

Flags and Bayonets

Mass Celebrations in Riga 1910-1920

by

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During the years of world war, revolution and civil war from 1914 to 1920, the city of Riga experienced massive shifts in population,¹ revolution, hunger and several changes of political regime. These regimes all took the opportunity, despite the turmoil of the period, to present themselves to the world against the backdrop of Riga.

In this essay, I will describe and discuss some of these celebrations, beginning with the unveiling of the monument to Peter the Great, which took place before the war (July, 1910) in the presence of the emperor himself. It reflected the feudal elements of society and the self-image of the Tsar as supreme representative of the Russian people. Eight years later, the city – now “liberated” by German arms – celebrated the birthday of Kaiser Wilhelm II as part of the German world. In 1919, the Mayday parade and celebrations under Bolshevik auspices and the one year jubilee of Latvian independence both reflected totally different regimes, the radical, ideological world of communist Russia and the western-oriented Latvian democracy respectively. None of the events of the war years was comparable in scope, complexity or pageantry to the events of July, 1910. No festive event in time of war could consume so many resources or involve so much planning. The events are interesting nonetheless because they so vividly demonstrate the drama of the war years in a colorful way. They allow us to compare the regimes that came through Riga’s revolving door in quick succession by looking at them as they chose to present themselves. We can observe which events each polity found meaningful, how these were celebrated, which symbols and interpretations were offered to the population for their “consumption”, and what role the current crises played in these interpretations. We can in some cases also note the “clientele”. Each regime had some support in part of the population, usually based on ethnic and class categories. No regime enjoyed total support. Several of

¹ An article on the demographic changes in Riga from 1914 to 1920 is due to appear in *Baltische Seminare*, probably in 2003. In it, I discuss the refugee problem, the evacuation of the city in 1915, and what these population shifts meant for the ethnic composition of the city and its *Stadtteile*.

the major events will be discussed in greater detail. I will show how each celebration shed light on both the larger context in which the city found itself as well as on the particular situation in the city itself at the time of the celebration. These festive events show how one city could provide not only the stage for several seemingly incompatible performances within a short, dramatic period of time, but also thousands of willing and often not-so-willing actors.

His Imperial Majesty in Riga, July 1910

The years before the First World War saw several jubilee celebrations with the participation of the Tsar. 1909 was the bicentennial of the battle of Poltava, 1912 the centennial of the Borodino battle, and 1913 the tricentennial of the establishment of the Romanov dynasty as rulers of the Russian state. These events took the sovereign and his suite to the locations of the events concerned for several days of parades, receptions, banquets, concerts and other festivities. For Nicholas, these celebrations were intended to strengthen the bond between Tsar and the people of the Russian Empire. He saw himself as the embodiment of the national myth, the personification of Russia. For him, it was an opportunity to show rapport with the army, meet Russian peasants, whom he considered to be the real people, and distance himself from the Empire's elite (primarily the Duma and the nobility). As with similar celebrations in other European countries, the celebrations were meant to express national consensus under the leadership of the monarch.²

The bicentennial of the siege and conquest of Riga in 1710 was similar in theme to the military anniversaries of Poltava and Borodino. But the monarchical element was strong as well. The event being celebrated was the political annexation of Livonia by the Empire more than the battle for Riga itself, which made it symbolically comparable to the founding of the Romanov dynasty for Russia, celebrated three years later. The visit of Nicholas II to Riga was the most elaborate and thoroughly prepared of the celebrations discussed here, so I will begin with a detailed description.

In September of 1908, the governor of Livonia asked the city administration of Riga to select a place to erect a monument to commemorate Peter the Great, the capture of the city and the addition of Livonia to the Russian Empire in 1710. The city fathers quickly agreed upon a location, where the Freedom Monument currently stands, and in November they were informed that the Tsar himself would be coming to Riga to unveil the statue. It was to be the first visit by a Tsar to Riga in 43 years. A committee was formed to make all the necessary preparations. It included the governor, the mayor, representatives of the nobility, the guilds and the *Börsenkomitee* and thus reflected the

² The seminal work on these events is RICHARD S. WORTMAN: *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. Vol. II, Princeton 2000. These interpretations were borrowed from pages 421-422 and 524-528.

local power structure. They organized fund-raising in those areas acquired by Russia in 1710 and collected almost 90,000 Rubles, mostly from the nobility. The city of Riga invested 28,000 Rubles in the statue and 400,000 Rubles in a variety of city improvements including new cobble-stones for streets; the new Peter Park; several hostels for children, the elderly and the poor; and new educational facilities.³

The day before the celebrations were to begin, the city was already in festive regalia. All the official buildings were covered with flags of various representation: the flags of Livland, of the Russian empire, Livonian cities, and the royal family covered the Riga castle, the House of the Black Heads, the *Rathaus* and other city and state structures. Other prominent structures were also in full parade uniform: the stock exchange was hung with flags and marked with huge numbers "1710-1910", the Russian Bank of Foreign Trade on Jacob Street was decked out in flags and the Hotel *Rossii* was lit up for the occasion. The churches spared no effort. The Lutheran cathedral was festively shrouded in pine wreaths, heraldic shields, and streamers. Four giant flags waved from the St. Peter's tower. Triumphal arcs crossed several of the main city avenues. The city was already filled with visitors: schoolchildren from all over the Baltic provinces being led through the city by their teachers, luxurious automobiles and expensive carriages carrying nobility or state dignitaries through the crowded streets, thousands of tourists peeking at the commemorative souvenirs on display in the shop windows.⁴

The first day of festivities began after a night of rain, but the weather had markedly improved by noon. At twelve, the schoolchildren, dressed in white hats, the girls carrying flowers, and the professional and volunteer fire departments dressed in blue and red, marched out and lined the parade route. Near the *Schützengarten*, the members of the *Schützenverein* and the *Deutscher Verein* gathered in their uniforms. The German *Selbstschutz* stood at various positions, together with members of the *Deutscher Verein* in front of the *Ritterhaus* (today the Latvian *Saiema*), near the cathedral and near the royal pavilion. Near the pavilion there were also representatives of the Rus-

³ See *Kratkii obzor deyatel'nosti Rizhskoi gorodskoi upravly za 1910 g.* [A short overview of the activity of the Riga city administration in 1910], Riga 1911; WILHELM VON BULMERINQC: *Lebenserinnerungen*, Wolfenbüttel 1952, pp. 30-34; Petrovskiiia *Torzhestva v g. Rige v Vysochaishem prisutstvii i uchastie v nikh obshchestvennykh uchrezhdenii* 3, 4 i 5 iyulia 1910 g. [The Peter Festivities in the city of Riga in the presence of His Imperial Majesty and the participation in them of public organizations on the 3rd, 4th and 5th of July, 1910], Riga 1911; two reports from von Hintze, a German military representative in St. Petersburg, made to the Foreign Office, dated 23.7.1910 and 2.8.1919 in AA, R 10198; and in contemporary Riga newspaper articles. One of the most detailed sources is the booklet: *Die Kaisertage in Riga am 3., 4. und 5. Juli 1910*.

⁴ Descriptions of the events can be found in the sources listed in footnote 1 and in: *Rizhskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, no. 13-17, 1910; Much of the information in these accounts overlaps. Detailed lists of participants at some events are documented as well in GARF f. 435/1/2, pp. 70-72; GARF 435/1/3, pp. 81, 83, 97, 98.

sian population, many in national costume. The police let traffic continue as normal for as long as possible, before closing the parade route to make way for the Tsar.

Crowds of people lined the Daugava banks on the opposite side of the river. Cavalry blocked the riverbank on the Old City side, permitting only the designated school children, state and city authorities, and the honor guard to enter. The dignitaries included Stolypin, General Kurlov, the minister of war, army and navy officers, the Livonian *Landrüte* and the *Landmarschall* Baron Pilar v. Pilchau, mayor Armistead, the head of the circuit court, the curator, and members of the city council. The wives of these authorities waited out on the river in the steamer *Condor* until the royal yacht *Shtandart* appeared. The Tsar disembarked and entered the city.

Having been greeted by the minister of the royal court, he was welcomed first by the representatives of the military and inspected the waiting honor guard Vyazma-Regiment. The national anthem was played. Again and again, the waiting schoolchildren, the sailors on the torpedo boats in the river, and the public standing on nearby balconies cheered Nicholas with shouts of "hurrah". The Tsar spent a few moments with the commanders of the local military units before the ceremonial march of the honor guard marched past the Tsar, who greeted them and was answered by cheers from the soldiers.

Only then was it the mayor's turn. He awaited the Tsar in the nearby tent and handed him salt and bread as a sign of welcome. This was followed by greetings by the landed nobility, then by the civil authorities, introduced by the governor. Then the Tsar boarded his carriage and, to the sound of church bells, musical bands, and the cheers of the crowds of schoolchildren, clubs and organizations, rode into Old Riga and through the Via Triumphalis on Nickolas Street. His entourage followed in countless carriages and automobiles. Meanwhile, the wives, escorted by the Mrs. Armistead, the mayor's wife, were taken aboard the *Shtandart* to enjoy tea and cakes with Her Royal Highness and the royal daughters.

The Tsar's column arrived at the Russian Orthodox cathedral, where crowds of people were waiting. The archbishop was the first to greet him. Following the liturgy, the archbishop, the abess of the Holy Trinity Sergius convent and a representative the Orthodox Peter-Paul brotherhood presented the Tsar with holy icons. Earlier that day, there had been a morning liturgy in preparation for the arrival of His Majesty in the Orthodox cathedral. The head archpriest Pliss held a sermon which expressed the attitude of the Russian church toward the coming event. The conquest of Livonia and Riga in 1710 meant not only the acquisition of territory for Russian settlement and contact with the West, but also the renewal of Orthodox Christianity in the Baltic region. According to Pliss, Russians should stand up as Russians and resist Protestantism and Catholicism, which had taken hold in the area, and strive to unify all of Russia under the one, true faith. The tens of thousands of conver-

sions to Orthodoxy since the annexation were evidence that it was possible to unify the Baltic with the Russian people.⁵ This motif – the Russian Orthodox church promoting national unity through common faith – was typical of Russian mass celebrations of the period and central to the national ideology of the regime.⁶

The royal carriage then carried the Tsar to the *Domplatz*, where he was greeted first by the President of the Livonian Consistory and representatives of the Riga Lutheran church administration, then by the reformed congregation and Lutheran churches in the Patrimonial area. Von Hintze, a German military diplomat, noted his disappointment that the Germans had not found more confident words on this occasion. In the Lutheran cathedral, “A Mighty Fortress is our God” was played and the Tsar addressed the local clergy. After a brief tour of the building, the Tsar then left the church after a total of about 20 minutes. According to von Hintze, he openly displayed his disinterest throughout the visit.⁷ Outside, he was greeted by the cheers of the crowd.⁸

The next station was the House of the Black Heads, where the Tsar was greeted by the guild leadership, then to the *Ritterhaus* for a reception with the nobility, and then to supper on the royal yacht. Between each station, the Tsar was cheered by crowds and by schoolchildren who lined the route.

The next day, there was another Orthodox service before the unveiling of the statue. It was christened by the Orthodox clergy and inspected by His Highness. After a military parade, there were wreath-layings at the feet of the statue: first a military unit, then 14 marshals of the nobility, followed by wreaths from the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow, the Livonian nobility and Oesel, the city of Riga, other Livonian cities, and the nobility of Couronia.

The noon meal was taken with court and city officials. The afternoon began with a short reception at Riga castle, where the Tsar met with representatives of the guilds, leading merchants, an organization of Russian merchants, factory owners, the Orthodox Latvian Consistory, the Old-Believer society, Russian organizations, the United Polish Societies, the Rifle Club, the Committee of the Latvian Jubilee Singing Festival, the Society of Property Owners, the Jewish Society, the Women’s Committee for Animal Defense, a children’s home, and representatives of the city of Mitau and the Baltic Orthodox Brotherhood. In the courtyard of the castle he met representatives of local towns and rural areas and the Russian population of Dorpat.

Mid-afternoon was taken up with a party in the Kaiser Garden with the same groups of people from the castle and representatives of foreign consulates and societies. There was some public access to these events for those

⁵ Rizhskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti, no. 13-14, 1-15.7.1910, pp. 438-444.

⁶ See WORTMAN (cf. footnote 2), pp. 525-526.

⁷ AA R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, p. 4.

⁸ Die Kaisertage (cf. footnote 3), pp. 23-25. See also a detailed account in P. G. HILLUER: Der Kaiserbesuch im Rigaer Dom, Riga 1910.

with special tickets. After the choirs sang the anthem "God Protect the Tsar", they struck up two Russian songs followed by two Latvian songs. Next the United German Male choir intoned two German songs. The Tsar proceeded to the Nicholas *Gymnasium* to meet with schoolchildren and watch them perform gymnastics, flag presentations and a ceremonial march. In the evening, he visited the *Ritterhaus* where the Livonian nobility hosted 700 prominent guests. In an act which apparently made an impression on the visiting Russians, the Germans used this opportunity to display some self-confidence. When the Tsar entered the hall, the Marshal of the Nobility did not step up to greet him at the doorway, but waited in the center of the room for the Tsar to come to him while the rest of the nobles bowed. This self-confidence apparently miffed Stolypin and some others from His Majesty's entourage, but impressed the Tsar.⁹ The rest of the evening was marked by continuous praise of the Tsar but, as a German diplomat later remarked, "[...] sie waren die Huldigungen deutscher Edelleute und nicht die sklavischen Schmeicheleien russischer Bojaren und Dienstmannen. Schade! Der Zar ist mehr auf letztere abgestimmt!"¹⁰

On the third day, Nicholas II was taken to nearby Kurtenhof for a military parade and the unveiling of another monument to Peter the Great and then to the new Peter Park to plant trees and meet local sporting clubs, city officials and their wives, and members of the nobility. Then the Tsar and his family, escorted by Mayor Armistead and others, inspected the harbor. The royal yacht left Riga with an escort of warships. Crowds lined the river to cheer and salute. On the following day, there was a garden party for local dignitaries and a "commoners' party" (*Volksbelustigung*) near the Paul church, on the Kobern meadow and at the horse market.

Hettling and Nolte describe a typical mass festivity as being made up of a "mystery" and a "procession".¹¹ The "mystery" was the founding event or the great break with previous history that all such celebrations are used to remember. The Tsar's presence as ruler re-connected Riga to the events of 1710 and to the Russian monarchy. It symbolized and emphasized the imperial aspect throughout. The central event – the unveiling of the statue – brought a Russian imperial symbol even closer to the heart of the city than the Orthodox cathedral had been. Riga and Livland were symbolically associated first and foremost with their Russian history, dating back two centuries, as opposed to its German history of seven centuries or a primordial Latvian myth. Riga was reminded of its Russian roots and its place in a wider specifically Russian context and the local elite reminded of the source of its privi-

⁹ AA R 10198, letter from German embassy in St. Petersburg to Bethmann Hollweg dated 6 August 1910, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ AA R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, p. 7.

¹¹ MANFRED HETTLING, PAUL NOLTE: *Bürgerliche Feste als symbolische Politik im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *Bürgerliche Feste*, ed. by MANFRED HETTLING and PAUL NOLTE, Göttingen 1993, pp. 11-12.

leges (the person of the Emperor). Nicholas symbolically associated himself with the great achievements of his ancestors¹² and tried to show himself, even on this almost foreign venue, to be the representative of the people, the most Russian of Russians. Richard Wortman has noted this nationality doctrine in pre-war Russian imperial ceremony and showed how it was intended to symbolically make the subjects of the Empire partners in their own subordination by equating the specifically Russian Tsar with "the people".¹³ But unlike the other venues of Poltava or Moscow, this symbolic language was hardly compatible with Riga's historical situation, where neither "the people" nor many of the elite were Russian. The results, as will be shown below, were mixed.

In such ceremonies, the "procession" was intended to dissolve the division between the symbolized reality being presented on the one hand and the public on the other. By involving the public in the events, the public was supposed to identify with the symbols and the interpretation being offered. There was no ceremonial participation by large numbers of people beyond lining up to meet the Tsar or watching his carriage roll past. Direct participation was limited to those who already identified with the event: military, clergy, nobility, officialdom.

The protocol reflects the prominent role of the military in the way in which the regime wanted the event remembered. The Tsar not only greeted the military first, before the mayor, the empire officials, or representatives of the local elite, but he spent more time with them. The unveiling of the statue was accompanied again by a military formation and a military parade. Peter was displayed as a warrior-leader, in full uniform, a conqueror on his horse. The first to lay their wreaths were the local military units. This was consistent with Nicholas' affinity for the military, especially at ceremonial events.¹⁴

While mass celebrations were memorable for their pageantry and festiveness, they were not extraordinary in their expression of the socio-political order. Generally, they did not interrupt that order or put it on hold, but rather reflected, emphasized and reinforced it. The Riga protocol of July 1910 reflects the concentric circles of power in the Russian Empire: the Tsar in the middle, furthest away from the "masses", surrounded by his court entourage and imperial generals and military, then the local political, religious and economic

¹² This is an association Nicholas made again and again throughout his reign. See WORTMAN (cf. footnote 2), chapters 12 and 13.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 525.

¹⁴ Ibidem, especially pp. 413-414 and chapter 15. Wortman also discusses the statue of Alexander III and its unpopularity on aesthetic and symbolic grounds, pp. 426-428. I have found nothing in the sources to indicate that the Peter statue in Riga was subjected to similar criticism at the time. It has become the focus of controversy in Riga today, however, for obvious reasons. It was evacuated in 1915 and sunk by a German submarine on the way east. The statue has recently been restored and returned to Riga.

elite, finally the participation in some aspects of the ceremonies by clubs and organizations, and, on the outside, the cheering crowds, apparently cut off from direct participation at the center, relegated to watching the parades and then participating in carnival games only after the Tsar had left the city. Certain aspects of the protocol acknowledge, for example, the importance of the economic elite for life in Riga: the prominence of place accorded to the various banks and economic institutions and their decorations on the festive face of the city, the high rank given to their representatives at certain receptions – these elements reflect their importance for Riga itself.

The newspaper accounts and the booklets describing the events all note the efficiency and productivity of the local administration and showing off its “im Laufe der Jahrhunderte entwickelte kulturelle Eigenart”¹⁵ in all its majesty. “Eigenart” meant, of course, the German influence. German publications acknowledge again and again how much the Germans owed to the Tsar for allowing their unique culture to thrive on Russian territory and the great thankfulness of the German population for that privilege.

Riga was somewhat typical for Eastern Europe in the sense that social class and ethnicity traditionally corresponded. The ceremony’s compromise between local culture and imperial symbolism required, therefore, that the social elite – traditionally mainly German – be both on display and in the shadows. The fact that this traditional correspondence between nationality and social strata had been dissolving during the modernization of the city made the hereditary German nobility a likely compromise for the organizers which sidestepped the problem of national loyalty. Featuring the Livonian *Ritterschaft* at several events gave the Germans their due, but only in a feudal context. Specifically German elements in the modern sense were not desired. If a German had not been mayor – indeed, he was actually a descendent of the small English colony in Riga – German representation would not have exceeded Polish representation by much at all, religious aspects being the exception, where the Tsar neglected to visit a Catholic church.

It is difficult to draw a definite conclusion on the choice of symbols with regard to questions of nation and empire. The mixing of imperial, multiethnic, multi-confessional, Tsar-oriented imagery on the one hand, and specifically Russian national symbolism on the other was obvious throughout: The Russian Orthodox clergy received more time on the schedule than all the other religious representatives combined, Russian organizations were over-represented at gatherings and were first in line to greet the monarch and present him with bread and salt. Russian songs were sung first – followed by Latvian and then German songs. The protocol gives the impression that Riga was not just a city in the Russian Empire, but a thoroughly Russian city with a few quaint minorities. But there is little consensus among the eye-witnesses about whose symbols and actions were predominant. A German diplomat noted that the

¹⁵ Die Kaisertage (cf. footnote 3), p. 68.

ceremonies were very Russian in character, but that the government found it unavoidable to acknowledge the "German element" on several occasions¹⁶ and, as pointed out above, the local German elite did use the opportunity for some *Selbstbehauptung*. The protocol employed in Riga was borrowed from traditions used in other imperial ceremonies but adapted to local conditions, which meant that non-Russian themes could not be avoided.

According to one observer, participation was controlled both by the organizers and by voluntary non-participation by certain groups. The Polish population, who made up more than five percent in Riga, generally stayed away out of protest against the government's recent anti-Polish measures. Latvian socialists were considered a security risk and kept away (see below). "Das lettische Element war nur durch eine Anzahl Leute aus dem Mittelstand, die ihre Sünden aus der Revolutionszeit durch scheinbaren Patriotismus vergessen machen wollten und daher mit ihren Huldigungsbezeugungen besonders aufdringlich waren, vertreten." The festival leadership therefore called upon the nobility to use the *Deutscher Verein* as a provider of public backdrop. In addition, Old Believers from Riga and Livonia, known for their loyalty to the Tsar, were also called to line his carriage routes. "Das auf diese Weise künstlich zusammengestellte Publikum war dank geschickt inszenierter theatrialscher Verschiebung an allen Orten zur Stelle, die der Kaiser besuchte, und begrüßte den Monarchen mit begeisterten Zurufen."¹⁷ If this portrayal – which conflicts with the published accounts of broad participation and enthusiasm – is accurate, then the Tsar's visit to Riga offered virtually no opportunity for the common people supposedly so dear to His Majesty's heart to participate in the symbolism of the procession in any form. The representation of city clubs at some events makes it appear that at least a small, select number of ordinary citizens did get to see His Majesty up close, however.

The women (the wives of the elite) were treated to separate events (audiences with the Empress) or seated separately. They did not lead or orchestrate any aspect of the ceremonies. But children played a great role. All the descriptions of the events note how the schoolchildren lined every step of the Tsar's route. And the Tsar's visit to the school, where children from many schools – not just the schools of the local elite – were present, shows that they got some attention.

A further function of mass festivities was that of a safety valve used to let off pressure building between the social and political reality on the one hand and the idealized symbols on the other. The opportunity could be used to mock symbols, satirize, and protest in a way not usually allowed in non-democratic societies. The sources available give no hint of any such activity

¹⁶ AA R 10198, letter from German embassy to Bethmann Hollweg dated 6.8.1910, p. 2.

¹⁷ AA R 10198, letter from St. Petersburg to Bethmann Hollweg dated 6.8.1910, pp. 2-4.

in Riga.¹⁸ Agitation and protest were nipped in the bud. On the eve of the visit, there had been some fear of socialist violence. The Latvian section of the Social Democratic party printed some leaflets for the consumption of Riga's working class and for soldiers and sailors. They encouraged the "conscious workers" to not attend or acknowledge the Tsar's visit in any manner. They reminded the readers of the events of 1905 to 1907 and argued that the Tsar is a tyrant who is only coming to visit soldiers. The pamphlet addressed to the workers pointed out that the use of children to line the Tsar's path was just a ruse to protect His Majesty from bomb-throwing assassins. The pamphlets were confiscated by the police and it is not clear if the revolutionaries managed to get their message out another way and, if so, what effect it had. Shortly before the festivities in Riga, the group's cells in St. Petersburg were arrested.¹⁹ The Social Revolutionary Party appears to have been almost totally absent from Riga.²⁰ Security measures included large numbers of police and civilian-clothed "spies" in Riga and the mobilization of the *Selbstschutz* – men who had fought against the revolutionary Latvians four years before – to patrol the streets. 3,500 members of the local fire departments, students from the *Polytechnikum*, and trade guild members were also used to maintain order. Additional police were called in from Moscow and St. Petersburg, but they were kept in reserve and never used.²¹

There are two accounts of possible assassination attempts.²² According to a German diplomatic source, a "well-dressed man" tried to get into the House of the Black Heads during the Tsar's visit. When asked to present his invitation, he said he had "something better". He was searched and found to be carrying a loaded revolver. "Offenbar handelte es sich um einen Irrsinnigen." The incident was kept secret from the Tsar.²³ The future mayor of the city, Wilhelm Bulmerinqc, also mentions the arrest of a "man in a Russian shirt" without proper identification who gained access to the garden tent area where the Tsar was soon to appear.²⁴ The sources give no further indication of attempts at trouble-making.

Indeed, the sources are all in complete agreement that the events were very orderly and festive – even if the unpublished sources cited here indicate that

¹⁸ The tradition of using festivals to turn the tables on the elite had died out in Russia. See JAMES VON GELDERN: *Bolshevik Festivals 1917-1920*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1993, p. 107. He points out that tsarist festivals were not associated with rebelliousness.

¹⁹ GARF f. 435/1/5, pp. 31-34, 66, 73-75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-80.

²¹ BULMERINQC (cf. footnote 3), pp. 31-32; AA R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, pp. 1-2. The socialist leaflets also mention spies and additional police: GARF f. 435/1/5, pp. 31-34, 66, 73-75.

²² This does not include an incident at Kurtenhof when the overly-enthusiastic masses of people crowded up to the train as the Tsar was leaving and Cossacks had to beat the crowd back. See AA R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, pp. 9-10.

²³ AA f. R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, p. 5.

²⁴ BULMERINQC (cf. footnote 3), p. 34.

that was not the result of local agreement and conformity, but rather strict organization and police control. The surprising discipline of the Riga population is supposed to have been enough to convince the Empress to take part in the unveiling, which she had been planning to spend on the yacht with the sickly crown prince.²⁵ This is an indication that the success of the event probably served to reinforce the illusion of popularity and rapport with "the people" which Nicholas had been entertaining since the early years of his reign.²⁶

But the effect of the visit to Riga is ambiguous and, as was noted in the context of Nicholas' apparent boredom at the German cathedral, the foreignness of the venue for the Russian Tsar did not go unnoticed. Wortman has noted that the other jubilees had, from the perspective of the court, re-established the myth of loyalty to the Tsar that the Revolution of 1905 had dispelled. The "euphoria" experienced at these events had shown that the people had again rallied to the throne.²⁷ In the context of the Baltic, one of the centers of the Revolution and a region where the nationality issue was always considered a problem, the situation was far less clear.

According to a German diplomat, Nicholas was generally positive about the Riga visit, although he never drifted into superlatives about it. He would not compare it to the festivities in Poltava except to remark, speaking English, "Oh, that was quite another thing, the jubilee at Poltava had a widely different character, you know".²⁸

Stolypin, the interior minister and minister president, was less impressed. He duly noted the "un-Russian" character of the festivities, as he saw them. Von Hintze commented that both Stolypin and the Tsar had become convinced by the events in Riga that the province needs to become more Russian.²⁹

The ceremonies reflected the ambiguous loyalties of the Latvians and Germans to the monarchy, loyalties which the war would quickly force into the open. Ulrike von Hirschhausen has pointed out that the Germans of Riga tended to identify with their estate (in the sense of feudal class) and locale during this period, as opposed to the orientation to empire typical of the Russian citizenry and the Latvian aspirations for national culture. The main nationalities in the city adopted these three diverging orientations as a reac-

²⁵ The Tsarina's decision is explained in BULMERINQC (cf. footnote 3), p. 31.

²⁶ See WORTMAN (cf. footnote 2), pp. 13, 524-528. Indeed, this bond between the emperor and the people had been a major theme of imperial representation since 1855.

²⁷ Ibidem, pp. 396, 424, 528.

²⁸ AA f. R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, p. 11.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 12-13. In a later report, v. Hintze goes on to note that by August there was not much talk at the court about Riga any more. Only Minister Isvolsky was still talking about it in the context of his fight against anything non-Russian. Report by v. Hintze dated 2.8.1910.

tion to modernity.³⁰ As von Hintze put it, the festival was organized and carried out largely by the German elite “um dem Kaiser zu zeigen, dass sie gute Russen sind”, an attempt which, according to the same source, largely failed, because of their focus on the Emperor.³¹ The Germans were concerned with estate and their emphasis during the ceremonies was, to the extent possible, on the person of the monarch and their loyalty to him, and not on a more modern loyalty to the Russian Empire as such. This feudal attitude, that of a bilateral contract, is reflected in the course of later events. The German population saw the anti-German measures taken by the government in 1914 and 1915 as the Tsar’s betrayal of that contract. One of the most offensive measures was the banning of the *Deutscher Verein* – the very club which had been selected for special duty in 1910 because of its presumed loyalty. A rapid change of sides by the German population of the region followed. The Latvians, whose national and cultural orientation and aspirations had drawn many into the socialist camp as a form of opposition to the German nobility, were considered a threat at the ceremonies in 1910 and were kept at a distance. In 1914 and 1915, however, they proved to be among the empire’s most patriotic adherents, threatening to the public order only to the extent that their fervent anti-Germanism expressed itself in open hostility to the local German elite. The war would totally reverse the picture that the ceremonies of 1910 had tried to portray.

War and Revolution

The years of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War and the Latvian War of Independence were some of the most turbulent and dramatic in the history of the city of Riga. The wars brought economic isolation, the evacuation of its industry and monuments, the loss of much of its population, numerous regime changes and an intensification of ethnic conflict. The city was practically under siege from 1915 to 1917, during which period the city was flooded with military personnel from all over the Empire. Riga underwent economic ruin and mass evacuation of people, schools and industry in 1915, revolutionary upheaval in 1917 and 1919 and, in the fall of 1919, became a battlefield for several weeks. The sanitary conditions deteriorated dramatically and there was widespread hunger during much of this period.

During the ongoing crisis, there were numerous events that could be considered mass celebrations in the sense that they involved both the direction and preparation of officials and official bodies and masses of mostly anony-

³⁰ ULRIKE VON HIRSCHHAUSEN: *Stand, Region, Nation und Reich: Die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen im lokalen Raum Ostmitteleuropas. Das Beispiel Riga 1860-1914*, in: *Nationalismen in Europa. West- und Osteuropa im Vergleich*, ed. by ULRIKE VON HIRSCHHAUSEN and JÖRN LEONHARD, Göttingen 2001, pp. 372-397.

³¹ AA R 10198, report by v. Hintze dated 23.7.1910, p. 12.

mous participants and onlookers. The summary of main events below does not include more or less spontaneous demonstrations such as the patriotic rallies at the outbreak of the war (for which the statue of Peter the Great served as a gathering point), the celebrations of the capture of Lemberg in 1914, or the liberation of the Mitau quarter in 1919. It also does not include small but festive receptions of visiting dignitaries, nor protests such as illegal political demonstrations or the demonstrations of the women from the fish market ("*Fischweiber*") mentioned in the memoirs of a member of the Riga city council.³²

Summary of mass events in Riga during wars 1914-1920

| Date | Event | Description |
|----------------|---|---|
| July 1914 | Second All-Russian Olympic Games | Opening parade at hippodrome, sporting events in Kaiserwald, Riga Strand, and other venues ³³ |
| September 1914 | Arrival of Wondrous Icon of the Mother of God from a monastery in Pskov | Icon arrives at train station and is greeted by Orthodox clergy, city officials, and paraded with crowd to cathedral; liturgy ³⁴ |
| May 1917 | May Day celebration | Large demonstration/parade ³⁵ |
| September 1917 | Visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II | Kaiser views city three days after its capture, takes military parade, passes out medals on Esplanade |
| January 1918 | Celebration of Kaiser Wilhelm's birthday | see main text |
| September 1918 | Celebrations commemorating one year of German rule in Riga, | Parade of city, choral, student, sport, and other organizations through city center; church services; military parade on Esplanade |
| January 1919 | Burial of those Red Army members and revolutionaries who were killed capturing the city | Speeches, singing, ceremony and burial on Esplanade |
| May 1919 | May Day celebrations | see main text |

³² HELMUTH STEGMANN: Aus meinen Erinnerungen. IV. Im Dienst der Stadt Riga während des I. Weltkriegs. Baltische Hefte 17 (1971), pp. 206-248. *Fischweiber* on p. 228.

³³ Information on these events is very rare, perhaps because the war prevented and eclipsed efforts to record them in more permanent form. The Soviet press published short articles about it on anniversaries. Photos are extremely rare, probably because only one company was allowed to take pictures at all.

³⁴ See Rizhskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti, no. 19, 1.10.1914, pp. 565-566.

³⁵ For a brief description see MARGERS VESTERMANIS, G. GROZOVA, M. MISTRE: Pirmais Maijs Latvija (1893-1919). Vesturiska izzina [The First of May in Latvia (1893-1919). An historical investigation], Riga 1957, pp. 47-49.

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| November 1919 | Celebration of Liberation of Riga / First anniversary of Latvian independence | see main text |
| July 1920 | Good-bye ceremony for American Relief Administration feeding program | 2000 children from soup kitchens gather on Esplanade for ceremony; reception and concert in the <i>Musse</i> ³⁶ |
| October 1920 | Return of last Latvian riflemen from Siberia | see main text |

Kaisergeburtstag, January 1918

The celebrations of the birthday of Kaiser Wilhelm II on the 26th and 27th of January 1918 took place more than two years after the German army had taken up positions near the city's western environs and five months after German troops finally captured Riga. The city's population had dropped to less than half of what it had been on the eve of the war, had become somewhat more homogeneous. The proportion of Germans and Latvians had increased, while those of other groups had dropped. The economic base of the city – its trade and industry – had been ruined by war and evacuation, and there had been some plunder during the Russian withdrawal.

For many Latvians, whose famous riflemen had been fighting desperately to prevent the city's fall since 1915, it was the low point of the war.³⁷ The occupation period brought with it some marginalization of the Latvian population (although the Latvians were allowed a newspaper and a theater), even harsher living conditions, and isolation from the political life of Russia and the Latvian elite living in Moscow and Petrograd.

The liberation was an event celebrated by the local Germans, for whom it meant an end to harsh anti-German policies and a hope for a return of privilege. The birthday festivities for the German emperor were not unlike similar celebrations in Germany in years past.³⁸ But the *Rigasche Zeitung* remarked: "Wenn dieser Tag im Reich, dem Wunsche seiner Majestät und dem Ernste der Zeit entsprechend, äußerlich wohl ein weniger festliches Gepräge tragen

³⁶ See THOMAS J. ORBISON: Diary of Thomas J. Orbison written while on duty with the American Relief Administration. There is a copy in the Herder Institute library. It is a photocopy of a typewritten text with no additional information. Signatur: 46 VII K54, pp. 71-72.

³⁷ For an interesting Latvian perspective on the German conquest of the city and Kaiser Wilhelm's visit three days later, see ANNA BRIGADERE: *Dzels dure* [An Iron Fist], Riga 1993 (written in 1921), pp. 43-52. The Russian population had been most effected by the mobilizations and evacuations and had become a marginal factor in the city.

³⁸ Compare the descriptions offered in MONIKA WIENFORT: *Kaisergeburtstagsfeiern am 27. Januar 1907. Bürgerliche Feste in den Städten des Deutschen Kaiserreiches*, in: *Bürgerliche Feste* (cf. footnote 11), pp. 157-191.

wird als sonst, so ist er für uns im befreiten Riga doch ein Festtag von ganz besonderer Weihe und Bedeutung.”³⁹

The emphasis was on a presentation of state military power and glory. The measures taken to decorate the city were similar to what Riga had witnessed during the Tsar’s visit, but on a lesser scale than in 1910: black, white and red flags and portraits of Wilhelm II were hung from all prominent buildings, the shops displayed busts and images of the Kaiser or of historic events. Prior to the main events, the elementary and secondary schools celebrated with singing and other presentations by pupils. The evening of the 26th, the celebrations began in earnest with taps (*Großer Zapfenstreich*) in front of the governor’s offices, across from the Esplanade. In one of the two major events to take place in full public view, 200 soldiers and military musicians marched from there into the city center to the *Rathausplatz*, many carrying torches through the blacked-out streets, followed by large crowds of people.

That same evening, the German Soldiers Aid organization (*Kriegerhilfe*) held a celebration in the Small Guild (*St. Johannigilde*) which was filled to capacity with prominent guests including the mayor, the military governor and other officers, Prince Joachim of Prussia, and visiting Turkish dignitaries. The speeches by Governor v. Alten, the chairman of the *Kriegerhilfe Gouvernementspfarrer* Griesenbach, and by *Landrat* v. Sievers-Römershof all emphasized the unity of Germany with the Baltic Germans under the person of the German Kaiser, who was portrayed as the warlord who had made Russia into mere “geographic entity” (“*geographischer Begriff*”). In words typical of Baltic German sentiment at this time, v. Sievers-Römershof spoke about the faith that the local Germans had maintained throughout the war, faith in German greatness and in eventual liberation.⁴⁰

The next morning, the military was again front and center with a public reveille (*Großes Wecken*), which the *Rigasche Zeitung* called a “[...] reizvolle musikalische Neuerung für unser militärisch ungeschultes Riga”⁴¹, a rather strange claim, considering the recent history of the city. The churches were filled to capacity for special services while the Esplanade was shoveled free of snow for the parade to follow. At noon, General Count Kirchbach, escorted by Prince Joachim and other military dignitaries, inspected the troops, who were arranged in a large carré around the Esplanade, and led the men in four cheers for the Emperor. There was a salute fired from the *Basteiberg*, Iron Crosses awarded, and a military parade given. The afternoon and evening were spent with a banquet for the Army High Command at the House of the Black Heads, a governor’s party with 60 important, civilian *Herren* in the *Musse*, and a special performance of “*Freischuß*” at the German theater with

³⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 19, 23.1.1918.

⁴⁰ For the details of the event, see HEINRICH OELLERS: *Kaisers Geburtstag in Riga*, Berlin-Steglitz 1918, pp. 11-12; *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 23, 28.1.1918.

⁴¹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 23, 28.01.1918.

all the dignitaries. Speeches and concerts were held in soldiers' homes throughout the city.⁴²

Like the royal birthday celebrations in pre-war Germany, the military was the main public face of the event. It now symbolized more than royal power and prestige, however.⁴³ On the streets of wartime Riga, the German army brought the national theme into bold relief.

Indeed, the festivities focused solely on the German element – the symbols, the processions, the clientele. The press accounts nearly ignore the other population groups altogether. Indeed, the ethnic factor was considerably more modern than that on display eight years before. While the monarch got considerable attention, the rhetoric and symbols were decidedly more national. The Baltic Germans were now part of the German *Volk* and not merely a feudal estate, a transformation reflected in all aspects of the ceremony, but especially in the speeches. In 1910, the German nobility had made some effort to portray Riga as a host city for the Emperor and his entourage. Now, Riga had been demoted to the role of subject.⁴⁴

There is no evidence in the available sources of any attempt to protest or cause any problems at the festivities. There had been a small, abortive demonstration by Riga socialists on the anniversary of the 1905 revolution a few weeks before, but they were silent for the rest of the month.

The military aspects of the ceremony must have seemed much more directly meaningful to the participants than during the royal visit eight years before. In contrast to 1910, the army marching over the Esplanade and on *Rathausplatz* in January of 1918 was not the caricature of a conquering army from a distant century, put on display as an abstraction, with no real foe at hand. It was an army in field uniform with three years of combat experience, the same army that had recently conquered – or liberated – the city after a two-year siege. For many Germans, they were real heroes, visible manifestations of a hope now realized, the armed defenders of their dignity. For Latvians, they were an occupying army who had come, like the punishment expeditions after 1905, to more firmly route national ambitions. If the Tsar's parade army of 1910 was an abstract representation of "sedimented" war experience and symbolic memory, this army was a starkly current reflection of life in a city still at war.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See WEINFORT (cf. footnote 38), pp. 158–159, for the role of the German military in pre-war celebrations in Wilhelmian Germany.

⁴⁴ CHARLOTTE TACKE contrasts the role of the local region as host (*Gastgeber*) in earlier ceremonies and subject (*Untertan*) in 1909 in her paper: Die 1900-Jahrfeier der Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald 1909, in: Bürgerliche Feste (cf. footnote 11), pp. 192–230. See p. 201.

May Day, 1919

After the armistice in the West, the Germans pulled back from Riga and were followed by an invading Red Army of Russians and Latvians who captured the city in January of 1919. During the four and a half months they controlled the city, conditions in Riga deteriorated even further. The occupation caught Riga at a time when the Bolshevik project was at its most radical and the Civil War at its peak. It was also the fifth consecutive winter of total war in the city, and Riga was starving. The Bolsheviks, desperate to maintain power and solve the food shortages, only exacerbated the problem with their program of terror and confiscation.

The May Day celebrations in 1919 were held at the peak period of Bolshevik power in Riga. Unlike the first mass celebration under Red rule, the burial of those who fell during the capture of the city in January, the regime was now well established in the city and the weather was perfect for such an event. But the front was on its way back toward Riga. Mitau had already fallen, and there was some sense of urgency about the situation. Fighting at the front could be heard from Riga, the Bolsheviks had called women to arms to help control the city, and the policies of plunder, imprisonment, resettlement and murder were being stepped up to deal with the ever deteriorating supply problem.

The organization and presentation of the celebration was done in typical Bolshevik style: totally orchestrated with little left to chance, the threat of violence for non-participation or for disturbance (including a threat to shoot "bourgeois" hostages if German aircraft should harass the proceedings), and full of military and revolutionary rhetoric and symbolism.⁴⁵

The streets, many of which had been renamed in April (Rosa-Luxemburg Street, Karl-Liebknecht Street or International Street, for example), were decked out with garlands, revolutionary red flags and banners. The focus of the festivities was not the city center, but the Esplanade, now called "Communarde Square".⁴⁶ It featured more red banners, a large plaster bust of Karl Marx surrounded by wreaths, large posters of communist leaders which the *Rote Fahne* described as being unfortunately "dead-looking, modern expressionist" renderings, and a new monument depicting a gear, a hammer and an anvil, intended as symbols of the working people. A banner hung at the podium, where the communist leaders were to speak, which referred to the nearby graves of the fallen red heroes, "You will live forever in the memories of the revolutionary proletariat! Glory to the first fighters!"

Typical for Bolshevik festivals, the central event of the day was a "demonstration". This was a total reversal of what it had meant to demonstrate. In

⁴⁵ Description of the events from VESTERMANIS, GROZOVA, MISTRE (cf. footnote 35), pp. 61-64, and the newspaper *Rote Fahne*.

⁴⁶ *Komunara Laukums* in Latvian sources, *Kommunistenplatz* or "Communist Square" in German sources.

pre-revolutionary times, "working class demonstrations were an expression of animosity toward the rich and powerful; they were illegal and thus an act of civil disobedience. After the February Revolution they became legal, and after the October Revolution they received full state sponsorship. Grim manifestations became celebratory parades."⁴⁷

The various political organizations, including the national organizations of the communist party, various committees, the Bund and the Social Revolutionaries, and military organizations gathered between eight and ten in the morning at the *Griesenberg*, the site of the mass demonstrations of 1905. There were close to 6,000 people present in the crowd at that point. Throughout various locations in the city, groups of marchers were assigned starting positions depending on the factory or department of employment. From all the starting points, the crowds of participants then marched along assigned routes to the *Griesenberg*, where a rally was held, and then back to Communarde Square. Once there, they would file past the graves of the fallen Red Army men who died while freeing Riga from the enemy. The head of the column back into town included the leadership of the Latvian Communist Party, the Riga party committee, the Soviet Latvian government, and communist youth organizations. Behind them marched military units and people's militia, and thousands of workers from the various commissariats, factories, cooperatives, and educational institutions.

The Bolshevik German-language paper *Rote Fahne* described what it called an "authentic workers' celebration" ("*Ein rechtes Arbeiterfest*").⁴⁸ It emphasized the proletarian character of the event: the "bourgeoisie", who had observed workers' parades in years past with curiosity, were now gone. Bankers and landowners were nowhere to be seen, choosing instead to stay home.

It would appear that the communist celebration was by far the most inclusive of those that took place in that decade. Even if the published number of 60,000 "demonstrators" (35,000 workers, plus soldiers, educators, students, politicians etc.) is exaggerated, that number does refer to the number of participants – onlookers not included. The other celebrations in 1910 and 1918 were conducted by a relatively small number of people – the soldiers in the parades, the royalty and dignitaries at the various parties and events. The ratios of participants to onlookers appears to have been reversed in the case of the May Day celebrations of 1919.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ VON GELDERN (cf. footnote 18), p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Rote Fahne*, no. 99, 4.5.1919, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁹ A photograph of the main Mayday parade in VESTERMANIS, GROZOVA, MISTRE (cf. footnote 35), p. 48, shows a section of the marching column on what appears to be Dorpater Straße. There are several hundred marchers, but the sidewalks are virtually empty. ANGELIKA VON KORFF gives another impression, however, in her account quoted below.

But participation as a so-called “demonstrator” was not always voluntary. If all these celebrations put a degree of emphasis on war imagery, and military symbolism and armed power, the Bolshevik parade went one step further, militarizing societal participation in the procession by threat. October had made participation not only legal, but mandatory, even for class enemies. Angelika von Korff, a young German woman who kept a detailed diary during the entire Bolshevik period, has left a vivid account of how such an event appeared in the eyes of the “bourgeois”.

After describing the outward appearance of the city under the cover of “tasteless” flags and garlands and posters, and new street signs for the re-named streets, she describes how she and the other employees of the city administrative office for which she worked spent the day. She portrays the military march formation of the working population by office or factory, the endless waiting, the armed women who marched alongside the column to assure participation⁵⁰, the seemingly endless march through the city and generally poor organization of the entire event, the crowds of viewers, the horrendous and seemingly endless singing, and the all-pervasive hunger. Her description of the rally on “ommunarde Square” is worth quoting at length:

Halbtot vor Müdigkeit schleppten wir uns bis zur Esplanade, wo die eigentliche Feier erst beginnen sollte. Dort sollten Reden gehalten werden, Lieder gesungen etc. Stutschka war noch nicht da, auf ihn wurde gewartet. [...] Um mich herum eine abgehetzte, müde, stumpfe Menschenmenge. Von irgendeiner Begeisterung war wohl keine Spur mehr zu erblicken. Überall nur Verzweiflung über diese Quälerei. Endlich, endlich erschien Stutschka, betrat die Rednertribüne, wo ca. 20 rote Fahnen wehten, und hielt eine lange, begeisterte Verherrlichungsrede über den 1. Mai und die Revolution. [then others spoke ...] In ewigem Gedächtnis bleibt mir dieser Tag, der ein Fest für viele bedeuten sollte, aber auch die waren nicht mehr begeisterungsfähig. Auch denen war das Unheil dieser Herrschaft klargeworden und zu meiner Freude wurden auch die Reden von keinem Jubel begleitet, die meisten verhielten sich still und gedrückt.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The armed women she mentions, the “*Flintenweiber*”, get special attention in many German memoirs. According to VESTERMANIS, these Latvian women also drew special attention at the parade: “They, who had been oppressed until very recently, today could defend their liberated fatherland together with the men.” VESTERMANIS, GROZOVA, MISTRE (cf. footnote 35), p. 63. For a discussion of the *Flintenweiber* in Riga, see pages 195–200 of MARK R. HATLIE: *Die Welt steht Kopf: Die Kriegserfahrung der Deutschen in Riga 1914–1919*, in: *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums* 49 (2002), pp. 175–205.

⁵¹ BARONESSE ANGELIKA VON KORFF: *Riga 1919. Ein Tagebuch*, Hannover-Döhren 1991, pp. 106–109. During the Moscow parade for the International Congress in July of 1920, a foreign delegate remarked that it was “absolutely clear that nobody could force such a mass on the streets”. See VON GELDERN (cf. footnote 18), p. 199. VON KORFF’s account, read in the context of general conditions in Riga at the time, make it clear that it is indeed possible to force a large number of people to march and wave flags against their will.

Following the parade, there were 10 concerts and rallies at different points in the cities. At night, the city and river were illuminated and singing and celebrating continued into the night.⁵²

Other than the dramatic account by von Korff, there is little information available which indicates possible resistance to or dislike of the regime in the context of the festivities, except for the ransacking of a typographic workshop where leaflets for the event were being printed the night before the event.⁵³ The regime was too oppressive to allow any such opportunity. Just about everybody who opposed the regime had fled the city, was jailed, or otherwise stayed away from the ceremonies to the extent possible. The impression given here – by quoting extensively from a member of the German elite – is that the events found little resonance among the population. Further research into the popularity of the regime is necessary, however. There are indications that Bolshevism had broad support among much of the Latvian population. There was a clientele for the May Day celebrations; its contours are harder to discern than for the other events. As von Geldern has pointed out, such events were a powerful tool of social manipulation and had an obvious propaganda function, but it is too much to assume either a monolithic ideology, the knowledge of that ideology among the organizers, the absence of alternative interpretations of the message, or the willingness of the participants and spectators to understand the message. Symbolic communication is too vague and the circumstances too ambiguous.⁵⁴

Bolshevik May Day demonstrated both the need to adjust to local spaces and traditions as well as the desire to redefine spatial symbols.⁵⁵ They could not totally disregard the city center as the best place to demonstrate political control and power and thus focused on the Esplanade, as both the Tsar and the soldiers of the Kaiser had done. It is the only open space near the center of town at all suitable for a mass rally or parade. But they ignored the Cathedral and re-defined the Esplanade as a cemetery for their own fallen, as they had re-defined the streets throughout the city. And instead of parading past the mote into the city center, they included the Griesenberg at the edge of town, scene of their own historical myth, and paraded through the proletarian outskirts of the city. This was somewhat ironic considering their recent efforts to re-settle the working class in the city center and move the “bourgeoisie” to the periphery.⁵⁶

⁵² This sequence of events was typical for Bolshevik celebrations of the period and not all that different from the tsarist model. See VON GELDERN (cf. footnote 18), p. 40.

⁵³ VESTERMANIS, GROZOVA, MISTRE (cf. footnote 35), p. 62.

⁵⁴ VON GELDERN (cf. footnote 18), pp. 8–11.

⁵⁵ VON GELDERN discusses these ideas in the context of other Bolshevik celebrations, *ibidem*, pp. 43–85 and Chapter 6.

⁵⁶ Little is known about the extent of the resettlements. See HATLIE (cf. footnote 50), p. 195.

Although the May Day events have the distinction of being the first such mass celebration in the city while under nominal Latvian control, the symbolic center was not nation as much as class. The "Mysterium" was both an idealized foundation event, the period of struggle starting in 1905, and an idealized future state of affairs when social justice would reign. Although there were some anti-German undertones, the organizers made an effort to be inclusive and did not explicitly glorify or exclude any national group. The religions were not included in the protocol. On the contrary, the houses of worship were used for meetings, an act which many witnesses saw as desecration. The ceremonies reflected an "enlightenment in overdrive" with nationality symbolically leveled, religion under attack, and the traditional structures of society turned upside down. All the contradictions of the communist-imposed enlightenment were on display – democracy as dictatorship, inclusiveness as open class warfare, and rhetoric about a perfect future of fairness and victory juxtaposed against the present day of conflict and famine.

The Latvian State and the End of the War

After the return of the provisional government in the summer of 1919, the Latvian state managed to establish itself again in Riga, although it was still fighting for much of the rest of ethnically Latvian territory. The war raged on and, while the Bolsheviks were driven off and did not reappear in the city for over 20 years, German and Russian elements remained a threat. The period of war and revolution in Riga reached a highpoint when the city was put practically under siege by the army of Bermondts in the fall of 1919. That was the only time that the city itself became the focus of military action for a prolonged period of time. The river Daugava became the front line, with the German/Russian forces on the left bank and the Latvians holding the bulk of the city, including the city center, on the right bank.

On the 11th of November 1919 the battle for the city was over and beginning at approximately 11:30 in the morning, a patriotic demonstration began. An army orchestra marched through the city and was joined by an ever-growing crowd of people. There were several thousand "demonstrators" by the time the column reached the offices of the army high command. General Balodis greeted the crowds and praised the army for chasing off the "black knights", as the German enemies were often called. The march continued on to the offices of the provisional government, where more speeches were held and the anthem sung, and then on to the President of the People's Council, the French diplomatic mission, the American Red Cross, and to "Uncle" Orbison, the representative of the American Relief Administration, which had been feeding Riga's children for months. The column broke up before it could reach the Estonian, Polish and Lithuanian delegations because the orchestra had to leave at 15:00.⁵⁷ The speeches were all warlike, and the stations along

⁵⁷ Jaunakas Sinas, no. 140, 12.11.1919.

the march reflected the Latvian's feeling that they were alone in their struggle against Germany and Russia.

Only a week later, with the war still in full swing but Riga firmly in Latvian hands, the Latvian state celebrated its first full year of independence. The festivities, such as they were, reflected the tenuous state of that independence in that they were neither ostentatious nor pompous, neither celebratory nor symbolic of power. The protocol shows that the tone was more somber and, if loud at all, then in a way that showed determination and will to overcome recognized obstacles. The precariousness of the political and military situation was not brushed under the rug with fanfares and parades, although wartime themes were certainly dominant. The day began at the Brethren Cemetery (*Bralu Kapi*), where representatives of the Latvian government, the People's Council, the army staff, city officials were joined by numerous school classes, the Latvian Trade Union and other organizations for wreath-laying and speeches.⁵⁸ At the cemetery, the secretary of the People's Council made a speech heavy in *tauta* ("Volk") rhetoric. In the various churches, the congregations were treated to sacred music by organs and military bands ("Bless the Lord, my Soul" and "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" were featured). The main state church service was held in the Jakob church. This was significant, as the press pointed out, because this church had been used by the German *Landtag* for its opening services and was now in Latvian hands, witnessing a "truly festive Latvian service for the whole Latvian people" on their day of statehood.

The schools each held individual memorial services for the fallen soldiers and put on student concerts, presentations and lectures, one of which was attended by Krisjanis Barons, considered a living icon of "Latvianism". In the evening, the Red Cross gave a concert to a full house in the First City Theater. Both the presence of Barons and the ceremony at the military cemetery show that the "Mysterium" was not a distant, primordial event, but a myth in the making, the bloody birth of a nation taking place before the eyes of the participants. It was only nominally an anniversary celebration.

The People's Council also held a special session with military and foreign dignitaries in attendance. The speeches given by President Cakste's and Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis brought out the main themes of the day: the issue of recognition by Entente countries (who were acknowledged and applauded), the ongoing war – which Cakste explicitly referred to as a continuation of the First World War – the need to liberate the entire Latvian territory, the fact that so many men were still away at the front, and a call for unity. Ulmanis reminded the audience that the Germans had let the Bolsheviks into Riga "against our will". The appeal was clearly Latvian-national, pro-western and anti-German. Conspicuously absent was the parade as a demonstration of military prowess which had featured so prominently at the earlier events. The

⁵⁸ Details of the course of events during the day all taken from the newspaper *Jaunakas Sinas*, no. 146, 19.11.1919.

papers argued that the army was needed at the front and could spare only some high-ranking commanders and a handful of symbolic delegates. The same argument might have been made in 1918 or in May of the same year, but now there was either less need for local security or perhaps an even more desperate need for men and resources at the front.

The war ended the following summer, but almost a year would pass before the symbolic closing act. The last unit to arrive home after years of war was the Troizka regiment of Latvian riflemen. After being shipped from Vladivostok, it arrived by train from Libau just before noon on the 5th of October, 1920. It was greeted by the President and cabinet of ministers, the commanders of the army, other dignitaries, and an honor guard. After an orchestra played the anthem, the regiment marched through the streets of the city to the Latvian Club, being showered with flowers by crowds of people all along the route.⁵⁹

Concluding Remarks

During the troubled years of social, political and military upheaval, mass ceremonies present an element that was present during each regime despite the surrounding crisis. They allow us the opportunity to focus on symbolic forms of expression as well as on social reality by showing how the powerful chose to present their version of history, how they used the opportunity to interact with the rest of society, and how the offer was accepted and received, even if the sources make *Rezeptionsgeschichte* in times of war very difficult. If there is any kind of common theme to the ceremonies described here, it is perhaps that they reflected the rapid changes and modernization which took place during the period as well as shed light on the changing but more stable background present within Riga society. The city was a very different place in 1910, 1918 and 1919 and the ceremonies bring Russian Riga, German Riga, Red Riga and the Latvian National Capital into sharp contrast. They show a society in 1910 still infused with feudal elements trying to maneuver its way into the industrial age, undecided on how to compromise, mistrustful of much of its citizenry but also not in tune with the Empire of which it was a part. The turmoil a few years later showed that the model offered was already out of sync. By 1918, Riga was under the banner of another monarchy. But the society was more in step with modern trends, having been dragged into a more Western orientation to nation state by war, revolution and occupation, each nationality now firmly intent on dominance or independence. For those in power, the trappings of feudalism were giving away to the appeal of national integration, symbolized in by the presence of a national German army. The divisions running through the city's population had been made clearly visible. In the spring of 1919 the divisions exploded Riga society. The world turned upside down as the leveling hand of radical egalitarianism tried its turn

⁵⁹ Jaunakas Sinas, no. 229, 6.10.1920.

and succeeded in destroying much of the old while failing to build something new. The image of Riga's citizens marching, singing and celebrating like puppets on a string shows the low end potential of modern political development, the nightmare of totalitarianism.

The ceremonies for the Latvian state represent another stage in development. They were also modern, but more livable and accepting of some of the elements which the Bolshevik regime had sought to eradicate, more compromising. They were a step on the way to a new normalcy. Participation was reminiscent of what is common for festive national events today, in that symbolic ceremonies involving the rulers were central (unveilings, wreath-laying, etc.), but closed-doors events for the elite (banquets, private audiences, etc.) either did not occur or were not considered worth reporting. Participation was symbolically open, but not coerced. The symbols of choice reflected the now dominant Latvian element in the city and the city's new role as national capital. The *Mysterium* was to combat this group's sense of long disenfranchisement: the Latvian *tauta* and its battled and victorious soldiery, its fallen, its elected parliament as a symbol of freedom from centuries of foreign rule. In a nation born of war celebrating during war, emphasis on war and sacrifice is hardly surprising. But it was not jingoistic and overly hostile; the clientele extended even abroad, to the Western democracies, whose representatives were repeatedly singled out for praise. It did not include minority ethnic groups on the ceremonial level. That would have required a rhetorical subtlety not necessarily suitable to a time of war against nations represented by the capital city's two strongest and previously powerful minorities. But things did cool off and the policies that were to follow were certainly more liberal than what had come before. The independence day celebrations show, however, what was either a sign of war weariness or of rare human insight: The cooling off began even before the shooting was over.

Archives:

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| AA | Auswärtiges Amt, Bonn |
| GARF | Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow] |
| LVVA | Latvijas Valsts Vestures Arhivs [Latvian State Historical Archive, Riga] |
| RGIA | Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Archiv [Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg] |

Periodicals:

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| Jaunakas Sinas |
| Rizhskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti [News of the Riga Diocese, the official organ of the Russian Orthodox Church] |
| Rote Fahne |
| Rigasche Neueste Nachrichten |
| Rigasche Zeitung |

Zusammenfassung

Fahnen und Bajonette. Bürgerliche Feste in Riga 1910-1920

Die Stadt Riga erlebte während der Welt- und Bürgerkriegsjahre 1914-1920 Bevölkerungsverschiebungen, Unruhen, Hungersnöte und Regimewechsel. Die verschiedenen Regime hatten trotz aller Umwälzungen Gelegenheit, sich selbst in Riga mittels großangelegter Feierlichkeiten darzustellen.

Angefangen mit der noch zu Friedenszeiten stattfindenden Enthüllung des Denkmals Peters des Großen, bei der der Zar persönlich anwesend war und die im Zusammenhang mit anderen Jubiläumsfeierlichkeiten zu sehen ist, werden hier einige Feierlichkeiten in ihrer Durchführung und Symbolik dargestellt und interpretiert. Spiegelte der Zarenbesuch 1910 ein feudales, auf die Person des Monarchen gerichtetes Selbstbild des Regimes wider, wobei die überwiegend deutsche Elite der Stadt sich vor allem als Stand repräsentierte, feierte Riga den Geburtstag des deutschen Kaisers im Januar 1918 unter ganz anderen Vorzeichen: als „befreite“, zur deutschen Nation gehörige Stadt. Die Maitagsparade von 1919 besaß mit ihrem lettischen, aber vor allem zugleich bolschewistischen Hintergrund wiederum einen völlig anderen Charakter. Wenige Monate später schließlich, vor dem Hintergrund des Kanonenfeuers, wurde der erste Jahrestag lettischer Staatlichkeit und Solidarität gefeiert.

Die genannten Feierlichkeiten spiegeln sowohl den raschen politischen Wandel als auch die vom Krieg vorangetriebene Modernisierung Rigas wider.