and Limbaži.[19] This, in contrast to the Bolsheviks garnering only approximately a quarter of the popular vote in mainland Russia, proves that many Latvians out the outset clearly saw the Bolsheviks as a promising third option, as opposed to tsarist or German rule.[20]

However, following the Bolsheviks' overthrow of Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government in November 1917 (new calendar), the war conditions worsened for Latvians. In fact, the situation had already turned a few months prior, when Russian soldiers, influenced by the Bolsheviks' pacifist message, refused to participate in the so-called Summer Offensive. As a result, German forces routed the Russians at Ternopil, in present-day western Ukraine, whereupon they turned toward St. Petersburg. The Latvian Riflemen, now facing even greater numbers, could not hold the Riga-Daugava line, and thus Rīga, which had defended at high costs for years, was lost to the Germans at the beginning of September. This trend continued over the next months, so that, once in power, Lenin and the Bolsheviks – wanting to consolidate their control, and comprehending that the war with Germany was working against this goal – signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. Unfortunately for Latvians, this resulted in their worst nightmare: excluding Latgale, the Bolsheviks had just signed away Latvian lands to the Germans.

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[19] Modris Eksteins, *Walking since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 53.

[20] It is worth noting just how receptive Latvians were, in fact, to Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It has been detailed that Lenin brought in the famous Latvian Riflemen to defend his new government in Petrograd. After the October Revolution, all eight of the Latvian regiments went over to the Bolshevik side. In July 1918, these regiments were used to squash disturbances staged by Lenin's rivals. Another interesting side note concerns the troops responsible for killing the royal tsarist family. The firing squad that executed the tsar and his family in the Urals was composed of seven Latvians and only four Russians, and, on top of that, the military commander in the area who gave the command was also a Latvian. Jukums Vācietis is yet another case of a powerful Latvian in Soviet Russia. Vācietis served, after September 1918, as the head of the entire Red Army. See especially Andrew Ezergailis, *The Latvian Impact on the Bolshevik Revolution the First Phase: September 1917-April 1918*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

While the Bolsheviks' drastic actions to get out of the war certainly came as an unpleasant surprise for Latvians, there was, nonetheless, a silver lining. This was the continued growth and development of a cadre of nationalist leaders who had been gaining experience and confidence as a result of their work with the refugee committees.[21] In fact, one of the most significant developments on this front occurred just after the February Revolution, when on March 25-26 approximately 400 representatives of various Latvian organizations met in Valka, in the far north of Vidzeme. There the Latvian leaders drafted a resolution, to be submitted to the Provisional Government, stating that all Latvian-speaking lands should be unified in one administrative territory that should be granted complete autonomy within the empire. Even more noteworthy, that same month the Provisional Government agreed to appoint Jānis Čakste and Andrejs Krastkalns (both Latvians) as the new governors of Kurzeme and Vidzeme, respectively.

During this time, Ulmanis also rose among the ranks of Latvian leaders. Having become well known for his work in Vidzeme, the Provisional Government agreed to Ulmanis's appointment as the vice-governor of Vidzeme. Unfortunately, there are no surviving primary sources that document Ulmanis's reaction to this new, important job in Rīga, but taking into consideration all that he had been through as a result of his previous political-criminal record, it seems safe to presume that such a development would have given him much needed hope during the depressing war. That seems to have indeed been the case, because over the coming months Ulmanis played the leading role in the establishment of the Farmers' Union party. Under Ulmanis's guidance, the Farmers' Union sought to represent not only the interests of rural inhabitants, but of all Latvians. In fact, Ulmanis sought to build the party as a national party working toward the idea of a free Latvia (either as an autonomous entity within the Russian

[21] For an excellent discussion on this exact topic, see Ādolfs Klīve, "Ceļā uz savu sūtību," in *Kārlis Ulmanis 75 gadi*, ed. Latviešu Zemnieku Savienība (S.L.: Brīvā zeme, 1952), 39-65.

Empire or as a completely independent country), as opposed to the narrow, class-based platform adopted by the Social Democratic party, which remained the second largest political party, behind the Farmers' Union, up through the end of the war.[22]

Moreover, as the German military attempted to bring about their desired aims of colonizing and incorporating into the Reich the "war land" of the Baltic littoral, they only strengthened this burgeoning nationalist movement.[23] Centered in the cities of northern Vidzeme not under German occupation, especially Valka, nationalist leaders began to more fervently discuss the possibility on an independent Latvian state. In mid-November 1917, for instance, Latvian leaders in St. Petersburg, along with those who remained in Vidzeme, called for the creation of a Provisional National Council. At the gathering in Valka, the optimistic leaders, despite the fact that most of Latvian-speaking territory remained under German rule, announced that a constitutional assembly would be formed. It was the first major step toward a free Latvia.

However, the problem was that this step was not a unified one, as the National Council had been led primarily by Latvians who were residing in St. Petersburg, not to mention that the Social Democrats had not participated either. To Ulmanis, who had not participated in the assembly due to poor health, the actions of the St. Petersburg Latvians and the National Council were threatening to undermine national unity at the time when it was needed the most. Likewise, though Ulmanis certainly hoped it would not last, he also thought that the leaders of the National Council were ignoring the realities of German rule, which at that point also included an impending alleged referendum, organized by the occupying German forces and scheduled for

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[22] For example, in July 1917 the Farmers' Union had approximately 17,000 members, while the Social Democrats had only about 7,000. See Antonijs Zunda, "Kārlis Ulmanis un Zemnieku savienība," in *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1998), 99.

[23] Vejas G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Also useful on the Germans' aims in the East is Gregor Thum, *Traumland Osten: deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2006).

summer 1918, on whether Vidzeme would be included within the Reich. Thus, rather than support the National Council, Ulmanis favored the approach of the Democratic Block, which he, in fact, had co-founded in autumn 1917. Comprised of leaders of all political affiliations who had remained in Latvian lands rather than fleeing to St. Petersburg or the interior, the Democratic Block took a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, recognizing the reality of German rule, the members of the Block drafted a written appeal to the Social Democrats in the German parliament, requesting that Latvians be granted autonomy. However, Ulmanis and others also hoped, of course, that Latvians might be able to gain independence. Therefore, using his first-hand knowledge of democratic, grassroots activism, which he had observed in America, Ulmanis began delivering, under the guise of his work with the Central Agricultural Union in Rīga (in May 1918 he was elected to the board and named the editor of its journal), talks aimed at furthering the idea of Latvian independence and explaining the nature and benefits of democracy. Thus, by summer 1918 Ulmanis's image among the Latvian populace had been transformed from an agronomist to perhaps the single most important and well known national leader.[24]

-Latvian War of Independence-

In the end, the Germans' plans in the East were all for naught, as by autumn 1918 German military leaders realized that the war on the Western Front could not be won and instructed the political authorities to sue for peace. Following General Erich Ludendorff's logic that if the war could not be won then it at least should not be lost, the German leaders sought a negotiated end to the war. On the morning of November 11, 1918, aboard a private train car in Compiègne, France, German and French representatives signed an armistice. The war was over. However, for the Latvians, who took advantage of the unexpected power vacuum and on November 18 declared their independence in Rīga, the war did not end so suddenly.

[24] *20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture I*, 643-647; Klīve, "Ceļā uz savu sūtību," 61-65.

Although the Latvians had been able to declare the formation of the independent Latvian republic and a provisional government, headed by Ulmanis, the situation in their new state was extremely fragile. This was because German and Russian forces were quick to reassert themselves. Lenin, for example, was mindful of the opportunity to regain some of the land he had lost as a result of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Additionally, the Baltic region represented for Lenin a "window to the west," an avenue to help spark a world-wide revolution, and therefore he had not welcomed the proclamation of Latvian independence. In fact, according to one report, Lenin, fuming at the Estonian and Latvian declarations, had charged, "Cross the frontier somewhere, even if only to a depth of a kilometer, and hang 100-1,000 of their civil servants and rich people."[25] Hence, already in early December 1918 the Bolshevik Red Army invaded Latvia. Meeting little military resistance, for the fledging Latvian government had barely had any time to organize a national army, by January 1919 the Red Army had occupied Rīga.

This was the precise Soviet response that the Allies had feared. Previously, as part of the peace settlement reached with the Germans, the Allies mandated that German forces remain in the Baltic until "the Allies shall think the moment suitable [for withdrawal], having regard to the internal situation of these territories."[26] In other words, the Allies wanted to use German forces to prevent a Soviet incursion into Eastern Europe. Therefore, with the fall of Rīga, Ulmanis and the new Latvian government were awkwardly forced to align themselves with both remaining imperial German forces and the *Freikorps*, whose members had volunteered to come to Latvia in the hope of gaining land one way or another, as well as with local Baltic German forces.[27]

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[25] Eksteins, 61.
[26] Ibid, 63.
[27] The best studies of the *Freikorps* have been done by German historians. See in particular, Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1969); Dominique Venner, *Söldner ohne Sold: die deutschen Freikorps, 1918-1923* (Wien; Berlin: P. Neff, 1974); H.W. Koch, *Der deutsche Bürgerkrieg. Eine Geschichte der deutschen und österreichischen Freikorps, 1918-1923* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1978).

With the invasion of the Soviets, Latvia again became a hotbed of violence. This time, though, the lines of division were not nearly as distinct. On one side were the Russian Red Bolsheviks, the Latvian Bolsheviks (including the majority of the *strēlnieki*), a few Latvian Social Democrats, and those who detested the Germans above all. On the other side, there was a far from united combination of more or less everyone whose primary goal was to prevent a communist takeover, including: the Ulmanis-led government and other nationalist Latvians, the Germans (both Baltic Germans and those in the army or *Freikorps*), and a small contingent of the Russian White Army. As noted above, initially the Red Army had great success, taking Rīga by the end of 1918. Consequently, Ulmanis and the cabinet fled to the far-western port city of Liepāja, where they organized the defense of Latvia from the hull of a previously captured Russian battleship, *Saratov*, now anchored in the British-protected harbor. As part of that effort, Ulmanis signed a military agreement that further integrated Latvian and German forces.[28] Additionally, Ulmanis and a few other top leaders made a number of diplomatic journeys to Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, where they pleaded for financial or military support. In Stockholm, Ulmanis managed to secure a loan to finance the new government, using future timber and flax seed deliveries as collateral. While in these neighboring foreign capitals, Ulmanis and others also discussed the need for assistance with diplomats of the Allied Powers. But help proved slow in coming, though the Americans did send much needed foodstuffs, while the British sent weapons. Lastly, by March the Ulmanis government had also succeeded in establishing military ties with the new national governments in neighboring Estonia and Lithuania.[29]

[28] For an excellent discussion of this military agreement, see Dunsdorfs, 105-107.
[29] Dunsdorfs, 117-119.

Ironically, it turned out that it was temporary communist rule in Latvia, headed by Pēteris Stučka, that gave a big boost of support to the Ulmanis regime. Even by early 1919 the new Latvian government had not yet succeeded in winning the support of all Latvians. What turned the tide in Ulmanis's favor was the violent nature of Stučka's regime. One such example was the murder of over 6,000 Rīga civilians who were deemed "bourgeois, counter-revolutionary" enemies.[30] Acts like this caused many Latvians to believe that the communists were more worried about settling scores than building a workers' paradise, and thus already by spring 1919 even large numbers of the earlier radicalized *strēlnieki* had turned against the communists, promising their loyalty and support to Ulmanis and the new Latvian state. Consequently, by autumn 1919 Ulmanis was able to boast of a new Latvian army with a fighting force of 11,500 soldiers—the bulk of which came from the *strēlnieki* and the newly created *Aizsargi*, a paramilitary organization akin to a national guard.[31]

Therefore, by late spring 1919, the dire situation had begun to improve. Ulmanis had even managed to outlast an attack on the legitimacy of his government when, in April, the Germanophile Latvian pastor Andrievs Niedra attempted to establish in Liepāja a new government with the military support of the local German military commander, Rüdiger von der Goltz, who reportedly thought of the Ulmanis government as a group of half-Bolshevik German-haters.[32] Moreover, developments on the battle front had also improved. Though there were constant anxieties about the loyalty of the German forces – concerns that were certainly not unfounded given von der Goltz's attitude – a combination of German and Latvian forces were

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[30] Eksteins, 68.
[31] Plakans, *The Latvians*, 111-119. For an excellent discussion of the importance of such paramilitary organizations in the immediate post-war Baltic states, see Tomas Balkelis, "Turning Citizens into Soldiers: Baltic Paramilitary Movements after the Great War," in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 126-144.
[32] Dunsdorfs, 118-119. On Niedra, see his book *Tautas nodevēja atmiņas: piedzīvojumi cīņā pret lieliniecismu* (1923; reprint, Rīgā: Zinātne, 1998).

beginning to push back the communists. Initially stopping the Red Army in central Kurzeme, by the end of March the Latvian forces had managed to liberate the city of Jelgava. But as is often the case with war, the "liberating" forces frequently resorted to these same acts of violence. In the case of Jelgava, immediately following liberation from the communists, 500 Latvians were shot without trial for being "pro-Bolshevik."[33] The violence experienced during this struggle for Latvia was hitherto unforeseen by all parties involved. For instance, one communist soldier, a German who had volunteered for the communist forces, later recalled of that time:

> We hunted the Letts [i.e., Latvians] across the fields like hares, set fire to every house, smashed every bridge to smithereens and broke every telegraph pole. We dropped the corpses into the wells and threw bombs after them. We killed anything that fell into our hands; we set fire to everything that would burn. We saw red; we lost every feeling of humanity. Where we had ravaged, the earth groaned under the destruction.[34]

As this quote illustrates, the fighting in Latvia was indeed ruthless, to the point, even, of disbelief at the sheer inhumanity of man. Rudolf Höss, for instance, who served in the *Freikorps*, was still aghast nearly thirty years later at what he saw there. Höss's recollection is striking because he went on, of course, to serve as the commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp from 1940-1943. Writing in 1947 from his prison cell in Krakow, Höss noted about his time in Latvia:

> The battles in the Baltic were more wild and ferocious than any I have experienced either in the world war or in the battles for liberation afterwards. There was no real front; the enemy was everywhere. And when contact was made, the result was butchery, to the point of utter annihilation. The Letts were especially good at this. It was there that I first encountered atrocities against civilians…Countless times I saw horrible images of burned-out cottages along with the charred or smeared corpses of women and children. When I saw this for the first time I was turned to stone. I could not believe then that this mad human desire for annihilation could be intensified in any way. Although later I had to face more horrible images repeatedly, I can today still see, perfectly clearly, the scorched cottage with an entire family dead inside, at forest's edge on the Dvina [Daugava] River. In those days I could still pray and I did.[35]

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[33] Eksteins, 72.
[34] Quoted in Eksteins, 83-84.
[35] Quoted in Eksteins, 85-86.

The fact that Höss's memories of his time in the *Freikorps* remained with him so vividly and hauntingly says much about the vicious fighting that took place during the Latvian War of Independence (*Latvijas neatkarības karš)*, as the brutal post-First World War conflict is known today. Additionally, testimonies like Höss's also explain why some historians view the hardened and dehumanized *Freikorps* members as the vanguard of Nazism.[36]

Unfortunately for those involved, the brutal war of annihilation dragged on as Latvian and German forces slowly pushed eastward. With Rīga having been liberated, in July 1919, Ulmanis and the government triumphantly returned to the capital. However, in a turn of events that speaks to just how blurry the lines were between friend and foe in this war, in October of that same year the newly formed "West Russian Volunteer Army," a motley group of about 40,000 *Freikorps* men and 10,000 Russian White forces, attacked Rīga under the leadership of von der Goltz and Pavel Bermondt-Avlov, an Ussuri Cossack whom von der Goltz had recruited. Like the first attack on the Ulmanis government with the Niedra coup, the West Russian Volunteer Army's assault on Rīga was a last-ditch effort to preserve German superiority in the region. To be sure, von der Goltz, a native son of Züllichau, Brandenburg, even believed that his occupation of Rīga would be the first step toward overturning the results of the Great War. However, von der Goltz was acting entirely on his own, for the German government, following Allied orders, had ordered him to withdraw his troops from the region after his unsuccessful attempt at putting Niedra in power. Consequently, with next to no funds and no way to resupply their lines, the West Russian Volunteer Army proved unable to match the strength of the Latvian forces, which were at this point also aided by the new Estonian army and, at the very end, by

[36] For example, see Nigel H. Jones, *A Brief History of the Birth of the Nazis: How the Freikorps Blazed a Trail for Hitler* (London: Robinson, 2004), and *Hitler's Heralds: The Story of the Freikorps 1918-1923* (London: Murray, 1987).

British naval support. Defeated, and in dire need of provisions, the unpredictable *Freikorps* fighters left Latvia by 1920.[37]

By the end of January 1920, the Latvian forces had also managed to expel the communists out of the majority of Latvian lands. A month later, the Ulmanis government reached an armistice with Soviet Russia. Then on August 11, 1920, the Soviets signed a formal peace treaty, in which they officially recognized the existence of a free and independent Latvian state.

-Free and Democratic Latvia-

Latvia may have been a free country again, but the devastation of two wars that had lasted for nearly six dreadful years had left it in ruins. For example, a study initiated by the Latvian provisional government found that there were 78,278 buildings that had been completely destroyed and another 104,574 that were severely damaged.[38] The domestic economy, too, had been hard hit. For instance, most of Latvia's factories in Rīga, the country's industrial hub, had been plundered when the retreat set in and the equipment shipped back to mainland Russia. In fact, Ādolfs Bļodnieks estimated that more than 30,000 railroad cars full of factory equipment were sent to mainland Russia.[39] Another problem was the infrastructure, which had been rendered unusable in most areas south of the Daugava River. Of course agriculture, too, had been affected. Even in 1920, more than thirty percent of all farmland was left untilled, and livestock numbers were down from the prewar years by more than twenty-five percent.[40]

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[37] Edgar Anderson, *Latvijas vēsture, 1914-1920* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1967), 512-538; Ādolfs Klīve, *Brīvā Latvija: Latvijas tapšana : atmiņas, vērojumi un atzinumi* (Brooklyn, NY: Grāmatu Draugs, 1969), 424-435. Von der Goltz later wrote about his time in the Baltic. See Rüdiger von der Goltz, *Als politischer general im osten (Finnland und Baltikum) 1918 und 1919* (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler, 1936).
[38] Kārlis Kalniņš and Zigismunds Vidbergs, *Vai jūs zināt, ka Latvija ...?: dati par Latvijas sasniegumiem 1918-1939. g.* (Esslingen: Latviešu ziņas, 1947), 45.
[39] Adolfs Blodnieks, *The Undefeated Nation* (New York: R. Speller, 1960), 183.
[40] Ibid, 334.

Without a doubt, the biggest problem of all, however, was the staggering loss of people. For example, Rīga, which had a prewar population of roughly 520,000, was inhabited at the end of the wars by barely 180,000 people, a sixty-five percent reduction.[41] Beyond Rīga, the numbers were equally bad. Had there not been a war, based upon an extrapolation of pre-war statistics there should have been slightly more than two and a half million people in Latvia, with 780,000 between the ages of twenty and forty. But instead the government found through its June 1920 census that there were only approximately 1.6 million people in Latvia, and only 383,000 were between the ages of twenty and forty. Fortunately, roughly a quarter of a million people would return from abroad in the coming years, but even that did little to ease the demographic crisis and heightened economic woes.[42] In truth, the damage done to Latvia during the two wars was so severe that years later Lenin reportedly continued to refer to the region as "the anvil," due to the fact that it had been repeatedly pounded by the Russians and Germans.[43]

Immediately following the end of hostilities, the Latvian government took steps to build up its political capital. Ulmanis and the other political leaders did this by accomplishing two chief things: writing a formal constitution and implementing a monumental land reform. Work on the constitution began in May 1920 with the state election of a constitutional assembly. This was the first democratically elected legislative body in Latvian history, and it not only was tasked with drafting a constitution, but it also served as the provisional parliamentary body until the election of the first parliament.

The constitution was formally enacted on May 1, 1922. It placed Latvia on a democratic footing, with power resting in the 100-seat *Saeima* (parliament). At the head of the government

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[41] Valdis O. Lumans, *Latvia in World War II* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 21.
[42] Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 16-17; Dunsdorfs, 157.
[43] Peggy Benton, *Baltic Countdown* (London: Centaur Press, 1984), 47.

was the state president, who was chosen by the *Saeima* for a term of three years, and which legally could not exceed six years consecutively. This was, however, more or less merely a ceremonial post, as the prime minister was responsible for leading the government. The prime minister and members of the *Saeima* were to be elected through state-wide elections for a term of three years.

The laws governing these elections were among the most liberal and democratic in Europe. According to the constitution, any group of seven or more people could form a political party, and once the number of members reached the minimum threshold of 100, then any such parties could put forth a list of candidates for state and municipal elections. The laws guiding legislative initiative were similarly liberal. Bills could be brought to the floor for discussion in the *Saeima* by any group of five or more *Saeima* members, by the president, the prime minister, or by one-tenth of the voting populace. Finally, legislation and motions in the *Saeima*, including on whether to dismiss the ruling coalition, were passed on a simple majority vote. Thus, as a result of these liberal laws, the Latvian government was plagued by frequent turnover.[44]

The epic land reform, the second major achievement, was important because it brought peace, prosperity, and stability to the countryside, minimizing any lingering support for the communists (though the Communist Party was officially banned) over the land question and diminishing the economic and social power of the Baltic German landlords. For centuries, land ownership had been a contentious issue because while the majority of Latvians were engaged in agricultural work, very few owned land. This was still the case prior to the wars, when just less than fifty percent of all land – and not just arable land – was concentrated in the hands of wealthy estate owners, who were typically Baltic Germans, though there were also a handful of

[44] Alfred Bilmanis, *Latvia as an Independent State* (Washington D.C.: Latvian Legation, 1947), 76-85, Spekke, 373-374.

estates owned by Russians and Latvians. Moreover, after the wars the proportion of people employed in the agricultural sector went up, to roughly eighty percent, as a result of the decimation of Latvia's industries. Thus, the land reform was the single most urgent socio-economic issue that the Latvian government faced.[45]

Work on the land reform began already during the Latvian War of Independence. As a matter of fact, Ulmanis made the need for land reform a point of emphasis even before the declaration of Latvian independence. Perhaps most noteworthy, on the evening of November 17, when members of the Democratic Block and National Council convened in Rīga and decided to declare Latvia's independence the following day, Ulmanis addressed those in attendance after he was selected as the prime minister of the newly formed provisional government. After formally accepting the position, Ulmanis detailed in his subsequent remarks, which were presented again the next day at the formal declaration, what he saw as the most pressing issues of the day: the food shortage and the need for a land reform. On the latter, Ulmanis argued that it had to be implemented as quickly as possible, because the future of Latvia's democracy depended on "a democratic reform," as he put it, of land holding.[46] Of course, concerns about the communists' appealing answer to this problem cannot be overlooked, but nonetheless it is clear that Ulmanis's call for a democratic country of small family farms was clearly patterned on his personal observations of the American model of Jeffersonian democracy.[47]

Work on the land reform began in earnest in January 1919, when Ulmanis ordered the compilation of a list of landless farmers so that the government could begin doling out former crown lands. A month later, the State Land Fund and Central Land Distribution Committee were formed, though due to the ongoing war its members were not able to work effectively until

[45] Spekke, 362.
[46] Dunsdorfs, 97.
[47] Ibid, 95-98.

autumn 1920. Collaborating with regional and local land boards, the committee inventoried distributable and redistributable land, processed applications from landless and small-holding farmers, and mediated disputes. On September 16, 1920, when a vote on the land reform legislation was held, it was decided that no single person was legally permitted to own more than 123 acres of land. Thus, while there had been many debates among politicians about land tenure models, in the end the small family-farm model which Ulmanis and others had championed won out.[48]

Consequently, between the years 1920 and 1937, when the government concluded that all available land had been distributed, the Central Land Distribution Committee parceled out 144,681 new properties, averaging twenty to thirty hectares in size. However, even this impressive number did not meet demand, for in 1920 there had been more than 600,000 landless citizens (though this number also included family members). As a result, during the Ulmanis regime the government undertook massive and much-celebrated efforts to reclaim new farm ground from marshland by drainage and amelioration. Indeed, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the regime touted its land reclamation successes as proof of the progress that it was bringing about.[49]

Unsurprisingly, the government's decision to appropriate and redistribute land caused a lot of controversy. Firstly, there was the question of compensation. In general, Ulmanis and the Farmers Union, along with a number of minority parties, and a few other rightwing parties favored some level of compensation for former estate owners, as they were concerned about causing major rifts between the government and an important segment of the citizenry. The Social Democrats and others on the Left, however, fiercely argued against any type of

[48] Spekke, 362-363; Andrejs Plakans et al., *Agrarian Reform in Latvia: The Historical Context* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1996), 6-7.
[49] Plakans, *Agrarian Reform in Latvia*, 8; Bilmanis, 223.

compensation, arguing, as Plakans has put it, that it was "payment for past injustices," for centuries of serfdom.[50] Indicative of the constant government turnover in the new Latvian republic, this debate was partially to blame for the collapse of four coalitions between June 1921 and January 1924. Ultimately, it was not until the government of Voldemārs Zāmuēls (who was politically unaffiliated) was formed in 1924 that the decision against compensation was agreed upon.

Beyond the question of compensation, the land reform also led to accusations of unethical practices and corruption. For example, newspapers reported on instances of "new farmers," as those who received land were known, who had already abandoned the land after felling all of the trees on the property and selling the lumber for a quick profit. Additionally, the Central Land Distribution Committee also ran into conflicts with city mayors who did everything in their power to complicate the Committee's repossession of unsettled city lands. Without a doubt, the most frequent charge, however, concerned corruption. Since distributing the land was a lengthy, bureaucratic process, and because there proved ultimately not to be enough land to satisfy all of the applications, certainly some of these allegations came from frustrated and angry individuals who felt that the Central Land Distribution Committee played favorites. However, while most of these claims were unfounded, the existence of one high-profile case was enough to raise and sustain people's suspicions. This single instance, which first surfaced in spring 1921, involved some level of corrupt dealings between members of the Central Land Distribution Committee and a Latgalian land board, wherein a number of board members illegally granted to themselves former estate land that they had nefariously excluded from the list of redistributable properties.

By late May 1921, the scandal had caused for Ulmanis's cabinet a crisis of public confidence, as the populace began questioning the government's trustworthiness and level of

[50] Plakans, *Agrarian Reform in Latvia*, 8.

oversight on major projects like the land reform. The opposition parties, taking into consideration that Ulmanis had survived botched assassination attempts by leftist radicals in the summer of 1920 and again in April 1921, and also hoping that his image had been damaged by an embarrassingly bad contract for railroad equipment that had resulted in a huge financial loss for the government, slammed Ulmanis in the press and railed against him in the constitutional assembly. Sensing that the tide was not going to turn in his favor in the near future, in early June 1921, after having served 953 days as prime minister and starting Latvia down a democratic path, Ulmanis resigned from office.[51]

It would seem that Ulmanis strategically chose to resign rather than continue to fight the accusations of mismanagement because he instead hoped that the storm of controversy would blow over and long be forgotten prior to the elections for the first parliament, which were scheduled to take place in October 1922. Thus, as the chairman of the Farmers' Union, Ulmanis began campaigning for the parliamentary election. Unsurprisingly, the party platform centered on rural affairs. Perhaps most significantly, his party campaigned on the promise of using state funds to speed up the war recovery work in the countryside, as there were still many buildings to be rebuilt and trenches to be filled, and the farmers had neither sufficient access to capital nor the manpower needed to accomplish these tasks in a timely manner. Ultimately, the election went well for the party, which won the most seats in parliament. Ulmanis, too, won a seat. However, despite Ulmanis's best efforts to explain some of the perceived shortcomings of his leadership of the provisional government, in the end Zigfrīds Meierovics, a fellow Farmers Union member and Latvia's first foreign minister, was selected prime minister.[52]

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[51] Ādolfs Klīve, *Latvijas neatkarības gadi: Latvijas polītiskā veidošanās un augšana* (Brooklyn, NY: Grāmatu Draugs, 1976), 35-40.
[52] Ibid, 41-47; Dunsdorfs, 166-168.

Due to an apparent rift that developed between Ulmanis and Meierovics during the campaign over their respective explanations of why the earlier Ulmanis government (Meierovics had been the foreign minister) had not received any war reparations from Germany, Meierovics chose not to select Ulmanis for a cabinet post. Instead, Meierovics offered to appoint Ulmanis as Latvia's ambassador to the United States. Ulmanis, sensing that Meierovics's proposal was in truth a cunning move to get rid of him, declined the post and instead went about his work as a member of parliament.[53]

The first parliament commenced its work in November 1922. Immediately, one thing became very clear: U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's vision of nationally homogenous nation-states in the post-imperial lands of Central and Eastern Europe did not mesh with reality. Far from being a nation-state of ethnic Latvians, the republic (and especially Latgale) was comprised of large groups of ethnic minorities – mostly Germans, Russians, Poles, and Jews – who made up slightly more than a quarter of the total population.[54] This high composition of minorities in fact put Latvia at the top end of the list of interwar European countries with greatest level of national diversity. As a result of the liberal election laws, there was a significant number of minorities in the parliament. In the first parliament, for instance, sixteen of the 100 seats were held by non-Latvians.

With regard to coalition-building, however, the minorities' power far exceeded their actual number of seats. This was because none of the elections to the four parliaments (in 1922, 1925, 1928, and 1931) yielded an absolute majority for a single party or even for a narrow coalition of the Left or Right. What is more, the two parties that consistently won the most seats – the Farmers Union and the Social Democratic Party, steadfastly refused as a result of

[53] Dunsdorfs, 167.
[54] In 1935, the populace was 75.5% Latvian, 10.59 % Russian, 4.79% Jewish, 3.19% German, 2.51% Polish, 1.38 % Byelorussian, 1.17% Lithuanian, and 0.36% Estonian. See *Vai jūs zināt ka Latvija?...*, 10.

ideological differences to work together in a so-called "Grand Coalition." Thus, when it came to forming a majority coalition, the big, predominantly Latvian parties had no choice but to recruit partners from the minority parties. Naturally, the minority representatives were cognizant of the power that this middle ground afforded them, and thus they leveraged it to ensure that the parliament passed laws granting cultural autonomy and protections for their constituents.

For example, the minority parties successfully pushed through the parliament very liberal laws on education that granted citizens the right to instruction in their respective mother tongue. Consequently, by 1935 nearly a quarter of all public schools in Latvia were minority schools that were fully subsidized by the state. Moreover, these education laws extended to the post-secondary level as well. Thus, in Rīga, for example, there was, most famously, the prestigious Herder Institute for German students. Equally telling are the laws enacted to protect freedom of religion and religious instruction. The law on instruction, for instance, mandated that the tenets of every religion with ten or more adherents in the school had to be taught in the classroom.[55]

As these examples indicate, the Latvian state was not a nation-state of ethnic Latvians but a state of many quasi-autonomous groups of nationalities. As a result, there developed both within the parliament and the public sphere a division between, on the one side, those who advocated cooperation, tolerance, and the supremacy of civic identities and, on the other, those who promoted ethnocentrism and, in the case of ethnic Latvians, called for a more "Latvian Latvia." Thus, while the minorities were granted special privileges in the realms of education and religion, running counter to that liberal trend was a concerted effort on the part of more nationalistically minded Latvians to ensure that the Latvian language and Latvian nation retained a hegemonic position. Hence, Latvian was made the official state language, meaning that affairs

[55] Plakans, *The Latvians*, 137-138; Joseph Roucek, *Central-Eastern Europe: Crucible of World Wars* (New York, 1946), 477-478.

in government and municipal offices were to be conducted only in the Latvian language. Additionally, all street signs and public announcements were to be in Latvian. At times, this effort to Latvianize the public sphere also went beyond language. For example, in order ostensibly to ensure the fair and equal use of historic buildings and prominent public places – many of which had for centuries been chiefly populated by Baltic Germans – the Latvian government appropriated in 1923 and 1931 respectively the two most historic churches in Rīga, the *Jakobkirche* and *Domkirche*, and placed them under the administration of a special council, which consisted of eight Latvians and three Baltic Germans.[56]

The upshot of the minorities' strength in the parliament and the increase in rhetoric about building a more Latvian Latvia was parliamentary dysfunction and seemingly constant government turnover. For instance, between January 1923 and December 1928 there were ten different governments, only one of which was led by Ulmanis (December 1925-May 1926). More troublesome yet was the increase in social turmoil that resulted from this governmental instability. One of the worst incidents, in fact, happened just six days after the collapse of Ulmanis's government. On May 12, 1926, an emboldened communist rebel set the *Saeima* ablaze, significantly damaging a portion of the building.[57] Furthermore, not only was there frequent government turnover, but coalition-building often proved a protracted, discordant process. This was because every year the number of political parties in Latvia increased as a result of the liberal election laws and the sense of malaise that prompted voters to hope that the next new party would be able to curb the factionalism. Indeed, between 1922 and 1934, there were in Latvia, a country of less than two million people, at least forty-four different parties that at one time or another competed for seats in the parliament. Even more telling, there were 109

[56] John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities: Paul Schiemann, 1876-1944* (London: C. Hurst, 2004) ,74-187.
[57] One certainly wonders, given his later actions, what Ulmanis would have done had he been in power at the time, though at this point he may have still held more hope for the democratic process.

different political parties in existence in spring 1934.[58] Consequently, in the four parliaments between 1922 and 1934, each included, on average, at least twenty-five parties.[59] Yet, perhaps the statistic that indicates best the level of government turmoil and party factionalism is the number of different people who held cabinet positions. According to the calculation of one historian, in less than twelve full years the top ten cabinet posts were held by an astounding ninety-four different persons, three-quarters of whom served in only one cabinet.[60] Admittedly, this high rate of turnover perhaps helped mitigate institutionalized corruption, but on the downside it also made it very difficult to hash out and implement long-term plans.

To be clear, despite the fact that majority coalitions proved short-lived and difficult to negotiate due to the intense proliferation of small parties focused on narrow agendas rather than broad political philosophies, democracy was nonetheless working in other ways. For example, voters continued to participate at a high rate. In the four parliamentary elections, for instance, the median voter turnout was seventy-nine percent. Furthermore, political activism remained high in the public sphere as well, as even by 1934 political parties enjoyed impressive membership numbers. Beyond the parties, there were also 11,071 associations and 109 political organizations devoted to furthering the initiatives of the citizenry, sticking evidence of a robust democratic civil society.[61]

Thus, what ultimately proved more detrimental to democracy was not the average voter's abandonment of political consciousness and activism. Rather, as was the case elsewhere in Europe, what undermined the legitimacy of the democratic system was, ironically enough, the

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[58] Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis," 199.
[59] Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars.* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 375; Janis Rogainis, "The Emergence of an Authoritarian Regime in Latvia, 1932-1934," *Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly,* Vol. 17, No.3, (1971), 62-63.
[60] Rogainis, 63.
[61] Plakans, *The Latvians*; Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis," 189.

platform that it gave to antidemocratic ideas. As Kurt Sontheimer brilliantly illustrated in his work on antidemocratic thought in Weimar Germany, antidemocratic thought proved especially powerful and influential for two reasons. First, the democratic system itself lent space and legitimacy to these "political irrationalisms," as Sontheimer described them. Second, as legitimate political alternatives, the focus on leaders, nation, and organic community ties inherent in antidemocratic thinking created a disparate "value-filled political order" that competed with democracy and its message of equality, individualism, and freedom.[62] In other words, both in Latvia and Germany, as elsewhere in Europe and the West, democracy in the interwar period proved to be a feeble and vulnerable political system not because it did not work. On the contrary, it worked all too well in some dimensions, both offering space to and legitimizing a political alternative that sought to expunge the spirit, individualism, and ostensibly artificial societal bonds of the democratic era.

The existence of antidemocratic thoughts in interwar Latvia is best exemplified in the Latvian National Club's (*Latvju Nacionālais klubs*) so-called "Active Nationalism" movement (*Aktīvais nacionālisms*). Formed in November 1922 by nationalist intellectuals who were upset about Latvian politicians bending to minorities' demands, the Latvian National Club was an association that promoted the exclusive interests of the Latvian nation. Sensing that the democratic system was tearing the nation apart as a result of rampant individualism and factionalism, the club rejected democratic politics and instead espoused the creation of an "Active Nationalism" movement that would recreate the organic nationalism of the pre-independence years. However, as Uldis Krēsliņš has shown in his excellent work, though it was ostensibly apolitical in its rejection of democratic comprise and narrow-interest parties, it

[62] Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933* (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1962), 16, 42-43.

nonetheless used the channels of democracy to promulgate its message and pressure ethnic Latvian politicians. Furthermore, as a sort-of modern-day nonprofit organization that lobbied and influenced the government from the sidelines, the club also served as an umbrella organization for political organizations and parties that by 1934 numbered more than thirty.[63]

Thus, whether through the Latvian National Club or one of the other fourteen clubs and movements that Krēsliņš has identified as also belonging to the wider "Active Nationalism" movement of the democratic era, nationalist intellectuals already beginning in 1922 started criticizing the parliamentary system and Latvian politicians' ostensibly weak nationalism.[64] For the active nationalists, who were most often academics, journalists, writers, bureaucrats, and war veterans, their earliest and most frequent targets were the Latvian Social Democrats, whom they criticized for placing class consciousness above national consciousness. Seeking to counter the Social Democrats' lucid and appealing message of worker solidarity, many active nationalists sought to craft a counter-narrative built around the Latvian farmer and the Latvian countryside as the authentic embodiment of the nation and its united culture and heritage. Spreading their ideas through public talks and articles, many of which appeared in the mainstream press, these nationalists celebrated the pure, healthy, and communal life of the Latvian farmer, often praising, as one writer put it, their "true struggle … and true suffering" but "enormous patience and love for life." Yet another prominent thinker argued that only those who "closely – generation after generation – have worked with the soil, who feel its warm and healing breath" have been able to preserve the true spirit and organic unity of the nation.[65]

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[63] Uldis Krēsliņš, *Aktīvais nacionālisms Latvijā: 1922-1934* (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2005), and "Aktīvais nacionālisms," *Diena*, September 24, 2005, accessed on April 3, 2014, http://www.diena.lv/arhivs/aktivais-nacionalisms-12620109.
[64] Krēsliņš, *Aktīvais nacionālisms Latvijā*, 306-307.
[65] Quoted in Ieva Zake, *Nineteenth-Century Nationalism and Twentieth-Century Anti-Democratic Ideals: The Case of Latvia, 1840s to 1980s* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 66.

While the Active Nationalism movement began as an attempt to rekindle beyond the political realm a feeling of national unity rooted in the nation's agricultural heritage, a topic that will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter on Latvian 4-H, its adherents by the mid-to-late 1920s moved beyond the celebration of the peasantry and took up the new task of attacking the democratic system itself. Arguing that an authentic Latvian state and government should ideally reflect the culture of the Latvian nation, the active nationalists objected to democracy on the grounds that it was a "foreign" idea that, as one writer powerfully put it, had been "forced upon us as some glorious and sacred culture."[66] In fact, as Krēsliņš concluded, one of the ideas that united all of the various Active Nationalism clubs and movements was the belief that parliamentary democracy was "foreign and inorganic" and had been forced on Latvians as a result of "the Versailles system."[67] Hence, Active Nationalists began calling democracy "a curse," the parliament a "house of trading," and lamented that the pre-independence spirit of national unity had been replaced by "shamelessness and business," as every person pursued their own interests. Indeed, one writer even contended that the guiding principle of democracy could be summarized in two words: "Get rich!"[68]

As this last criticism suggests, the Active Nationalists also developed in their rhetoric an anti-capitalist sentiment as well. For example, one notable academic complained in late 1931 about Rīga's "big army" of merchants and businessmen who in their "self-interested, isolated, and exploitative" nature collected fees … from the peasants." Still others derided the "egoism" of the businessman "who had openly set himself outside good and evil," instead being "guided

[66] Quoted in Ieva Zake, "Authoritarianism and Political Ideas of Latvian Nationalist Intellectuals," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3, (September 2007): 300.
[67] Krēsliņš, *Aktīvais nacionālisms Latvijā*, 289.
[68] Quoted in Zake, *Nineteenth-Century Nationalism and Twentieth-Century Anti-Democratic Ideals*, 74-75.

merely by his greed."[69] As would be expected, some of this anti-business, anti-capitalism stance came about as a result of the Great Depression, which caused a mild economic crisis in Latvia in 1931-1932.[70] However, the true deep-seated impetus for this viewpoint was the continued distrust of and antipathy for Baltic Germans, who maintained a strong presence in Latvia's business and financial sectors. Additionally, a few nationalist intellectuals also directed these statements towards the country's small but economically important Jewish population, whom these intellectuals criticized for being greedy and defiant in their relations with Latvians.[71]

These were the people and things that the active nationalists were against. However, they also offered alternatives. First, they proposed that the Latvian state should be apolitical. As one well-known artist and writer proclaimed, "Politics separates us from ourselves." Instead, society and the state ought to be guided by "the Latvian soul," another intellectual advised in his 1932 treatise on the problem of national disunity. Thus, by the onset of the 1930s, many nationalists were calling for a "Latvia for Latvians," wherein the state would emphasize the ethnic collective – the Latvian nation – rather than promote harmful individualism. Unquestionably influenced by the rise of authoritarianism abroad, most notably in Mussolini's Italy, a large number of these nationalist thinkers ultimately concluded that the best way forward was to concentrate power around one center, around an elite of outstanding, nationalistic leaders. For example, an influential writer and journalist encouraged in his 1933 article, "Let's search for the most honest, true, and deep ones: let's find great persons and glorify them, then we and our nation will become great."[72]

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[69] Ibid, 67.
[70] The most thorough examination of this crisis can be found in Arnolds P. Aizsilnieks, *Latvijas saimniecības vēsture 1914-1945* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1968).
[71] Zake, *Nineteenth-Century Nationalism and Twentieth-Century Anti-Democratic Ideals*, 71. On anti-Semitism in Latvia, see especially Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: The Missing Center* (Rīga; Washington, DC: Historical Institute of Latvia and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996).
[72] Ibid, 79.

-Studying to Be the Latvian Roosevelt or *Vadonis*-

While Ulmanis did not actively participate in the Active Nationalism movement, he certainly followed it closely in the pages of the press. But what he seemed to enjoy reading about even more was events abroad, particularly in America and Germany. This was the case, of course, because Ulmanis had personal ties there, and his language skills enabled him to get additional news about those countries and the wider world directly from American and German publications, some of which he personally subscribed to (and that was the case with the American ones) while others were sent to him by the German "Argus" News Bureau. Thus, considering that Ulmanis's typical reading day from the 1920s on was comprised of Latvian-, English-, German-, and Russian-language newspapers and journals, it is no wonder that visitors to his private residence reported in amazement at the huge piles of newspapers and books on the furniture and floor.[73]

Beyond merely reading the news, Ulmanis also kept track of affairs in America through his former professors and employers, with whom he corresponded periodically. Quite often, in addition to asking about events in America, Ulmanis also expressed his growing nostalgia and admiration for his second homeland. For example, Ulmanis wrote to Professor Haecker in 1921 to inform him that he was sending a check to pay off the money he owed. Furthermore, Ulmanis also took the opportunity to express at least one of the lessons he had learned during Latvia's brutal experiences in the two wars. He wrote:

> Well, that is Europe with her unrest. But we are hoping for better times and I am sure they are coming. Professor Haecker, my dear Professor, the foundation and the formation of a new state by a little nation like ours is no small matter after all, believe me. The longer I live the more I begin liking and admiring the history and the great statesmen of America.[74]

[73] See, for example, Eduards Laimiņš, "Kārlis Ulmanis, kādu es viņu redzēju un sapratu kopīgā darbā," *Kārlis Ulmanis 75*, ed. Latviešu Zemnieku savienība (Apgāds "Brīvā zeme", 1952), 73-74.
[74] "Ulmanis—Builder of a Republic," *The University Journal*, September 1924, 253.

Additionally, Ulmanis kept track of local Nebraska initiatives. For instance, he continued to follow closely the development of American 4-H, which he had first participated in as a dairy cow judge at the Nebraska State Fair, through magazines and books. Likewise, he also contributed money to the University of Nebraska for a commissioned oil portrait of Professor Smith and, very interestingly, to the university's sports stadium fund, which led to construction of today's iconic Memorial Stadium.[75]

What is more, Ulmanis also welcomed American visitors to Latvia whenever he could, always reminding them of his own days in Nebraska while also querying them about how things had changed since he left. For instance, in July 1939, Ulmanis cordially welcomed the Yale University Choir, which had been invited to perform in Latvia. Taking advantage of the chance to converse with young American students, Ulmanis even accompanied the group one afternoon on a joyous summer outing to the seaside town of Jūrmala, where they all posed for a scenic photo. Perhaps even more telling, though, is George C. Hager's visit to Rīga. Hager, the one-time president of Rotary International, visited Latvia in the early 1930s. While there, he arranged to meet Ulmanis. Hager later described his experience:

> They told me that he received nobody except under rare circumstances and then for only 15 minutes. It was given to me to know that he was a very busy and severe man and that I could not expect to have much conversation with him. When I got there, he dismissed his staff and demanded to see me alone. I walked into his grand, private office, hardly knowing what to expect. He suddenly got up, came to meet me with outstretched hand and said in perfect English, "My it's good to see another graduate of an American university. I'm from the University of Nebraska, you know. How long has it been since you were out in Lincoln, Nebraska? Tell me all about the place."[76]

Whereas in previous years Ulmanis seemed to follow events in America primarily for his own satisfaction, the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in November 1932 seemed to mark a watershed in Ulmanis's reading habits. One can follow this interest of his, because as compared

[75] Kuck, "The Legacy of '*Vadonis*' Ulmanis,"106; "Ulmanis—Builder of a Republic," 253.
[76] Betty Provost, "Alumni Paragraphs," *The Nebraska Alumnus*, Vol. 34, No. 9, November 1938, 17.

to prior years, when he only rarely saved newspaper clippings and journal articles – the compilation of which now comprises a part of the Kārlis Ulmanis Collection at the Latvian State Historical Archives that has previously never been examined – beginning in late 1932 Ulmanis began filing away huge numbers of clippings on the Roosevelt Administration and its response to the economic and social crises that were afflicting the United States.[77]

Of course, Ulmanis was not merely interested in whether Roosevelt's New Deal could improve the tough situation in America. More than that, Ulmanis became a student of the New Deal because he believed that it could be emulated in Latvia to alleviate the economic and agricultural crises that were adding to the recurring problem of government turnover. Before turning to a discussion of the clippings and articles that Ulmanis saved, it is vital to recall that he had always made agricultural issues the focal point of his attention and work as a democratic politician. For example, once Ulmanis lost the prime minister post in 1921, he turned his attention to raising the profile of the Farmers' Union's official newspaper, *Brīvā zeme* (*The Free Land*), which eventually became the most widely circulated paper in the countryside. Additionally, understanding that poor access to credit was hindering the farmers' ability to rebuild after the wars, in 1923 Ulmanis and others from the Farmers' Union founded the Farmers' Bank of Latvia. Furthermore, when Ulmanis returned as prime minister from December 1925-May 1926, he also worked hard to expand access to credit by finalizing trade and loan deals with the U.S. and German governments, to cap the annual percentage rate on loans at twelve percent (though this initiative failed), and to encourage farmers to raise the quality of their products aimed for the international market, most notably butter and bacon. As yet another example, in 1929 Ulmanis also published *Kā pacelt lauksaimniecību* (*How to Advance*

[77] For the Kārlis Ulmanis Collection in the Latvian State Historical Archives, see LVVA, 5969. f. On Ulmanis's interest in Roosevelt and America, see especially LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 301.-305. l.

Agriculture), a 481-page treatise on how farmers and the government should work together to modernize Latvian farms.[78]

However, perhaps Ulmanis's most interesting effort as a democratic politician to help Latvian farmers came in early 1931, when he gave a speech (in English) at the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Without a doubt, this speech was one of Ulmanis's clearest explanations of the agricultural crisis in Latvia. Beginning with a description of the agricultural crisis, Ulmanis noted that the crisis was really quite simple: input costs have been higher than profits for an extended number of years. This, Ulmanis admitted, was not unique to Latvia. However, some of the causes were. For instance, Ulmanis went on to explain that part of the reason why input costs had remained high was because farmers were still rebuilding from the wars. Furthermore, bad harvests in 1927 and 1928 put farmers further into the red. The lynchpin of the problem, Ulmanis concluded, was that farmers simply could not get loans at a reasonably low interest, and thus they simply did not have the capital to survive major setbacks, let alone buy new machinery to farm more efficiently. The upshot for Latvian farmers, Ulmanis told the diplomats, was the following:

> With our poor and depleted soil, our short, northern summers, when all the work is compressed into only a handful of weeks, where all of the livestock have to be kept in the barn for 6-7 months, with a shortage of capital and suitable credit, and also with our lack of machinery, me simply cannot produce more cheaply and compete with countries where the growing season lasts 8 or even 12 months, and where one person with a tractor and machinery can manage a farm of 200 hectares [600 pūrvietām] and then afterwards live as easily and comfortably as one can imagine.[79]

Having thus laid out the disadvantages that Latvian farmers faced, Ulmanis ultimately concluded his speech by proposing that the League of Nations establish an International Farmers' Bank, arguing that only such a bank could ensure that all farmers in the League's member states, even

[78] Dunsdorfs, 166, 175-189; Kārlis Ulmanis, *Kā pacelt lauksaimniecību* (Rīga: Latv. Zemnieku S-bas, 1929).
[79] "Tautu savienības ekonomiskās komitejas lauksaimniecības eksperta K. Ulmaņa runa ekspertu delegācijas sēdē 1931. g. 14. janvārī," *Ekonomists*, Nr. 3 (February 15, 1931): 116-117.

those residing in small countries like Latvia, had adequate access to capital and a fair chance to compete on the world market.[80]

As Ulmanis had long been an advocate of government intervention in the economy, and most especially in the agricultural sector, it is not surprising that he was fascinated by Roosevelt's New Deal. After all, Ulmanis had always admired Henry A. Wallace, Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture and later Vice President, whom Ulmanis had already known about from his reading of *Wallaces' Farmer.* There are a number of series within the Ulmanis collection that contain newspaper and journal clippings about America during the Roosevelt years. Of those series exclusively focused America, there are at least 500 individual entries, plus hundreds more that are scattered throughout other topical collections, such as on the world economic crisis.[81]

There are a few identifiable trends with regard to what Ulmanis clipped out and saved. First and foremost, he apparently set aside for his personal collection nearly everything he read about Henry Wallace and his approach to solving the farm crisis. For instance, Ulmanis saved a March 21, 1933 article on Wallace's new farm bill. Interestingly, Ulmanis underlined the passage in the article that concluded that Wallace "is given vast dictatorial powers in the bill—powers to license all processors of food, millers, packers, manufactures, dairymen and all the huge army involved in handling the food of the Nation. It is no wonder that the bill threatens to raise protest and has raised already much opposition."[82] Ulmanis also saved many articles on the proposed Farm Credit Agency, on the Federal Farm Board, about producing grain ethanol, and about Wallace's plan to regulate crop and livestock prices.[83] As an indication of just how much

[80] Ibid, 117.
[81] See LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 301.-305. l. For the series on the world economic crisis, see LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 141. l.
[82] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 301. l., 7. lp.
[83] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 301. l., 10., 18., 21. 68. lp.

Ulmanis was interested in Wallace and his ideas, Ulmanis even saved an article on Wallace's wife.[84]

Secondly, many of the articles in the series deal with Roosevelt's grand public work projects. For instance, Ulmanis kept articles on the Civilian Conservation Corps, on work done in National Parks, on national highways, etc.[85] Furthermore, Ulmanis was also fascinated by the big construction projects like Boulder Dam (Hoover Dam), which he eventually sought to replicate with Ķegums Dam, one of his pet projects that was completed in 1940. Interestingly, as an indication of just how much Ulmanis admired the Boulder Dam project, the clippings on it were neatly glued in a well-kept binder, whereas clippings on other topics were loosely stored in folders.[86] Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Ulmanis also accumulated a vast collection of clippings on Roosevelt's new style of leadership. For example, Ulmanis read carefully articles on Roosevelt's "dictatorial power," on his direct influence in the economy, on his administration's investigation into pre-depression era business practices, and on Roosevelt's important speeches.[87]

Although Ulmanis seems to have read the most about America, he was also interested in events elsewhere in the West, though primarily in Germany. However, he did not read as widely about German life as he did American life. Rather, Ulmanis was interested in Hitler's rise to power in January 1933, in the development in Europe of the so-called "third way" between pure capitalism and communism, and in the education of youth. For example, one series in the Ulmanis collection is devoted entirely to clippings on the new style of political leadership advocated by Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, and Oswald Mosley of the fascist British

[84] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 301. l. 4. lp.
[85] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 303. l., 29., 62., 70. lp.
[86] See, for instance, LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 305. l., 1., 4. lp.
[87] Here I have broadly summarized the holdings of LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 301.305. l.

"Blackshirts."[88] In other series, Ulmanis also filed pieces on authoritarian leaders in neighboring Lithuania and Estonia.[89] Adding to this interest in the leadership principle, Ulmanis was also acutely aware of ideas about "a new age" in Europe and the West, clipping out English-language articles on "the new era in American life," and German-language pieces on "Europe between Tradition and Revolution, " and on "Fighters for the New Worldview," to give but three examples.[90]

A third main interest of Ulmanis's was discussions about the youth. In fact, there is an entire series of clippings (136 in all) devoted to this topic, most of which are in German, though many are also in Latvian.[91] It seems that his main interest here was how to deal with disillusionment among the youth. In particular, based on the articles, it seems that Ulmanis placed the most emphasis on reforming schools and building youth organizations aimed at cultivating a passion for work.

Finally, there is a fourth, clearly identifiable category among the thousands of clippings: an interest in fascism. For example, Ulmanis saved all of his copies from 1934 on of *Nachrichtenblatt über die Faschistischen Korporationen*, a German-language publication on fascist corporativism in Italy which he was already reading prior to his coup.[92] Additionally, Ulmanis studied carefully, often times underlining passages with a red pencil, articles on "the theory of fascism," on the "agripolitical revolution of the NSDAP," on fascists' "appeal to emotions," and on the "*Führergedanke*," or the "idea of the leader" in fascism." Perhaps summarizing what he had learned about this last topic, at the end of one series Ulmanis jotted down in German on a small pink sheet of paper the following note: "The will of the Leader is

[88] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 109. l.
[89] For example, LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 109., 127.
[90] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 109. l., 28., 90., 115. lp. The last two headlines here were from German newspapers.
[91] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 306. l.
[92] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 437. l.

today the will of the German nation….The men of the fist and brow [*Die Männer der Faust und der Stirn*], their trust, their will and their complete commitment to the Leader, these were the underlying cornerstone of the building that today firmly stands before us and is secure in its early structural work."[93]

There are a number of important observations to note about this invaluable portion of the Ulmanis collection, which, it should be noted again, has never before been analyzed. First of all, it is interesting to note that Ulmanis was not saving articles on Mussolini prior to 1933, or at least those clippings are not part of the extant collection, and thus it seems that Ulmanis did not begin to think about alternatives to Latvia's existing parliamentary system until late 1932 at the absolute earliest. This date is also in line with the theory outlined by Valters Ščerbinskis, one of the preeminent experts on Ulmanis's coup.[94] Though it is far from certain, it looks from Ulmanis's reading material that the horribly acrimonious end to his third term as prime minister was the turning point. Indeed, there is another series in the collection that focuses entirely on domestic and international coverage of the government crisis in Latvia in late 1931, when the Social Democrats helped bring about an end to the Ulmanis-led government (in power from March-December 1931) but then refused to lead the next coalition. To be sure, Ulmanis was not the only one who found the infighting in the parliament abhorrent. As a matter of fact, flags in Liepāja were reportedly flown at half-mast as a result of the government disorder.[95]

While it is clear that Ulmanis had begun thinking about alternatives already by 1933, importantly, the collection also suggests that it was far from certain that he was planning all along to suspend Latvia's democracy and become a dictator. Instead, if we correlate the number of articles on a given country and topic to his preferred alternative, then without a doubt we

[93] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 109. l. 136., 102., 24., 109., 146.-147. lp.
[94] Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis," 193.
[95] Dunsdorfs, 207.

should conclude that Ulmanis hoped to become a disciple of Roosevelt's, for Ulmanis collected by far the most clippings on Roosevelt and the U.S. Indeed, another action that Ulmanis took about this time further corroborates this conclusion. Perhaps looking to adopt Roosevelt's model, Ulmanis and other members of the Farmers' Union began pushing in autumn 1933 for legislation that would reform the division of powers set forth in the constitution. In particular, their proposal sought to bolster the powers of the president (who was to be directly elected), shrink the size of the parliament, change the election laws, and limit the number of parties to three—one party each for farmers, laborers and the middle class. Although Ulmanis and others in the Farmers' Union did not say as much, it is clear that they were looking to America as an exemplary model.[96]

Not to be forgotten, however, is the fact that Ulmanis also began studying, at more or less the same time, authoritarian and fascist ideas, leaders, and regimes. While one could suppose that Ulmanis might have viewed the American and German-Italian models as distinct alternatives – as plans A and B, if you will – the way he compiled the clippings suggests otherwise. For example, the series full of articles on the "new political style" contains clippings on not only Mussolini, Hitler, and other European strongmen, but also on Roosevelt.[97] To be sure, Ulmanis was not alone in grouping these men together. For instance, one of the articles that Ulmanis particularly liked, titled "Mussolini Great by Appeal to Emotions," links Roosevelt with Mussolini. In fact, the author of this *Kansas City Star* opinion piece, Harry Carr, who had just returned from a trip to Rome, argued that "President Roosevelt has obviously taken over many ideas from Mussolini's 'corporate state.'"[98]

[96] Bilmanis, 81, Dunsdorfs, 212-217.
[97] See, for example, LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 109. l.
[98] LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 109. l., 24. lp.

Of course, beyond perhaps borrowing from Mussolini's corporative model, Roosevelt was also great at using political emotionalism and straight-forward speeches to drum up support. For example, he chose as his campaign slogan in 1932 "Happy Days are Here Again," thus putting a particular frame of mind at the forefront rather than a broad political policy. However, what Ulmanis's collection of clippings suggests most of all is that he saw this "new political style" as one guided by pragmatism. Indeed, though today Mussolini is often regarded as a radical, ideologically driven revolutionary, much of the early analysis on him was rather different. For example, in a 1926 essay in the *Political Science Quarterly*, W. Y. Elliot, an American historian who went on to advise six U.S. presidents and serve on Roosevelt's so-called Brain Trust, argued that Mussolini was, as he put it, "the prophet of the pragmatic era in politics." What is more, Elliot opined that "Fascism has come to mean to the popular imagination just this application of pragmatism to politics."[99] Of course, Elliot and others with similar opinions were eventually proven wrong since fascism, and especially the Nazi German iteration of it, became increasingly more radical and irrational in the decades that followed. Even by 1934, however, Ulmanis was acutely aware that Hitler and the Nazis had a peculiar obsession with the Jews, something which he read about but in no way sought to emulate.[100]

All told then, Ulmanis equated interwar European authoritarianism and fascism with the American New Deal because he saw that despite some peculiarities, like the Nazis' racial policies, all three were focused on using the "third way" of state and government planning to bring about, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch put it in his book *The Three New Deals*, "a seismic

[99] W. Y. Elliott, "Mussolini, Prophet of the Pragmatic Era in Politics," *Political Science Quarterly Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (1926): 161, 164.
[100] For example, see LVVA, 5969. f., 1. apr., 306. l., 128. lp.

historical change from liberal to state capitalism."[101] On a related point, while Ulmanis also seems to have understood that there were differences between Europe and America in the way that the leadership principle was used and cultivated – chief among those being the fascists' embrace of a messianic cult of personality as opposed to Roosevelt's fatherly "fireside chat" image – he nonetheless saw one guiding principle to the successful employment of this new "third way": the role of the leader, who used the levers of state power to bring about a better future.

-May 15 Coup-

For all of Ulmanis's reading in 1933-1934 about authoritarianism and fascism, it seems that he would have nonetheless preferred to maintain Latvia's democracy, albeit with some changes.[102] For one thing, unlike the gripping economic misery that periodically crippled Weimar Germany and made the promises of the Nazis all the more compelling, interwar democratic Latvia had actually witnessed relative economic stability and many societal successes, despite the indisputably detrimental governmental gridlock and crises. For example, in 1920 there had been over 600,000 landless rural residents, but as a result of the land reform the percentage of landless people in the countryside (family members were included in these statistics) had dipped below twenty percent by 1930. In education, too, Latvia had progressed rapidly. In terms of certified public school teachers, the total number rose from 2,580 in 1920 to 9,137 by 1938. As a result, already by 1934 the state illiteracy rate had fallen to a mere eight percent—one of the lowest in Europe. Higher education also advanced. In addition to the

[101] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 186. For another important examination of the connections between Roosevelt's America and fascist regimes in Europe, see *Routes into the Abyss: Coping with the Crises in the 1930s*, ed. Helmut Konrad and Wolfgang Maderthaner (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), especially Nelson Lichtenstein, "The United States in the Great Depression: Was the Fascist Door Open?," 115-126.

[102] Dunsdorfs and other Ulmanis critics have argued otherwise. For a good summary of those viewpoints, see Dunsdorfs, 215-221.

aforementioned German-language Herder Institute, the University of Latvia was founded in 1919, and by 1933 it had an annual enrollment of more than 8,500 students.[103]

Still another example of the progress made can be seen in the area of culture and social welfare. For instance, thanks in large part to the founding in 1920 of the state Fund for Cultural Achievements, Latvia achieved an impressive record of art and literature production. In fact, interwar Latvia had one of the highest rates of book production per capita in the entire world. Finally, as for social welfare, the government consistently allocated around fifteen percent of the total budget to social programs, thus resulting, for instance, in a doubling between 1922 and 1937 in total healthcare services. Similarly, the government was also intimately involved in the founding and furthering of a number of social organizations like the Latvian Red Cross and the Anti-Alcoholic Society.[104]

In summation, Ulmanis's coup was not an organic outgrowth of recurrent, crippling crises. It is obvious that institutional factors in Latvia's political life led to high government turnover – all told, there were eighteen cabinets between November 1918 and May 1934 – and this naturally resulted in a seesaw approach to economic and foreign policy, with the Social Democrats and other parties on the Left focusing chiefly on urban development and trade with the Soviet Union, while the Farmers' Union and other agrarian parties pushed for rural programs and trade with Western Europe. Even the Great Depression, which is often seen as one of the leading causes of the collapse of democracy in interwar Europe, did not afflict Latvia as badly as

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[103] Jānis Rutkis, V Kreicbergs et al., *Latvia: Country and People* (Stockholm: Latvian National Foundation, 1967), 334-342; Plakans, *The Latvians*, 138; Roucek, 478, Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 131.

[104] Rothschild, 395; *Vai jūs zināt ka Latvija?...*, 33; Bilmanis, 89. For an excellent discussion of the *Ziemeļblāzma* anti-alcohol society, see Guntis Vāveris, "Latviešu pretalkohola kustība 1934.1940. gadā: bezalkohola biedrības 'Ziemeļblāzma' piemērs," *Latvijas Arhīvi*, Nr. 3 (2012): 179-205. Here I would like to thank Guntis for sharing so kindly a scanned copy of his article.

elsewhere in Europe, and indeed already by 1933 the height of the economic trouble in Latvia had passed.

Thus, in the end, it was not that the democratic and free capitalistic systems were completely defunct. Rather, Ulmanis simply believed that there was a better way forward. Economically, Ulmanis wanted to create a Latvian version of Roosevelt's New Deal, for although the economic situation was slowly but steadily improving, he believed that deficit spending aimed at improving the quality of life and purchasing power of the farmers would stimulate the economy much faster than sticking to the existing path. Indeed, Ulmanis introduced these precise ideas in his 1933 book *Kas jādara un kā: saimnieciskās rosības atdzīvināšanai un valsts budžeta sabalanēšana* (*What Must Be Done and How: On Reviving Economic Activity and Balancing the State Budget*).[105]

Politically, Ulmanis and the Farmers' Union had introduced bills in the parliament to reform the constitution. On the one hand, this reform was aimed at putting an end to the frequent government turnover and collation-building troubles. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly in Ulmanis's view, the reform was also meant to be a first step toward limiting the further fractionalization of the Latvian nation, for Ulmanis and other Latvian nationalists believed that the infighting in the parliament had led to a detrimental fractionalization of the Latvian nation. In addition to coming to this conclusion through his careful reading, Ulmanis also had an informative trip to Germany in late summer 1933 that further crystalized this view.

In early September 1933, Ulmanis underwent a risky heart operation, performed by Dr. Jēkabs Alksnis.[106] Though it is unknown what kind of heart complications Ulmanis suffered from, certainly he was susceptible to heart disease, as his father and brother Indriķis had both

[105] Kārlis Ulmanis, *Kas jādara un kā: saimnieciskās rosības atdzīvināšanai un valsts budžeta sabalanēšana* (Rīga: Zemnieka Domas, 1932-1933).
[106] Dunsdorfs, 213.

died in middle age of heart attacks. Obviously hoping to fight against this genetic predisposition, Ulmanis chose to have the surgery. However, as Ulmanis reported in his September 7 letter to Enzeliņš, the surgery ultimately "didn't produce the results that we had hoped. My already previously weakly functioning heart will continue to get worse, and so today, based on the doctor's advice, I am traveling to [Bad] Nauheim. Obviously, I have to remain there for a month or so. This time I am grudgingly following the doctor's recommendation."[107]

Ulmanis stayed in Bad Nauheim, Germany, world-renown for its salt springs that were believed to cure nerve and heart problems, for a short month. Unfortunately, there are very few sources on Ulmanis's time in Germany. In fact, Ulmanis did not even write to Enzeliņš while in Germany, though perhaps that is not so surprising since their correspondence by mail had over the years dwindled down to only a few letters per year, most of which were focused on agricultural events in Valmiera that Enzeliņš asked Ulmanis to attend. What is known for certain about Ulmanis's stay in Germany is that he stopped in Berlin on October 18 while on his way back to Latvia. According to the report published on October 19in the Baltic German newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau* (*The Riga Review*), Latvia's ambassador to Germany, Edgars Krieviņš, met Ulmanis at the train station and escorted him to the German Foreign Office, where he met with Karl Ritter and discussed the possibility of increasing Latvia's butter exports to Germany. Though it was not reported in the newspaper, the historian Edgars Dunsdorfs has claimed that Ulmanis also met that day with Richard Walther Darré, the minister of food and agriculture.[108]

Upon returning to Latvia, Ulmanis renewed his effort to seek a constitutional reform. Additionally, having apparently been impressed with the national unity he saw in Hitler's Germany, Ulmanis also began to intensify his public comments about the need for ethnic

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[107] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, September 7, 1933, published in *Latvijas vēstnesis*, Nr. 260/262, October 9, 1997, accessed on August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45246.
[108] "K. Ulmanis verhandelt in Berlin," *Rigasche Rundschau*, Nr. 239, October 19, 1933; Dunsdorfs, 212.

Latvians to unite together again. For example, on the evening of November 9, 1933, Ulmanis spoke to a packed hall of more than 700 people about his observations in Germany. During his remarks, Ulmanis focused on two overarching themes: the Nazis' economic and agricultural policies, and the nature of the Nazi regime. On the first topic, Ulmanis explained to the audience how the German state was utilizing public work programs to alleviate the unemployment problem. Additionally, Ulmanis remarked that the Nazis' decision to regulate crop and livestock prices, rather than let them be determined by the world market, was already paying dividends. As Ulmanis put it, I saw "a lot of carefree faces and in the stores there were more costumers."[109]

As for the nature of the regime, Ulmanis informed the audience that Hitler and the Nazis were clearly intent on overturning the Treaty of Versailles. However, Ulmanis did not think that they wanted war. What Ulmanis spoke the most about, however, was the nationalistic ideology of the regime. This ideology was groundbreaking, he explained, because, as he phrased it, "Everything in this intellectual culture made anew." This was, Ulmanis went on, because of the extreme discipline to Hitler, the party, and the German nation. In particular, Ulmanis continued, this discipline is built around the message that "going forward everyone must work and sacrifice for the nation." Finally, as he brought his speech to a close and sought to make clear just how existentially powerful this message could be, Ulmanis stated resolutely that "nothing before has ever demanded such sacrifices as those called for by the National Socialists, not even Christianity."[110]

Ulmanis's closing remarks speak to just how well he understood fascism. Already in 1933, from his careful reading and one trip to Germany, he could see that fascism was something entirely new, a type of political religion whose tenets sought to replace the ostensibly weaker

[109] "Kā klahjas zemē, kur walda jauna kahrtiba: Ko sthasta K. Ulmanis par Wahciju," *Pēdējā Brīdī*, Nr. 255, November 10, 1933.
[110] Ibid.

values of the past.[111] These messianic or religious aspects of fascism never seemed to appeal to Ulmanis, however. Rather, he only appreciated its supposed end goal: national unity and prosperity. Consequently, as his hopes for a constitutional reform waned once the legislation got bogged down in endless parliamentary debates and committee meetings, Ulmanis began to consider more seriously whether he could create a Latvian version of fascism. In fact, between November 1933 and May 1934, Ulmanis even made a number of remarks that hinted at his possible turn toward authoritarianism. Of those, perhaps the clearest elucidation came during a speech on February 18, 1934.

Ulmanis gave the remarks in Rīga at the annual Congress of Farmwives, a perhaps somewhat surprising setting for such a key, revealing speech. The title of Ulmanis's talk that night was "Societal Work in the Future." It was an apt title, because from the very outset he repeatedly hit on the problems that were plaguing society. Most imperative, Ulmanis argued that the nation and societal work specifically had been plagued by rampant individualism and selfishness. This Ulmanis blamed on the government, whose disunity and factionalism, he argued, had trickled down into the populace. Ulmanis then reminded his audience that this was the exact reason why he wanted to revise the constitution, to heal the nation. Then, having made that push for democratic reform, Ulmanis transitioned into what seemed to those who heard and read his remarks to be a hint at a possible authoritarian alternative. Ulmanis's political opponents had long argued that his proposed constitutional reforms were in fact a furtive power grab, and here, for the first time, he hinted at such a possible authoritarian route. Turning to the question of the outcome of the reforms, Ulmanis noted, "There is a lot of talk in society that a new era in our

[111] On the fascism as a political religion, see especially George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses; Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975); Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), and *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); *Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion*, ed. Roger Griffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

state's history is being prepared. We won't allow ourselves to wait while this era comes. We have to go towards it while fulfilling and adhering to our former viewpoints."[112] For much of the remainder of the speech, Ulmanis then focused on those "former viewpoints": on the national unity that had led to Latvian independence, and on how only a strong leader – and here he cited the example of Oliver Cromwell, the military strongman who led Britain through the seventeenth-century civil war – can ensure that the nation does not deviate from these views.

While the speech was certainly not a manifesto of authoritarianism, and in fact the majority of Ulmanis's remarks focused on the nation rather than the role of the leader, it was nonetheless seen by some observers as a move toward authoritarian rule. In fact, the next day the headline in the *Rigasche Rundschau* read "Karl Ulmanis on the Leader of the Nation."[113] Additionally, though it was not reported in the newspapers, there was also a rumor swirling that Ulmanis had ended his speech in a fascist style by raising his arm and shouting "Towards the Sun!"[114] Regardless of the veracity of this rumor, it does seem certain that Ulmanis was testing out a new political message and style, and the fact that he chose to do so in front of a group of farmwives suggests that Ulmanis was uncomfortable using this new style and was also still on the fence about suspending Latvia's democracy. Unfortunately, there was little coverage in the newspapers about the audience's response to Ulmanis speech. Instead, articles merely noted that Ulmanis received applause.[115]

Perhaps what ultimately pushed Ulmanis to decide in favor of a coup was the vote on May 4. The parliament voted that day in favor of amending the constitution to permit citizens to directly elect the president. However, the parliament rejected what Ulmanis and his party saw as

[112] "Wakar notika gadstahrtejā lauksaimneekschu sanahksme," *Latvijas Sargs*, Nr. 8, February 19, 1934.
[113] "Karl Ulmanis über den Führer des Volkes," *Rigasche Rundschau*, Nr. 40, February 19, 1934.
[114] Dunsdorfs, 218.
[115] "Wakar notika gadstahrtejā lauksaimneekschu sanahksme."

the key provision of their reforms: the ability of the president to dismiss the parliament.[116] Ulmanis never explained later whether this vote was indeed the proverbial final straw, but a mere eleven days later he led a bloodless coup that put an end to Latvia's democratic era.

Late in the night on Tuesday, May 15, 1934, Ulmanis, General Jānis Balodis, and Alfrēds Bērziņš orchestrated a bloodless coup, with help from the army and *Aizsargi*. The next morning, the new government announced a state of emergency, claiming that Latvia's democracy had been suspended both to put an end to the parliamentary factionalism and in order to prevent violent and revolutionary threats from the far Right and Left. While there were in fact potentially radical groups like the *Pērkonkrusts* (Thunder Cross) or the *Leģions* (Legion) operating in Latvia, nearly all historians have agreed that the Ulmanis regime far exaggerated their threat.[117] Beyond the state of emergency, the new government also disbanded the parliament (though technically its members resigned) and banned all political parties, including the Farmers' Union.

Not only were political parties outlawed, but beginning already on May 16 many prominent politicians and activists, and especially those on the Left, were arrested. Perhaps surprisingly, there was little violence, and no one was killed. Quite often, those arrested also had their homes searched. It turned out that a number of Social Democrats and others on the far Left had illegal firearms and ammunition, and the Ulmanis regime conveniently used this to justify the coup. Wanting to ensure that there would not be any violence or counter-coups, in the weeks and months that followed, the Ulmanis regime ordered the arrest of 503 members of social democratic organizations, 126 members of an underground communist party, 128 members of *Pērkonkrusts*, a few members of ethnic minority organizations, and a small number of members

[116] Dunsdorfs, 220; Bērziņš, *Kārlis Ulmanis*, 176-180.
[117] See Armands Paeglis, *Pērkonkrusts pār Latviju: 1932-1944* (Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1994); Krēsliņš, *Aktīvais nacionālisms Latvijā*.

of other various political parties.[118] Most of those arrested were never charged with a crime and were subsequently released within a few days or weeks. However, the regime did send 369 people, mostly Social Democrats, to a temporary prison camp in Liepāja in far western Latvia, well away from the center of power in Rīga. Only a few inmates still remained when the camp was closed in spring 1935.[119] All told, only a small handful of people were charged with and convicted for "anti-state activities" and illegal possession of guns and ammunition, for which the majority were sentenced to less than three years in prison.[120]

In the months that followed the coup, there was also a "purging" of the state and local government apparatus. Valters Ščerbinskis has tallied that between May 16 and December 31, 1934, at least 3,982 people were dismissed from their state or municipal position.[121] Ščerbinskis has also calculated that between July 1934 and February 1937 about fifty-six percent of all pre-coup county board (*pagastu valdēs*) members were replaced. As would be expected, the primary reason for dismissal was perceived political unreliability. Indeed, Ščerbinskis found that the majority of those fired belonged to Left-leaning groups. Interestingly, though, he also discovered that even Farmers' Union members were let go for reasons ranging from poor work habits, alcoholism, poor Latvian-language skills, and so on.[122]

There was a mild suppression of apolitical associations and organizations as well. In the first few months after the coup, the Ministry of Internal Affairs shut down thirty-seven organizations. The ministry also placed "loyal" people on the administrative boards of another fifty-four social organizations, thus ensuring that they would cooperate with the regime.

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[118] Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis," 197.
[119] On the camp, see especially Valters Ščerbinskis, "Liepājas koncentrācijas nometne un tās režīms: 1934. gada maijs-1935. gada marts," *Latvijas Arhīvi*, Nr. 1 (2009): 66-88.
[120] Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis," 198.
[121] Valters Ščerbinskis, "Pašvaldību amatpersonu atlaišanas un iecelšanas pēc 1934. gada 15. maija apvērsuma," *Latvijas Arhīvi*, Nr. 2 (2007): 61.
[122] Ibid, 62-68; Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis," 198.

Additionally, as part of the state of emergency decree, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was granted the authority to suspend any press, trade, or associational publication that was deemed a threat to public order. Thus, almost immediately following the coup, the Ministry of Internal Affairs shut down some fifty publications. By the end of June 1934, that number had ballooned to ninety-nine, though some were later resumed. Many of the organizations and publications targeted were, unsurprisingly, Left-leaning, but there were also a handful of prominent "conservative" publications, like for instance *Latvis*, that were also pulled from circulation. Finally, the Ministry of Internal Affairs also began censoring the press immediately after the coup. Originally censorship occurred prior to publication, but as the ministry could not keep up, in November 1934 censorship was transferred to post-publication.[123]

Finally, the state of emergency that the Ulmanis regime announced also temporarily banned all public gatherings not previously approved by the government, restricted the volume of alcohol sold, and enacted a law that made it illegal to criticize the regime in an incendiary manner. In his impressive archival-based work on the aftermath of the coup, Ščerbinskis found that during the summer of 1934, at least 250 people were charged with "anti-state pronouncements" and given fines or, in some cases, even short prison sentences.[124]

Archival evidence suggests, however, as Ščerbinskis has illustrated, that all of these measures of repression and control were rooted in an unfounded paranoia, because actually the large majority of Latvians either welcomed or were apathetic about the coup. For example, *Aizsargi* and police reports from the months after the coup indicate that most people viewed the coup positively. In fact, the most frequent response was that it was a good thing that "the age of

[123] Ibid, 200.
[124] Ibid, 200.

party promises was over."[125] However, while there were very few reports of public criticism, there were also very few reports of overt celebration. Instead, in most places daily life seemed more or less the same, save for the sight of a few more Latvian flags, flown in support of the new regime.[126]

Having thus consolidated power rather easily, Ulmanis subsequently turned to a more challenging task—obtaining the organic loyalty and enthusiastic support of the nation. To do so, Ulmanis and the regime worked hard to cultivate his image as both the Latvian *Vadonis* and *Saimnieks*. As we will see in the following chapter, Ulmanis, like most authoritarian leaders in interwar Europe, commenced this legitimizing rhetoric amid the most impressionable segment of society, the youth.

[125] Ibid, 196.
[126] Ibid, 195-197.

Chapter Four—"Grow for Latvia": *Mazpulki* and the Ulmanis Regime

In addition to his passion for agriculture and politics, Ulmanis was a voracious reader and a man who enjoyed, even savored, a good turn of phrase. And like the great Nebraska orator William Jennings Bryan, whom he seemingly sought to emulate as a politician and public speaker, Ulmanis was fond of using quotable, folksy colloquialisms in his speeches. In fact, over the duration of his career Ulmanis utilized so many of these lines in his talks that entire volumes have been devoted to preserving and disseminating them.[1] As did Bryan, Ulmanis found such expressions to be effective means of communication, because they enabled him to sound at the same time both intelligent and folksy, thus helping him relate in one way or another to his listeners, regardless of their place of residence, education, or socio-economic status.

Of the innumerable maxims Ulmanis used both as a democratic politician and the authoritarian leader of Latvia, he was reportedly especially fond of the saying, "One cannot harvest what hasn't been sown."[2] It is not surprising that Ulmanis favored this particular adage, for his approach to life and work was premised on this kernel of truth. But as we turn in this chapter to an investigation of one of the primary ways that Ulmanis sought to legitimize his nondemocratic rule, it is worth considering an alternative interpretation of this phrase. While of course the dictum teaches that self-initiative, planning, and hard work are the foundations of success, it also speaks to the promise of the future, calling to mind the farmer, who knows that nature will produce a life-sustaining abundance from even the tiniest seed, if only he or she gives it a proper place to grow. Thus, for Ulmanis the maxim was appealing because it expressed his hope that if he "planted" his ideas for a renewed Latvia in fertile "soil," he would eventually be

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[1] For example, see Kārlis Ulmanis, *Degsme*, ed. Līgonis (Rīga: A. Gulbis, 1938), *Atziņas un runu fragmenti*, ed. Sigizmunds Timšāns (Rīga: Avīze Prizma, 1990), *Viens mērķis—tauta un valsts: Karļa Ulmaņa runu, rakstu fragmenti un atziņas*, ed. Juris Ciganovs (Rīga: Jumava, 2011).

[2] R. Dzērve, "Latviskā gara devējs mazpulku kustībai," in *Tev mūžam dzīvot Latvija, 1918-1938*, ed. Atis Zālītis (Rīga: Izglītības ministrijas mācības līdzekļu nodaļa; A/S Rota, 1938), 319.

able to harvest the loyalty of the Latvian populace. As it turned out, Ulmanis decided there was no better soil in which to sow his ideas than in the Latvian youth, and this is an aspect of the Ulmanis Times that has been previously overlooked by scholars who have maintained that Ulmanis saw the so-called "old farmers" as his support base.[3]

Throughout the first Latvian republic, Ulmanis was a constant friend and supporter of a number of youth organizations, most notably the *Aizsargi* (the paramilitary organization founded in 1919 whose youth section became a popular choice for young Latvians) and *Skauti* and *Gaidas* (Boys and Girls Scouts).[4] But, as this chapter argues, there was surprisingly, above all the others, one youth organization that was dear to his heart, and which he viewed as particularly key to the future of "renewed Latvia": American 4-H, a most unlikely group to bolster authoritarianism.

-A Brief History of 4-H-

As the most storied agricultural youth organization in the United States, and certainly one of the most noteworthy youth organizations of any type in American history, 4-H has a rich and important past. Even the numbers alone are impressive: over its history, approximately seventy million Americans have participated in the organization, not including the millions more who

[3] For a leading example of this perspective, see in particular Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 66-69. Also useful in understanding this analysis is Ādolfs Bļodnieks's discussion of the tensions between Ulmanis's Farmers' Union party and the New Farmers' and Small Landowners' Party (*Latvijas Jaunsaimnieku un sīkgruntnieku partija*) in his book Blodnieks, *The Undefeated Nation.*

[4] Compared to *Mazpulki*, membership in *Aizsargi* and *Skauti-Gaidas* was much smaller. For instance, compared to over 40,000 *Mazpulki* members in 1940, there were approximately 14,000 members in the youth section of *Aizsargi*. Additionally, unlike *Mazpulki*, Ulmanis was not the head of either of these other organizations. On *Aizsargi*, see Ilgvars Butulis, *Sveiki, aizsargi!: Aizsargu organizācija Latvijas sabiedriski politiskajā dzīvē 1919.-1940. gadā* (Rīga: Jumava, 2011). As for *Skauti*, which was first organized in Latvia in 1917, nothing has been written, save for Dunsdorfs's interesting discussion of post-1934 *Mazpulki-Skauti* relations and the Ulmanis regime's ostensible favoritism towards *Mazpulki*. See Dunsdorfs, 313-314. It is worth noting that Scouts also played a prominent role in authoritarian Lithuania. See Raimundas Lopata, *Authoritarian Regime in Interwar Lithuania: Circumstances, Legitimation, Conception (Autoritarinis Rezimas Tarpukario Lietuvoje: Aplinkybes, Legitimumas, Koncepcija)* (Vilinius: Lietuvos Istorijos Institutas, 1998).

served as club leaders.[5] But it is also an indefinite history on the whole, because there was neither a single founder nor a clear location of emergence. Also adding to this rather nebulous history is a dearth of comprehensive studies on the organization, as the first substantial works on 4-H written by professional historians did not appear until 2011-2012.[6] The primary reason for this is two-fold. First, the organization has a unique nature with its mixture of public and private initiative. Furthermore, 4-H's administrative apparatus is divided between federal, state, and county levels. The upshot of this distinctive nature and organizational structure is that it has always been easier to tell the history of 4-H at the county or state level than to craft a comprehensive overview, since the extremely scattered locations of the primary sources made the telling of the larger, organization-wide story a daunting task.[7]

Nevertheless, it is possible to at least sketch an outline of the history of 4-H. The earliest origins of 4-H go back to the beginning of the twentieth century in the Midwest, when there was not yet an umbrella organization but only local clubs. Most typically these clubs were called some version of a boys' or girls' club, with a particular plant, like corn, or hobby, like quilting, tacked in between. Normally the clubs were associated with a local school and functioned as after-school activities for students. For example, in Clark County, Ohio, A. B. Graham, the superintendent at the county school, began sponsoring in 1902 corn-growing contests and other club activities for local youth. His aim, as he explained a few years later, was to "elevate the standard of living in rural communities," to develop in the students an elementary understanding

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[5] Gabriel Rosenberg, *Breeding the Future: The American 4-H Movement and the Roots of the Modern Rural World, 1914-1948* (Ph.D. dissertation: Brown University, 2011), 4.

[6] Those works were Rosenberg's Ph.D. dissertation, *Breeding the Future*; and Amrys O. Williams, *Cultivating Modern America: 4-H Clubs and Rural Development in the Twentieth Century* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2012). Though it is not the work of professional historians, also useful is Thomas R. Wessel and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H, an American Idea, 1900-1980: A History of 4-H* (Chevy Chase, Md.: National 4-H Council, 1982).

[7] Indeed, while there have been very few works on 4-H as a whole, there have been hundreds of booklets and pamphlets on the history of 4-H at the state and county levels, and most of these were written by 4-H members or leaders, usually as part of a 4-H project.

of modern agricultural practices and domestic work, and to get "a taste for the beautiful in nature."[8]

It is not surprising that 4-H's earliest history dates back to boy's and girl's clubs in the Midwest. After all, the first clubs appeared only a few years after the Wallace family began publishing in Iowa their farm journal, *Wallaces' Farmer*, and almost all of those early clubs were centered in the primary region of the journal's readership. Like the Wallace family -- whose journal championed "Good farming, clear thinking, and right living"[9] – the early founders of clubs, as Amrys Williams astutely shows in her work, were concerned about the societal consequences of industrialization and urbanization. As Williams details, not only were rural citizens alarmed on a personal level at the number of young people in their communities who were leaving for life in the city, including quite often members of their own family, but on the national level they were concerned that the slow disappearance of the independent farmer, long seen as the cornerstone of American Jeffersonian democracy, would have dire consequences for the country.[10]

Thus, at their core, these clubs, while nominally about promoting modern agricultural practices, were in fact about fighting for the hearts and heads of America's youth. Indeed, the eventual name of the umbrella organization – 4-H – came from a motto that was adopted by a Nebraska club in the early years of the twentieth century: "hand, heart, head."[11] These three "H's" soon spread through the Midwest – for example, in 1910, Celestia Josephine Field Shambaugh, the superintendent of schools in Page County, Iowa, developed a three-leaf-clover pin with one "H" on each leaf for the local club participants. A few years later, many clubs

[8] Quoted in Rosenberg, 59.
[9] Culver and Hyde, 19.
[10] Williams, see especially the introduction and chapter 1.
[11] Wessel and Wessel, 7.

adopted a fourth "H," health, and from that time forward the boys' and girls' clubs began to be known as 4-H clubs. The official pledge, using these 4 "H's," was soon thereafter written by Otis Hall, a 4-H club leader in Kansas.

> I pledge my head to clearer thinking,
> my heart to greater loyalty,
> my hands to larger service,
> and my health to better living,
> for my club, my community, my country and my world.[12]

In other words, one of the concerns that stirred rural educators, parents, and agricultural activists to promote 4-H was their realization that the curriculum in the local schools completely ignored agricultural issues, thus both denigrating that sector by implying, as a corollary, that it was a way of life and line of work for uneducated people, and also encouraging young people to move to the cities in order to take advantage of their education. Thus, in order to offer a balanced curriculum and pedagogical approach, many teachers volunteered to serve as local 4-H leaders and would invite their students to join. Hence, 4-H grew tremendously between 1900 and 1914 and quickly became one of the most beloved social activities for rural children, who in the past had had few social activities beyond school and church.

As a result of the impressive increase in the number of clubs, in 1914 4-H officially became a federally recognized and, in part, a federally funded program. With the passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the Cooperative Extension Service, including a special department, both at the USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. and at the state level, for the administration of 4-H. As part of a larger governmental effort, dating back at least to the Roosevelt administration's Commission on Country Life, to improve rural living conditions, the Cooperative Extension Service was created

[12] "4-H Motto, Creed and Pledge," *National 4-H History Preservation Program*, accessed on February 27, 2014, http://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/M-C-P/

to serve as an educational outreach program between land-grant state universities and local farmers.[13] 4-H was thus thought to be a natural fit within the Extension Service, because Extension Service agents, like 4-H leaders, were to help develop and modernize the countryside by circulating information about the latest agricultural research, whose findings were to lead to greater profits for individual farmers and, in turn, a rise in the overall quality of life in the countryside.

But with the influx of the funds and authority of the federal government, 4-H took on a new role: advancing "practices of everyday state-building in the American countryside," as Rosenberg put it in his seminal study.[14] What began as an organic manifestation of the efforts to "save" the countryside from the perceived ill effects of modernity by promoting students' interest in agricultural and rural life had become by the turn of the second decade of the twentieth century an institutionalized way for the state to cultivate and shape the youth. And this is significant because of course during the first half of the century this particular demographic group would turn out to be the primary target of state-led ideological efforts, regardless of whether the respective state was democratic or authoritarian in nature. Consequently, having developed at the beginning of the century which saw what Michael Mann has called a "cult of youth," one aspect of 4-H's history that is especially interesting, and which needs to be more fully contextualized in a transnational context, is the fact that 4-H was the first significant instance of state-sponsored organizations aimed at shaping the heads, hearts, hands, and health of

[13] The term "land-grant universities" refers to universities that were established as a result of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. These acts funded the creation of state universities by giving to states federally controlled lands, the partial selling of which funded new public universities. For a good general overview, see Coy F Cross, *Justin Smith Morrill Father of the Land-Grant Colleges* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1999). On the early history of the Extension Service, see Roy Vernon Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).
[14] Rosenberg, 6.

children and adolescents.[15] Hence, in addition to investigating how the Ulmanis regime used 4-H, known in Latvia as *Mazpulki*, to sow and germinate the "idea of 'renewed' [*atjaunotā*] Latvia," this chapter will also seek to place 4-H within a transatlantic, transnational context, rooting it in the wider milieu of the significant growth of, and increased emphasis placed on, youth organizations.

However, before turning to a discussion of Latvian 4-H, it is worth noting that Latvians were not the only Europeans to adopt the idea of clubs for young farmers. As was mentioned earlier, 4-H has always been a unique government-private endeavor with regard to its scope and funding. And one of the key sources of private funds, especially during the early decades of 4-H, was John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board (GEB). Originally founded in 1902 with a portion of Rockefeller's Standard Oil fortune, GEB was committed to the improvement of the educational system at all levels. From 1902 to 1965, GEB distributed more than 325 million dollars, and 4-H received a significant portion of that total.[16] With the purpose of further popularizing the organization, 4-H leaders like Gertrude Warren, Roy Turner, and C. B. Smith used part of the GEB funds to produce promotional literature, which they also distributed to embassies in Washington, D.C. As a result, the idea of 4-H began to spread abroad, first to Canada by 1913 and then to Sweden by the end of the First World War.[17]

Following the war, 4-H became an avenue for the support of democracy in Europe. Although the U.S. government certainly supported the initiative, the lead role here was played by John D. Rockefeller's International Education Board (IEB). As the name suggests, IEB, which was founded in 1923, was an extension of GEB, though rather than focus on education broadly

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[15] Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 359.
[16] "John D. Rockefeller," Rockefeller Archive Center, accessed on March 10, 2014, http://www.rockarch.org/bio/jdrsr.php.
[17] "International 4-H Continuum," National 4-H History Preservation Program, accessed on March 10, 2014, http://4-hhistorypreservation.com/History/International_Programs/.

defined, IEB predominantly funded education in the agricultural and natural sciences, including the promotion of 4-H. This was because Rockefeller believed that a good education and successful, independent farmers were the backbone of a sound democratic society. As a result of IEB's initiatives, in conjunction with the continued propaganda efforts of American 4-H leaders, 4-H clubs sprang up all over Europe during the interwar period, including in Great Britain, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Norway.[18]

Finally, following the Second World War and even during the war itself, the U.S. government pushed the global expansion of 4-H in the hopes that "the improvement of farming efficiency, living standards, and health of rural people" would ensure a more democratic and peaceful world.[19] To coordinate this effort, the USDA and the State Department's Institute of Inter-American Affairs founded a training program in the early 1940s for the worldwide promotion of 4-H and the Extension Service. Renamed the Foreign Training Division (FTD) when the USDA assumed sole responsibility for the program in 1944, the main objective of FTD was to bring foreign agronomists to America to educate them about extension work, including 4-H. By 1960, more than 6,000 foreign nationals from at least 100 different countries had graduated from the FTD program. Upon returning, quite often these graduates went about establishing 4-H-inspired clubs, usually with at least some financial assistance from the U.S. government, including quite often from the U.S. military, as Gregg Brazinsky has detailed in the case of South Korea.[20] Thus, by 1965, 4-H had spread to more than seventy-six countries. A

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[18] Ibid; "International Education Board," The Rockefeller Foundation: 100 Years, accessed on March 10, 2014, http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/education/international-education-board; "History of 4-H Club," Maricopa Agricultural Center at the University of Arizona, http://cals.arizona.edu/aes/mac/ag-ventures/4-H_detailed_history.htm.

[19] Rosenberg, 303.

[20] Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). In this work, Brazinsky devotes a section of his chapter, "Molding South Korean Youth," to 4-H.

decade later, global 4-H membership had exceeded 7 million.[21] While today the popularity of 4-H has declined among America's youth, 4-H's mission continues. To be sure, as it was for Rockefeller, 4-H remains a favored destination for charitable giving among America's citizens and most recognizable companies, for they continue to believe that the values championed by 4-H will produce a national and global citizenry devoted to peace, democracy, and the betterment of the world.[22] Thus, given the history of 4-H's global agenda, the story of Ulmanis's use of 4-H, to which we now turn, is one rooted in a great irony.

-Founding of *Mazpulki*-

Despite what Ulmanis's detractors have said about ostensible early signs, even in his childhood, of his ambitions for authoritarian control, Ulmanis did not import 4-H to Latvia with the hope of using it to bolster his power. Ulmanis wanted to bring it to Latvia simply because he admired the goals and work of 4-H. Perhaps part of the reason why Ulmanis became a supporter of 4-H is because Val Kuska, who worked with Ulmanis on the Warner farm, brought it to his attention. A son of Czech immigrants, Kuska was born in 1887 on the family farm near the small town of Ohiowa, Nebraska, and during his years of secondary school he participated in the local agricultural club, sponsored by the Nebraska Boys' Agricultural and Girls' Domestic Science Association. Kuska enjoyed his club work so much that after finishing his schooling at the University of Nebraska, he continued working with 4-H through his job as an Extension Service agent, sometimes also known as a "farm demonstrator." After returning from service in the First World War, Kuska then continued to support the work of 4-H as an agricultural agent with the Burlington Railroad. In fact, over his career Kuska played such a pivotal role in the development

[21] "History of 4-H Club," Maricopa Agricultural Center at the University of Arizona.
[22] Today, some of 4-H's biggest benefactors include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walmart, Pioneer, Monsanto, Cargill, John Deere, AT&T, Motorola, The Coca-Cola Foundation, Nike, Philips, UnitedHealthcare, Lockheed Martin, and more.

of 4-H in Nebraska that he was inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Agricultural Achievement in 1961.[23]

Beyond certainly hearing about 4-H from Kuska, it is unclear if Ulmanis ever participated in any 4-H meetings in Nebraska. At the minimum, he was at least familiar with 4-H livestock shows, since he served as a judge at the 1908 Nebraska State Fair. In addition to images of 4-H garden produce exhibits, perhaps the most stereotypical image of 4-H is that of a young girl or boy showing her or his beloved farm animal, hoping that the judges will award a first-place blue ribbon. Consequently, Ulmanis saw for himself the amount of self-initiative and hard work that was required of 4-H members, as well as the respect and autonomy that were afforded them by their parents and club leaders. It was these qualities that he saw in the members, and how those affected their relations with adults, that evidently struck Ulmanis the most, for he said as much in an article written for *Zemkopis*.

The piece, titled "*Saimnieku dēli*" ("The Sons of Farmers"), appeared in January 1910, and in it Ulmanis opined about the differences between the fates of farmers' sons in the Baltic Provinces as compared to those in America. Describing the situation for these rural sons as "certainly unenviable," Ulmanis lamented that already at a young age they have to choose between two options: they can either remain loyal to their parents, working for them, typically without monetary compensation, in the hopes of one day inheriting the farm; or they can leave their family in the hopes of finding gainful employment elsewhere, most typically in the city.[24] Even more significantly, the problem with both options, Ulmanis pointed out, is that more often than not these sons come to regret their decision, no matter how they chose. For those who stay

[23] John D. Orr, *The History of 4-H in Nebraska* (Lincoln, Neb: Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nebraska, 1985), 3-4; "Kuska, Val," Nebraska State Historical Society, last modified March 2001, accessed April 3, 2013, http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/timeline/kuska_val.htm.
[24] Kārlis Ulmanis, "Saimnieku dēli," *Zemkopis*, Nr. 4, January 27, 1910, 65.

on the farm, desires for autonomy and the need for money, especially if they want to start a family of their own, often make them wish they had struck out on their own. Likewise, those who leave often are tormented with the guilt of "abandoning" their family and, to make matters worse, often miss life on the farm or do not like their job.

It was with this problem in mind that Ulmanis turned to a discussion of American 4-H. Although he did not actually refer to it by name, which is not that surprising since the boys' and girls' clubs had not yet been unified under the name 4-H, it is obvious that Ulmanis had been inspired to write the article after learning about how 4-H helped improve the outlook for farmers' sons, while also bettering the relationship between fathers and sons. For instance, Ulmanis discussed the example of one Midwestern farmer who had seven sons, yet managed, in the farmer's words, to make sure that every son became "a better man than their father." In the farmer's analysis, the reason for his success in this parental endeavor was that he allowed every one of his sons throughout their teenager years to use a plot of land to cultivate their own crops, which they could then sell. This arrangement – of fathers allocating to their children plots of land for their garden – has always been the foundation of 4-H, at least in the countryside, and the appeal for this farmer, as well as for Ulmanis, was that it taught children initiative, gave them a sense of autonomy and pride, and enabled them to accumulate spending money. Consequently, though Ulmanis admitted that it would be only a first step in solving the conundrum that rural boys faced, he encouraged Baltic farmers to adopt this American model, because he was convinced that merely an improvement in their spirits and outlook "would surely lead to thousands of farmers' sons remaining on the farms and not wandering off into the world."[25]

But after the publication of this article, Ulmanis put his efforts to promote a Latvian version of 4-H on hold. At first this was because of the demands of his work in Nebraska and

[25] Ibid, 67.

Texas. Then, upon returning home, of course the chaos of the First World War and subsequent War of Latvian Independence, and the demands as prime minister of leading the war-ravaged Latvian state, forced him to put the 4-H project on hold. Yet, once the country had begun to recover from the wars and Ulmanis had more time, after leaving the post of prime minister, to advance his plan to start 4-H in Latvia, he still faced a major obstacle: a lack of interest in his idea for Latvian 4-H among parents. Unfortunately, there are no archival sources on Ulmanis's early, unsuccessful attempts to establish Latvian 4-H. But in his 1938 book *Augsim Latvijai* (*We Will Grow for Latvia*), which remains one of the few publications of any length on the history of *Mazpulki*, Arnolds Lūsis, the head of *Mazpulki's* education and propaganda department, noted that Ulmanis had trouble starting the organization because the older generations simply did not understand why the youth needed to be given the opportunity to freely pursue their interests, work independently, and, most especially, to earn awards and compensation for their work.[26] In other words, many parents, especially those in the countryside, simply did not understand why it was necessary to deviate from the centuries-old practice of viewing children as obedient, unpaid laborers.[27] To permit their children to pursue their own interests at the expense of forsaking their farm chores simply did not make sense to many parents. Thus, the biggest post-war hindrance

[26] Arnolds Lūsis, *Augsim Latvijai: grāmata mazpulku jaunatnei* (Jelgava: LLK izdevums, 1938). The only other works on the history of *Mazpulki* are Ādolfs Eglītis's self-published booklet, *A History of Latvian 4-H: 1929-1991*; and Jordan Kuck, "Renewed Latvia. A Case Study of the Transnational Fascism Model," *Fascism*, Vol. 2 (2013): 183-204, in which he uses *Mazpulki* as a way of examining the transnational fascism model of analysis. Additionally, Aldis Purs devotes a few pages to *Mazpulki* in his article "'Unsatisfactory National Identity': School Inspectors, Education, and National Identity in Interwar Latvia," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2004): 97-125. However, I disagree with Purs's argument that *Mazpulki* was not really a replica of American 4-H.

[27] For a good discussion of the historical importance of child labor on the farm, see Robert McC. Netting, *Smallholders, Householders: Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive, Sustainable Agriculture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), especially chapter two. For a global perspective, see Hugh D. Hindman, *The World of Child Labor an Historical and Regional Survey* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

that Ulmanis had to overcome in his attempt to organize Latvian 4-H was, as Lūsis put it, to melt "the ice in the old farmers' hearts."[28]

In other words, there was a generational divide that had to be overcome, at least that is how Ulmanis and other *Mazpulki* leaders came to understand it. As a result, they spent quite a lot of time talking and writing about ways to convince parents to support their respective child's interest in *Mazpulki*.[29] While we will return to this issue later on in the chapter, with regard to the founding of *Mazpulki*, an important and ultimately decisive change in the narrative of why 4-H should matter to parents occurred as a result of Ulmanis's urging that a Latvian translation of John Francis Case's 1927 novel *Under the 4-H Flag* be published. Originally translated by the writer Ausma Roga, the Latvian version first appeared as a special, multi-month series in the popular, predominantly countryside-oriented newspaper *Brīvā Zeme*. Then late that year a new translation of the work by Anna Ēvelīte appeared under the title *Zem baltzaļā karoga* (*Under the White-Green Flag*).[30]

The publication of a Latvian-language edition of Case's work was an important development in Ulmanis's endeavors to start 4-H in Latvia because in the work Case tells a story that helped Latvians see how an entire farm, family, and community could benefit from 4-H. Set in the isolated Missouri countryside, Case's story is about a family that moved to the area in the hopes for a better life, but arrived to find that the dilapidated farmyard did not match the rosy

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[28] Arnolds Lūsis, *Augsim Latvijai: grāmata mazpulku jaunatnei* (Jelgava: LLK izdevums, 1938), 13.

[29] For instance, in a memo to Ulmanis laying out the main goals for the organization in 1935, Mazpulki leaders identified the need to increase the popularity of the organization among the older generations as one of the most vital goals. See LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1447. l., 180-181. lp. Additionally, there were frequently articles published in *Vādītājs*, the journal for *Mazpulki* leaders, on the topic of how to improve the organization's relations with parents and the older generations. For two excellent examples, see A. Ķibēns, "Mazpulks un mazpulka dalībnieku vecāki," *Vādītājs*, Nr. 6, December 1, 1937, 407-417; Rita Kundziņa, "Sadarbība ar vecākiem," *Vādītājs*, Nr. 1, March 1, 1938, 49-53.

[30] Lūsis, *Augsim Latvijai*, 13-14; "Vēsture," Latvijas Mazpulki, accessed April 3, 2013, http://www.mazpulki.lv/lv/page/vesture. The Latvian title was chosen because the colors of the 4-H flag in America were, and remain to this day, white and green.

promises of the settlement agent. Told from the point of view of the teenage son, Robert, readers follow the travails of Robert and his mother, who struggle to turn things around while the father laments his life as a farmer, dreaming instead that he could earn a living playing the fiddle. Besides Robert, who is portrayed in his ambition and maturity as a boy well beyond his years, the heroes in the story are the county extension agent, who helps the family alter their farming practices to better suit the local soil and climate, and most especially the local 4-H members, who befriend Robert, convince him to join their 4-H club, and then time and again volunteer to help Robert and his family transform their run-down farm into a model of prosperity. By the end, even the fiddle-playing father has become a better farmer and man, having been influenced by the can-do spirit of 4-H and the alluring promise of modern farming practices.[31]

Inspired by Case's story, a number of teachers started 4-H clubs in the fall of 1929. The first club was formed by Roberts Kalniņš on November 8 at the Ezere primary school. Once a number of other clubs were established that winter, the leaders of Latvia's Central Agricultural Association (*Latvijas lauksaimniecības centrālbiedrība* [LLC]), with whom Ulmanis had been in discussion about 4-H since at least 1927, agreed to create a new department for the organization, which was given the name *Mazpulki*, meaning approximately "clubs," after Rosma used the neologism in her translation.[32] With the administrative and financial support of LLC, the early clubs and their leaders went about establishing the customs and traditions of *Mazpulki*. For

[31] John F. Case, *Under the 4-H Flag*, (Philadelphia & London: Lippincott, 1927).

[32] Within the Latvian lexicon, there is, in fact, the word *klubs*, and indeed Rosma also used the phrase "*jaunatnes klubs*" in her translation. But most likely this word was deemed too foreign sounding, or maybe even too mundane to be used for the name of the organization. Hence the neologism "*mazpulki*" was used instead. *Mazpulki* – from the adjective *mazs* (small) or the adverb *maz* (little, few) and the noun *pulki* (regiment, squadron, or crowd) – is difficult to translate. Literally it means "small crowds," but one could also feasibly translate it, using the word small as a stand-in for youth, as groups of youth. In fact, Ādolfs Eglītis, in his English-language booklet on the history of *Mazpulki*, published for members of the Colorado Springs 4-H clubs, translated *mazpulki* as "gathering of the young." See Ādolfs Eglītis, *A History of Latvian 4-H: 1929-1991* (self-published), 9. On the other hand, Aldis Purs has translated the term as "little regiments," arguing that this best conveys the organization's militaristic aspects. However, with regard to the origins and original meaning of the word, this is an anachronistic argument, because it was not until the mid-1930s that the organization began to introduce military-style training. On Purs's take, see "'Unsatisfactory National Identity': School Inspectors, Education, and National Identity in Interwar Latvia," 120.

example, they adopted the standard, and now quite recognizable, American 4-H four-leaf clover emblem with its four H's. Also borrowed from the American template was the motto of American 4-H – "to make the best better" – which was directly translated into Latvian as "*labo darīt vēl labāk.*" Additionally, in April 1930, LLC appointed Kārlis Ķirsis, the twenty-four-year-old, University of Latvia-educated agronomist from Tirza County in northeastern Latvia, as the head of *Mazpulki*, and he, among other important tasks, oversaw the creation of the official *Mazpulki* journal, *Mazpulks*, which first appeared in 1931.[33]

Seeing that Ulmanis spent years trying to bring his plan for 4-H to fruition, it was fitting that he wrote the lead article for the very first issue of *Mazpulks*, an article which, for all intents and purposes, was the organization's first public statement. Naturally, in the article, Ulmanis addressed his vision of and aspirations for *Mazpulki*. Among other things, Ulmanis explained that the purpose of the organization was to promote a general respect in society for agriculture, and to encourage a general love for the land and the Latvian farm among Latvia's youth. Ulmanis expressed his hope that *Mazpulki* would motivate the youth to show "initiative" so as to "free them[selves] from the excessive deference to others, and especially among foreigners."[34] In other words, this was an appeal to do away with the deference shown over 700 years to the historic overlords of the region, the Baltic Germans. Finally, hinting at the generational divide that had slowed the establishment and growth of *Mazpulki*, Ulmanis issued a challenge, telling the *Mazpulki* members that they must show their parents new and better ways to do things in

[33] Lūsis, *Augsim Latvijai*, 14-16;Arnolds Lūsis, *Aiztek ūdeņi—aiztek gadi: atmiņas* (Lincoln, NE: LELBAs Apgāds, 1982, 99-100); "Mazpulku attīstība Latvijā," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 11, November 15, 1935, 407-411. For Ķirsis's biographical information, see *Es viņu pazistu*, 285.
[34] Kārlis Ulmanis, "Mazpulku dalībniekiem," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 1 (Feb. 1931), 2.

order for the countryside to begin to prosper again and one day become "just as attractive as life in the cities."[35]

The sorts of initiatives Ulmanis laid out in the article – the need to modernize farm practices, to stem the flow of rural youth to the cities, and to improve the quality of life on the farms – mirrored the ambitions of American 4-H. This is not surprising since much of the Western world shared similar developmental and demographic challenges brought about by the onset of modernity. Likewise, these initiatives, as was also the case in America, were especially appealing to farm boys, whose plight Ulmanis had already pointed out in his 1910 article. However, unlike the "melting pot" experience of American 4-H, which took children of all different ethnicities and melded them into "Americans," *Mazpulki* was not about fashioning civic identities as much as it was about developing ethnic ones. Put another way, while American 4-H encouraged civic patriotism, *Mazpulki* sought to develop an ethnic form of nationalism that, as we will see, made it startlingly easy for Ulmanis to transform a classic example of what Alexis de Tocqueville saw as a hallmark of democracy – civic clubs and associations – into a bastion of authoritarianism, though as Rudy Koshar's seminal study of Marburg, Germany shows, such a development was certainly not exclusive to Latvia.[36]

Of course, Tocqueville also forewarned of the "tyranny of the majority," and in a sense that is what Ulmanis and Mazpulki were moving towards with their focus on ensuring that Latvians were the masters of the Latvian nation-state.[37] Yet, Ulmanis was not focused, at least at this point anyway, on trying to suppress the Baltic Germans or other minorities. Far from it,

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. James T. Schleifer and ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2012); Rudy Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism: Marburg, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).
[37] Tocqueville devoted an entire chapter to the question "of what tempers tyranny of majority in the United States." See volume I, part II, chapter 8.

Ulmanis, as was shown in earlier chapters, had a deep respect for many aspects of German culture. Rather, Ulmanis wanted Mazpulki members, and indeed all ethnic Latvians, to stop focusing on others – namely, the Baltic Germans – out of deference, or due to possible feelings of inferiority, and instead turn inwards to focus on what it means to be "Latvian."

As has been powerfully argued by Liah Greenfeld, growing nationalism had much to do with the birth of modernity, with the claim of being a "modern" nation.[38] Therefore, in order to assert their place among the modern nations of the West, Latvians sought to define their national identity. But as was discussed earlier, this was an effort that proved to be far from harmonious in the pre-independence period, and the chief cause of the dissension was a divide in opinions among Latvian nationalists about the influence of German culture. As Ivars Ijabs illustrates in his recent article on the origins of Latvian nationalism, one cannot understand the developmental path of Latvian nationalism without analyzing the debate about the "colonial mimicry" of Baltic German culture.[39] By colonial mimicry, Ijabs means of course the attempt of the so-called Young Latvians to develop a Latvian "high culture" based upon the model or template of German culture. For some Latvian nationalists, most notably Juris Māters, who, as will be recalled, had a significant influence on Ulmanis, this particular road to modernity was problematic.

Using the terminology of present-day theories of nationalism, at the root of the debate was a disagreement over primordial and modernist perspectives of nationalism. Most members of the Young Latvians seemed to understand Latvian nationalism through a modernist and "intercultural context," as Ijabs puts it.[40] That is, to "develop" a Latvian nationalism, the Young Latvians thought it was necessary to first and foremost cultivate a "modern" Latvian public

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[38] Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*; also useful is her collection of essays, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).
[39] Ivars Ijabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism: Young Latvians, Baltic Germans, and the Emergence of Latvian National Movement," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2014): 95.
[40] Ibid, 89.

sphere replete with associations, societies, a Latvian-language press, etc.[41] One could say, then, that they thought that nationalism was a product of modernity, and as such they believed that the cities would serve as the cradle of the national awakening. To nationalists like Māters and, later, Ulmanis, this way of thinking was erroneous. For one thing, they tended to theorize nations as primordial in nature, and thus they saw the national awakening as an effort to overturn the negative effects of 700 years of occupation and serfdom, to bring about a rebirth of the true, untainted Latvian nation.[42] Thus, as a corollary, adherents of this primordial view believed that the countryside, not the cities, should be at the epicenter of the national awakening, for the cities were thought to be "foreign" places long dominated by the Baltic Germans. Lastly, it is also worth noting that inherent in this debate were differing takes on the notion of time in the modern world, as the primordial camp, with their calls for a rebirth of the nation, hinted at a cyclical sense of time, while the modernists viewed the awakening as a consequence of the linear progression of time.

This bifurcated understanding of the nation, and of nationalism, modernity, and time, had a tremendous impact on the Latvian nation-state during the interwar period.[43] Indeed, nearly the

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[41] Noteworthy studies from this perspective include Ieva Zake, "Inventing Culture and Nation: Intellectuals and Early Latvian Nationalism." *National Identities*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2007, 307-329, and *Nineteenth-Century Nationalism and Twentieth-Century Anti-Democratic Ideals: The Case of Latvia, 1840s to 1980s* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008); Andrejs Plakans, "Peasants, Intellectuals, and Nationalism in the Russian Baltic Provinces, 1820-1890," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1974): 445-475, "The Latvians," in *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914*, ed. Edward C. Thaden and Michael H. Haltzel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 207-283. In the Latvian language, see especially Gints Apals, *Jaunlatviešu kustības raksturs 19. gadsimta 50. un 60. gados* (Rīga: LU, 1993), and *Pēterburgas avīzes: latviešu pirmā saskare ar Eiropas politiskajām idejām* (Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 2011); Vita Zelče, *Latviešu avīžniecība: laikraksti savā laikmetā un sabiedrībā, 1822-1865* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2009).

[42] For a particularly excellent discussion of this aspect of Latvian nationalism, see Katrina Z. S. Schwartz, "'The Occupation of Beauty': Imagining Nature and Nation in Latvia," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2007): 259-293. The scholarship on theories of nationalism is incredibly rich and vast. For a helpful overview on the various theories and perspectives, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2001). Also insightful is Adeed Dawisha, "Nation and Nationalism: Historical Antecedents to Contemporary Debates," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 3-22.

[43] For an insightful study of how this bifurcated nationalism affected state policies in Latvian "borderlands" during the interwar period, see Aldis Purs, "The Price of Free Lunches: Making the Frontier Latvian in the Interwar Years," *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (2002): 60-73.

entirety of the Ulmanis regime's ideological efforts was focused on building a consensus on these debates among ethnic Latvians, though as we will see, even the regime itself struggled to build a consistent and unified message. It is thus not surprising that Ulmanis put *Mazpulki* at the forefront of this initiative.

However, during the early years, when the organization was almost exclusively focused on the countryside, *Mazpulki* grew slowly, at least in comparison to what happened after Ulmanis's coup. For example, over the first four and a half years of its existence, *Mazpulki* grew to 377 clubs and 5,846 members. But in the year immediately following the 1934 coup, *Mazpulki* expanded its scope by adding new housekeeping programs for young women and encouraging new social activities (such as summer camps) aimed at urban youth, and as a result by May 1935 the organization had grown by 430 new clubs and had added nearly 13,000 additional members. Significantly, many of these new clubs were in the cities, as the number of urban clubs grew from twelve in 1934 to 119 by 1939. This tremendous growth throughout the Ulmanis Times led to *Mazpulki* becoming not only the largest youth organization in the country, with more than 40,000 members, but also one of the most noteworthy and powerful organizations of any type.[44] However, some of this growth during the authoritarian era was in part the outcome of planning prior to the coup. For instance, on March 18, 1934, LLC and Mazpulki leaders held an important joint meeting about growing and diversifying the work of *Mazpulki*, including a reformatting and expansion of its journal, *Mazpulks*.[45] But on the other hand, certainly *Mazpulki* would not have expanded as rapidly as it did, nor would it most likely have become one of the most powerful

[44] The statistics in this paragraph are from "Mazpulki," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates lauksaimniecības izstāde: Pārskats*, ed. J. Ķenģis and M. Vagulāns (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecīas kamera, 1939), 153-162.
[45] See, LVVA 1690. f., 4. apr., 1457. l., 109. lp.

and celebrated organizations in interwar Latvia, had Ulmanis not become the *Vadonis* of Latvia and, most importantly, the *Virsvadonis* (Supreme Leader) of *Mazpulki*.[46]

-The Nature of *Mazpulki*-

Having laid out the essential history of the founding of *Mazpulki*, the chapter will now turn to an investigation of the nature of *Mazpulki*, including the changes wrought by the onset of authoritarian rule in Latvia. The section will begin with a look at the continuities in the organization between the democratic and authoritarian eras, before subsequently discussing the changes that occurred during the Ulmanis Times.

Throughout its existence during the first Latvian republic, *Mazpulki* was chiefly devoted to four goals: 1) to cultivate in the youth a positive, can-do attitude and love of work; 2) to modernize Latvian agriculture and the countryside as a whole, which, it was hoped, would also encourage rural Latvians to remain in the countryside; 3) to develop in society a greater appreciation for the youth; 4) to bring about in the youth a more ardent love of their homeland and Latvian identity. As we will see, these primary aims were seamlessly integrated into every aspect of *Mazpulki* life.

Ulmanis had long been frustrated by what he saw as a pervasive pessimism, apathy, and lack of interest in new ways of thinking and working among Latvians, and especially Latvian farmers. This frustration already existed during his years abroad, as was evidenced in the earlier analysis of Ulmanis's letters to Enzeliņš, and it continued during the years of Latvian independence, a postcolonial dilemma echoed elsewhere. It was thus out of a desire to reform this aspect of Latvian culture that Ulmanis was first drawn to the idea of bringing 4-H to Latvia, for what he thought it could instill in Latvia's youngest residents was hope for the future and a

[46] Ulmanis accepted the invitation to assume this role in early June 1934. Of course it is difficult to determine the sincerity and source of the invitation, but it should be noted that, officially speaking, the Mazpulki leadership invited Ulmanis to take on this role. See LVVA 1690. f., 4. apr., 1456. l., 17. lp.

happiness of purpose, character traits that had been suppressed in the nation by centuries of working for others. This was the precise message that Ulmanis conveyed in his speech at the first *Mazpulki* general assembly on February 24-25, 1931.

Though he did not play an active role in leading *Mazpulki* until after his coup, Ulmanis was always recognized as the father of Latvian 4-H, having conceived the idea, and consequently he was almost always present for and spoke at major *Mazpulki* events. In this case, more than 100 members and leaders had traveled to Rīga to celebrate the first full year of the organization's work. In addition to taking in the sights of Rīga, including visits to the Ministry of Agriculture's Museum of Agriculture, the parliament, the National History Museum, etc., on the afternoon of February 25, the members convened for an award ceremony, followed by Ulmanis's closing speech. Having just observed the ceremonial awarding of *Mazpulki* flags – a bicolor, green and white flag divided horizontally, with a large four-leaf clover situated in the middle – Ulmanis used the flag to expound on the organization's values. He explained that the white half represents unplowed fields and work to be done, while the green signifies the "green hope of agriculture." The 4-leaf clover, he continued, represents our happiness, which is rooted in work and the promise of the results. Lastly, the brown flag pole, he pointed out, represents the land. These colors, Ulmanis concluded, should always remind us that although the work of Mazpulki might seem small, it teaches members that small things can nonetheless be very important, and hence we must do everything whole heartedly. He then cautioned those gathered that "we must protect against those thoughts that circumstances can keep people from fulfilling their duties. That cannot be allowed to happen! A person isn't a slave of circumstances. Rather, circumstances are to be overcome."[47]

[47] "Pirmā mazpulku dalībnieku sanāksme Rīgā 24. un 25. februārī, *Mazpulks*, Nr. 1, March 15, 1931, 9-13.

As to the circumstances that Ulmanis wanted *Mazpulki* members to conquer, perhaps the clearest elucidation came in 1935 at a *Mazpulki* work exhibition. In early October that year, *Mazpulki* organized at the Trade Associations' Hall in Rīga its first state-wide work exhibition. On display were a wide variety of items, from garden produce to crafts, and clothing to tools and instruments of all sorts, all of which were grown or made by member of the 241 clubs represented. Upon arriving at the hall for the opening ceremony on October 11, Ulmanis walked through the exhibition, admiring and complimenting the youth on their projects, and even buying a few items for himself, including a straw basket from a member from Talsi, a horse bridle from a boy from Nurmuiža, and a fine example of a renowned Sigulda walking stick. Upon finishing his tour of the exhibition, and before beginning in earnest his speech, Ulmanis remarked, "Well, who's to say that no wonders are occurring in our day? Everything that we see here really is a true wonder of the world. Children today productively use their free time and when the parents will see just how much the youngsters are doing, then they will work more out of pure jealousy. And so all of our lives will move forward. And we will use free time in a useful way."[48]

Beyond overcoming laziness or idleness, there was yet another circumstance, or another oft-used excuse, that Ulmanis held a great disdain for, and he turned to this in his speech. Wanting to help his audience more fully understand the long-term, bigger-picture importance of such work exhibitions, Ulmanis pointed to the fact that the event's spirit of progress and optimism stood in stark contrast to a common but negative line of thought. "Surely you yourselves have heard," he commented, "that a number of oppressive [*smagi*] problems trouble us, that in our country the summers are short, the land is infertile, and the winters long…." It is this type of defeatist attitude, he clarified, that makes this exhibition so imperative, for it

[48] "Mazpulku brīnumu pasaule: Ministru prezidents apmeklē mazpulku darbu izstādi," *Rīts*, Nr. 281, October 12, 1935, 6.

confirms that "at every step habits are being rooted in their [i.e., Mazpulki members'] minds and hearts to view and think about life differently than in earlier times. These works [i.e., the items at the exhibition] are an inducement [*ierosinājums*] and beginning, so that there might be better efforts in life and a new burning courage in their hearts for the present work, as well as for their life in the coming years."[49]

Being part of *Mazpulki* entailed, however, much more than listening to speeches, for like its American counterpart, it was organized on the pedagogical premise of active learning, of doing. As we will see, this took place on a number of levels since *Mazpulki* was administratively organized at the club, county, regional (there were thirteen administrative regions by 1939), and state levels. But of course the bulk of activities occurred at the local club level. Here the club was divided into two sections: those between the ages of eight and eleven; and those from the age of twelve on up. However, to complicate things further, there was another, separate division when it came to physical education and work competitions. In those instances, members were divided into two groups: 12-15 year-olds, and 16-21 year-olds.[50]

Generally speaking, each section of the club met twice every month, usually at the local schoolhouse. For the older group, the standard meeting was two hours long, while the younger members only met for ninety minutes. Although the leaders, who were not monetarily compensated for their work, had a lot of freedom to organize the meetings as they pleased, they were advised by the central leadership that each session should include: some type of inspection, which might include, e.g., clothes, personal hygiene, posture, etc.; singing; games; physical education or formation drills; hands-on learning; and a lecture, which often focused on a topic

[49] "Vajaga mācīties paklausīt, lai citi klausītu: Mazpulku virsvadoņa ministru prezidenta Dr. K. Ulmaņa norādījumi mazpulku izstādi atklājot," *Rīts*, Nr. 281, October 12, 1935, 6.
[50] See, "Mazpulku fiziskās audzināšānas resp. vingrošanas programma," LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr.,1456. l., 54-55. lp.; and N. Cīrulis, "Mazpulku dalībnieku vecuma grupas," *Vādītājs*, Nr. 2, May 1, 1937, 104-110.

related to their work, though after 1934 leaders or guest speakers increasingly focused on political topics. Additionally, the second meeting of the month would typically include a visit from a regional or senior inspector. These men and women were full-time, paid employees of LLC (which was subsumed by the *Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera* [LLK], or the Latvian Chamber of Agriculture, in 1935), and they visited local clubs both to teach and inspect members on their respective area of expertise, whether that be field work, gardening, housekeeping, etc.[51] Lastly, quite often in the warmer months this second club meeting of the month would also conclude with a visit to a prominent local farm, agricultural business, or even with a trip to another *Mazpulki* club. In sum, whatever the meetings might entail, the objective was to give members a chance to socialize, to instill in them desired values, to teach them useful information for their professional and private lives, and to promote a culture that celebrated rural life and gave young people an opportunity to socialize and develop a shared generational ethos.

If the monthly club meetings were collective experiences that helped build a sense of community, then the other main component of membership – individual projects – was about developing a member's initiative, persistence, and sense of pride. In the early years of the organization, members' individual projects were almost entirely of an agricultural nature, and they were most often field plots of grain or vegetables, decorative gardens, or livestock. Beyond simply learning how to properly plow a field or seed a bed, members were obliged to keep a journal and register of input costs so that at the end of the year, once they sold their harvest, they could determine total labor hours and net profit. In other words, what *Mazpulki* leaders were

[51] For an overview of the bureaucratic structure of *Mazpulki* and a list of top inspectors in 1939, see LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1582. l., unnumbered. As an example of the salary of an inspector, the regional inspector in the Talsi-Ventspils region made 141 lats per month after taxes. See LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 2279. l., 166. lp. This was a nice salary, as the average urban worker in 1935 made roughly 770 lats per year. See, Baiba Rivža and Benjamiņš Treijs, "Kārļa Ulmaņa agrārpolitika šodienas skatījumā," in *Kārlim Ulmanim 120*, ed. Andris Caune et al. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1998), 119-120.

doing was teaching members to approach farming as a business, and that meant, among other things, focusing on rationalizing time and input costs.

There were incentives to adopt this new approach. First and foremost, members could sell their produce, crafts, livestock, etc. at local and regional work exhibits, or even privately to local farmers or businesses. Although there are few records on the sort of profit that an individual member might expect from a specific endeavor, clubs did keep track of totals. For example, during the 1938 growing season, *Mazpulki* members produced crops worth 317,512 lats, with a total net profit of 198,618 lats.[52] In 1935, members sold medicinal plants to the firm T. L. M. drogu noliktava (T. L. M. Drug Storehouse), earning in sum roughly 5,400 lats.[53] Unfortunately the extant sources do not provide statistics on the total value of livestock, poultry, crafts, and other non-foodstuffs produced, but as was evidenced in the example of Ulmanis's purchases at the 1935 general work exhibition, members could sell such items at any number of many local and regional exhibits, which during the fall and winter of 1938-1939, for instance, totaled 1,014.[54] Additionally, a few companies, like A/S Bekona exports (A/S Bacon Exports), one of the most successful internationally trading companies during the 1930s and a generous supporter of *Mazpulki*, also permitted members to sell items at their stores.[55] Not only did such work exhibits and relationships with prominent companies give members a financial incentive to work hard, but of course they also raised the public profile of *Mazpulki*, helping recruit new members as well as proving to parents and older members of the Latvian populace the important contribution that young people could make to the economy and well-being of the nation.

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[52] "Devītais mazpulku darbības gads," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 7, July 15, 1939, 314.
[53] "Mazpulku sestā darbības gada pārskats," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 7, July 15, 1936, 318.
[54] "Devītais mazpulku darbības gads," 316.
[55] On A/S Bekona exports and its support of *Mazpulki*, see, for instance, LVVA, 1690. f., 7. apr., 4400. l., 6. lp.; 1690. f., 4. apr., 1748. l., 25. lp.; 1690. f., 4. apr., 1582. l., unnumbered; 1690. f., 4. apr., 1480. l., 4. lp.; and "Mazpulku rudens darbu uzdevumi," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 17, 1936, 3.

Competition also proved to be a powerful incentive. At these exhibits, for instance, awards, usually in the form of ribbons or medals, were given in a variety of categories, including for the largest produce, the aesthetic quality of crafts, etc. More telling still were the annual competitions in events like plowing, cutting hay, milking cows, digging potatoes, knitting, and cooking. To arrange these competitions, local leaders would work with farmers to organize competitions appropriate to the agricultural calendar, so that, for example, in mid-summer a farmer who needed to mow his hay field would let the local *Mazpulki* club hold their hay cutting contest at his field. In this way, though there was a chance that some of the youth might not do the job exactly as he hoped, he got the needed work done for free, and, in the best case scenario for *Mazpulki*, the farmer also learned a thing or two about new farming methods and the value of the organization's work.

During these competitions, contestants had to complete a certain amount of work. This was the first point of evaluation. For example, in the plowing competition (which was only for boys over the age of twelve), participants had to plow a plot of ground measuring fifty by twenty meters in size. They had one hour and twenty minutes to complete the work, and for every minute exceeding this time limit, they were penalized a point. Using a 100-point scale, a panel of five judges, usually comprised of local farmers and agronomists (the leaders tried not to serve on the panel for fear of being accused of favoritism), evaluated the participant on: 1) time to completion; 2) how skillfully they handled the horse and plow; 3) their skill at adeptly turning into a new furrow; 4) the straightness and depth of the furrow; 5) whether they left any unturned soil between furrows. In the other competitions, participants were judged similarly, with

accumulative scores being based on time to completion, technique, and the overall quality of the end product.[56]

Local winners then advanced to the regional competition, and the winners at that level went on to compete in the state competition, if in fact there was a state competition in the event that year, since each year *Mazpulki* leaders chose a different event for the boys' and girls' state competitions. Although they had always been part of *Mazpulki's* calendar of events, these state competitions became major cultural attractions during the Ulmanis Times. In fact, they were held in the years 1935-1937 at the grand, state fair-like *Pļaujas svētki* (Harvest Celebrations) that were, as we will see in the next chapter, the most popular events organized by the Ulmanis regime. Finally, accompanying the increased societal attention given to the competitions, the prizes presented to top performers became more valuable each year, and not only in terms of actual monetary value, but also because Ulmanis and other famous Latvians often donated the prizes, which ranged from cash to books, radios, tools, wrist and pocket watches, and more.[57]

There are a number of ways to analyze these competitions, but one of the most fascinating things to consider is the emphasis placed on time. Indubitably leaders used this evaluation point as a clear and cut way to determine the top performers. But given the organization's goal of modernizing the countryside, there is a deeper, more profound aspect to this. Namely, this focus on time was a way for leaders to alter the way that Latvians had historically approached farm work. As E. P. Thompson has persuasively shown, "pre-industrial" work habits were informed by "'natural' work-rhythms," meaning that a person's sense of time

[56] J. Andersons, "Darba sacensības mazpulkos (beigas)," *Vādītājs*, Nr. 3, December 1, 1936, 214-221.
[57] On these national competitions and prizes given, see, for example, J. Andersons, "Darba sacensības mazpulkos," *Vādītājs*, Nr. 1, July 1, 1936, 51-58, and "Darba sacensības mazpulkos (beigas)"; LVVA, 1690. f., 7. apr., 4993. l.; 1690. l., 4. apr., 1582. l.; 1690. f., 7. apr., 268. l.; "Mazpulku lielā skate," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 9, September 15, 1939, 414-417.

was tied to their task-oriented life.[58] Whether it was milking the cows, planting the field, or harvesting the grain, it was the rhythms of nature that governed a person's short- and long-view sense of time. Therefore, when it came to work habits, what mattered most was completing the work on nature's time. It mattered little whether one stopped working in the field for a mid-morning nap or lengthy chat with a neighbor; all that really mattered was that the job had to be done by nature's deadline, which might be, for instance, getting the harvest in before the first snow.

But with the onset of industrialization, "traditional" work habits changed drastically. Suddenly, such natural work-rhythms were thought to be "wasteful" and "lacking in urgency," because once labor came to be tracked down to the hour and minute, then time became money, as Benjamin Franklin famously put it.[59] Consequently, the modern age, as Zygmunt Bauman has observed, "perhaps more than anything else … is the time when time has a history."[60] Perhaps most important to our discussion, however, is Max Weber's observation that this paradigmatic shift in the understanding of time led to a never-ending drive toward ever greater levels of purpose- or function-oriented rationalization (or *Zweckrationalität).*[61]

Thus, what *Mazpulki* leaders were doing by focusing on time to completion during competitions, and by asking members to track the total number of hours they worked on their projects, was to encourage rural residents to adopt a "modern," time-based approach to work. Riveted by angst about the depopulation crisis caused by rapid industrialization and urbanization in the modern period, Ulmanis and *Mazpulki* leaders hoped, ironically enough, that a switch to

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[58] E. P Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: New Press, 1991), 358.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 110.
[61] Weber expounded on this theory in a number of works, though perhaps he did so most famously in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. For a helpful summary of Weber's theories, see Sung Ho Kim, "Max Weber," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed on March 11, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/#RatTheUni.*

industrial, urban work habits would ultimately "save" the countryside by making farmers more efficient in their work and thus more prosperous. And this outcome, so the leadership reasoned, would result in young people recognizing the opportunities that a career in agriculture afforded.

Also worth noting with regard to this emphasis on time and work is the acute labor shortage in the countryside that plagued the Latvian government throughout the years of independence. Due to the combination of the loss of lives in the wars, rural flight, and a continued reliance on sheer manpower in advance of mechanization, landed farmers often had a difficult time finding enough hired help. Thus, out of desperation, the government permitted the employment of foreign guest workers. For example, despite the fact that more than 40,000 people moved from cities back to the countryside in 1934-1935, thanks in part to the ideological efforts of the Ulmanis regime, in 1935 still a quarter of all hired labor in the countryside were guest workers from surrounding countries, particularly Estonia, Lithuania, and Poland.[62] This problem lingered in future years as well. For instance, in a February 1937 meeting, Ulmanis's cabinet already decided to permit the Ministry of Agriculture to begin organizing the emigration of 27,000 foreign workers for summer agricultural work.[63] Two years later, there were still at least 27,869 Polish guest workers employed in the agricultural sector.[64] Considering this endemic shortage of farm labor, certainly one of the reasons for the focus on time and rationalization was to ease this problem by making Latvians more efficient and productive workers, so that one day, as Ulmanis was fond of saying, Latvian land would be plowed by only Latvians.[65]

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[62] "Latvijas dzīve un darbs Latgales izstādē: Mūsu speciālkorespondenta ziņojums no Rēzeknes," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 8, 1936, 9.
[63] LVVA, 1307. f., 1. apr., 1460. l., 21. lp.
[64] LVVA, 1676. f., 1. apr., 622. l., 29. lp.
[65] Ulmanis first used the phrase "*pašu zemei—pašu arājs*" ("for our own land—our own plowman") in a November 2, 1938 speech to a joint session of all of the chambers. Afterwards, it became one of his most repeated phrases.

But as Ulmanis's slogan suggests, solving this labor shortage was about more than simply ensuring that the agricultural work got done, and it went beyond frustration that Latvian money was being sent abroad by guest workers. In reality, what this crisis was really about, at least in the perspective of Ulmanis and *Mazpulki* leaders, was an existential threat to the nation. For those like Ulmanis who saw the countryside as the historic cradle of the nation, the labor problem was but further proof that Latvians lacked a mature national consciousness rooted in an understanding of the nation's ties to the land. Thus, to alleviate this threat, *Mazpulki* focused on developing in the youth a more zealous nationalism.[66]

One of the most popular aspects of this campaign was *Meža dienas* (Forest Days), the Latvian version of the Arbor Day celebrations that Ulmanis had observed in Nebraska, where J. Sterling Morton first founded the initiative. *Meža dienas* began in 1930 and took place every spring thereafter. But unlike the American prototype, in Latvia it was not celebrated on a particular day. Rather, local *Meža dienas* committees, which included *Mazpulki* leaders, determined the date of the celebration in their area. The focal point of each *Meža dienas* was – and remains, for the tradition continues today – planting trees and bushes, and the intent in doing so was to recognize and expand, as it was expressed in the booklet for the 1937 *Meža dienas*, "our land's greatest natural resource and splendor."[67] In other words, the goal was the "beautification of the homeland and the strengthening of stewardship" of the land.[68] In practice, this meant that local committees were asked to organize the planting of trees and bushes in three locations: in areas that had been deforested by logging or during the wars; in public spaces, in

[66] Since most *Mazpulki* leaders were also school teachers, it is not surprising that this turn towards a more virulent ethnic nationalism seeped into the school classroom as well. On this topic, see Aldis Purs, "'Unsatisfactory National Identity': School Inspectors, Education, and National Identity in Interwar Latvia."
[67] Quoted in *Meža dienas Latvijā, 1937 gadā*, ed. K. Birnbaums (Rīgā: Meža dienu centrālās komitejas izdevums, 1938), 5. This publication can be found in LVVA, 3723. f., 1. apr., 15617. l., 24-76. lp.
[68] "Instrukcija meža dienu komitejām," LVVA, 3723. f., 1. apr., 15617. l., 20. lp.

which case committees were to give great consideration to the aesthetic combination of the sizes and colors of different tree varieties; and at historically important locations, where commemorative trees were to be planted at the site of important events in Latvian history, or at the birthplace of famous Latvians.[69]

Still, beyond an act of beautification and stewardship, *Meža dienas* was about tying Latvians more closely to the land, to the nation's sustaining force, for in the process of planting a tree, the theory went, the planter herself or himself also took root in the soil. What is more, planting a tree was a symbolic statement of hope for the future. J. Sterling Morton once remarked about his tradition, "Other holidays repose on the past. Arbor Day proposes the future." Without a doubt, it was this aspect of Arbor Day that spoke to Ulmanis, and it was this firm commitment to the future that he hoped this borrowed tradition would instill in Latvia's youth.[70]

Perhaps at this point it would be pertinent to use a discussion of *Meža dienas* to pivot towards a look at how *Mazpulki* changed following Ulmanis's coup, for the members' participation in *Meža dienas* took on during the Ulmanis Times a more overt political orientation. First and foremost, while involvement in *Meža dienas* had always been encouraged, it nonetheless remained voluntary. But following the establishment of Ulmanis's authoritarian rule and his ascension to the *Virsvadonis* of *Mazpulki*, the organization's central leadership decided in February 1935 that participation in *Meža dienas* would be mandatory. They also commanded that that spring all members would hold *Meža dienas* events on May 15 in order to plant commemorative trees "in honor of the important developments of 15 May."[71] Thus, on

[69] Ibid, 20-21.
[70] Not unlike 4-H, there is also a dearth of comprehensive histories on Arbor Day, despite the fact that it has spread around the globe. In fact, the current historiography on Arbor Day consists of only short booklets produced by state or local committees. As well, as of yet nothing has been written in the Latvian language either, excluding booklets from the 1930s.
[71] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1456. l., 58-61. lp.

May 15, 1935 *Mazpulki* kids planted a whole "generation" of May 15 trees, totaling more than 107,000 trees in all.[72] This continued in future years, both in terms of political overtones and participation, as not only did Ulmanis and other top political figures make it a priority to appear at *Meža dienas* events, but by 1938 the number of trees planted each year by *Mazpulki* members had increased to nearly 200,000.[73]

Beyond *Meža dienas* events, *Mazpulki* as a whole took on a more pronounced political and ideological role after May 15, 1934. Although the extent to which Ulmanis mandated the changes remains unclear, memos from Alfreds Bērziņš, the long-time member of Ulmanis's Farmers' Union party who became the head of the Ministry of Public Affairs (*Sabiedrisko lietu ministrija*), suggest that top leaders often interpreted for themselves how they were supposed to lead their respective ministries in the new era, though plans were also normally run by Ulmanis before being implemented. Interestingly, in Bērziņš's case, his June 1934 memos to Latvian embassies in Berlin and Rome, in which he asked for "wider literature on Goebbels's ministry of propaganda" and books, magazines, and articles on "the organization of propaganda," on "fascism in general, on the essence of nationalism, on the corporative state … [and] on relations between the state and workers, farmers, the youth, the intelligentsia, and so on," suggest that his approach to decision-making was, to Latvianize Kershaw's famous thesis about leadership in the Third Reich, to work "towards the *Vadonis*."[74] In other words, this means that although Ulmanis did not make every single decision, he was nonetheless at the center of leadership, because leaders attempted to channel Ulmanis when making decisions. Moreover, given the fact that Bērziņš clearly wanted to emulate the Italian and German models, one could argue that he was

[72] "Mazpulku sestā darbības gada pārskats," 320.
[73] "Devītais mazpulku darbības gads," 316.
[74] LVVA, 3758. f., 1. apr., 173. l., 293-294. lp. On Kershaw's thesis, see in particular his "'Working Towards the Führer': Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," in *The Third Reich: The Essential Readings*, ed. Christian Leitz and Harold James (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 231-252.

also working towards a yet undefined model of generic fascism—a topic that will be discussed in the second half of the chapter.

Within *Mazpulki,* the most lucid explanation of this new mission and the role of a leader in the authoritarian era came in an article that Lūsis, the head of the organization's education and propaganda department, penned for *Vādītājs* (*Leader*), the journal for *Mazpulki* leaders that he edited upon its founding in 1936. In this most important piece, titled "*Vadoņu meklēšana*" ("In Search of Leaders"), Lūsis argued that one of the primary tasks of *Mazpulki* was to provide Ulmanis with a "guard" (*gvarde*), a group of "collaborators who understand his ideas and intentions the best and can surmise his will, even if he has not said a word." Lūsis believed that *Mazpulki* had to play the lead role in producing this needed group of leaders because, as he explained:

> They will come from that place where the fortresses of Latvianness and the Latvian spirit have always stood strongly and securely. They will come from the countryside, where the difficult work and the black rye bread have made them strong for withstanding various tribulations and misfortunes. They will come from that place where the spirit of ancient harmony, the joy of work, and the spirit of purity of heart and godliness still hover about the threshold. And they will come from those Latvian farmyards where everyone talks to us in Latvian.[75]

Thus, under the leadership of Lūsis, Ķirsis, and Rūdolfs Dzērve, whom Ulmanis appointed as the head of LLK, *Mazpulki* became a sort of unofficial "Ulmanis Youth" organization. Yet, as was shown above, *Mazpulki* did not abandon its original agricultural roots, and indeed much of its work remained the same as before the coup. Instead, leaders simply portrayed that work in a more virulently nationalistic light, while also promoting the cult of the leader (or *vadoņaprincips*). For example, instead of working "to make the best better," as the original motto directed, now *Mazpulki* members were instructed and called upon to "grow for Latvia" following the adoption of a new motto – "*Augsim Latvijai!*" ("We Will Grow for

[75] Arnolds Lūsis, "Vadoņu meklēšana," *Vadītājs*, Nr. 2, September 1, 1936, 90.

Latvia!").[76] Cleverly incorporating and blending the increased emphasis on nationalism with the organization's continued focus on agriculture and pedagogy – the verb *augt* can be used in reference to both the growth of plants and children – this new slogan indeed became the ideological foundation of *Mazpulki* during the Ulmanis Times.



Figure 6: *Mazpulki* members greet Ulmanis at a May 15 celebration, undated.[77]

In fact, Ulmanis even devoted his entire speech at the 1936 *Mazpulki* summer camp in Dobele to the meaning and significance of the phrase. Summer camps had always been a mainstay in the organization's annual event calendar – as indeed they long have been in American 4-H – and during the democratic era they were held in order to build camaraderie, promote a love of nature and the outdoors (the campgrounds were usually located in the countryside near a lake or river), and to learn about and practice new work methods. Quite often

[76] According to the records, Ulmanis asked *Mazpulki* leaders in 1936 come up with a new motto. In early 1937 they sent Ulmanis four choices: "*Augsim Latvijai!*"; "Rokas darbam – sirdi Latvijai!" ("Our Hands for Work—Our Hearts for Latvia!"); "Darbam – vienībai – tēvzemei!" ("For Work—For Unity—For the Fatherland!"); and "Darbam – uzvarai – tēvzemei!" ("For Work—For Victory—For the Fatherland!"). See LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1447. l., 149. lp.

[77] This image is courtesty of *Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs*.

regional competitions would also be held in conjunction with the week-long camp. However, during the Ulmanis Times, leaders revised the summer camps, making them more blatantly political in nature. For one thing, whereas in previous years the camp activities went on in relative obscurity, after 1934 Ulmanis and other members of the regime often appeared at the camps, thus generating a lot of attention in the press. In this regard, Ulmanis's appearance at the Dobele camp is especially noteworthy, not only in terms of the pomp and circumstance of his visit, but most especially in terms of his remarks, for they proved to be an important turning point in the nature of *Mazpulki*.

As Ulmanis was wont to do when he made an appearance at a *Mazpulki* event, he began his speech with the call "Grow for Latvia!" to which the youth in attendance replied "We Will Grow for Latvia!" Having garnered their enthusiastic reply, Ulmanis then launched into a lengthy explanation of how they are indeed growing for Latvia.

> Your tasks are really diverse. You have your flowerbeds, gardens, and plots of grain, or also your animals, both small and big. About all of this each of you can say: those are my flowers, planted with my own hands, and my field was the first to sprout. First of all you make a few notes, whether in thought or on paper, about what it seems that the flowerbed or field plot needs. And then you yourself with our own hands tend the whole time to what you have planted; you care deeply about it and say: look—those are my flowers, [or] that is my section of grain. And so the greater the joy you have about it, what you call your own, the deeper it is tied to your heart.
>
> If your heart is generally able to be delighted, if in your heart is crackling a bright fire, then the fatherland, state, and nation also will find a place there. This deepest and most burning love in the world you will learn from your work. We will stick with the example of the grass or grain sprouts. It is necessary that you prepare the soil as best as possible, that the seed be the best. One has to look to make sure to plant only the best seeds—for there won't be a valuable harvest from bad seeds. You do everything with love and great care. From here it is only a small step further to love the fatherland, nation, and state. If we will grow, wanting to live for Latvia, then we must prepare ourselves to do that as well as possible.[78]

[78] "Tev mūžam dzīvot, Latvija! Valsts prezidenta Dr. K. Ulmaņa runa mazpulku svētkos Dobelē," *Zemgales Balss*, Nr. 154, July 13, 1936, 1, 5.

Still, despite his assurances that *Mazpulki* "is a good school in how it prepares one for adult life," Ulmanis concluded his speech by turning to a discussion of something important that he saw missing: a confident disposition. "We often appear to ourselves more inferior than we actually are," he began, "and more inferior than we permit ourselves to be. I would like to say that this feeling of inferiority is eradicable….We have the right to feel worthwhile, because there isn't anything that proves that we are inferior!" Speaking directly to this cultural legacy of serfdom, Ulmanis continued:

> All these characteristics that Mazpulki members get, taken together, they help create, build, and strengthen one thing, an especially valuable possession in each person's life, something without which it is quite difficult to deal with the work and duties in life: this characteristic reinforces and builds up a person's character, which gives a person the ability to take on each difficulty and every one of the most complicated questions. This character trait … will give us something that we are often lacking. We are often still lacking something that could be summed up in a word that for us is still foreign and strange, a word which might be taken from military service, from the aizsargi: this new characteristic, this new strength and ability we will call 'disposition' [*stāja*].[79] So that we, like a knife, are not bending every time, may we always be able to draw ourselves up [*nostāties*] in order that other people know, when they come upon us, that they are dealing with people who know what they want, know what they are capable of, and know that they will carry through to the end everything they will begin.[80]

Inspired by Ulmanis's diatribe on the lingering legacy of serfdom and the centuries of "occupation," in the years that followed the cultivation of "*stāja*" became a top priority in *Mazpulki*. For example, in the very next issue of *Vādītājs*, Lūsis published his thoughts on this precise topic. In the essay, titled "*Nācionālā pašapziņa un jaunatne*" ("National Self-Consciousness and the Youth"), Lūsis argued that in order to develop in the youth a proper disposition and a firm resolve, "first and foremost we must strive to rouse a national consciousness." Lūsis went on:

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[79] One could choose a number of ways to translate "*stāja*." Other possibilities might include "stance," "bearing," or perhaps "poise," but "disposition" best conveys what Ulmanis was getting at in referencing the military elements of mental and physical posture.
[80] Ibid.

> This consciousness appears as a struggle against our nation's history, against our past and contemporary culture, and against the nation's indivisible, organic unity of fate. What, for example, will give us the realization that we are Latvians if we don't know anything about what our nation has been, is, and will be in the future? In this case we imagine, how it quite often has happened up until now, that we have come into the world only by accident, that we don't have a particular place or significance in the history of the world…Yes, even further, we perhaps even begin to think that we were only created to always serve other nations, to always live in the shadow and never go out into the sunlight. It wasn't too long ago when a lot of Latvians disavowed their ethnicity and became embarrassed if someone tried to remind them of it….But times have changed. The osiers of Germandom [*kārklu vācietības*][81] and the waters of Russification have run all over our land, leaving behind a lot of dust that is now beginning to be swept away by the fresh birch broom of the new era.[82]

In addition to "sweeping the Latvian nation" clean of obsequiousness towards other nations, and of a perceived lack of national consciousness that was ostensibly one of the primary causes of the labor crisis in the countryside and of national disunity, the importance given to developing a strong disposition also resulted in the veneration of leaders – especially Ulmanis – and a trend towards greater levels of physicality and militarism.[83] These can be identified in much of the organization's work during the mid-to-late 1930s. For example, *Mazpulki* members became an increasingly important part of the aesthetics of unity and power that marked the annual May 15 celebrations in Rīga, taking part in parades and occupying a prominent location on the square during Ulmanis's yearly May 15 address to the nation.[84]

With regard to militarism, a key development occurred in spring 1938, when Ķirsis asked the Minister of War, General Jānis Balodis, to appoint an active member of the army to cooperate with top *Mazpulki* leaders on the development of military training programs for

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[81] In previous times, Latvians who tried to seem "German" were sometimes derisively called "*kārkluvācietība*," meaning roughly an "osier/willow of Germanness" or a "osier of Germandom." Presumably, given the genuflection that such people showed towards Germans, they were associated with the limp, flexible osier, as opposed to the strong oak tree, which had long been highly regarded in Latvian folklore, and which became synonymous with the Latvian nation.

[82] Arn. Lūsis, "Nācionālā pašapziņa un jaunatne," *Vādītājs*, Nr. 3, December 1, 1936, 174.

[83] Nancy Ruth Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Björn M. Felder and Paul Weindling, *Baltic Eugenics: Bio-Politics, Race and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1918-1940* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013).

[84] For an example of *Mazpulki's* involvement in May 15 celebrations, see LVVA, 4820. f., 1. apr.,4.l., 23.lp.

leaders and members.[85] Captain T. R. Freimanis, Balodis's selection, helped introduce military-style drills for monthly meetings and at summer camps, and these were first passed on to leaders that summer at the first ever *Mazpulki* leaders' summer camps. Held at *Saules dārzs* (the Sun Garden) – the former seventeenth-century Baltic German estate on the northern outskirts of Rīga that became in 1936 the organization's Rīga campground – over 500 leaders were brought in for week-long camps, during which they learned not only about teaching Freimanis's drills, but also about everything from teaching folk dancing, to gardening, and first aid.[86] In addition to helping with these summer courses, Freimanis also wrote an extensive, ninety-three page manual for *Mazpulki* leaders entitled, *Mazpulku rokas grāmāta stājas macībā* (*The Mazpulki Handbook on The Instruction of Disposition*).[87] Equally significant and telling, he also helped develop and implement *Mazpulki's* air defense training. Begun in spring 1938, Ādolfs Eglītis, an agronomist and graduate of the University of Latvia who became a notable leader in *Mazpulki's* Rīga region, led during that spring and summer five-day-long air defense training courses in Rīga, where each club was asked to send three representatives to attend. Upon completing the course in Rīga, these representatives were then ordered to hold air defense training sessions in their own regions with Mazpulki members above the age of fourteen (though there was also talk of lowering the age limit to twelve). These training courses, which were to be held in every city by no later than December 1 of that year, consisted of lectures on the concept of air warfare, different types of bombs, on how to organize a fire brigade and fight a fire, on camouflaging buildings, on how to protect farm animals, on how to properly use a gas mask, and so on.[88]

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[85] LVVA, 1690. f., 4.apr., 2098. l., 70. lp.
[86] On these leaders' camps, see especially LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1467. l., 36. lp.; 1690. f., 4. apr., 1467. l., 61-63. lp.
[87] T. R. Freimanis, *Mazpulku rokas grāmāta stājas macībā* (Jelgava: LLK izdevums, 1940).
[88] LVVA, 4820. f., 1. apr., 1567. l., 74. lp.; 4820. f., 1. apr., 1567. l., 75. lp.; 4820. f., 1. apr., 4. l., 8-10. lp. For the memo on the original decision to make the air defense training a part of *Mazpulki's* activities, see LVVA, 1690. f., 5. apr., 4327. l., 27. lp.

-*Mazpulki* and Latvian Fascism-

It has been argued thus far that a number of key factors shaped the culture and development of *Mazpulki*, namely: American 4-H; the nature of Latvian nationalism; the crises of the Latvian countryside; and of course Ulmanis's ascension as the *Vadonis* of the nation and *Virsvadonis* of *Mazpulki*. Undoubtedly, by the late 1930s, fresh fears of another European war also gave impetus to more focus on military training, as evidenced, for instance, by the new air defense initiative. Lurking in the shadows of our discussion up to this point, however, is another external factor that clearly had a major influence on the evolution of *Mazpulki* from a predominantly agricultural organization to a quasi-official Ulmanis Youth organization, and that factor was the rise of fascism in interwar Europe. Hence, given both Ulmanis's leadership role in *Mazpulki* as well as the obvious importance of the organization to his regime, at this point our discussion will turn to the intriguing question of whether *Mazpulki* and the Ulmanis regime were ultimately of the fascist variety.

Although *Mazpulki* leaders did not openly describe the post-1934 organization as a "fascist" youth organization, we should conclude that – at Ulmanis's urging – it adopted many fascist-style characteristics and practices. Certainly, Ulmanis's regime does not fit well into artificial analytical categories of "generic" or "mature" fascism, and thus previous professional, "unbiased" historians have shied away from attaching the term "fascism" to the regime.[89] However, as we saw in the previous chapter, prior to his coup, Ulmanis was clearly a student of fascism. Moreover, as the rest of this chapter will illustrate, he also clearly saw himself and his regime as belonging to a wider, transnational fascist movement.

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[89] The historiography on fascism is incredibly vast. For helpful overviews, see Roger Griffin, "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age. From New Consensus to New Wave?," *Fascism* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–17, and "The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 21–43. Also very helpful is the historiographical essay at the end of Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

Therefore, cases like the Ulmanis regime attest to the historiographical necessity of using the transnational fascism approach, for it enables us to investigate a number of further important issues, such as the relationship between "maximum" and "minimum" fascist regimes and movements, how fascist ideas "moved" across national borders, and the complicated reasons why "generic" fascism could look so different in its national manifestations. Put another way, this new approach to studies of fascism, which will be employed here, is insightful because it enables us to move beyond analyzing fascism as either hermetically existing distinct national movements, or as a clearly defined international political system, to instead investigate fascism as it really was: as a syncretic international political system that in its individual national manifestations was in competition with and hence shaped by democracy and communism. Lastly, this approach also prompts us to analyze fascists' attempts to gain legitimacy by balancing a fine line between embracing national culture on one hand and, on the other, heralding the prestige of belonging to a burgeoning international political movement that espoused the creation of a new and better world.[90]

However, to understand how Latvia fit into the transnational fascist movement that swept over Europe during the interwar years, first we must examine the national level to get a sense of what "Latvian" fascism looked like. To do this we will investigate a number of especially interesting and revealing events, where the self-presentation of the regime was vividly on display. One such occasion was the first ever congress of *Mazpulki* leaders in April 1935. The

[90] On fascism as an international movement, see especially Michael Arthur Ledeen, *Universal Fascism; the Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928-1936* (New York: H. Fertig, 1972); Anthony James Joes, *Fascism in the Contemporary World: Ideology, Evolution, Resurgence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978); George L. Mosse, *International Fascism*: *New Thoughts and New Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 1979); Stein Uglevik Larsen et al., *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1980); Roger Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Roger Griffin, "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age. From New Consensus to New Wave?," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012): 1–17. For an argument against the idea of fascism as an international movement, see especially Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept," *The American Historical Review* 84 (April 1979): 367-388.

three-day event in Rīga brought together more than 900 *Mazpulki* leaders from every region of Latvia. On the afternoon of April 26, the last day of the congress, Ulmanis gave a formal address in the grand hall of the Latvian Society House. Recognizing the importance of this address for the future of both *Mazpulki* and his regime, Ulmanis chose to explain for his audience, which also included those tuning in on the radio, the backdrop to recent developments in Latvia. More specifically, Ulmanis turned to a discussion of Italian fascism to clarify why the leaders were learning about ideas rather than specific, prepared work plans. Fearing that there might be a misunderstanding or perhaps even disillusionment or anger at the fact that the leaders had been called to Rīga only to find out that nothing had yet been fully prepared, Ulmanis turned to a long theoretical discussion of Mussolini's seminal 1932 treatise on fascism. Pulling directly from Mussolini's writings, Ulmanis clarified that: "In the beginning … fascism was only work and action. Fascism was not founded autocratically or artificially … with the help of some sort of developed doctrine: it was born out of the necessity for action, and thus fascism itself was work and action."[91] Consequently, he continued, if:

> someone today would read the news about the founding meetings of Italian fascism in the already yellowing newspapers of that time, he wouldn't find there any doctrine, only rudimentary teachings, remarks, and hypotheses which had been freed from all of the unintentional additions, which after some years evolve a healthy line of foundational thought, and which thus turned fascism into a completely independent political doctrine, one which stands against all other previous and current doctrines.[92]

Finally, to finish his lesson, Ulmanis explained, again quoting Mussolini, that after the establishment of fascism in Italy, there was "a period of work and struggle. There could not be a theoretical doctrine, and beautiful and fine paragraphs could not be distributed and discussed, because instead of that there had to be something else, something a lot more powerful, of course: a living faith." Therefore, he concluded, it is only after a long period of work and struggle that

[91] "Valsts Prezidenta Dr. K. Ulmaņa uzruna mazpulku vadītājiem," *Vadītājs*, Nr. 5, November 1, 1937, 301-302.
[92] Ibid, 302.

fascism can "definitively take a position on all economic and intellectual questions which affect present-day humanity."[93]

With the significance of Mussolini's words still lingering in his listeners' minds, Ulmanis immediately turned to how all of this related to *Mazpulki.* He asked, wondering out loud, 'Why is it exactly that the number of Mazpulki clubs and members grew so strongly in 1934?' To be sure, he answered, it is because May 15 changed Latvia. It changed Latvia by giving people the ability to work. But more than anything, he argued, May 15 rekindled a sense of togetherness that harkens back to 'that great era of enthusiasm and affectionateness when great workers like Kronvalds, Auseklis, Valdemārs, and the other greats of that time were walking among the people.'[94] Having thus framed 'renewed Latvia' [*atjaunotā Latvija*], as the regime called the post-coup era, as a rebirth of the nineteenth-century era of national awakening – meaning that by extension he was also placing himself in the pantheon of great Latvian nationalist leaders – and after further discussing how this rebirth was already changing Latvia, Ulmanis came full circle by ending his speech with another powerful quote from Mussolini. He avowed: 'We are seeing the future! That which we will achieve will be superior to that which has already been achieved. This spirit of the future carries in itself the life and glory of the nation. It will consistently rise above that which today is fading into oblivion … Life is beautiful, but still, to live without any ideals is worse than not living at all.'[95]

There are a number of noteworthy details here. First of all, it is interesting to note that Ulmanis chose, in an indirect yet obvious way, to tie Latvia and himself to Italy and Mussolini. As has been pointed out by a number of scholars, such a position was always difficult for fascist leaders, in that they had to attempt, on the one hand, to be ultranationalistic and omniscient

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, 303.
[95] Ibid, 308.

while, on the other hand, also referencing their connections to other great foreign leaders as proof of their membership in an alluring transnational movement.[96] For instance, here Ulmanis simultaneously attempted to cultivate his connections to transnational fascism while also arguing that such a model had led to the organic rebirth of the nation, a palingenetic trope that Roger Griffin has identified as the core of fascist ideology.[97] Furthermore, there were tough decisions to be made in regard to whom to invoke, with Mussolini and Hitler serving, of course, as the two prime examples for most fascist leaders. In this case, it should not be surprising that Ulmanis avoided any reference to Hitler and Germany, given the centuries-old tensions between Latvians and Baltic Germans. Finally, in terms of interpreting and explaining fascism, in the Latvian case, Mussolini's 1932 treatise was a principal reference point.

Yet another telling event was the three-day celebration held in Rīga on September 2-4, 1939 to mark *Mazpulki's* ten year anniversary. The celebration – which was intended both to mark a milestone and to serve as a way of further increasing the organization's popularity and prominence, and especially among the parents of urban youth[98] – was incredibly large for such a small nation and required over a year of planning. In all, it brought together more than 20,000 members from all 1,085 clubs at a cost of more than 55,000 lats.[99] Additionally, there were a substantial number of invited foreign guests, including 4-H leaders and members from the United States, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, and Estonia.[100] Interestingly, leaders of youth organizations in Germany were also originally on the June 1939 invite list, but at some point that

[96] For two compelling studies, see G. Love, "'What's the Big Idea?': Oswald Mosley, the British Union of Fascists and Generic Fascism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 3 (July 1, 2007): 447–68.
[97] In particular, see Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991).
[98] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1447. l., 181. lp.
[99] For example, a memo about the event was sent to Ulmanis in April 1938. See LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1479. l., 123. lp. On the budget: LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1447. l., 55. lp.
[100] LVVA, 4820. f., 4. apr., 1447. l., 70. lp.; LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1479. l., 107. lp; "20.000 jauniešu zvērests tēvzemei, tūkstoši karogu sveic Prezidentu," *Brīvā zeme*, Nr. 199, September 4, 1939, 3. For information on the organizing committee, see especially LVVA 1690. f., 4. apr., 1483. l.

summer – and for reasons yet unknown, though most likely the heightened tensions over German actions in Eastern Europe had something to do with it – the Germans listed were boldly crossed out with a red pencil.[101]

Over the three-day celebration, there were many exciting and grand activities, including the formal *Mazpulki* parade, which occurred on September 3. At 17:00, 3,000 members gathered at the former Cathedral Square – which had been expanded to accommodate mass rallies and renamed May 15 Square in 1936 – for their ceremonial march down Castle Street, where Ulmanis, key government ministers, *Mazpulki* leaders, and the foreign guests were awaiting the procession on the balcony of the presidential castle. The first ones in the parade were the oldest boys, who were dressed in their formal grey paramilitary uniforms. At the very front of the parade were the bearers of the 1,085 green and white *Mazpulki* flags, with each listing the name and number of the respective club. After that came a group of 200 armed *Mazpulki* members who marched past the castle in perfect military formation, with one arm raised in a fascist-style Roman salute while the other secured a rifle against their shoulders. Next in line were the leaders and a large contingent of the younger boys and girls. Finally, the last group to greet Ulmanis and the crowd, which had gathered in the park across the street, were the oldest girls, who were dressed in their traditional regional folk costumes, whose bright colors contrasted sharply with the white handkerchiefs that the girls waved while greeting Ulmanis. As the parade drew to a close, the crowd of onlookers serenaded Ulmanis with shouts of "*Lai dzīvo*!" ("Long may he live!").[102]

Following the formal procession, the members, leaders, and foreign guests made the five-kilometer trek to a primary site of Latvian nationalism: the Cemetery of Brothers (*Brāļu kapi*),

[101] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1479. l., 114. lp.
[102] LVVA, 4820. f.,1. apr., 4. l., 119-125. lp.; "20.000 jauniešu zvērests tēvzemei, tūkstoši karogu sveic Prezidentu," 3; "Prezidents vēro mazpulku pausmes gājienu," *Rīts*, Nr. 244, September 4, 1939, 3.

the cemetery and national monument for soldiers killed in World War I and the War of Independence. To be sure, the scene that night was a memorable one tinged with fascist aesthetics and ritual. Amid the more than 2,000 graves enclosed within the high cemetery walls that impart to the place its emotive intimacy, and among the ornamental flowers, shrubs, and bushes which line the pathways separating each uniform row of grey headstones, the *Mazpulki* members and their guests gathered for a torch-lit ceremony. For many, the event evoked ethereal feelings, as suggested by one observer who noted that, with the more than 20,000 youth, "whose grey uniforms mixed with the darkness of the evening dusk … it seemed as though the graves opened up and the spirits of the fallen heroes were one with the living."[103]

After everyone had taken their places – including the 1,000 armed *Mazpulki* members, "whose young hands," wrote one journalist, "held the rifles just as securely as they hold the scythe or plow in their fathers' field" – a small group of *Mazpulki* leaders methodically and dramatically made their way into the graveyard.[104] In these leaders' arms were ceremonial urns containing handfuls of sacred dirt from historic locations such as Ulmanis's birthplace and major battle sites from the two recent wars. Once they had reached their positions, Rūdolfs Dzērve, the head of LLK, broke the silence with his greetings to those dignitaries and special guests in attendance, including General Jānis Balodis, the current Minister of Defense and famous war veteran who had played an integral part in Ulmanis's 1934 coup.[105] He then thanked the *Mazpulki* members for their service and patriotism, which, he noted, "you have displayed, with a love of the fatherland burning in your hearts, by carrying Latvia's sacred soil to the altar of the

[103] "20.000 jauniešu zvērests tēvzemei, tūkstoši karogu sveic Prezidentu," 3.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Balodis played a seminal role in leading the new Latvian army through the War of Independence. See especially Arnolds Auziņš, *Ģenerālis Jānis Balodis* (Rīga: Jumava, 2006).

fatherland."[106] We *Mazpulki* members, he continued, "have come to this place as a result of listening to our hearts. We have come to promise to live and work for Latvia." The soil in these urns, he explained to them, serves two purposes: it reminds us of our duty, and it "tells you, the fallen heroes, that your sacrifice has not been in vain. The land for which you have struggled belongs to the Latvian nation, and its borders, which you have guarded, are secure and unchangeable. We have grown strong in belief and courage and ardent in our love of the fatherland." At the end of his remarks, Dzērve asked everyone to join him in the singing of the national anthem, 'God Bless Latvia.'[107]

The ceremony involving the sacred urns came next. Ķirsis, the superintendent of *Mazpulki*, led a call-and-response performance, in which he asked the chosen leaders carrying the urns whether they were following Ulmanis's directives. As each leader stepped up to the large sandstone urn, whose massive lid was shaped as an eternal flame, they shouted a promise to *Mazpulki*, the nation, and Ulmanis, whereupon they poured the contents of their urn into the larger receptacle placed at the feet of the large statue of Mother Latvia, who, with a wreath in one hand and the national flag in the other, achingly looks down on her lost sons. These promises, which had to be approved in advance by the *Mazpulki* leadership, included proclamations such as: "Latvia must be a Latvian state – for a national Latvia and the Supreme Leader!" or "The word Latvia is a sacred word. For a Latvian Latvia [latvisku Latviju] and our Supreme Leader!"[108] Finally, when the last urn had been emptied, every member pledged in unison: "We swear to love and protect this land so that Latvia might forever remain a Latvian state!" And at that exact moment, to provide an extra surge of emotions, the assembled orchestra

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[106] "20.000 jauniešu zvērests tēvzemei, tūkstoši karogu sveic Prezidentu," 3.
[107] Ibid; LVVA, 4820. f.,1. apr., 4. l., 119-125. lp.
[108] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1483. l., 81. lp.; LVVA, 4820. f.,1. apr., 4. l., 119-125. lp. It should be noted that on the whole the regime had a cultural-linguistic understanding of 'nation.' Thus calls for a 'Latvian Latvia' did not directly equate to calls for an ethnically pure Latvian state.

began playing somber yet powerful music. Apkalns, an army instructor, then brought the ceremony to a close by commanding the participants to never forget the promises they had made to Ulmanis and Latvia.[109]

The final day of the anniversary celebrations was scheduled to coincide with Ulmanis's birthday, and the closing ceremony that afternoon was held at *Uzvaras laukums* (Victory Field), the new multi-purpose amphitheater and parade grounds that had hosted the Ninth General Song Festival the previous summer.[110] The ceremony began at 16:00, and it was broadcast on the radio, during which Dzērve, Ķirsis, Lūsis, and other prominent leaders gave prepared remarks to the radio audience about *Mazpulki* and its role as the 'fulfiller of the idea of 15 May' in Ulmanis's 'renewed Latvia.'[111] Archbishop T. Grīnbergs opened the occasion by providing his blessings.[112] Gifts and ceremonial flags were presented to Dzērve, Alfreds Bērziņš, and other key government ministers. It was also at this time that honorary awards were presented to a number of special foreign guests in recognition of their outstanding work in 4-H. Perhaps most interesting here are the awards given to the American contingent from the Cooperative Extension Service. The group was comprised of the former and current directors, the vice-director, and a

[109] "Mazpulku lielā skate," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 9, September 15, 1939, 413; "20.000 jauniešu zvērests tēvzemei, tūkstoši karogu sveic Prezidentu," 3, 11. There is an interesting backstory to this urn ceremony. According to Lūsis, who came up with the idea, a number of top leaders in the organization did not like the idea, though he does not give any names, nor does he explain why they were against his proposal. Believing that it would inspire the youth, Lūsis took his proposal to Ulmanis, who signed off on the idea. Although it is not clear if those leaders against it were uncomfortable with the celebration of military sacrifice, Lūsis explains in his memoir that the purpose of the urn ceremony, at least in his mind, was to help members not be afraid of the sacrifices that might need to be made in order that Latvia would remain free. See Lūsis, *Aiztek ūdeņi—aiztek gadi: atmiņas*, 114.

[110] On the history of *Uzvaras laukums/parks*, see Māris Ruks, *Spridzinātāji* (Rīga: Apgāds Antava, 2011). It should be noted that since the first song festival in 1873, these song festivals, which generally take place on a five-year schedule, have remained perhaps the single most significant public celebration of Latvian national identity and culture. On the song festivals and Latvian national identity, see in particular Dace Bula, *Dziedātājtauta: folklora un nacionālā ideoloģija* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2000); and Guntis Šmidchens, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).

[111] See LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1483. l., 44. lp.

[112] On the Ulmanis regime and churches, see especially Deniss Hanovs and Valdis Tēraudkalns, *Laiks, telpa, vadonis: autoritārisma kultūra Latvijā, 1934-1940*, chapter 8.

number of extension service agronomists. Three of them were given the Order of Three Stars, 3rd class medal, an award that only one other foreign guest received.[113]

Then, to thunderous applause, Ulmanis walked onto the stage, and, looking out at the perfectly aligned rows of more than 20,000 *Mazpulki* members, he shouted: "Greetings, Mazpulki! Grow for Latvia!" In unison, the members raised their right arms in a Roman salute and responded, "We will grow for Latvia!"[114] In his subsequent speech entitled "My Faith Belongs to You, Mazpulki," Ulmanis celebrated the organization's achievements. But, given the recent outbreak of war in Poland, he forewarned of darker days ahead. Addressing the "political clouds" that, he admitted, "are preoccupying our thoughts," Ulmanis bemoaned that they "are menacing our and all of humanity's most precious possession: peace. And in place of peace stands conflict between many nations and states." Thus, while we should be grateful that "we are outside of this zone of conflict," he continued, we nonetheless must be prepared, despite our "hope [that] it never arrives … to get through the war time restrictions and the limitations and discomforts of life. And we will achieve this because the important developments of such weighty days makes us feel in the most ardent way just how beloved our land is to us, and how dear to us is our state, our Latvia."[115] Having laid out this impending challenge, Ulmanis brought his speech to a close with these words:

> Mazpulki youth! My faith belongs to you! Mazpulki! Your achievements are the fruits of your will and labor. Remain supremely confident in your own ability, maintain pride in your work successes—then you will have courage in the rest of your life's work and in your effort to stand at the front of the line, to pull others along, and to fulfill your duty and mission as members of the nation, as citizens of the state. The land will bless your group. The fatherland will bless its builders, its defenders, its protectors. God, bless Latvia![116]

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[113] "Mazpulku lielā skate," 417-418; "Latvijas mazpulku draugi – ārzemnieki," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 9, September 15, 1939, 420.
[114] "Mazpulku lielā skate," 417.
[115] "Mazpulki, jaunatne, mana ticība pieder jums!," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 9, September 15, 1939, 386-387.
[116] Ibid.

The multi-day anniversary festival then concluded with an hour-long display of military-style marches, folk dancing, and a callisthenic program which included a human choreography element – a common fascist practice – in which the members spelled out in giant letters "We greet the Leader," above which more members positioned themselves as a half-sun – an important symbol in Latvian folk culture – surrounding the organization's four-leaf clover emblem, while the last group formed "4. IX" in recognition of Ulmanis's birthday. Following the conclusion of the formal program, which ended with the onset of nightfall, everyone in attendance was then treated to a fireworks show, which kicked off an evening of revelry and folk dancing.[117]



Figure 7: *Mazpulki* members at the anniversary celebration in Rīga, September 1939.[118]

[117] LVVA, 4820. f.,1. apr., 4. l., 119-125. lp.; "Mazpulku lielā skate," 417. For copies of the official programs given to the members and to the general audience, see LVVA, 1690.f., 4.apr., 1479.l., 15.-22. and 47.-61. lp.
[118] This image is courtesty of *Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs*.

Perhaps the first thing to say about these vignettes is that clearly the leaders of *Mazpulki* were attempting to adopt a sense of fascist practices and aesthetics that would be at once both recognizably "Latvian" *and* "fascist." For example, in regard to the former we see an embrace of folk culture, as exemplified in the nationalism, folk costumes, dances, symbols, etc. But we also see examples of the latter, such as the cult of the Leader, the use of the Roman salute, the embrace of militarism, human choreography, and, most significantly, the fascist sacralization of soil, space, culture, etc.[119] Another interesting aspect is the vow, made during the torch-lit ceremony, that Latvia's borders would remain unchanged. This is fascinating because while many other fascist regimes had irredentist and expansionist goals, the Ulmanis regime certainly did not. Thus, the Latvian case further bolsters Kallis's argument that territorial expansionism should not be considered a basic tenet of generic fascism.[120]

It is also intriguing to note that the largest number of honored foreign guests at the anniversary celebration came from the United States. This was the case, as the memos suggest, because 4-H originated in America, and the Latvians wanted to honor that fact.[121] But it is interesting that there was apparently no discussion about whether for both parties it would be problematic, in an era of heightened ideology, to recognize Americans, including members of the Roosevelt Administration, at an ultranationalistic, fascist-style Latvian event. Likewise, it would also be interesting to learn if the Americans had any qualms about accepting the invitation. Whatever the case, it raises questions for further research about the relationships between democracy and fascism and the role of multinational organizations, and in particular youth organizations, as conduits of ideas and sites of ideological intermingling.

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[119] On the topic of fascism and the sacralization of politics, see especially Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).
[120] Kallis, op. cit.
[121] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1447. l., 70. lp.

-*Mazpulki*, Italian Fascism, and *Campo Dux*-

Another way to illuminate the nature of Latvian fascism is to place it in a wider perspective and look at the transnational movement of ideas and people, an approach that one scholar has called "journeys through fascism."[122] In such a way, *Ferruccio Guido* Cabalzar's visit to Latvia in June 1935 is particularly interesting. Cabalzar was a notable figure in fascist Italy—he was a long-time colleague of Mussolini's, the editor of *Giornale di Genova*, and a member of *Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalita di Roma (CAUR)* (the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome), which had organized and chaired two Fascist International Congresses in Montreux, Switzerland in December 1934 and April 1935. He traveled to Latvia, in fact, on behalf of CAUR, hoping to learn more about Ulmanis's Latvia, especially its cultural organizations like *Mazpulki*. It should be pointed out that Cabalzar was not the first Italian fascist or representative of CAUR to visit Ulmanis's Latvia. That honor went to Alessandro Pavolini, who briefly visited Latvia in the summer of 1934.[123] But since Cabalzar's visit was better documented, it will be the focus of our discussion.

The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Latvian-Italian Society, headed by Professor K. Straubergs, jointly arranged Cabalzar's visit. On June 12 – his first day in Latvia – Cabalzar met with Ulmanis in the presidential castle. According to Cabalzar, the two had pleasant conversations. In fact, he told the Latvian press that he took away "the very best impression," noting furthermore that Ulmanis, "reminded me of a family father, a good-hearted leader of his people, and on his face I couldn't find any sort of meanness or harshness."[124]

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[122] Charles Burdett, *Journeys through Fascism: Italian Travel Writing between the Wars* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).
[123] Valerio Perna, *Itālija un Latvija: diplomātisko attiecību vēsture* (Rīgā: Jumava, 2002), 89. This book is also useful for a general discussion of the Italian government's interpretation of events before and after the coup. See especially pages 85-96.
[124] "Mussolini uzticības persona Rīgā," *Rīts*, Nr. 161, June 13, 1935, 1.

Actually, in this way, he explained, attempting to link the two countries' leaders, Ulmanis is quite like Mussolini, whom "many have an incorrect opinion of …. His face also does not express any sort of meanness or even the slightest bit of coldheartedness but only gentleness and kindness."[125] The next day, June 13, Professor Straubergs, F. Andersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Press Department, and Edvarts Virza, a well-known writer who often worked with the Ministry of Public Affairs, took Cabalzar by automobile for a tour of the Latvian countryside in the historic region of Zemgale in south-central Latvia, including to the location where Ulmanis had spent his childhood.

One of the highlights of Cabalzar's visit to Latvia was a formal gathering at Rīga's Hotel de Rome on the evening of June 14. The event was put on by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to honor Cabalzar, and those in attendance included J. Druva, the head of the Latvian Press Association; Foschini, who was the Italian press representative in Latvia; and other prominent members of the local press. Two ceremonial speeches were given. V. Jankavs, the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Press Department, wished Cabalzar a splendid stay in Latvia and expressed his desire that Cabalzar's visit might bring about closer relations between Italy and Latvia. Cabalzar responded by thanking Jankavs for his remarks while further noting that he had very much enjoyed his time in Latvia. In particular, he said that he was impressed by Latvia's achievements and was amazed by everything that Ulmanis had accomplished in the last year. With that in mind, he noted for his audience, you can be sure that Latvia "is in tested and secure hands."[126] He then thanked his hosts and promised that he would do everything possible to ensure that he could return the favor by arranging for his Latvian colleagues to make a visit to Italy.

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[125] Ibid.
[126] "Ievērojama itāļu publicista viesošanāš Rīgā," *Latvijas Kareivis*, Nr. 133, June 16, 1935, 6.

During the remainder of his stay, Cabalzar met with members of *Aizsargi* and *Mazpulki*. On June 15 he convened with Dzērve, Ķirsis, and Lūsis to discuss *Mazpulki's* work, agriculture in Latvia, and the trip that was planned for the following day. Cabalzar was then taken to the *Aizsargi* headquarters, where he met up with Jankavs and Lieutenant Colonel Prauls. The three men left Rīga by automobile and drove to Ogre, approximately 40 km up the Daugava River from Rīga, to observe an *Aizsargi* training exercise. Upon arriving, the *Aizsargi* troops greeted Cabalzar with a Roman salute and the salutation "Long live Italy! Long live Mussolini!" Cabalzar raised his right arm and, finishing the obvious and bombastic attempt at creating a transnational fascist parallel, answered: "Long live Latvia! Long live Ulmanis!"[127] After observing the exercise, the group then concluded their tour by attending a local *Aizsargi* festival in Ulbruka, a small town on the eastern outskirts of Rīga. There the men took in a shooting competition, individual sporting events, and a volleyball tournament, followed by a demonstration of Latvian folk dancing.[128]

On June 17 Cabalzar spent the day learning more about *Mazpulki*. He was taken via automobile by Ķirsis and two others up the scenic coast of Vidzeme, Latvia's northernmost province. Along the way they stopped in Ādaži, some twenty-four kilometers north of Rīga, where they were greeted by local *Mazpulki* youth who presented Cabalzar with flowers and an official *Mazpulki* flag which was to be presented to Mussolini.[129] Cabalzar thanked them for their kind gifts and spoke about his own memories of organizing a youth organization in Italy. The

[127] "Dr. Kabalzars viesos pie aizsargiem," *Rīts*, Nr. 164, June 16, 1935, 16.
[128] "Aizsargu swehtki Ulbrokā," *Ogres Straume*, Nr. 4, June 22, 1935, 2.
[129] "Latvijas mazpulku karogs Italijai," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 7, July 15, 1935, 263.

group subsequently spent the rest of the day touring so-called new and old farms, meaning those farms founded before and after the monumental agrarian reform of 1920.[130]

During his time in Latvia, Cabalzar agreed to sit down for a number of interviews with the local press, most of which were apparently conducted in French.[131] While summing up his trip, which was nearing its end, Cabalzar explained that he had come to Latvia for two reasons: to learn about the latest developments in Latvia, and to "explain the mind of Mussolini."[132] Though he did talk about his positive impressions of Latvia, the majority of his comments were aimed at explaining fascism. At its core, fascism is idealism, he told them. Noting its transnational nature, he argued that fascism is sweeping over Europe because "we need idealism … as many people in Europe [are] feel[ing] anxious not because they might lack … material worth, but really because they have lost their higher goals. These goals must be found in the organization of the state." Consequently, fascism, he reiterated, is "the idea of the state."[133] He then corrected the erroneous idea that Italian fascism is a "type of export." This is incorrect, he emphasized, because "the foundational ideas of fascism … belong to the whole world."[134] Furthermore, while on the one hand he expressed his strong disagreement with the National Socialists' emphasis on racism and racial purity – something which disturbed him on a personal level since his grandmother was a Tyrol German – on the other hand he explained that not all manifestations of fascism will look the same since the local characteristics of each country will

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[130] "Dr. Kabalzars stahsta par eespaideem Latwijā," *Pehdejā Brihdī*, Nr. 134, June 18, 1935, 1. On the agrarian reform, see Andrejs Plakans and Charles Wetherell, *Riding the Tiger: The Latvian Agrarian Union and Agrarian Reform between the Two World Wars* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1996); A. Boruks, *Zemnieks, zeme un zemkopība Latvijā: no senākiem laikiem līdz mūsdienām* (Jelgava: Latvijas Lauksaimniecības universitāte, 2003); Arnolds Aizsilnieks, *Latvijas saimniecības vēsture 1914-1945* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1968); Oļģerts Krastiņš, *Latvijas saimniecības vēsturniskā pieredze* (Rīga: Latvijas valsts agrārās ekonomikas institūts, 1996, 2001).
[131] Olgerts Liepiņš, "Romas ideja," *Pehdejā Brihdī*, Nr. 133, June 16, 1935, 1.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] "Mussolini uzticības persona Rīgā," 1.

produce different manifestations.[135] Consequently, with these comments Cabalzar concluded his visit – perhaps with the aim of recruiting Latvia's participation in a future fascist International – by attempting to remind Latvians that commonalities like the admiration for great leaders or the longing for a higher purpose should trump differences over the role of racism or other issues.

Yet, despite the fact that Cabalzar's words were widely reported in the Latvian press, in terms of building transnational fascist ties, his most important achievement was not so much reaching Latvian readers, or perhaps even visiting with Ulmanis; rather it was establishing relations with organizations like *Mazpulki*. Indeed, upon his return home Cabalzar kept his word and worked to ensure that representatives of Latvian youth organizations received invitations to visit Italy. Most interesting here are two trips: Lūsis's 1936 visit, and the 1937 trip to Campo Mussolini.

In March and April 1936, Lūsis spent two weeks in Italy. Although much of the trip was devoted to sightseeing – in particular, as a former University of Latvia seminary student, he especially enjoyed the sites of early Christendom – Lūsis did spend a significant amount of time at the new so-called "University City" (*Città Universitaria*), the new campus of *La Sapienza* that was built between 1932 and 1935, and *Foro Mussolini*, Mussolini's new sports complex, noted for its exemplary "fascist architecture," where he met with members of local fascist youth organizations and observed the daily activities of its members.[136] Lūsis, who spoke some Italian (though the Latvian embassy in Rome also provided him with a translator), also gave talks about *Mazpulki*.[137]

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[135] Liepiņš, "Romas ideja,"1.
[136] Borden W. Painter, *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005), 63-66. On *Foro Mussolini*, see pp. 40-49.
[137] LVVA, 2575. f., 9. apr., 115. l., 1-6. lp.

As for his impressions of Italy, Lūsis was very impressed with what appeared to him the discipline, vigor, and united mindset of the members of *Balilla*, the main fascist youth organization in Italy. Most of all, Lūsis enjoyed seeing all of the pageantry and grandeur of *Balilla's* twenty year celebration on April 4, 1936, sights which surely informed his role in organizing *Mazpulki's* own anniversary celebrations three years later. Oddly for an interwar European authoritarian, Lūsis was critical of, in his eyes, the organization's overemphasis on athletics, which he mistakenly thought was a uniquely Italian phenomenon, though in fact much of this sports culture was the result of top *Balilla* leaders' training in the United States in 1931.[138] As he opined in his two-part 1936 article in *Mazpulks*, Lūsis thought this obsession with sports imparted the idea that life is only idle fun and games. But since life is full of hard work, he reasoned, then *Mazpulki*, which emphasizes the virtues of work, is doing a much better job than *Balilla* at educating and preparing its members for adulthood.

Likewise, while touring the Italian countryside, he was amazed at the poor state of Italy's agricultural system. Here he assumed that this must be due to a combination of three likely factors: 1) the poor, shallow soils of the hilly countryside; 2) the laziness of Southern Europeans, who simply do not work as hard as Latvians; 3) the lack, until quite recently, of state-funded agricultural development programs. Lūsis closed his essay on his Italian travels by saying that while he was glad to experience a new and beautiful place, he was happy to return to his native

[138] Lūsis also noted in his memoir that he found *Balilla* leaders to be overly "conceited" (*uzpūtīgi*) and "unaccommodating" (*neatsaucīgi*). Lūsis, *Aiztek ūdeņi—aiztek gadi: atmiņas*, 105. For the story of the forty-two members of *Balilla* who spent six months in 1931 training under the supervision of Bernard McFadden (who is considered one of the first health gurus in American history), including weeks of intense training at Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon, Tennessee, see Alessio Ponzio, "A Forgotten Story: The Training for Teachers of Physcial Education in Italy during the Fascist Period," *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2008), 44-58; and Thomas Brynmor Morgan and Claude M De Vitalis, *Italian Physical Culture Demonstration; a Report of the Visit, Training and Accomplishments of the Forty Italian Students Who Were Guests of Bernarr Macfadden during a Stay of Six Months in the United States Studying His Methods of Physical Culture* (New York: Macfadden Book Co., 1932).

Latvia, whose "white birch groves and green pine forests are just as beautiful as the southern palm trees."[139]

In addition to Lūsis's journey, there is yet another interesting account of Latvians visiting Mussolini's Italy—in 1937 a group of Latvians traveled to Rome to participate in *Campo Dux* (sometimes also known as "Campo Mussolini"), Mussolini's annual fascist youth camp. However, this second story has a different origin, one that goes back to the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. As part of the camaraderie of the Games, the organizers invited each participating nation to send thirty youth representatives. The Latvian contingent – led by R. Ķirkums and F. Laursons, two leaders from Latvia's Boy Scouts – included three *Mazpulki* members. At the Games, the group lived in a youth camp and took in the competitions. Most memorably, they watched Jesse Owens run away with the 100 meter final, right after which – and one would think much to Hitler's racist chagrin and the bafflement of their Nazi hosts – they made their way to the edge of the track to enthusiastically greet Owens, who kindly shook their hands. While at the youth camp, the Latvians also met Guglielmo *Della Morte, the Italian consul in Berlin. Curious to learn more about Latvia, Della Morte struck up an amicable friendship with Laursons that, by the end of the Games, resulted in an invitation to attend the next Campo Dux.*[140]

Over the next year, Della Morte and Roger di Villanuova and V. Andreoletti at the Italian embassy in Rīga, and Arnolds Spekke, Latvia's ambassador to Italy, worked to organize the

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[139] Arnolds Lūsis, "Itaļu zemnieks un jaunatne," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 7, July 15, 1936, 306. See also Arnolds Lūsis, "Citronu zeme," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 6, June 15, 1936, 254-256. On his way back from Italy, Lūsis also stopped in Czechoslovakia, where he learned about the *Sokol* youth sports/gymnastics organization. Apparently this part of his trip was not as interesting, because Lūsis never published anything about it in any of the *Mazpulki* periodicals, and in his memoir he only briefly mentions this part of his trip. See Lūsis, *Aiztek ūdeņi—aiztek gadi: atmiņas*, 105.

[140] R. Ķirkums, "Latviešu skolu jaunatne XI olimpiādē Berlīnē," *Audzinātājs*, Nr. 10, October 1, 1936, 602-603; G. Meierovics, "XI Olimpiāde Berlīnē," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 12, December 15, 1936, 558; Fr. Laursons, 'Latviešu jaunatnes reprezentācijas vienības brauciens uz Italiju un Vāciju 1937. g. 17. aug. – 15. sept." *Fiziskā kultūra un sports*, Nr. 7, November 1, 1937, 307.

Latvian group's trip.[141] The Italian government agreed to cover all of the transportation costs, and the Latvian Physical Culture and Sports Committee, with the backing of the Ministry of Education, also allocated 700 lats to cover the group's daily expenses. On August 17, 1937, eight secondary school students – including *Mazpulki* member Uldis Vilciņš – and two leaders, Laursons and Captain lieutenant A. Lūks, departed by train for Mussolini's *Campo Dux*.[142] On their way, the group made stops, prearranged by the Italians, in Königsberg in East Prussia, where they visited a new Hitler Youth camp facility, and in Berlin, where they were put up in a new Hitler Youth hostel boat anchored on the Spree River. They also dined with Hitler Youth leaders at the famed Aschinger restaurant, visited the exhibitions for the city's 700 year anniversary, and met with Della Morte at the *Fascio* institute. A few days later they made the last leg of the trip – along with a group of Italian nationals living in Germany, a cohort of Hitler Youth, and groups from Sweden and Finland – through Innsbruck, the Brenner Pass, and down to Rome. Upon arriving at the camp, which Vilciņš described in his *Mazpulks* article as 'a tent city,' they learned that there were more than 4,000 youth, mostly of Italian heritage, from at least twenty-two countries. Additionally, there were also a number of special visitor groups of non-Italian heritage. Besides the Latvians, there were groups from Finland, Germany, France, Bulgaria, Holland, Luxembourg, and China.[143]

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[141] Spekke, a professor of philology prior to his career as a diplomat, certainly help build closer ties between Latvia and Italy. For instance, even before he was appointed by Ulmanis in 1933 as the ambassador to Italy, Spekke had spent time in Italy in 1932-1933 while on a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship. Consequently, Spekke was able to comfortably move within academic and political circles in Italy. See Perna, 85-87.

[142] "Mūsu jaunatnes pārstāvji piedalīsies Campo Mussolini sanāksmē," *Jaunākās ziņas,* Nr. 161, July 22, 1937, 6; Fr. Laursons, "Latviešu jaunatnes reprezentācijas vienības brauciens uz Italiju un Vāciju 1937. g. 17. aug. – 15. sept. (Turpinājums)," *Fiziskā kultūra un sports*, Nr. 8, December 1, 1937, 349-350; "Izraudzīti Latvijas pārstāvji 'Camp Musolini' sanāksmei," *Rīts*, Nr. 210, August 3, 1937, 6. For a list of the students, see LVVA, 4820. f., 1. apr., 113. l., 233. lp.

[143] Uldis Vilciņš, "Kā strādā Italijas un Vācijas jaunatne," *Mazpulks*, Nr. 12, December 15, 1937, 556-557; Laursons, "Latviešu jaunatnes reprezentācijas vienības brauciens uz Italiju un Vāciju 1937. g. 17. aug. – 15. sept. (Turpinājums)," 349-350; Fr. Laursons, "4000 zēnu nometne pīniju paēnā: Vēstule 'Rītam' no Campo Musolini," *Rīts*, Nr. 231, August 24, 1937, 3.

In his article in *Mazpulks*, Vilciņš explained that camp life consisted of four main activities: marching, singing, call-and-response rallies, and sports. They typically arose at 5:00, drilled until 11:00, when lunch was served, and then resumed training until 18:00. In the evenings movies were often shown, but must of these, Vilciņš lamented, "were what we would call 'sensationalist' films or also fascist propaganda films."[144] Although Vilciņš surprisingly does not discuss it, we know from other accounts, including Laursons's, that all of this training culminated in a grand march on the *Via dell'Imperio* in the heart of Rome. The 1937 iteration took place on September 4, coincidentally the same day as Ulmanis's grand sixtieth birthday festivities back in Rīga. Amid his other memories, Laursons recalled as a point of pride that when his group neared Mussolini's box, they received his full attention. Not recognizing the Latvian flag, Mussolini pointed at the group while leaning down to ask one of his ministers for a clarification. Having received an answer, Mussolini very emphatically smiled and waved at the Latvians, who, like the rest of the marchers, were merrily singing folk songs.[145]

For Vilciņš, one of the most interesting and exciting aspects of the camp was the chance to learn about other cultures. In particular, he was fascinated by the Italian and German youth and how they differed from Latvians. In a private letter to his local club leader back in Rīga, Vilciņš wrote:

> In Latvia peace is viewed as the norm, and thus productive work stands as the primary goal. Young people in Latvia are of course prepared for war, but only in order to defend the fatherland and nation. Here in Italy the viewpoints are the exact opposite. War is viewed as the norm. They say: 'We don't have any space here in Italy. But we will get it.' In such a way the Italian youth are prepared for an unending war. Productive work doesn't even get mentioned here. In Germany we can see a combination of these two viewpoints. Although the youth are prepared for war, they are also familiar with productive work.[146]

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[144] Vilciņš, "Kā strādā Italijas un Vācijas jaunatne,"556-557.
[145] Laursons, "Latviešu jaunatnes reprezentācijas vienības brauciens uz Italiju un Vāciju 1937. g. 17. aug. – 15. sept. (Turpinājums)," 350-353.
[146] LVVA, 4820. f., 1. apr., 113. l., 226. lp.

Similarly, Laursons also felt that the camp confirmed the peaceful nature and overall superiority of Latvian culture. Describing his overall impressions of the camp for his readers, Laursons recollected:

> Those were unforgettably lovely days which will remain for a long time with us, and the rest of the camp participants, as fond memories. It was not only the good relations among the leaders, but also within a short time an ideal camp friendship developed among the rest of the youth. This friendship confirms that we, despite being youth representatives from Europe's north, middle, and southern regions, nonetheless still think in a similar way in that we all have common ideals, common goals, and similar views about the youth's tasks—to shape their nation's positive characteristics until they are perfect; to exhibit to the rest of their national brethren their nation's successes and the splendor of their fatherland; to foster self-confidence while creating a mutual understanding which will serve true world peace, a peace which we all need in order that we might reach the possible high stages of culture and enjoy the fruits of those good relations; and to be proud, conscientious, genuine, and happy people so that we might vindicate our existence in this world.[147]

Finally, he concluded that, for him, the camp confirmed that "we Latvians have already reached this stage … We are able to point out to other states our … nation's successes [which prove] that we are not at all just members of some small, unnoteworthy nation."[148]

This last sentiment – that receiving an invitation to *Campo Dux* and having Mussolini directly smile and wave at their group, even if moments before he had no idea who they were, proved that Latvia was part of the community of advanced Western countries – offers a key insight into the national identity that shaped Ulmanis's version of Latvian fascism.[149] Simply put, their geographic location at the border between West and East and their long history of foreign subjugation caused Latvians to often feel isolated and inferior. Following their declaration of

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[147] Laursons, "Latviešu jaunatnes reprezentācijas vienības brauciens uz Italiju un Vāciju 1937. g. 17. aug. – 15. sept. (Turpinājums)," 349.
[148] Ibid.
[149] It should be noted that prior to the coup there was a more extreme fascist movement known first as *Ugunskrusts* (Fire Cross) and later as *Pērkonkrusts* (Thunder Cross). First founded by Gustavs Celmiņš in 1932, the organization was quickly banned, though it did continue to have a very small following until Ulmanis repressed the movement and forced Celmiņš into exile following his coup. Among the other differences with the Ulmanis version of Latvian fascism, *Pērkonkrusts* more directly imitated National Socialism, especially in its racist and anti-Semitic ideology. See Armands Paeglis, *Pērkonkrusts pār Latviju: 1932-1944* (Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1994); Krēsliņš, *Aktīvais nacionālisms Latvijā*.

national independence – and with an eye to the Bolshevik threat to the east – most Latvians decided that their country needed to prove its rightful membership in the West. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the postwar years this decision led to the founding of a democratic parliamentary system in Latvia, as that was the progressive trend of the era. But by 1934, as the authoritarian wave was sweeping over Europe, it seemed to many Latvians that they would have to follow the new so-called "third way" in order to ensure their pro-West, anti-Bolshevik identity.[150] To be sure, while the Bolshevik threat was rarely part of the Ulmanis regime's ideology, as they preferred to build an identity of affirmation rather than negation, there is no doubt that such a threat intensified their desire for approval by the Western powers. Consequently, it should not be surprising given the fact that the regime increasingly curbed the freedom of the press that in an anonymous, front-page editorial of the newspaper *Latvijas Kareivis*, to give but one example, Cablazar's trip to Latvia was interpreted as proof that Latvia's political, economic, and cultural efforts to prove its full membership in the West had finally yielded noteworthy results.[151]

As for the journeys through fascism surveyed in the latter portion of this chapter, it is fascinating to see how unique national cultures shaped the travelers' interpretations of both local and transnational fascism. For example, apparently understanding that Latvians found violence, physical vigor, and militarism less appealing than Italians – and one has to assume that his discussion with Ulmanis must have been insightful in this regard – Cabalzar attempted to revise Latvians' image of Mussolini by, in his interviews, portraying Mussolini as a gentle, benevolent family father. It is no coincidence that this was exactly how Ulmanis sought to portray himself,

[150] For a discussion of political-intellectual trends in Latvia, see Ieva Zake, *Nineteenth-Century Nationalism and Twentieth-Century Anti-Democratic Ideals: The Case of Latvia, 1840s to 1980s* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
[151] "Rīgā, 16. jūnijā," *Latvijas kareivis*, Nr. 133, June 16, 1935, 1.

as epitomized in his self-identification as the *Saimnieks* of Latvia, the self-made image that is the focus of the next chapter. For their part, it is clear that the Latvians equated transnational fascism with not only militarism and the aesthetics of salutes and slogans, as we saw in the case of Cabalzar's visit to an *Aizsargi* exercise, but also, given the activities the Ulmanis regime arranged for him, with the importance of ultranationalism, youth organizations, and big, state-led projects like agrarian reform.

Yet, while the Latvian leaders did seem to understand at least some of the differences between Italian and Latvian fascism, for the young Latvians who journeyed through Italian fascism, they were shocked at the level of militarism, at the desire for war – as opposed to their own hope for international peace – and at the lack of a diligent work ethic, all of which made them appear in comparison to the Germans – whom the *Campo Dux* group learned a lot more about during their subsequent attendance at the Hitler Youth Congress in Nuremberg – to be both lazy and even more bellicose. Thus, for these travelers, their experiences, which of course were widely reported, simultaneously confirmed Latvia's membership in the "renewed" West while also pointing out those attributes which made Latvia unique and, in many ways, superior.[152]

-*Mazpulki*: A Microcosm of the Ulmanis Regime and the Era-

It is not a coincidence that *Mazpulki* played a major role in the development of the legitimizing culture of the Ulmanis regime. After all, 4-H's pedagogical method of active learning, of doing, is not far afield from Mussolini's conviction that "fascism is action." Thus, it could be said that *Mazpulki* served as an incubator for the type of regime-sponsored events that Vita Zelče has usefully categorized as "mobilizing acts."[153] Whether it was working in their

[152] On their German travels, see especially Fr. Laursons, "Latviešu jaunatnes reprezentācijas vienības brauciens uz Italiju un Vāciju 1937. g. 17. aug. – 15. sept. (Beigas)," *Fiziskā kultūra un sports*, January 1, 1938, 33-38.
[153] Vita Zelče, "'Bēgšana no brīvības': Kārļa Ulmaņa režīma ideoloģija un rituāli," in *Reiz dzīvoja Kārlis Ulmanis,* ed. Inta Brikše et al. (Rīga: Zinātne, 2007), 325.

gardens, displaying the results of their hard work at exhibits, planting trees during *Meža dienas*, or parading in a grand May 15 parade, *Mazpulki* organizational life mobilized members to act not only on their own behalf with an eye toward the future, but they were also summoned to work for each other, for the nation, and for Ulmanis, their *Virsvadonis*. In other words, *Mazpulki* came to exemplify and embody the type of nation and society that Ulmanis sought to cultivate.

The vision of the nation and society that *Mazpulki* and the Ulmanis regime were working towards was first and foremost predominantly rural in nature. As a result, the organization never achieved the level of participation and popularity among the urban population that it sought, though it nonetheless remained the most prominent youth organization by far. What is more, at times the celebration of rural life and culture threatened to work against the organization and regime's goal of a unified nation. Additionally, the organization – like the regime – espoused the idea of a "Latvian Latvia," and thus although minority youth were not barred from participating in *Mazpulki*, the insistence on using the Latvian language certainly discouraged them from doing so.

Another aspect of this vision was the emphasis placed on leadership. Among the members themselves, this took the form of developing the proper disposition (*stāja*) and not shying away from the task at hand. But it was also about devotion to Ulmanis as the *Virsvadonis*, and this was typically manifested in displays of fascist aesthetics at key political events like May 15 rallies or the Harvest Celebrations, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Finally, this cult of leadership points to one last major component of Ulmanis and *Mazpulki's* vision for a renewed Latvia: ties to the West. One of the great ironies of the Ulmanis regime – and, for that matter, of most interwar authoritarian regimes – was that for all the talk about building a "Latvian Latvia" whose values were rooted in the nation's unadulterated past, before the arrival

of the German occupiers, an investigation of *Mazpulki* shows that the regime relied heavily on traditions that were not so much renewed or invented as directly borrowed from abroad. Naturally, part of the reason for this was Ulmanis's biographical experiences, as best exemplified by the example of 4-H. However, this characteristic of the Ulmanis regime also speaks to the desire in the interwar period in Latvia and elsewhere to belong to organizations or movements that were heralding the dawn of a new age.

Chapter Five – Reaping the Harvest: The *Pļaujas Svētki* and Celebrating the *Saimnieks*

Slightly more than a month after the May 15 coup, Ulmanis made his first trip out of Rīga on a "tour of triumph" as the new *Vadonis* of Latvia.[1] On June 17-18, 1934, Ulmanis and a few other top government officials traveled through much of Vidzeme. A number of days later, Ulmanis resumed this tour of triumph, journeying to Cēsis, Valmiera, and the countryside of Zemgale and Kurzeme, where he participated in *Līgo* festivities, the midsummer celebration that has since ancient times been the most important annual celebration in the Latvian cultural calendar. After seeing to important government work in Rīga, Ulmanis again left on third leg of this tour, arriving in the Bauska area on July 1 for an *Aizsargi* celebration. Finally, the travels ended in August with stops on August 10 in Liepāja, on August 12 in Jēkabpils, and finally on August 17-19, when he visited much of Latgale.[2]

Wanting, as the new *Vadonis*, to make himself visible to the residents of Latvia's provincial cities, villages, and farms, Ulmanis astutely chose to make all of these trips in a convertible. Along the scheduled route, Ulmanis stopped frequently to thank local residents for their warm hospitality, which most often was displayed through a local festive gate or arch, which usually bore a message like "*Sveicam Vadoni!*" ("We Welcome the Leader!"), or by simply lining up along the road and waving hello. Of course, it was also imperative for Ulmanis to use this tour to shore up the continued cooperation and loyalty of the populace. Naturally, for Ulmanis part of this task included public talks, wherein he explained at campaign-like, town gatherings the meaning of "15 May," which became a kind of euphemism for the coup.

Not only were these trips aimed at building grassroots support, but the regime also hoped that they would cultivate a collective momentum and excitement, not only among the public, but

[1] "Ministru prezidenta K. Ulmaņa triumfa brauceens pa Widzemi," *Jaunākās Ziņas*, June 18, 1934.
[2] For a list of Ulmanis's travels that summer, see *Pirmais gads* (Rīga: Leta, 1935), 21-32.

even within the ranks of the regime itself. As already mentioned, part of this sought after "buzz" came from press coverage, and government censorship ensured that the press adequately and positively reported on Ulmanis's travels. However, since "15 May" was also about "awakening the spirit of the Latvian nation," as Ulmanis explained the coup in his May 18, 1934 radio address to the nation, the regime theorized that newspaper coverage alone would be inadequate, since words could only partially convey what this newly awakened spirit looked like.[3] Consequently, when Ulmanis made an appearance in the larger provincial cities that summer, a filming crew followed his every step, hoping to capture, for movie newsreels, the public's excitement at seeing and greeting the *Vadonis*.

Fortunately, these newsreels survive today, and they serve as an interesting and revealing starting point for a discussion of the Ulmanis regime's legitimizing rhetoric. For one thing, they suggest that Ulmanis was genuinely concerned about reaching out to and garnering the support of the public. In fact, in watching the video footage of his appearance in Daugavpils, one of the most ethnically diverse cities in interwar Latvia, one is surprised to discover that, despite all the ultranationalistic slogans about a "Latvian Latvia" and the "spirit of the Latvian nation," in fact Ulmanis gave many of his remarks in Latvian *and* Russian, taking a pragmatic approach to the city's centuries-old language divide.[4] Also worth noting is the behavior of the crowds as they listened to Ulmanis talk. What is distinctly noticeable in the clips that captured Ulmanis's speeches is that for all of the effort he put into using the serious nature of his remarks to hold his listeners' attention, he could not compete with the spectacle of the filming crew. Indeed, while Ulmanis went on rather poetically about the new "great days" that have already led to "a new sun rising over Latvia, [and] to new hearts in the people," the film crew at the back of the crowd

[3] "Ministru prezidenta K. Ulmaņa runa radiofonā 18. maijā," in *Pirmais gads* (Rīga: Leta, 1935), 14.
[4] Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs (hereafter LVKA), film Nr. 486, "Daugavpils sagaida valsts prezidentu Kārli Ulmani."

manipulated their equipment to capture the most dramatic scenes, thus prompting many listeners to fully turn around – and often for long stretches of time – out of inquisitiveness and amazement at the audio and visual equipment that most likely they had never before seen. To be sure, if there was anything memorable for locals about Ulmanis's visit to these provincial places, it seems to have been not so much the presence and charisma of the *Vadonis* himself, but the impressive planning and multimedia hoopla that surrounded him.[5]

Surely part of the explanation for the listeners' behavior in these videos is that Ulmanis was not a very good *Vadonis*, at least not according to the well-known and internationally recognized "fascist style" of Mussolini, Hitler, and others. First, Ulmanis did not look the part. Of course, he differed in his dress, never appearing in military uniform like other fascists. But his age and body type were also far from the fascist norm. By the time of the coup, Ulmanis was already in his late fifties. Moreover, he was rather portly and out of shape, though almost certainly this was in large part due to fluid retention from his poorly functioning heart. In other words, both in dress and fitness, Ulmanis certainly did not embody the physical prowess of the new fascist man.[6]

Moreover, Ulmanis also struggled visibly to deliver speeches in the fascist style. Unlike Hitler and others who used wild hand gestures and voice intonations during speeches, working themselves up to climaxes of frenzied rhetoric, Ulmanis was relatively calm, still, and monotone with his delivery, at least at the beginning. For example, in the newsreel footage, the only recognizable fascist style appears at the end of his speeches, when he would raise his right hand

[5] LVKA, films 564, 489, 487, and 486.
[6] On fascism and the body, see especially J. A. Mangan, *Superman Supreme: Fascist Body as Political Icon : Global Fascism* (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000); Brian Pronger, *Body Fascism Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 2002); George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body: Sport, Submissive Women and Strong Mothers* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

and shout "*Lai dzīvo*" ("Long live"—in reference to Latvia) three times. However, in later years, Ulmanis tried on some occasions to adapt some fascist approaches, namely, yelling in an animated manner, but even this did not go well, as it seemed terribly contrived, not to mention that when he yelled his voice became embarrassingly shrill.[7] As for why Ulmanis only attempted these fascist styles in later years, it is important to note that the regime permitted President Alberts Kviesis to finish his term in office, as it was hoped that his cooperation would lend greater legitimacy to the coup. Thus, until April 1936, when Ulmanis assumed the title of president, the regime had to tread carefully, fearing that if a cult of the *Vadonis* was pushed too much, Kviesis might cause problems.[8]

Lastly, beyond his physical and vocal limitations, it seems that Ulmanis also struggled to play the part of *Vadonis* as a result of his personality, which was not particularly gregarious, though he could be charming in private. In fact, Alfrēds Bērziņš wrote about this exact topic years later in America. As the head of the Ministry of Public Affairs, Bērziņš was in charge of organizing many of Ulmanis's public appearances, and as an admirer of Joseph Goebbels – as a matter of fact, Bērziņš even dressed and sculpted his hair like Goebbels – Bērziņš certainly would have prodded Ulmanis to adopt a more immediately recognizable fascist style in his mannerisms and speeches. However, as Bērziņš later noted, such public displays of unbridled emotion simply ran counter to Ulmanis's personality. In fact, Bēŗziņš went on to say that Ulmanis disliked attending any sort of event where he had to act a part, such as attending formal foreign ministry galas.[9] Even more telling, at times Ulmanis tried his best to downplay his arrival. For example, responding in a December 12, 1935 letter to Enzeliņš's invitation to participate in the upcoming Valmiera Farmers' Day event, Ulmanis wrote that he would happily

[7] LVKA, film 499, "Pļaujas svētki Jelgavā."
[8] On Kviesis, the coup, and Ulmanis's decision to assume the title of president, see Dunsdorfs, 251-256, 291-292.
[9] Bērziņš, "Pēdējais posms," 100.

do so though, he noted, "I would ask you to kindly see to it that my welcome and reception in Valmiera is very modest and not at all like last year: there is no need to erect honorary gates, nor is it necessary to have a ceremonial session of the city council, and so on."[10]

However, despite Ulmanis's clear shortcomings as an authoritarian leader, it would be overly simplistic to conclude that these were the sole reason for the behavior of the audiences in the newsreels. Instead, the reason so many listeners turned around and watched the filming crew is because they were simply amazed at the technological marvel that was taking place before their eyes for the very first time. Thus, what captivated these particular crowds was not the overall aesthetics of Ulmanis's arrival and speech in their town, but rather the specific technological advancements that made the cultivation and broadcasting of these aesthetics possible in the first place.

-Ulmanis as the *Saimnieks*-

Ulmanis was a perceptive observer—even his enemies and critics have admitted as much. Thus, among other things, he surely must have learned from the collective experience of his "tour of triumph" that despite all the careful planning that went into a staged event, one absolutely could not control the crowd's reactions. For the present-day viewer of these films, what is vividly clear is that the power of actions ultimately trumped that of words. It would seem that Ulmanis, too, noticed this outcome, because as he sought in the coming years to legitimize his power, he made action and progress the focal point of his ideological efforts.

In particular, Ulmanis put agriculture at the forefront of a drive for legitimation. This is not surprising, because, after all, he had spent his entire life promoting the development of the countryside. What might be surprising, however, is that despite the new era and the "new sun

[10] Kārlis Ulmanis, letter to Hermanis Enzeliņš, December 12, 1935, published in *Latvijas vēstnesis*, Nr. 263/264, October 10, 1997, accessed on August 21, 2013, https://www.vestnesis.lv/index.php?menu=doc&id=45295.

rising over Latvia," actually there was nothing particularly new about the regime's specific agricultural policies. Just as Ulmanis and the Farmers' Union had lobbied for during the democratic period, the regime focused on using state funds, or what we would today call subsidies, to modernize the countryside. This included not only promoting the use of tractors and modern machinery, but also working with agricultural societies and *Mazpulki* to promote more efficient work methods. Even the farmyard itself was a target of progress, as the state required farmers for the first time to meet building construction codes that had previously only been enforced in urban areas.

Conversely, although what Ulmanis was advocating was not new, he did envelop it – along with its outcomes – in a new ideological wrapping. Specifically, Ulmanis used his agricultural programs to cultivate his image as the progressive *Saimnieks*. This is a difficult word to translate, yet it is of decisive importance. The approximate translation of "husbandman" does not fully convey the various uses and meanings of *saimnieks*. The root of the word, *saim-*, comes from *saime*, meaning family or household. So, in one way, the word can be understood as the patriarch of the family and household. But the term has also historically been used to refer to a free, landed farmer – as opposed to a feudal bondsman engaged in unfree labor – and thus prior to the land reform, when few Latvian farmers owned land, this specific use of the term connoted great prestige and was a marker of progressive thinking and success, and personal initiative and individual standing. Lastly, *saimnieks* has also been used historically in urban settings, where tenants might use the term in reference to their landlord, and where workers often have used it as a colloquial term for a boss or manager.

It was thus quite clever of Ulmanis to promote himself as the *Saimnieks*, which he began doing alongside his image as the *Vadonis*. For one thing, by doing so it enabled him to place less

emphasis on his image of the *Vadonis*, a role that he was not well suited to play. Even more significantly, though, by presenting himself as the wise and caring *Saimnieks*, Ulmanis was also able to connect with Latvians on a more organic and authentically Latvian way, while also encouraging them to heal the societal atomization and national divisions of the democratic period by thinking of themselves as members of a family, thus echoing similar sentiments elsewhere in Europe about the need for organic community as opposed to artificial societal relations.[11] Indeed, as the *Saimnieks*, Ulmanis was able to speak to these sentiments more naturally than many other European fascist leaders. This was because of the mutual and complementary meanings of *saimnieks*—as the *Saimnieks*, Ulmanis was the familial father of the Latvian nation, a farmer among farmers, and the astute manager of the Latvian government and state. In other words, as the *Saimnieks*, Ulmanis was able to meaningfully relate to every demographic group in both rural and urban environs and thus, in the end, as the rest of this chapter will highlight, he was able to create a unique form of agrarian fascism that deflected some of the attention away from himself and toward the progress that he and the nation were bringing about together. Finally, with regard to his effort to legitimize his power, Ulmanis chose, then, not to act like a crazed fascist – for he did not think this fit well for him or Latvians as a whole – but as a calm father, farmer, and boss who asked for Latvians' cooperation. Using sociologist David Beetham's model of "consent expressed through actions," we will see that Ulmanis ultimately did legitimize his rule and win over the support of most Latvians.[12]

[11] On the significance of societal atomization, see especially Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966). On the community versus society debate, see especially Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society (Gemeinschaft Und Gesellschaft)*, trans. and ed. Charles Price Loomis (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957).
[12] David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1991), 12.

-The *Saimnieks* and Agricultural Progress-

The most pertinent place to begin a discussion of agricultural progress – and here progress should be understood as "directional change [perceived as being] for the better"[13] – during the Ulmanis Times is with the founding of the Latvian Chamber of Agriculture (*Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, LLK*) in 1935. The legislation on the chamber, the first of many such corporative chambers to come, was passed during the cabinet meeting on March 28, 1935.[14] According to the legislation, LLK was under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Agriculture (*Zemkopība ministrija*), which for the majority of the Ulmanis Times was headed by Jānis Birznieks. However, LLK soon became the more widely known and celebrated institution. One reason is because it was led by Rūdolfs Dzērve, whom Ulmanis had befriended through *Mazpulki* and tapped for the position despite the fact that Dzērve, a farmer from Lizums County in northeastern Latvia, did not have more than a primary education.[15] Ulmanis's selection proved to be crucial because one of LLK's main functions was to serve as an intermediary between local farmers, and the Latvian government, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture. Thus, it was important that Dzērve had always gotten along agreeably with local farmers, who respected his remarkable rise to national prominence.[16]

LLK had twenty-seven guiding principles, and these can be grouped into four overarching categories: outreach, education and research, development, and propaganda.[17] The first – outreach – meant chiefly that LLK was to work closely with both LLK and local agricultural societies, trickling information from the Ministry of Agriculture on down to societies and, eventually, area farmers, while also sending up conditions, requests, etc. from the local to

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[13] Ernst B. Haas, *Nationalism, Liberalism, and Progress. Volume 1* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 9.
[14] See LVVA, 1307. f., 1. apr., 1458. l., 77.-85. lp.
[15] Unāms, *Es viņu pazistu*, 147.On Ulmanis's selection of Dzērve, see Lūsis, *Aiztek ūdeņi—aiztek gadi:atmiņas*, 84.
[16] Lūsis, *Aiztek ūdeņi—aiztek gadi:atmiņas*, 84-86.
[17] See, *Pirmais gads*, 92-94.

the state level. As Ulmanis noted in his speech at the ceremony celebrating the commencement of LLK's work, this give and take between farmers and the state was a new kind of direct representation. Clearly hinting at a parallel with Latvians' experience with democracy, Ulmanis stated that LLK was needed because previously there were so many agricultural societies and organizations (approximately twenty in 1935) offering different plans and advice that it was hindering progress. Thus, the founding of LLK, Ulmanis explained, came out of the "raised voices asking for united, harmonized action led by one, united leadership."[18]

This united leadership, of course, started with Ulmanis, but LLK also had a 100-member chamber comprised of agronomists, farmers, farmwives, and farmhands who ran for and were elected to represent their region for a term of three years. Furthermore, in addition to full chamber meetings, which took place once per month, the members also served, based on their areas of expertise, in one or more of the fourteen departments in LLK, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, and construction, where they would advise the Ministry of Agriculture on new laws under consideration and local societies on laws that had been passed, on new work methods, etc.

It is important to emphasize that although LLK was given a voice, it was in truth merely an advisory body. Thus while its chamber was indeed comprised of directly elected members, LLK and other government chambers should not be viewed as an alternative from of democracy. Additionally, the president of the chamber – in this case Dzērve – was appointed by Ulmanis and had the power to dismiss chamber members at any time. As a result, there were no opposition members or block of any sort. It was precisely as Ulmanis had phrased it—"united, harmonized action led by one, united leadership."

[18] "Jums jāiegūst tāda uzticība pie arājiem, kādu jums dāvā valdība: Ministru prezidenta Dr. K. Ulmaņa runa lauksaimniecības kameru atklājot," *Rīts*, Nr. 281, October 12, 1935.

LLK was the first corporative chamber in Ulmanis's Latvia in part because agriculture and agronomy was Ulmanis's passion. More importantly, however, LLK was the first chamber because agriculture was still the most important sector of the Latvian economy, as Ulmanis often reminded people. For example, at the end of his speech at LLK's ceremonial opening, Ulmanis drove home this exact point, saying, "We are understanding more clearly all of the time that in our country and state the advancement of the entire economy begins and ends in the countryside … with our farmers."[19] Thus, the second major aspect of LLK's work, education and research, was focused primarily on making Latvia's farmers more profitable and, in turn, growing the economy. Perhaps the most telling and famous example of this portion of LLK's work was *Mazpulki*, which became a part of LLK in 1935.

Additionally, LLK also worked with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education to expand educational opportunities for those interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. For example, besides promoting the instruction of agricultural topics in primary schools, two agriculture-focused secondary schools in Mežotne and Priekuļi were expanded and the program lengthened to five years. In 1935, a women's housekeeping secondary school was opened in Jaungulbene, and its graduates automatically qualified for admission to the prestigious Kaucminde Housekeeping Institute (*Kaucmindes mājturības institūts*), which was renamed the Latvian Housekeeping Institute (*Latvijas mājturības institūts*) in 1936 and expanded to a three-year program. Furthermore, a housekeeping school opened in Liepāja during the 1938-1939 school year, as well as a horticulture program in Nurmiši for girls. Likewise, similar horticulture programs for boys were offered in Ziedonis and Bulduri. As further evidence of the variety of

[19] "Jums jāiegūst tāda uzticība pie arājiem, kādu jums dāvā valdība: Ministru prezidenta Dr. K. Ulmaņa runa lauksaimniecības kameru atklājot."

new educational opportunities that LLK supported, a fishing trade school opened in Liepāja in 1937.[20]

Perhaps the most celebrated higher education initiatives, though, were the new Jelgava Agricultural Academy (*Jelgavas lauksaimniecības akademija*) and the Agricultural Work Research Institute in Lielplatone (*Lielplatones lauksaimniecības darba pētītšanas institūts*). As discussed in chapter two, Ulmanis and Enzeliņš had conversed, even in the years prior to Latvian independence, about the idea of founding a Latvian agricultural college, and Ulmanis made this earlier dream a reality on June 26, 1936, when the cabinet decided to found the Jelgava Agricultural Academy, which was staffed with agricultural faculty from the University of Latvia. Following the expensive and meticulous reconstruction of the historic Jelgava palace, the splendid residence designed for the governors of Kurzeme by the famed architect Francesco Rastrelli (better known for his Winter Palace and Catherine Palace in St. Petersburg) that was heavily damaged in the wars, the Jelgava Agricultural Academy began offering courses in 1939. Interestingly, for Ulmanis, moving the agricultural faculty to a separate academy not only achieved a decades-old aspiration of starting an agricultural college for Latvians, but it also stood as a bold statement of Latvians' claim to one of the country's most famous palaces and historic seats of power. In fact, in his remarks at the academy's grand opening ceremony, Ulmanis even announced that the palace, which had originally been built atop the ruins of a thirteenth-century German castle, would henceforth be called the Viesturs Memorial Palace (*Viestura piemiņas pils*) in honor of Viesturs, a Zemgalian leader who organized a successful attack in 1228 on a German settlement in Daugavgrīva, thus Latvianizing a place that for seven centuries had served as a marker of foreign occupation.

[20] J. Kamols, "Lauksaimniecības izglītība," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 21-26

As for the Agricultural Work Research Institute in Lielplatone, in 1938 it began for the first time a one-year training program for machinery instructors, who subsequently worked with farmers to teach them how to properly use and repair tractors and other modern farm machinery. Additionally, the institute also focused on studying work methods with the aim of rationalizing agricultural work. This drive towards greater efficiency, towards implementing industrial practices and mechanical power on the farm, and towards thinking about farming as a business, was rooted in a desire to modernize the countryside and make farmers more profitable and their children less likely to flee to the cities. Furthermore, in the Latvian case, rationalization also became an oft-repeated exhortation because Latvian farmers frequently had to depend on foreign labor during the growing season.

Thus, working to increase Latvian farmers' efficiency, productivity, and dependence on workers from abroad, the Lielplatone institute researched work methods and advised farmers on approaches to farm and fieldwork. For example, J. Jānītis, an agronomist at the institute, explained in a 1939 article the type of simple yet immensely beneficial suggestions he gave to farmers. Jānītis noted that he had been particularly interested in rationalizing human energy, and thus he calculated that a farmer would typically walk thirty to forty kilometers during a day's work of plowing. Consequently, he suggested to area farmers that they attach an iron t-bar drag to the back of the plow, thus possibly eliminating the need to make another pass with a harrow. Similarly, Jānītis also advised farmers on which machinery to buy first, as this could be a daunting and expensive question. For example, he argued that a harrow with a seat was a wise primary investment, since it could be hitched to either a tractor or a horse, and the farmer could ride rather than walking, while cleverly using his own weight to push the harrow into the soil rather than using the old method of heavy stones or bags of sand. As for other machinery, he

contended that the modern bailer and thresher gave the greatest return on investment. Finally, citing the national significance of his work, Jānītis ended the article by quoting Ulmanis's line that "for us, agricultural machines are more crucial than guns."[21]

Besides the Lielplatone institute, LLK also worked with many other state research stations and institutes, which by 1939 numbered more than twenty in all. As an indication of the progress in the development of agricultural research during the Ulmanis Times, the research conducted focused on every aspect of the agricultural sector, from seed selection and tractor and machinery test stations in Priekuļi, cultivation of marshes in Pēternieki, dairy experiment stations in Smiltene, a fieldwork station in Jaungulbene, and to state horse breeding stations in Svētciems and Okte County. Much like the Cooperative Extension Service in America, with which Ulmanis was intimately familiar as a result of his employment at the University of Nebraska, LLK and the Ministry of Agriculture funded these institutes in order to use scientific research to better understand nature and agricultural work. Then, on the back end, LLK and the Ministry of Agriculture used its connections with local agricultural societies, as well its journals to disseminate the researchers' findings. Among many others, the most prominent LLK and Ministry of Agriculture journals during the Ulmanis regime were *Mazpulks, Vadītājs, Latvijas lauksaimnieks* (*The Latvian Farmer*), *Lauku pastnieks* (*The Country Postman*), *Lauksaimniecības mēnešraksts* (*The Agriculture Monthly*), and *Lauksaimniecības izmēģinājumu un pētījumu žurnals* (*The Agriculture Experiment and Research Journal*).[22]

[21] J. Jānītis, "Lauksaimniecības racionalizacija," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 65-69. The quote appears on page 69.

[22] For a helpful overview of the various research institutes and experiment stations, see J. Lielmanis, "Izmēģinājumu un pētījumu iestāžu darba rezultati," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 49-52.

As for the content in these journals, it was predominantly apolitical and focused specifically on aspects of agricultural work and rural life. For instance, the very first issue of *Lauku pastnieks* in March 1937 offered articles on grain prices, the leather and wool market, artificial fertilizers, forestry, on the topic of a potential shortage of work horses, and on modern farm equipment, among others. In fact, not a single article was devoted to anything outside of the realm of agriculture. However, Ulmanis was referenced in many articles. For example, in the article on grain prices, the author reminds readers that previously farmers and rural residents did not have any confidence in the future because:

> the Saeima with a majority vote could always annul the fixed grain prices. Now, after May 15, 1934, when a new order was established that no longer is dependent on political parties, and where state president Dr. Kārlis Ulmanis and Minister of Agriculture J. Birznieks determine agricultural policies, our farmers' confidence in the future is great, because they know that these persons have always understood correctly the farmers' needs and have worked always on their behalf.[23]

Still another way that Ulmanis and LLK worked to help the farmers was through development. First and foremost, this took the form of legislation, and one of the frequent targets was financial institutions, which many farmers had bitterly complained were unfair to struggling rural families. Following an initial study of the situation immediately following the coup, the government determined that the most frequent reason why farmers sold their farms and left the countryside, and why private efforts to modernize the countryside had gone slowly, was because there was a shortage of capital and lack of accesses to low-interest loans. Indeed, Ulmanis had even argued this as far back as 1931, when he spoke on the topic at the League of Nations. Thus, using the State Land Bank (*Valsts zemes banka*) as a tool of intervention, in October 1934 the State Land Bank began accepting applications from farmers who were interested in consolidating and restructuring previous loans at a lower annual interest rate, which by December 1938 had

[23] P. Grāvis, "Labības tirgus kārtošana un 1937. gada labības cenas," *Lauku pastnieks*, Nr. 1, March 23, 1937, 4.

been capped by law at a maximum of seven percent. Predictably, thousands of farmers took advantage of this welcome opportunity. In fact, through the end of 1938, nearly 30,000 farm families had refinanced more than twenty-four million lats of collective debt.[24]

It is also worth pointing out that there was a decided nationalistic element to this legislation as well. This was because prior to the coup, the majority of banks were owned by Baltic Germans and Jews – indeed, in 1930 roughly three-quarters of all privately owned companies were owned by members of these two minority groups – and thus part of the rationale behind the loan restructuring program was to migrate loans from private German or Jewish banks to state-owned ones. As further evidence of this drive to Latvianize the economy, Andrejs Bērziņš was appointed to head the Ministry of Finance's new *Latvijas Kreditbanka* (Latvian Credit Bank), founded in April 1935. Bērziņš, a committed believer in state intervention in the economy, had the primary task of acting as a sort of modern-day economic czar, controlling the ebbs and flows of the economy through credit rates, deficit spending, etc. Furthermore, Bērziņš also had the power to nationalize all banks and businesses that filed for bankruptcy or were obviously overleveraged, again ostensibly to manage the economy and prevent crises. However, by 1938 the bank was also buying out and nationalizing business that had no apparent financial troubles, and although companies owned by ethnic Latvians were not immune, certainly Jewish or Baltic German-owned industries were affected more dramatically. For instance, by 1938 the bank had taken control of German-owned breweries like Tanheizers and Waldschlößchen and the chocolate and candy company Laima, which had been started in 1870 by the Baltic German

[24] H. Dzelzītis, "Lauksaimniecības kredits atjaunotā Latvijā," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 52-60.

Theodore Rigert, whose goods quickly won international acclaim and by 1930 were being shipped to markets as far away as Egypt.[25]

In addition to the loan restructuring program that, at least in part, was aimed at minimizing the financial power of Latvia's minorities, LLK and the regime also used the State Land Bank to facilitate greater access to lines of credit. For example, in 1934 the bank began offering very low and sometimes even interest-free loans to persons buying farms or modernizing their farmyard, such as building with more fireproof brick buildings. What is more, the bank also initiated new lending programs for war reconstruction, for starting cooperative creameries, and for purchasing new farm equipment. As a result of these various lending programs, by 1939 the State Land Bank held approximately seventy percent of all agricultural loans in Latvia.[26]

Additional help for farmers came in the form of government subsidies and regulations. One of the most applauded initiatives was a farm family support program, which offered a prorated stipend to farmers with young children. This was primarily intended to raise the standard of living in the countryside, but of course it also promoted demographic growth, which is yet another way that the government sought to resolve the rural labor shortage. As evidence of the popularity and importance of this program, over 54,000 families were enrolled by 1939.[27] Further support for rural families was established in 1937, when the Ulmanis government announced that it would provide special subsidies, in addition to low-interest loans from the State Land Bank, for the construction of government-approved, modern farm buildings.

In consultation with Ulmanis and his cabinet, LLK and the Ministry of Agriculture also guaranteed farmers a fair price for their products, announcing each spring the fixed prices of

[25] "Vēsture," Laima, accessed on April 14, 2014, http://www.laima.lv/lv/par-laimu/vesture/.
[26] Dzelzītis, 59.
[27] Bilmanis, *Latvia as an Independent State*, 199-200.

each commodity and respective quality grade. Significantly, in 1935 a new crop and livestock insurance program was started that paid full market price for all crops that were more than twenty-five percent damaged by any weather-related occurrence and seventy-five percent of market value for any livestock lost to disease. Additionally, in terms of inputs, the government also placed price ceilings on requisite materials like seed, fertilizer, machinery, and construction materials to ensure their affordability and availability to the average farmer. These items could be purchased directly from government-organized stores like C/S Turība, which began opening in 1937 rural general stores so that farmers in remote provinces would not have to journey to the nearest big city to buy needed equipment and supplies.[28]

Another key aspect of LLK's developmental work was centered on increasing the amount of arable land in Latvia. Primarily the effort concentrated on draining and ameliorating parts of the more than 650,000 hectares of swampland in Latvia.[29] In fact, this enterprise was not unique to the Ulmanis Times, however funding for it dramatically increased after the coup, as 4.8 of the 9.96 million lats allocated for the work came between 1934 and 1938.[30] Most of this money went to the purchase of culverts and pipes, which the government sold at a loss to farmers. For example, in 1938, the Ministry of Agriculture sold ten million drainage pipes to farmers at a discounted rate that cost the government nearly 35,000 lats.[31] Much of the rest of the money went to purchase earthmoving equipment, and as a result the number of tractors the Ministry of Agriculture had for this work rose from three in 1937 to fifty-one by 1939. Finally, each year the government also spent a considerable amount of money on a popular program that enabled

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[28] Ibid, 227-253. On C/S Turība, see J. Blumbergs, "C/S Turība un patērētāju biedrības," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 108-110.
[29] "Uzvaras līdums," *Meža dzīve*, Nr. 134, Oct. 1, 1936, 4846.
[30] A. Kupfers, "Melioracija," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 74.
[31] Alfrēds Jumiķis, *Atjaunotās Latvijas celtniecības pārskats* (Rīga: b.i., 1939), 36.

farmers to have Ministry of Agriculture technicians come in with state-owned equipment and plow up to three hectares of reclaimed, virgin land each year.[32]

Unquestionably, the draining of swamps was one of the regime's most highly touted projects. To get a sense of why that was the case, it is worth examining in detail the most celebrated project of all, the so-called Victory Clearing (*Uzvaras līdums*), which was made the focus of the entire country during a propaganda event staged there on September 23, 1936. Late that afternoon, Ulmanis strode to the microphone to address the citizens of Latvia amid the most unusual of backdrops— the Olaine-Tīreļa swamp. Accompanied by the calls of cranes, the song of the forest shrike birds, and the sounds of the rustling birch and pine forests, Ulmanis stood at the podium, bedecked in oak-leaf garland and framed by three Latvian red-white-red flags, hoisted aloft by the proverbial winds of change, for Ulmanis was about to speak about a miracle of modern scientific and agricultural ingenuity that he named "Victory Clearing."

After a long list of formal greetings to those various groups of people, including a contingent of 300 *Mapzulki* members, who were among the approximately 1,000 people in attendance – a truly huge number for an event in a swamp – and after he thanked those tuning in via the live radio broadcast, Ulmanis commenced his remarks. "We are gathered here today with feelings of joy and anticipation in our hearts," he began, "because today we are assembled here to see and learn about the project that in our land … is entirely new."[33] Wanting to frame for his listeners the importance of the work being done in the Olaine-Tīreļa swamp, located approximately halfway between Rīga and Jelgava, Ulmanis discussed the Latvian nation's long struggle to find arable land amid the soggy lowlands of the Daugava River and its many tributaries.

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[32] Ibid, 37; Kupfers, 76.
[33] "Uzvaras līdums," *Jaunākās ziņas*, 217, Sep. 24, 1936, 1.

Having laid out the history of that protracted endeavor, Ulmanis instructed the audience that the government's work was the cause for a newfound hope, for, as he put it, "Today we see here the first fruition … [of the belief] that it is possible to conquer the land, to recapture the unsuitable, infertile land by making it suitable and productive."[34] Moreover, Ulmanis pointed out, such work "has again stirred and awakened in a new way" our "ancient homesteaders' spirit, that spirit of work and persistence."[35] Finally, as Ulmanis came to a close, he urged his listeners to learn the lesson of how "human work and ingenuity have transformed the thousand-year-old swamp into suitable fields, meadows, and forests … making our land beautiful and rich."[36]

After the speech and the singing of the national anthem, Ulmanis and the other government officials then walked under the festive gate reading "We Welcome the Great Leader to the Land Reconquered from the Swamp!" [37] and participated in placing the cornerstone for the first of eighteen planned farmhouses, all of which were later given to landless *Strēlnieki* who had also served in the Latvian National Army during the War of Latvian Independence.[38] In the end, the work, which began with a sizeable workforce of 2,000 men, led to the draining and amelioration of 224 hectares of land. As for the eighteen farmsteads, the Ministry of Agriculture's Central Land Survey Committee cooperated with the Ministry of Defense in selecting the recipients from the pool of 329 qualifying veterans who applied.[39]

In the years that followed, Victory Clearing remained a popular story in the Latvian press. From construction updates on the farm houses, to detailed information on the first harvest,

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[34] "Vecais līdumnieku gars modies jaunā veidā: Prezidenta runa Uzvaras līdumā Olaines purvos," *Brīvā zeme*, 217, Sep. 24, 1936, 1.
[35] Ibid.
[36] "Uzvaras līdums," 1.
[37] "Vecais līdumnieku gars modies jaunā veidā: Prezidenta runa Uzvaras līdumā Olaines purvos," 3.
[38] Only those veterans who had joined the new Latvian National Army were eligible to apply for the new farms at Victory Clearing. In total, 329 veterans applied for these farms. The Ministry of Agriculture's Central Land Survey Committee cooperated with the Ministry of Defense in selecting the recipients.
[39] Ibid; "Sadalīs Uzvaras līdums," *Zemgales Balss*, Nr. 284, December 14, 1936, 4.

which one farmer, Jānis Alksnis, even sent a sample of to Ulmanis, Victory Clearing indeed became a national obsession.[40] In fact, a search on *Periodika*, the Latvian National Library's online periodical archive, for Victory Clearing yields at least 350 articles on the topic that appeared in various publications between January 1936 and June 1940, when the Red Army invaded Latvia. The question, then, is why were so many people apparently fascinated by this topic? Or, alternatively, why did Ulmanis and the regime decide to push this one development so vigorously in the press?

While certainly Latvians appreciated the practical benefits of draining swamps to create more farmland and boost domestic agricultural output, the most significant reason why the project garnered such attention is because Latvians' collective identity was more closely tied to the countryside than the cities, which they had long viewed as being dominated by Baltic Germans and other "foreigners." Consequently, for many Latvians the 650,000 hectares of swamplands in the countryside were not just agricultural impediments. They also epitomized what William Cronon has called "nature as self-conscious artifice" and therefore were emblematic of contradictory nature of Latvian nationalism, which, in this case, would both praise the natural beauty and curse it as a sign of national inferiority and backwardness.[41] Thus, such successful and massive undertakings like the Victory Clearing or, even more famously, Ķegums Dam, were really about proving that Latvians, too, were forward-thinking and capable of the "conquest of nature" that had long been part of the drive toward modernity in Germany, America, and elsewhere in the Western world.[42]

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[40] "Prezidenta novēlējums," *Rīts*, Nr. 250, September 12, 1937, 1.
[41] William Cronon, "Introduction: In Search of Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed.William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 40.
[42] David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: Norton, 2006); David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

If Victory Clearing was in some sense about Latvians asserting their rightful place among the echelon of advanced nations, then one could say that Latvia's dairy industry gave them a sense of superiority that was integral to their sense of national exceptionalism. As Oliver Zimmer has noted in his excellent study of nationalism in Switzerland, it is precisely such exceptionalisms, rooted in comparisons and confrontations, that leads to group identity formation.[43] What is more, Ulmanis and LLK worked hard to further develop this particular aspect of Latvians' identity, especially among urban inhabitants. For example, in March 1935, the regime organized, for the first time in the history of Latvia, a state dairy propaganda week. The festivities took place in Rīga and began on Sunday, March 10. That afternoon the Central Dairy Union of Latvia (*Latvijas piensaimniecības centrālā savienība*) and the Central Society of Latvian Milk Producers (*Latvijas pienrūpnieku centrālā biedrība*) organized a parade through the streets of downtown Rīga. It included nine trucks and forty-two horse-drawn wagons loaded with dairy products, advertisements, and posters. At the front and back of the parade were orchestras, whose members set the mood with one popular folk song after another. Additionally, a large contingent of young milk maids dressed in ethnic garb were interspersed between the trucks and wagons, adding a touch of bountiful femininity to the parade that was clearly meant to celebrate the abundance and richness of the Latvian dairy industry. Finally, when the parade reached the Foreign Ministry building on the main thoroughfare of Valdemārs Street, Ulmanis suddenly opened an upper-floor window and waved enthusiastically at the cheering crowds, thus permitting them to ceremoniously recognize his role in bringing about such happy days.[44]

Following the parade, the week-long dairy exhibition opened at Liela Vērmaņa dārza paviljona, one of the major pavilions in Rīga. Impressively, more than 10,000 people attended

[43] Oliver Zimmer, *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761-1891* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13-14.
[44] "10.000 apmēklētāju piena propagandas izstādē," *Rīts*, Nr. 70, March 11, 1935, 1

that day, which was a big draw since free samples of a wide variety of dairy products were given out on that afternoon, as opposed to the rest of the week when they were sold at a small price. Of course, Latvians had known for decades that Ulmanis was an expert in dairying, thus they probably did not think too cynically about the prominently displayed table of dairy goods, above which was a photo of Ulmanis eating happily at a table splendidly replete with Latvian dairy products.[45]

During that opening afternoon session, the Minister of Agriculture, Jānis Kauliņš – the Jelgava native and former member of the New Farmers' and Small Landowners' Party (*Latvijas Jaunsaimnieku un sīkgruntnieku partija*) whom Jānis Birznieks replaced in July 1935 – gave the opening address. Among other topics, Kauliņš devoted much of his speech to the benefits of drinking milk, a beverage that had fallen out of favor with urban residents long ago. "Milk," Kauliņš explained, "is a 100% Latvian product that is produced by our country's chief class, the farmers." Furthermore, besides supporting Latvian farmers, Kauliņš noted that "milk, if everyone will consume it, will bring health to the entire nation," because "milk is a cheap and nutritious foodstuff."[46] Kauliņš also offered impressive statistics about Latvians' advanced dairy industry. For example, he noted that Latvians ostensibly ranked third in the entire world in terms of butter consumption, consuming nearly ten kilograms per person each year. Likewise, he cited proudly the fact that Latvians ranked fourth in milk consumption, behind only Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, and America.[47] In addition to Kauliņš's speech, during the rest of the week, each day a talk on the benefits of dairy was broadcast on the state radio, and the Ministry of Education asked all restaurants, produce stores, and coffee shops to tune in.[48]

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[45] Ibid.
[46] "Piena progagandas nedēļu," *Valdības Vēstnesis*, Nr. 60, March 12, 1935, 2.
[47] Ibid.
[48] "Piena propagandas nedēļas programma," *Latvijas kareivis*, Nr. 58, March 9, 1935, 4.

Just as it began, the first-ever dairy propaganda week ended with a parade. This second time the parade had a specific theme—"The World of Milk." In total, there were eighteen trucks and ninety horse-drawn wagons. In addition to hauling milk, free samples of which were offered to onlookers, the truck beds and carts were full of brand new milk cans, separators, chillers, and butter churns. The message must have been evident to everyone: Latvia's dairy industry was rapidly being modernized thanks to Ulmanis's expertise and leadership. Alongside the machinery, there were also orchestras and groups of dairy workers, such as hay mowers, who replicated their job in the "milk world" as they marched along singing well-known folk songs. Following the workers, there were more trucks and carts full of hay and other types of fodder, some of which was pitched out to the dairy cows in the parade, encouraging them to cooperate in the propagandistic endeavor. Finally, at the back of the parade was a group of 120 children, whose banner indicated that they had happily given up tea in favor of milk, and these children, along with the milkmaids, passed out complimentary milk samples. Rather humorously, when the parade reached the Foreign Ministry, a young girl even delivered a glass of milk to Ulmanis, who, like before, appeared at a window, only this time he did so to show the crowd just how much he enjoyed wholesome Latvian milk.[49]

Altogether, the first state diary propaganda week, which saw more than 60,000 people visit the exhibition in Rīga, was considered a success.[50] Thus, in hindsight it appears to have served as a model – one which surely was informed by Ulmanis's experiences in America at events like the National Dairy Show – for future development and propaganda work, especially the Harvest Celebrations, which we will discuss later on in the chapter. In terms of the dairy industry then, the government continued to sponsor cultural events, including dairy propaganda

[49] "Piena propagandas nedēļas noslēgums," *Rīts*, Nr. 77, March 18, 1935, 1; "Pļāvēji Rīgas ielās un govis uz auto," *Rīts*, Nr. 75, March 16, 1935, 1.
[50] "Piena propagandas nedēļas noslēgums."

events at the local level. For instance, the July 1939 cover of *Mazpulks* included an image of *Mazpulki* members participating the previous month in the Jelgava dairy propaganda parade. Similarly, in October 1935, Jānis Birznieks appeared at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of Rūjiena Dairy Company, where much was made about the fact that the company's 7,000-liter butter churn ranked among the largest in the world.[51] Still another prominent example of the cultural effort to promote the consumption of, and pride in, Latvia's dairy were the popular and trendy milk restaurants and pavilions in Rīga, the first of which Rīga's Dairy Union opened in June 1935 in the picturesque Kronvalds' Park in downtown Rīga. Lastly, though not a cultural initiative, it is worth noting here that the regime also frequently referenced as further evidence of its progressive policies the establishment in 1935 of the Anglo-Baltic Produce Co. Ltd, which advertised and facilitated the sale of Latvian dairy products in England.[52]

-Harvest Celebrations-

For as much as Latvians during the Ulmanis Times enjoyed drinking milk and kefir at state-organized, urban festivities, most assuredly they enjoyed even more savoring a stein of beer at the grand *Pļaujas svētki*, or Harvest Celebrations. Indeed, this reference to beverages is an apt way to transition into a discussion of the Harvest Celebrations, because they were first and foremost intended to be times of revelries, when Latvians of every age, gender, ethnicity, and occupation could harmoniously join together to rejoice in the agricultural progress that was continuing to rapidly transform Latvia from a new, war-ravaged country into a secure, peaceful land of abundance.

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[51] "Labas zīmes saimnieciskā dzivē," *Rīts*, Nr. 289, October 20, 1935, 16.
[52] T. Kalniņš, "Latvijas Piensaimnieku centralā savienība," in *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, J. Ķenģis et al. (Jelgava: Latvijas lauksaimniecības kamera, 1939), 100-104.

Generally speaking, the three Harvest Celebrations of 1935, 1936, and 1937 were similar in character and purpose to what Ulmanis had observed at the Nebraska State Fair. Indeed, both events shared the goals of uniting rural and urban citizens, celebrating and promoting agriculture, crafting a narrative of progress, and providing entertainment. As was the case with the Nebraska fair, the Harvest Celebrations typically lasted a week (though sometimes longer) and were comprised of agricultural and industrial exhibits, livestock shows, competitions, amusements, etc. Additionally, as was the case with William Jennings Bryan's speech on the Nebraska fair's closing day in 1908, so, too, Ulmanis and other top government officials would arrive for the closing ceremonies of the Harvest Celebration, where Ulmanis always delivered the much-anticipated keynote speech. Beyond potentially borrowing from Ulmanis's experiences in America, in some instances, German practices, as we will see, also proved influential.

Nevertheless, despite these apparent foreign influences, in fact the idea of a harvest celebration was not new to Latvians. Rather, it had been a part of Latvian rural culture for centuries. However, as one author explained in his article drumming up support for the First Harvest Celebration, which took place in October 1935 in Koknese, this ancient tradition was "repressed and disparaged" by serfdom, as well as in recent times by foreign ideas that "confused Latvians' free actions and preached disunity," an obvious reference to the principle of individualism inherent in representative democracy.[53] What made the Harvest Celebrations different from the ancient custom, then, was that for the first time it was organized by the state and was intended for all citizens, not just local, rural residents who celebrated the end of harvest in their area.

The promotion of agriculture was also an addition to the old tradition. As the primary organizer (along with the Ministry of Public Affairs), LLK naturally used the exhibition portion

[53] Ž. Gībietis, "Vienības zelta pļaujas svētki," *Rīts pielikums: Darbs un arodorganizācijas*, October 12, 1935, 2.

of the Harvest Celebration to educate farmers about new work methods, seed varieties, machinery, and so on. In fact, the LLK agronomist Viļums Skubiņš, who oversaw a number of the Harvest Celebrations, once clarified that the exhibition portion was intended to be a sort of "agricultural people's college."[54] To that end, Skubiņš organized, in the case of the Second Harvest Celebration in Rēzekne – which the regime selected as the host city in order to solidify support in Latgale, Latvia's most ethnically diverse region – an exhibition that was more than five hectares in total size. Working with at least 1,159 companies and persons who applied and paid by the cubic foot for a booth at the exhibition, Skubiņš grouped them into eleven thematic sections, including, for instance, on statistics, metal work and machinery, textiles, woodworking and furniture, housekeeping, and agriculture, which was far and away the most popular as a result of the tractor demonstrations.[55] As for the celebration of Ulmanis and the progress of May 15, there was a special section of the exhibition on "The Unity of the Nation," and the focal point was a huge painting of Ulmanis that was adorned with wreaths of grain and a draping of Latgalian cloth. Above the painting was a huge placard reading: "Belief in the Leader—the Nation's Strength."[56] Finally, the entertainment during the exhibition period offered a main event each day. Sometimes it might be a lecture, as for instance during the first day there were a series of talks on "history and the idea of the national state," while other times it involved *Mazpulki* competitions, horse races, or scenic bus tours through the beautiful Latvian countryside.[57]

Naturally, organizing all of this proved to be a monumental task. Indeed, LLK's preliminary plans for the Third Harvest Celebration in Jelgava compiled an impressive 650 pages

[54] "Tās noguruma nepazīst: atklāja lielo izstādi," *Brīvā Zeme*, Nr. 202, September 7, 1936, 9.
[55] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1598. l., 1.-4. lp.; LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1695. l.; LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1969. l., 13. lp.
[56] "Ministri lielās izstādes apskatē," *Brīvā Zeme*, Nr. 202, September 7, 1936, 13.
[57] *Brīvā Zeme*, Nr. 200, September 4, 1936, 1.

in all.[58] Since the organizers were hoping to draw huge numbers of people from all regions of Latvia, one of the biggest organizational headaches involved transportation. First, LLK encouraged local businesses and societies to offer transportation in buses or farm trucks if possible, and often times they did so. For example, in Cēsis the local government and businesses offered bus transportation to and from the Third Harvest Celebration.[59] The majority of festival goers, however, traveled by special festival trains that the Ministry of Transportation offered at a discounted rate, some years even up to seventy-five percent off. Furthermore, in some years there was even a package deal, where a validated train ticket served doubled as an entrance ticket to the Harvest Celebration.[60]

Lodging also was a logistical challenge. Unsurprisingly, there were not enough inns and guesthouses in the area, so LLK worked with local schools to arrange hay beds (which cost a mere eighty cents per night), and with the local city council and businesses to compile a list of residents who were willing to provide guests with accommodations.[61] Additionally, those who were brave enough to bear the cold and often rainy autumn nights were also allowed to pitch tents near the festival grounds, which were illuminated throughout the night.[62] The organizers also worked with the army to set up modern conveniences at the grounds, including sanitary stations, beer and other beverages, and a buffet supplied by a large number of army field kitchens.[63] Beyond those essentials, the main festival grounds also were equipped with a first aid table, a temporary postal, telegram, and telephone station, and a public address system that

[58] LVVA, 3723. f., 1. apr., 15620. l., 14. lp.
[59] LVVA, 1690. f., 1. apr., 1403. l., 190. lp.
[60] LVVA, 1307. f., 1. apr., 1458. l., 227. lp.; "Tas jāzina braucējiem uz Rēzekni," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 4, 1936, 2.
[61] A.V., "Svētki var sākties – Rēzekne gaida," September 5, 1936, 15; "Jaunas sejas, jauni izstādījumi: Rēzeknē darbs top vēl drudžaināks," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 4, 1936, 2.
[62] LVVA, 1690. f., 1. apr., 1402. l., 460. lp.
[63] LVVA, 1690. f., 1. apr., 1386. l., 2. lp; LVVA, 1690. f., 1. apr., 1402. l., 476. lp.

amplified speakers' remarks and informed the public of train arrivals and departures.[64] Furthermore, those interested could also buy commemorative Harvest Celebration items, including a beer stein for eight-five cents and a large badge for four and a half cents.[65]

One of the most popular events at the Harvest Celebration was the bonfire celebration. This always occurred on the night prior to the closing ceremonies, and it mimicked the *Līgo*, midsummer festivities, when Latvians dance and sing around a bonfire during the shortest night of the year as a way of celebrating the victory of light over darkness. At the First Harvest Celebration in Koknese, for example, festival goers gathered around two huge bonfires adjacent to the old castle ruins and Daugava River, where they spent the evening singing folk songs, and dancing. Of course, such activities work up a hunger, so the organizers also kept the beverage and food tents open all night.[66]

In addition to all of the other fun and educational opportunities that were afforded, certainly the most highly anticipated portion of the Harvest Celebration was the closing day, when Ulmanis and other dignitaries made their grand appearance. In fact, put together, more than 480,000 people – in a country of only two million – attended the concluding events of the three Harvest Celebrations, a statistic that speaks volumes about the public's extremely positive response to this renewed Latvian tradition. In the instances of the Second and Third Harvest Celebrations, the day's festivities began around noon with the arrival of the special government train. From the train station all the way to the festival field on the outskirts of town, festival goers lined up to wave and cheer as Ulmanis passed by. Often, Ulmanis would stop at the festive gates to greet particular people or groups. For instance, after passing through a festive gate reading

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[64] "Kārtība un prieks svētku laukumā," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 14, 1936, 5.
[65] LVVA, 1690. f., 1. apr., 1402. l., 450., 483. lp.
[66] "130.000 apmeklētāju lielajos pļaujas svētkos," *Rīts*, Nr. 283, October 14, 1935, 4; "Tas jāzina visiem pļaujas svētku apmeklētājiem," *Rīts*, October 11, 1935, 8.

"The People's Leader, Take Our Hands and Hearts" and another saying "Latgale Welcomes the United Country's Saimnieks," which was impressively adorned with wreathes of grain, a scythe, and a rake, Ulmanis stopped to say hello to *Mazpulki* members, who greeted him with flowers and a song.[67] In the case of the First Harvest Celebration, they touched on Ulmanis's image as the *Saimnieks*, singing a short song whose refrain instructed, "We are all one family / We all have one Saimnieks."[68]

Once Ulmanis and his entourage had slowly made their way through the streets lined with thousands of people and hundreds of Latvian flags and arrived at the festival grounds, the afternoon of speeches commenced, as did the live radio broadcast. From local farmers and mayors to heads of government chambers, one speaker after another offered their perspective on the meaning of the Harvest Celebration, always ending by thanking "the country's mighty Saimnieks … for peace and harmony amid the nation, and for the land's bounties and blessings."[69] Wanting also to include the perspective of the capital, the organizers invited Rīga's mayor, Roberts Liepiņš, to speak. His remarks at the Second Harvest Celebration are particularly striking. He began by noting that since May 15, the harvest festival has grown in many ways, and the phrase "pļaujas svētki" has taken on a connotation of the nation's successes, not only in the countryside, but also in the cities. Indeed, Liepiņš pointed out that Ulmanis had created a place for everyone at the communal table, for as much as he has focused on agriculture, he has also paid close attention to "the beautification, the modernization, and to all of those affairs tied to the Latvianization of our city." Furthermore, Liepiņš highlighted that Ulmanis has not been a passive observer, as proved by his impressive plans for the new Victory Field in Rīga. Finally, in a

[67] "Fanfaras vēsta Prezidenta ierašanos," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 14, 1936, 4.
[68] "Gavilēšana valsts prezidentu, ministru prezidentu un valdību sagaidot," *Rīts*, October 14, 1935, 4.
[69] R. Dzērve, "Varpu zelta vaiņags: Pļaujas svētki—himna radošam darbam," *Brīvā Zeme*, Nr. 206, September 11, 1936, 1.

passage that succinctly summarized the message that Ulmanis and the regime sought to convey through the Harvest Celebrations, Liepiņš closed his comments by pronouncing that renewed Latvia is "growing and changing at quite an American pace."[70]

By mid-afternoon, it was Ulmanis's turn at the microphone. Each year he gave a rather long address, typically at least an hour in duration. One could argue that the three speeches he gave at these celebrations were the best, most coherent (he was prone to rambling) messages of his entire political career, an indication of just how important the Harvest Celebrations were. Ulmanis crafted each of the speeches around the themes of joy and gratitude. Speaking to the ancient tradition of celebrating the harvest, Ulmanis pointed out at the First Harvest Celebration that the first element of joy comes from knowing that one's hard work has paid off, that the crops cared for "during sweltering days and through thunderstorms" has "been harvested and the granary is full of new grain."[71]

Ulmanis then turned to the other obvious source of gratitude and joy—freedom. This most precious joy, Ulmanis explained, comes from the recognition that "this country, this land of ours, has given its fruits to us, and to no one else," a line which drew applause from the crowd. Continuing on, Ulmanis stated:

> Today with complete justification we can say that this land is our land. But for a long time foreign feet have walked over this land, and it groaned under the oppression of those foreign feet. Back then our farmers could not be happy about their produce, about their harvest, about the fruits of their labor. During those years and throughout that long timespan, this land has now and again been heavily inflicted. We know and have learned that there has been a time when traveling through open stretches one did not see for ten kilometers a single building, home, or barn, nor even a living person. Today we say that now and again there have been overlords over us who told us what to do … Those days in our country have been experienced and lived through, and now our land has come into our hands. Now this land is cultivated by our hands. This land has given its fruits under the drone of our own footsteps.[72]

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[70] "Galvas pilsētas sveiciens: Rīgas pilsētas galva uzrunā Prezidentu," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 14, 1936, 4.
[71] "Ceļš uz valsts varenību: Ministru prezidenta lielā runa pļaujas svētkos," *Rīts*, Nr. 283, October 14, 1935, 5.
[72] Ibid, 4-5.

Another portion of his remarks at the First Harvest Celebration were on the joy and gratitude derived from unity. Recalling the rancor and dysfunction of parliamentary politics, Ulmanis instructed his listeners to be grateful that the government's actions are no longer bogged down "by the demands and constraints of parties." Likewise, Ulmanis admitted that he personally appreciated that the:

> government is not encountering any opposition from the side of urbanites when it wants to come to the aid of the farmers or to support agriculture. Everyone understands that from the land, from the farmer's work comes the first initiative, the first spark that drives the wheels of our economy and intellectual life, and which sustains the system … [Therefore] all of the farmers themselves must know that the rest [of the nation] are prepared to give them a helping hand, and they truly need to take note of that. We need to understand that it is good … to be ready to come to each other's aid.[73]

Finally, gazing out over the crowd of roughly 150,000 people from all walks of life, Ulmanis concluded his speech by talking about the joy and gratitude inherent in the organic unity shown at the event. He closed, saying:

> The sea of people and the forest of flags before our eyes give evidence not only of festivals of joy and gratitude, but also, in the fullest sense of the word, a festival of unity, of an unrivalled and unbreakable unity. The physical laborer meets here with the intellectual and everyone understands each other. This unity among us wasn't experienced earlier in the era of party wrangling: in those times of discord it simply wasn't imaginable. 15 May has brought this unity to us, and that is the greatest benefit of this new era of 15 May. May this unity remain our most precious possession, because it gives us strength, it teaches us to truly understand the people, the nation, and the state, and why we must love our nation and state. This unity will make our oak tree sons into true sons of the fatherland and our linden tree daughters into hardworking maidens, into caring housewives, and the bearers, protectors, and nurturers of the next generation… This unity teaches us and gives us the courage and strength to take on and carry out each of our responsibilities, whether big or small, and it teaches us and gives us the courage to accept the duty so that we can stand one for all and all for one… We will all live and work together for one goal and one duty![74]

Following Ulmanis's speech, there was an intermission to prepare the stage for the so-called "Work Parade." In the meantime, Ulmanis took the opportunity to converse with the journalists present, including at the Second Harvest Celebration journalists from England,

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid, 5.

France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, America, and the Soviet Union.[75] The always-popular Work Parade thus began by late afternoon. This particular event was especially well-liked because it told the story of progress as participants marched across the stage to the orchestra and choir's accompanying music. In other words, the parade was by far the most sensory experience of the whole festival.

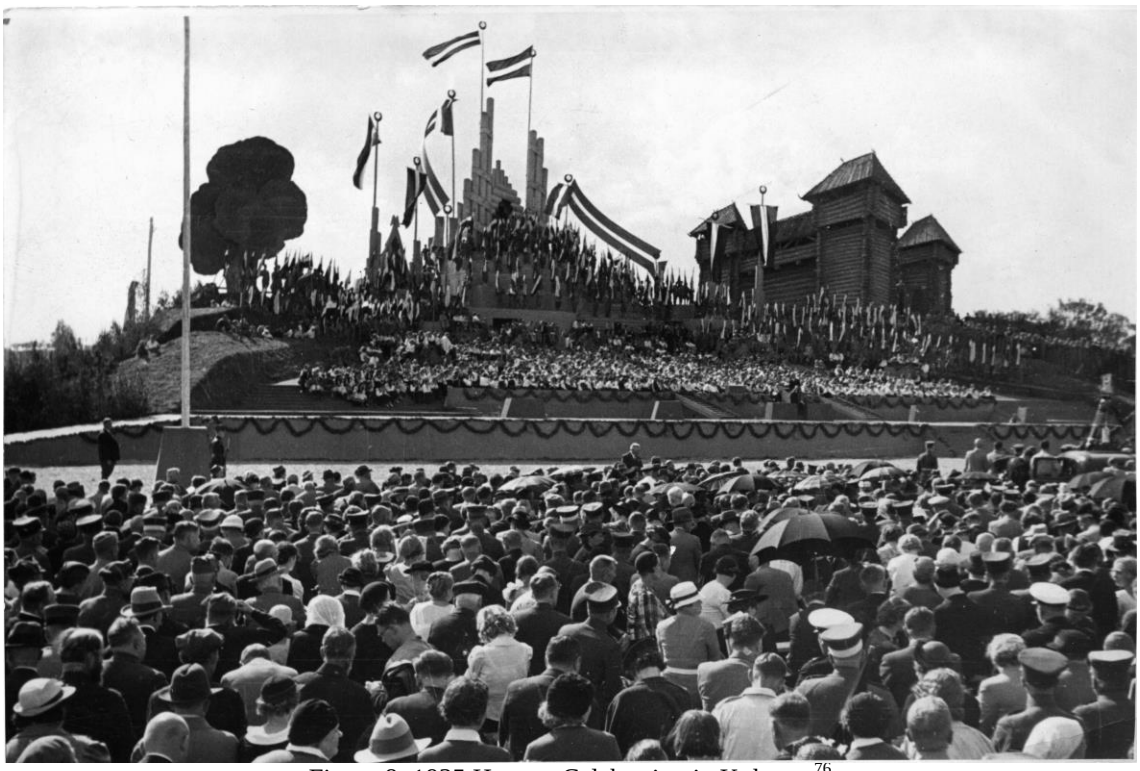


Figure 8: 1935 Harvest Celebration in Koknese[76]

For example, the 1935 iteration at the First Harvest Celebration involved 2,000 people representing various trades, jobs, and tasks. Participants were assembled in two ways. First their order in the parade was determined by the work calendar, meaning that, for example, the plowers and sowers came before the harvesters. Second, the marchers were also organized according to a teleological narrative of progress within each task. Consequently, the plowers, for instance, would begin with a plowman driving a horse and wooden plow. Then, as the parade progressed,

[75] "Tauta ar valdību: Prezidenta uzruna žurnālistiem," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 14, 1936, 13; "Galvas pilsētas jaunākie notikumi," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 11, 1936, 15.
[76] This image is courtesty of *Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs.*

each subsequent group of plowers marched across – always turning to face and salute with a raised arm the dignitaries in the front row – with subsequently more advanced tools and equipment, so that in this case the group of plowers ended with plowmen driving across brand new tractors and large steel plows.[77]



Figure 9: The work parade at the 1935 Harvest Celebration.[78]

[77] "2000 zemes kopēju darba parāde," *Rīts*, October 14, 1935, 10.
[78] This image is courtesy of *Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs.*



Figure 10: The work parade at the 1935 Harvest Celebration.[79]

Interestingly, the parade at the Second and Third Harvest Celebrations also took on a militaristic aspect. In these instances, in addition to telling a story of progress, the parade also spoke to the need for national defense. For example, immediately after the *Mazpulki* members and LLK leaders opened the parade, a large contingent of factory and trade members marched across the stage. Then, suddenly, and to the surprise of many, a group of *Aizsargi* calvary sped in front of the stage while recently purchased military airplanes flew directly over the festival grounds, suggesting, as the subsequent music apparently indicated, that Latvia's story of progress was only possible thanks to those who fought for and have guarded the fatherland.

[79] This image is courtesy of the Latvian National Library's "Zudusī Latvija" digital archive, accessed on May 22, 2014, http://www.zudusilatvija.lv/objects/object/8902/.

Naturally, this was quite an impressive display. Indeed, one observer later concluded that anyone who observed it "couldn't possibly doubt our will, our power, and our might."[80]

What makes this specific aspect of the Work Parade especially interesting, however, is that it seems to have been adapted from the German example. In fact, among the hundreds of thousands of archival documents on the Harvest Celebrations, there is a copy of LLK employee Valdemārs Bušs's fascinating four-page report on his May 1936 trip to an agricultural exhibition in Frankfurt, Germany. Among other observations, at the end of his memo, Bušs pointed out that the most popular event at the Frankfurt show, at least in his estimation, was when a squadron of military airplanes flew over, suggesting, as he reported, that air power will safeguard the farmyard.[81] Thus, archival evidence suggests that much like *Mazpulki*, another hallmark of the Ulmanis Times, at least some aspects of this principal celebration in Ulmanis's "Latvian Latvia" were shaped by transnational influences and direct borrowings.

-Five Year Achievement Exhibitions-

Following the Third Harvest Celebration in Jelgava, which was attended by more than 200,000 people, LLK and the regime decided to begin work on a new project, the so-called Five Year Achievement Exhibitions, rather than continue organizing future Harvest Celebrations. As the name of the project implies, the Five Year Achievement Exhibitions were organized to celebrate the five year anniversary of renewed Latvia and the Ulmanis regime. In all, there were four exhibitions: an art exhibition at the National Art Museum, an architectural exhibition at the University of Latvia, a general exhibition held at the Congress Hall (also in Rīga), and an agricultural exhibition located at former Harvest Celebration grounds in Jelgava. It is the last exhibition, the agricultural one, which will be discussed here.

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[80] "Darba parāde pļaujas svētkos," *Brīvā Zeme*, September 14, 1936, 7.
[81] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1604. l., 116.-126. lp.

Hoping to emulate the success of the Harvest Celebration exhibitions, LLK organized the five year agricultural achievements exhibition in a similar way. For example, there were pavilions devoted to the newest and greatest products from both private and state run cooperative companies. There were also buildings devoted to modern rural architecture, including booths about indoor plumbing, the wondrous benefits of electricity from the new Ķegums dam and hydroelectric plant, and more. Additionally, much space was devoted to the promise of research and technology. For instance, there was a large section on work tools and machines, and the organizers were careful to place the old, traditional tools next to the modern ones, so as to drive home the theme of progress. Furthermore, everywhere there were graphs and charts indicating the rise in productivity since 1934. For example, it was noted that red apple production in Latvia had gone from 116,000 kg in 1935 to 543,600 kg in 1938 and that the value of the exportation of Latvian flaxseed had jumped from 46,000 lats in 1935 to well over 900,000 lats in 1939.[82]

One of the most interesting parts of the exhibition was the propaganda and ideology pavilion. This housed the booths on *Mazpulki*, whose tremendous growth and valuable work during the Ulmanis Times was made vividly clear through images and charts. The rest of the building was devoted to a celebration of Latvian culture which, the regime emphasized, was rooted in the countryside. Thus, there were galleries of idyllic paintings and photos glorifying, even sacralizing, the Latvian land. As would be expected, there were also many items in the pavilion that portrayed Ulmanis as the mighty, productive *Saimnieks*. Most noteworthy among them were the images of and quotes from Ulmanis that were scattered throughout. Yet, by far the most impressive was the large "Zemes Saimnieks" ("Husbandman of the Land") statue of Ulmanis located at the primary entrance. Set against the backdrop of a panorama of photos

[82] *Atjaunotās Latvijas 5 gadu sasniegumu skates: lauksaimniecības izstāde Jelgavā no 15. jūnija līdz 2. jūlijam*, 201-210.

depicting the four historic regions of Latvia, and bracketed by quotes emphasizing Latvians' connections to the land, the statue of Ulmanis, which depicts him securely cradling a bundle of grain, was clearly meant to portray him as a common farmer, a protector, and the bearer of abundance.[83]

Aside from the pavilions, there were also a plethora of outdoor exhibits. For example, there were working displays of an American-made windmill and water pump, an exhibit on electric motors, and a live demonstration on organizing and caring for the farmyard's fruit trees, garden, and ornamental plants. Furthermore, periodically over the three and a half months that the exhibition was open, there were also livestock shows. However, the most popular section of the exhibition was unquestionably the tractor and machinery demonstration area, where onlookers could view rock drills, bulldozers, and tractors in action, thus learning first-hand about the marvels of industrial engineering and agriscience.[84]

As is evident from this basic description of the exhibition, which was attended by around 42,000 people, LLK made a concerted effort to link Ulmanis's leadership with progress—and specifically with a form of progress rooted in agrarian nationalism. These sorts of events and propaganda initiatives are difficult to assess, particularly in an authoritarian country with a censored press. However, there is a heretofore unexamined archival source that offers insights into the public's reaction: a *Mazpulki* essay competition which asked members to write on the question, "What did you like best about the exhibition, and why?" Furthermore, what makes the resulting essays even more interesting is that Ulmanis donated the prize money, an act of generosity that was widely reported in the press, including in *Mazpulks*.

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

Unfortunately, archival finding aids indicate that a substantial portion of the *Mazpulki* essays have either been lost or misplaced, so it is unclear how many essays were submitted in total. However, there are still hundreds remaining, a sample pool large enough to permit the drawing of general conclusions. First of all, it is interesting to examine the *Mazpulki* members' answers to the essay prompt. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the tractor and machinery demonstrations were their clear favorite. Another common answer, especially among the female students, was the model of a modern home, while a close third was the booth on Ķegums Dam and the benefits of electricity. Still, the answer the best speaks to the essayists' collective response was the electric fence on display. Noting that this was the first time he had ever seen such a fence, the author indicated that this was absolutely his favorite thing at the exhibition because it meant that if his father were to use it, "then I won't any longer have to go to round up the livestock."[85] In other words, the *Mazpulki* members generally liked best those things which they believed would improve or enrich their lives. In fact, some students even indicated that what they enjoyed most at the exhibition was, as one boy put it, simply thinking "about which parts of everything I saw could be used in my own life."[86]

Interestingly enough, despite the impressive statue of Ulmanis and the fact that he personally sponsored the essay competition, no student indicated clearly that anything Ulmanis-related was their favorite. That it is not to say, however, that Ulmanis is nowhere to be found in the essays. Rather, many students extolled him as the wise *Saimnieks*. For example, one *Mazpulki* member, having given an overview of the exhibition, explained that "Latvians have only achieved all of this because our grand Saimnieks, our beloved Leader stands at the forefront

[85] LVVA, 1690.f. ,4. apr., 1752. l., 118. lp.
[86] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1752. l., 109.-110. lp

of our homeland."[87] Additionally, many other essayists regularly used a variety of Ulmanis's quotes in their description of the exhibition, such as his oft-used line "Force in Unity," or his directive, "From this land we have grown – for this land we must bind ourselves together." Furthermore, still other writers expressed positive thoughts about the progress of renewed Latvia. For example, one student concluded her essay with a firm belief in the future, writing, "When the whole pavilion is considered, then it is clear that our life has advanced in great measure." She continued, "We will learn and work, and if we follow the path set by our Leader, then in the next five years our achievements will be redoubled over and over again."[88]

Other writers were proud that the Ulmanis regime had made work easier and raised agricultural productivity, because they felt it improved the status of the Latvian nation. For instance, one essayist mentioned that Latvia has depended too heavily on an influx of agricultural workers from abroad. Therefore, the student ended with the emphatic assertion, "Today the rationalization of work is strongly propagandized, and machines are the most direct way of aiding work. If more machines are used, foreign workers will not be needed any longer, and then Latvian land will only be plowed by Latvian plows."[89] Yet another student commented that it will be a glorious day when Latvia no longer needs "foreign farmers."[90]

In summation, by using these essays not only to examine the public response to this exhibition, but also to the entirety of the regime's legitimizing rhetoric, we can conclude a number of things. First, with regard to a possible cult of Ulmanis, it seems that everyone involved – from Ulmanis all the way down to young essay writers – preferred to think of renewed Latvia as the epoch of the *Saimnieks*. As a corollary, the period of authoritarian rule in

[87] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1752. l., 179. lp
[88] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1752. l., 83.-85. lp.
[89] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1752. l., 91.-92. lp.
[90] LVVA, 1690. f., 4. apr., 1752. l., 93.-95. lp.

Latvia was not marked by a god-like worship of Ulmanis. To be sure, if anything was extoled with a religious zeal it was progress, particularly agricultural progress, since Latvians viewed themselves as a nation of farmers. In part, this is because Ulmanis seemed to desire this outcome. Certainly he had studied Hitler and Mussolini, among others, but Ulmanis did not turn to authoritarianism because he wanted to become a demigod. Rather, Ulmanis decided to join the ranks of European interwar dictators because he hoped he could improve Latvia's future.

As this chapter has shown, Ulmanis believed he could do so by rallying Latvians around their shared agricultural ancestry and modernizing the agricultural industry. Therefore, Ulmanis's fascism, which might best be termed "agrarian fascism," was certainly not anti-modern. Instead, the fascism of renewed Latvia sought to create an alternative modernity in which the wheels of progress did not crush the countryside, leaving it empty and desolate, but rather worked to renew it, bringing farmers back to the forefront of the nation and society—and as the great *Saimnieks*, Ulmanis was no different.

Conclusion

For a man whose sole driving passion was agriculture, seemingly the simplest and most peaceful of occupations, Kārlis Ulmanis lived an extraordinarily complex and troubling life. His desire to obtain an advanced education and help Latvian farmers eventually took him to Switzerland, Germany, and America. It also put him at the forefront of Latvian politics, for he believed, and rightfully so, that the agricultural question in the modern period was inextricably intertwined with the political one. Thus, wedded only to the ideology of progress and positivism, and a drive to ensure that Latvia was firmly rooted in the West, Ulmanis seemingly had no qualms about abandoning democracy in favor of the authoritarian path. Indeed, as his careful study of the New Deal, Fascist Italy, and the Third Reich suggests, Ulmanis perhaps believed that the one naturally led to the other, as authoritarianism and fascism were, in a sense, premised on the absolute rule of the majority.

As that outline of his career implies, for as much as Ulmanis initiated his own challenges and obstacles through his career choices and professional activities, his actions were continuously prompted and shaped by forces and events beyond his control. In that sense, then, the ebbs and flows of Ulmanis's life, like that of so many other residents of Central and Eastern Europe, were actuated by the powerful and often contradictory currents of the twentieth century. Thus, Ulmanis, not unlike the Latvian state and Central and Eastern Europe as a whole, was in turn animated and affected by revolution, war, nationalism, communism, democracy, and authoritarianism, among others. Interestingly, rather than try to shield or insulate both himself and Latvia from these currents, Ulmanis chose instead to internationalize Latvian politics and culture – whether by adopting American 4-H, parliamentary democracy, or amending the fascist

model – believing that it was the best way to ensure Latvia's progress and membership in the West.

Consequently, it is truly one of the greatest ironies of Ulmanis's life that while he hoped that embracing international trends would guarantee Latvia's continued existence, in the end it was an international conflict over those currents or trends that ultimately led to the demise of Latvian independence, as well as to Ulmanis's imprisonment and death. About the Second World War, Ulmanis has often been criticized by his detractors for being ignorant of the events abroad that preceeded it. This is a completely baseless charge. In truth, Ulmanis was astutely aware of developments outside of Latvia, as his newspaper clippings confirm, and this was also the case with the run up to the Second World War. For example, readers in the Latvian State Historical Archive will find that Ulmanis was rather worried about war and understood that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 was a monumental and perhaps paradigm-shifting development.[1] However, Ulmanis apparently decided there was little he could do to save Latvia, and thus he stood watch helplessly as the Soviets strong-armed their way into his country with the so-called "mutual assistance pact" of October 1939, which "permitted" the establishment of Soviet military bases in Latvia. The other shoe, so to speak, dropped on June 15, 1940, when Red Army troops attacked Latvian border guards in Masļenski. Already by June 17, Soviet tanks were rumbling into Rīga.

Paradoxically, for all the talk during the Ulmanis Times about confidence, initiative, and positive thinking, the Soviet invasion that ended the era of renewed Latvia was met with solemnness, inactivity, and deference to fate. Ulmanis even said as much in his radio address that day, when his last words to the Latvian people were "I shall remain in my place, you remain in

[1] LVVA, 5969. f.,1. apr., 246. l., 25. lp.

yours."[2] However, Ulmanis did not exactly remain in his place, because later that day, before the rapidly approaching Soviet forces would restrict his movement, he went for one last car ride through Rīga. A tragically beautiful, sunny day, Ulmanis was driven around Rīga in his convertible. Rīgans were not unaware of what the day perhaps would bring, yet rather than a scene of general panic and mass unrest, the streets of Rīga were calm and eerily quiet. According to Žanis Unāms, who witnessed Ulmanis's last tour of the city and later wrote about his memories of that day, Ulmanis sat all alone in the back seat, stoically admiring the beauty of the Latvian capital. This time, unlike in the past, Ulmanis did not stand and enthusiastically wave to onlookers; and for their part, the onlookers did not greet him with a raised arm or any of the other gestures used during the previous five years. Instead, people tipped their caps or waved ever so tentatively, and Ulmanis responded in kind. It was a simple yet genuine and humane gesture in an age of madness.[3]

Although the Soviets had earlier promised Ulmanis that he would be permitted to go into exile in Switzerland, on July 22, 1940, they put him on a train headed east. Eventually, Ulmanis was imprisoned in present-day Stravopole. However, with the Germans' push into the Soviet interior, Ulmanis was moved in August 1942 to Türkmenbaşy (Krasnovodsk) in modern-day Turkmenistan, where he reportedly died of poor health in September 1942.[4]

Ulmanis suffered a tragic ending to his rule and, ultimately, to his life. To make matters even more terrible, one could contend that his entire life's work was all for naught, as Latvia lost its independence, whereupon the Soviet occupiers collectivized Latvia's independent farms and sent to gulag camps many of Latvia's best capitalistic "kulak" farmers, whom Ulmanis had

[2] Dunsdorfs, 376.
[3] Unāms, *Dzīva Latvija*, 60-61.
[4] See Indulis Ronis, "Kārlis Ulmanis Latvijas brīvvalsts likteņa stundās un viņa Golgātas ceļš," 167.

praised and encouraged and sought to make the bedrock of society.[5] In this sense, Ulmanis was truly a tragic figure. However, not unlike how Ulmanis's image was bolstered following the first period of Soviet rule in Latvia under Stučka during the War of Independence, ironically Ulmanis took on a cult of personality following the loss of Latvian independence. He became, in a sense, a "vehicle of nostalgia," serving as a point of reference for the better times of the past, as well as an emblematic figure of Latvian suffering.[6] Therefore, it was only in death that Ulmanis became a Latvian demigod of sorts, and it was during the Soviet period when Latvians began to refer to the 1930s as the glory days of "the Ulmanis Times."

Today, Ulmanis remains an iconic figure in Latvian history. In fact, one can buy a brand of *kvass*, a fermented rye bread drink, called "Ulmanis Times Kvass." Even the logo looks like something straight out of the 1930s: a large stein surrounded by heads of rye with the words "*Ulmaņlaiku kvass*" in an old-style script. Perhaps even more telling, however, is a painting that was on display at a 2012 art exhibit in Rīga. Painted in a cartoon-inspired fashion, the work shows the upper bodies of four men, all of whom are wearing t-shirts. On each shirt is an iconic logo: the Apple Inc. apple, the McDonalds golden arch, the face of SpongeBob SquarePants, and a front profile of Ulmanis. Unfortunately, the artist did not explain the painting, so it is open to interpretation whether it was meant as a criticism of Ulmanis's mostly positive historical legacy, or as a stimulating call for a new look at Latvia's most famous figure. Either way, it is my sincere hope that this work will enrich our understanding of interwar Latvia and the iconic yet misunderstood man who shaped it.

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[5] See Jānis Labsvīrs, *The Sovietization of the Baltic States: Collectivization of Latvian Agriculture, 1944-1956* (S.l.: Taurus, 1988); Aldis Purs, "Soviet in Form, Local in Content: Elite Repression and Mass Terror in the Baltic States, 1940-1953," in *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 19-38.

[6] On the topic of history and vehicles of nostalgia, see especially Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, "The Dimensions of Nostalgia," *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1989), 2-4.

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Vita

Jordan Tyler Kuck was born and raised in south central Nebraska. The son of Kallen and Kristy Kuck, Jordan attended Bertrand Community School, graduating in 2001 with top honors. He subsequently attended the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where he graduated *summa cum laude* in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts in History with a minor in Political Science. Jordan began graduate school at the University of Nebraska at Kearney in 2005. He graduated *summa cum laude* in 2007, and his thesis, "The Legacy of '*Vadonis*' Ulmanis: Kārlis Ulmanis, Past, Present, and Future,", advised by Dr. Carol Lilly, was selected as the runner-up for the best graduate thesis. Before beginning his doctoral work, Jordan worked as a copywriter at Information Technology, Inc. (now Fiserv, Inc.), where he produced literature on information technology software for the financial service industry. Jordan commenced his doctoral studies in modern European history at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2008. His dissertation, titled "The Dictator without a Uniform: Kārlis Ulmanis, Agrarian Nationalism, Transnational Fascism, and Interwar Latvia," was advised by Dr. Vejas Liulevicius.

During his career, Jordan has won a number of major prizes, including a Fulbright Fellowship, a U.S. Department of Education FLAS Fellowship, and an AABS Dissertation Research Grant, among others. In 2011, he received the Chancellor's Extraordinary Professional Promise Award, and in October 2013 was named a University of Tennessee Quest Scholar of the Week. Jordan's publications include *A Century of Sports at the University of Nebraska at Kearney* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), co-authored with Mark Ellis, and multiple articles and reviews, which have appeared in such venues as *Fascism: The Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, and *Buffalo Tales*. Finally, Jordan has been an active member of the academic community,

presenting research at conferences in the U.S., Germany, and Latvia. He has also given invited guest talks on his research at various venues in the U.S. and Latvia.