

Violence as Political Agitation: the Example of Political Posters in Latvia, 1920-1934

by

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It is well known that violence is a common element in human politics. Many historians have been studying the expressions and influence of violence in written sources. However, much less attention has been paid to the representation of violence in visual materials. One such source is the poster. In this paper it is argued that the violence expressed in posters proves the tolerance of different violent activities as a casual behaviour form in early 20th century Latvia.

With the rise of the idea of democracy and increased political participation in the 19th century public opinion began to be more highly valued. From there it was just a small step to the development of different persuasive techniques, including the utilization of visual representation effects.¹ Many political parties and state authorities gave prominence to the poster in their political campaigning. Throughout Europe posters were used for various aims – political and commercial alike. In early 20th century therefore such visual materials were regarded as effective in the eyes of enterprises and political organizations.

In the sphere of politics, posters were an interesting medium that managed to synthesize both a political message and artistic expression – the unity that incorporated the social, cultural and political reality of the time. As documented by Gerhard Paul, an independent visual language used in posters developed.² The symbol's colour schemes, and repeated slogans used in posters are important historical evidence of the contemporary political culture. The argumentation of this paper rests on the thesis that posters provide evidence of the perception and understanding of different events in contemporary society, thus also giving information in particular about the use of violence and how it was perceived.

One of the main questions in this paper is what kind of violence was utilised in election posters and in whole election campaigns in Latvia during the parliamentary period of 1920-1934? What kind of symbols and symbolical constructions were used to visualise violence and how did these correlate with

¹ GERHARD PAUL: Die visuelle Geschichte und der Bildkanon des kulturellen Gedächtnisses, in: *Jahrhundert der Bilder. Bildatlas 1900 bis 1949*, ed. by IDEM, Bonn 2008, pp. 14-39, here p. 14; TOBY CLARK: *Art and Propaganda*. New York 1997, pp. 7-15; VITA ZELČE: Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu kampaņa: par informācijas plūsmu un īpatnību [The Election Campaign of Latvia's Constitutional Assembly: on information flow and patterns], in: *Latvijas Arhīvi* (2010), 1, pp. 125-156, here p. 126.

² PAUL, Die visuelle Geschichte (as in footnote 1), p. 16.

the existing legal and behavioral norms of the society? In addition, analysis of election posters could provide information to evaluate the use of violence and to determine the threshold of tolerance of the acceptable use of violence, which existed in interwar Latvian society. In order to answer these questions this study focuses on an analysis of the visual language incorporated in the election posters produced during Latvia's parliamentary period. The objects analyzed here are posters in which violence is symbolically presented. In cases where a more impressive depiction of violence is found, reproductions of these posters are included here as examples of differing portrayals of violence by various political parties.³

I Election Poster and Propaganda

In the context of the election poster an important issue is the definition of this kind of medium. The definition of the poster elaborated by Friedrich Medebach is following – a poster is a publicity medium aimed at shaping the opinion of society and state, to create certain opinion in order to influence the actions of individuals as well as to reach the widest possible audience.⁴ In other words, election posters may be considered as a concurrent part of propaganda media.

Frequently the word “propaganda” is understood as “strategies of manipulative persuasion, intimidation and deception”.⁵ Originally these negative connotations derived from the experience of the First World War and totalitarian regime practices during interwar period, to which the definition given above more appropriately applies. One of the earliest attempts to define propaganda and to avoid the negative connotations attached to it was made by Edward Bernays in 1928. He sought to explain the principles of propaganda as a “mechanism by which ideas are disseminated on a large scale, in the broad sense of an organized effort to spread a particular belief or doctrine, [...] whether propaganda is good or bad depends upon the merit of the cause urged, and the correctness of the information published”.⁶ With regard to the term “modern propaganda” he stated the following: “Modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group”.⁷

³ Of the currently accessible election posters – in the collection of the National Library of Latvia (*Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka*), Latvia's War Museum (*Latvijas Kara muzejs*), and Latvian State Historical Archives (*Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs*) holdings – around 23% contain symbols referring to expressions of violence.

⁴ As quoted in FRANK KÄMPFER: “Der rote Keil”. Das politische Plakat. Theorie und Geschichte, Berlin 1985, p. 36.

⁵ CLARK (as in footnote 1), p. 7.

⁶ EDWARD BERNAYS: Propaganda, New York 1928, p. 20; <http://sandiego.indymedia.org/media/2006/10/119695.pdf> (last accessed 12.07.2011).

⁷ Ibidem, p. 25.

To some extent Bernays' definition of propaganda correlates with its understanding in the history of Latvia. During the interwar period neutral understanding and usage of the term dominated in everyday interaction, which is most obvious when looking at the newspapers of that time. Most commonly the term "propaganda" was used as a synonym for "popularization or advertising", often used in such instances as, for example, "propaganda for Latvia's products".⁸ More often the term "propaganda" was used during Kārlis Ulmanis' authoritarian regime, when it was referred to as a positive process which aims at explaining and persuading the people to accept important contemporary views and ideas.⁹ Unfortunately, in Latvian historiography there are no further attempts to analyze the principles and theoretical aspects of propaganda; it is often described only in general terms. This is also true of the detailed research into the ideology and propaganda of the Ulmanis authoritarian regime by Latvian historian Ilgvars Butulis¹⁰, in which propaganda is considered as a wide spectrum of organised efforts in order to educate people according to ideological requirements and to gain control over culture, education and thinking of society.

In the case of this paper and in the context of election posters, the term "propaganda" refers to a totality of techniques aimed at persuading the potential electorate to sympathise with the views of various political groupings, in order to gain their support in the elections, including both deceptive and informative means of persuasion. This understanding also correlates with the definition given by Oliver Thomson, who states that propaganda is an art, in which, by different means, the "right" views are introduced; it is an art in which collective attitudes are shaped with the help of different symbolic expressions.¹¹

II The Political Situation in Latvia in the First Years of Independence

On November 18th, 1918 Latvia declared independence. For the first two years following the declaration of independence the leaders of the newly established state had to deal with military and political instability until the newly founded state could begin to foster its institutions.

⁸ Eksporta veicināšana un savu ražojumu propaganda [The facilitation of export and propaganda of our own production], in: *Ekonomists* (1931), 14/15, p. 15.

⁹ Preses, filmas un radio darbs politikā [The work of the press, movies and radio in politics], in: *Rīts* (1938), 58, p. 16; Valsts propagandas darbs [The work of state propaganda], in: *Jēkabpils Vēstnesis* (1935), 42, p. 1; Filma tautas audzināšanā [Movie in the education of the nation], in: *Rīts* (1937), 57, p. 2.

¹⁰ ILGVARS BUTULIS: Autoritäre Ideologie und Praxis des Ulmanis-Regimes in Lettland 1934-1940, in: *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919-1944*, ed. by ERWIN OBERLÄNDER, Paderborn 2001, pp. 249-298, here pp. 274-295.

¹¹ OLIVER THOMSON: *Easily Led. A History of Propaganda*, Stroud 1999, p. 1.

The period from the declaration of Latvian independence in 1918 until 1920 is most commonly described in Latvia's historiography as the "struggle for freedom", "Latvia's liberation struggle" or the "War of Independence"¹² and only recently has the term "civil war" been used.¹³ Since the declaration of independence, the newly formed government led by Kārlis Ulmanis had to deal with two foreign powers on its territory. The first was the retreating German occupation authorities, with whom the new government had to cooperate. The second was the Red Army, which reached Riga on January 3rd, 1919 and soon occupied almost the entire territory of Latvia claimed by Ulmanis. In East and Central Latvia the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic was formed and led by Pēteris Stučka, whereas the Ulmanis administration established its temporary residence in Liepāja (Libau).

With the establishment of the Soviet Latvian government, repression was accompanied by dogmatic political measures, which created great resentment among the population and prevented any acceptance of this political system by the majority of Latvian society.¹⁴ Particularly ineffective and catastrophic for the people in countryside was the Soviet Latvian economic policy, which resulted in famine. The nationalization of property also caused discontent among the wealthier population. Regarding the experience of violence in society, a very important characteristic of Stučka's policy was evident in attempts to repress the growing dissatisfaction in society by methods of terror. During the three months of Bolshevik rule, almost 2 000 persons¹⁵ were arrested, of whom approximately 300 suffered capital punishment¹⁶. Concentration camps were established and violence became an everyday reality.

In order to cope with the Bolsheviks, the Ulmanis-led government tried to cooperate with Germany, resulting in the stationing of German *VI. Reserve-Korps* in Kurzeme (Kurland). The commander of the German forces in Latvia was Rüdiger von der Goltz. The activities of the German forces, which tried to maintain their influence in Latvia, resulted in a rift between Latvia and Germany which culminated in the coup d'état against the Ulmanis government, led by a detachment of Baltic Germans, and the establishment of a pro-German Latvian government headed by the pastor Andrievs Niedra. All these

¹² ĒRIKS JĒKABSONS: Latvijas neatkarības karš 1918.-1920. gadā: galveno militārpolitisko norišu atspoguļojums historiogrāfijā [Latvia's War of Independence 1918-1920: The reflection of the main military-political occurrences in historiography], in: Latvijas valstiskumam 90. Latvijas valsts neatkarība: ideja un realizācija, ed. by JĀNIS BERZIŅŠ, Rīga 2010, pp. 20-44, here p. 21.

¹³ ALDIS MIŅINS: Latvijas pilsoņu karš [Civil war of Latvia], in: Latvijas Vēsture. Jaunie un Jaunākie Laiki (2009), 2/3, pp. 28-48.

¹⁴ INESIS FELDMANIS, DAINA BLEIERE, ILGVARS BUTULIS, AIVARS STRANGA: Latvijas vēsture 20. gs. [A History of Latvia in the 20th century], Rīga 2005, p. 113.

¹⁵ JĀNIS ŠILIŅŠ: Rīgas cietumi un lielinieku terors, 1919. gada janvāris-maijs [Prisons in Riga and the terror of the Bolsheviks, January-May 1919], in: Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls (2009), 3, pp. 119-137, here p. 122.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 133.

political activities created a situation where three governments existed simultaneously on Latvian territory, each with a substantial political ally: Great Britain, however reluctantly, supporting Ulmanis, Germany informally supporting Niedra, and Soviet Russia supporting Stučka.

From March until April the German forces and the 1st Latvian separate battalion pressed the Red Army out of Kurzeme, and on May 22nd, 1919 German forces entered Riga. After this event cooperation between Latvian and German forces broke down as the German forces tried to increase their influence in Latvia. It was planned that the German force will move further into eastern Latvia forcing the Red Army out of this territory, but instead von der Goltz started an offensive against the common forces of the Estonian Army and Northern Latvian brigade. The military breakthrough took place on 19th-23rd June, 1919, when the Estonian army together with the 2nd Latvian Cēsis Regiment (part of the Northern Latvian brigade), which later formed the core of Latvian army, defeated German forces around Cēsis (Wenden). Thereafter the government of Niedra left the political stage. A few weeks later the Ulmanis government returned to Riga.

During the last phase of "Latvia's struggle for liberation" the newly established Latvian armed forces had to deal with an offensive led and organised by the adventurer Pavel Bermond, who was supported by Goltz after the Germans had to leave Latvia because of pressure from the Allies. He was financed by monarchist anti-Bolshevik "Whites", with good contacts in Germany's anti-democratic circles. Bermond, claiming to fight Bolshevism in October 1919, turned his army against Riga. This offensive was stopped in the November of 1919 by the Latvian Army with the help of artillery support from a force of allied battleships and two armored trains from Estonia. The "struggle for liberation" came to an end at the beginning of 1920, when, with the help of Polish forces, the Soviet army was forced out of its last bastion – Latgale. With this step, the Latvian SSR also ceased to exist, and on February 1st, 1920, an armistice between Latvia and Soviet Russia came into force (the Peace Treaty was signed on August 11th, 1920), finally ending these politically and militarily turbulent years.

With the end of military action, Latvia began its democratic development with all the social, cultural and political processes this entailed. One of the most important tasks in the newly established state was to develop all those political institutions necessary to ensure democratic governance. Political logic required the creation of a representational political body which would be responsible for creation of the Latvian State Constitution.

The first democratic elections took place in the spring of 1920, concerning the Constitutional Assembly. It was in the election campaign for this Assembly that, for the first time, modern techniques of persuasion in democratic circumstances were used in a focused manner on a large and varied scale with the aim of shaping public opinion. This campaign is considered a turning

point in Latvia's propaganda history¹⁷, when on such a large scale the population had to face different and contrasting political messages and form their opinions in line with their evaluation of these messages for the first time.

The first democratic elections facilitated the formation of different political parties, which competed for votes and seats in this representational body. At this time there were a huge number of political, economic, and social issues which the newly established Republic of Latvia was confronted with. These issues were predominant in the agitation programs of new and already prominent political parties.¹⁸ It is worth noting that the citizens' participation in these elections was very high – 84.88%.¹⁹ This very high degree of popular participation in the democratic process remained at the same level in Latvia during the whole of its parliamentary period (1922 – 82.2%²⁰, 1925 – 74.89%²¹, 1928 – 79.3%²², 1931 – 80%²³).

Another important aspect was the number of political parties which participated in elections. As a result of the liberal election law there were almost no restrictions regarding the registration of political parties. The establishment of an impressive number of political parties was determined by other factors as well. The newly established state had not gained significant political experience: political organization in Latvian society began fairly late and thus consolidation of political parties was only beginning to form.²⁴ Another important aspect was the heterogeneous nature of society – most newly established political parties based their programs on the narrow interests of different groups according to ethnic, social, gender and other categories. All these circumstances produced a situation where the average number of parties participating in each election was around a hundred (1920 – 57²⁵, 1922 – 88²⁶, 1925 – 141²⁷, 1928 – 120²⁸, 1931 – 103²⁹ lists). In these circumstances politi-

¹⁷ ZELČE, Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu kampaņa: par informācijas plūsmu (as in footnote 1), p. 126.

¹⁸ IDEM: Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu kampaņa: 1920. marts-aprīlis [The election campaign of Latvian Constitutional Assembly: March-April 1920], in: Latvijas Arhīvi (2008), 1, pp. 86-139, here pp. 88-92.

¹⁹ 20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture: Neatkarīgā valsts, 1918-1940 [20th century history of Latvia: independent state, 1918-1940], ed. by VALDIS BERZIŅŠ, Rīga 2003, p. 154.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 171.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 185.

²² Likumdevēju vēsture [History of legislator], in: <http://www.saeima.lv/lv/par-saeimu/li-kumdevēju-vesture> (last accessed 12.07.2011).

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ IMANTS MEDNIS: Labējā spārna politiskās partijas Latvijas Republikas parlamentārajā periodā (1920-1934) [Right wing political parties in Latvia's parliamentary period (1920-1934)], in: Latvijas Arhīvi (1995), 1, pp. 21-26, here p. 22.

²⁵ 20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture (as in footnote 19), p. 152.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 171.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 185.

²⁸ Likumdevēju vēsture (as in footnote 22).

cal competition was very fierce and political parties were forced to develop election campaigns that were more eye-catching and convincing than those of their numerous rivals.

Election posters played an important part in propaganda campaigns, but were not the only means of political campaigning. In the first elections, and those that followed, the dissemination of information took place both through media and by individuals and groups. Oral persuasion – word of mouth – was very important. People were affected by rumors and assumptions circulating about the contemporary situation.³⁰ The Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku partija*, in existence from 1904 to 1934), which was one of the oldest, largest and most influential parties in Latvia's parliamentary period, even used theatrical performances as a way of getting their political message across, incorporating singing and dancing shows.³¹

As regards posters, during Latvia's parliamentary period, in addition to the newspapers, election posters functioned as an important medium for spreading visual and textual messages to wide range of passers-by. Visual propaganda had the advantage of addressing the people more directly than newspapers. In comparison with newspapers and leaflets, which could be easily thrown away unread, the effectiveness of posters lies in their position in public places, in front of people's eyes, catching the attention of those passing by.³² This fact and the realization that the combination of a short slogan and a colourful image produced a definite effect was a reason for posters to be considered an integral part of election campaigns.

During all parliamentary and municipal elections the streets were full of different kinds of posters, the amount of which increased with every election. Parties were forced to come up with new ideas and methods to make their posters more attractive and eye-catching to their potential electorate. Their aim was to make posters which would stand out from the crowd and to achieve this goal, parties, depending on their financial resources, contracted well known artists, increased the number of posters printed and distributed as well as new ways of portraying their political message in the most interesting and appealing manner.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ ZELČE, Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu kampaņa: par informācijas plūsmu (as in footnote 1), p. 127.

³¹ Latvian State Historical Archives: holding 3017 (Social Democratic Workers' Party), description 4, file 137, pp. 58-90 (scenarios of performances, year 1928).

³² GERHARD PAUL: *Aufstand der Bilder. Die NS-Propaganda vor 1933*, Berlin 1990, p. 150.

III Posters and the Utilization of “Violence”

Violence in itself carries strong emotional effect, which is an important aspect of addressing society. Already in the interwar period, besides their technical efforts, different political organizations evaluated the importance of emotionality in their poster messages. Communication employing different emotions – both positive and negative – in their depiction of various political ideas became an integral part of each election campaign. Expressions of violence were utilised as one such emotionalizing method.

There are different definitions of violence. One definition categorises violence in seven forms: aggressive behaviour, vehement conduct, infringement of property and dignity, the use of physical force, threats, and, importantly in context of this paper, the dramatic portrayal of any of already mentioned forms of violence.³³

An important issue is how violence of the types mentioned above correlates with actual norms of behaviour in the first half of the 20th century in Latvia. A key source for this kind of analysis in Latvia is the law in force at the time. Legislation set the rules and norms for society, establishing acceptable limits of behaviour, which might not be crossed unpunished. An important act, which was in force during the entire parliamentary period in Latvia, was the criminal law or in direct translation, the “Penal Law”. Its origins date back to 1903 when it was drafted by the tsarist Russian authorities. Although amended later, the overall body of the law was maintained.

Perhaps a more clear insight into the contemporary perception of violence can be found when analyzing editorial comments in the published edition of the “Penal Law”³⁴ meant for public use. The systematic index of this publication shows the editor’s personal understanding of the articles. There the editor has included the term “violence” with reference to 20 articles of the “Penal Law”. These articles consist of different crimes which correspond to the previously given definition of violence, thus giving evidence of the way in which this term was perceived at the beginning of 1930s, when this particular edition was prepared.

Different kinds of mayhem are defined as the most severe violent crimes in the “Penal Law”. These include beating, different kinds of severe physical injury as well as causing severe incurable mental damage. Furthermore, suicide and assisting suicide, as well as abortion, are defined as violent crimes.³⁵ It is interesting that use of violence against older family members, foreign state officials, local state officials, clergymen and policemen while on duty, is distinguished from other acts of violence and carry a more severe punish-

³³ CAROLE NAGENGAST: Violence, Terror, and the Crisis of the State, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994), pp. 109-136, here p. 111.

³⁴ 1903. gada 22. III Sodū likumi [Penal Law of 22 march, 1903], Rīga 1932.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

ment.³⁶ The maximum punishment for all the above-mentioned crimes varies from three to ten years in jail, penitentiary without or with forced labour depending on whether the violent act led to the death of the victim.

The overall characteristics of the criminal situation and the presence of violence in interwar Latvia is seen when looking at the statistics of registered criminal activities. From the moment the war in Latvia came to an end, much work was devoted by the state authorities to eliminate violence by developing and strengthening the state police. The statistics demonstrate that these efforts soon brought significant success and that crimes of violence as police officials understood it significantly decreased. For example, in 1920 there were 238 homicides and 627 burglaries registered, in 1927 these numbers had decreased to 113 and 128 respectively³⁷, and in 1932 only 35 homicides and 48 burglaries were registered³⁸.

Of course, the analysis of the "Penal Law" and comments on it, as well as the overall criminal situation in Latvia, should not be viewed as an absolute demonstration of the public perception of violence, and it is necessary to look at the everyday expressions of violent behavior; election posters can be regarded as one of the visual sources pertaining to this subject.

IV Control over the Content of Posters

With the establishment of a democratic republic, free speech was declared as one of the most important values. Nevertheless, the new state still set limits on the content of different means of expression. These limits were incorporated into the legislative norms which also detailed the methods of controlling the content of the different media. The above-mentioned "Penal Law" itself incorporated norms on how the content of different media should be controlled. The "Penal Law" allowed for the confiscation of typographic materials which were judged to constitute an appeal to take "rebellious or treacherous action"³⁹ or to commit "serious crime"⁴⁰. The institution responsible for monitoring such occurrences was the Political Directorate, which was created as an intelligence office under the Ministry of the Interior.

One of the media which was closely monitored was the political poster. There are many cases in which posters were confiscated and their creators charged according to norms incorporated in the "Penal Law". In some cases these confiscations were based not merely on a perception of the posters as a

³⁶ Ibidem, pp. 8-9.

³⁷ 20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture (as in footnote 19), p. 505.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 507.

³⁹ 1903. gada 22. III Sodu likumi (as in footnote 34), p. 40.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

minor breach of legislation, but as a serious criminal act.⁴¹ The problem with the motivation and the reasons for the confiscations is that in most cases it is impossible to determine whether the poster in question was confiscated because of the unacceptable violence depicted on it, or simply because it was considered to be aimed against state authority, or because it was inciting hatred among the population – something which also fell under the category of a “serious crime”. The reports on confiscations usually consist of a reference to one and the same article of the “Penal Law” (Article 129). Article 129 states that persons should be punished if they publicly address people, through speech, portrayal or in written form, with the intention of inciting people to rebellious actions, to making a coup d’etat, to acting against the law, committing serious crimes, or to spreading hatred among different groups of society. The inclusion of all these different situations in just one article provides a great deal of leeway for free interpretation in each individual case.

Confiscations were made on a regular basis, mostly involving communist materials, as well as in some cases being directed against the Social Democrats’ and nationalists’ posters and propaganda literature. Ongoing discussions in Parliament, where such confiscations were fiercely debated, gave more evidence regarding the conditions under which such materials were defined as unlawful. One such discussion took place in October 1932 in which Communists tried to defend one of their posters (Figure 1) which had been confiscated during the pre-election period in 1931. The explanation given as to why this poster had been confiscated, was that with its huge emotional effect displaying the horrors of war, its impact was too overwhelming. This was not acceptable to police⁴², and was thus defined as an appeal to oppose the existing state system.

Media censorship and confiscations were performed as a control mechanism, *post factum*. But these actions did not always prevent all kinds of materials including “violent” materials appearing in public. There were situations when confiscations of the “illegal” materials were carried out some days after the poster had been displayed on the streets so that passers-by were able to catch their messages before subsequent confiscation. Thus posters still managed to fulfill their primal duty in informing and addressing society and also played an important role in ideological and political competition.

⁴¹ All documents related to the confiscation of different agitation materials, including posters, are kept in the Latvian State Historical Archives: holding 3235 (Political Directorate), description 1, files 43-1261 (reports).

⁴² Latvijas Republikas IV Saeimas stenogrammas: IV sesija 1932. gadā [Transcript of IV parliament of the Latvian Republic: Session IV 1932], Rīga 1932, p. 103.

V “Fight”⁴³ as a Symbol in Election Posters

If we look at the content of the posters and their particularities, an important aspect is the use of different symbols in the depiction of violence. According to Gerhard Paul the function of symbols is threefold – first, to transform complex sets of ideas such as political platforms and the parties’ world views into pictorial representation to obtain the support of the electorate, second, to raise an emotional response in passers-by which could be transformed into real action and, third, to create identity with some general ideas which consequently induce the feeling of unity among different people.⁴⁴ The spectrum of the forms symbols may take is broad – abstract signs, allegorical images, body gestures etc. Symbols communicate in a synthetic, compact way, appealing to emotional and barely-conceived associations, while avoiding intellectual evaluations. In this manner symbols are a fast and effective means of artistic communication. Messages transferred in this simple and attractive way are more easily received and accepted.⁴⁵

In Latvia’s election posters the most frequent symbols used to depict violence were largely conventional images – different kinds of weapons (guns, knives, axes, clubs etc.), corpses, blood, shooting, and scenes of fist fighting. Different political parties in their posters used various symbols of violence, with different degrees of intensity, sometimes in a quite similar manner. The most commonly used symbol of violence was the depiction of different scenes of fist fighting in election posters: here referred to as a “fight” symbol. There were several trends in the use of this symbolic construction with different meanings attached to them.

One design of “fight” symbol exploited the negative connotations attached to fighting itself. A slight distinction could be drawn between two subgroups within this first design of the fight symbol itself. The first subgroup was more widely used, consisting of the depiction of a fight among different political parties without identifying the specific parties meant in each scene. This kind of symbol became a metaphor for the unstable political system in Latvia, the metaphor for the inability to achieve unity among members of parliament, and was already to be found on election posters from the first parliamentary elections in 1922. Actually it was a metaphor for the negative side-effects of an overly liberal election law, which led to the fragmentation of Parliament into small, unstable political groups.

⁴³ Here the term “fight” signifies violent confrontation between persons, most commonly taking the form of fist fighting.

⁴⁴ GERHARD PAUL: *Kampf um Symbole. Symbolpublizistischer Bürgerkrieg 1932*, in: *Jahrhundert der Bilder* (as in footnote 1), pp. 420–427, here p. 422.

⁴⁵ INETA TUNNE, VITA ZELČE: *Simboli un rituāli 9. Saeimas priekšvēlēšanu kampaņā* [Symbols and rituals in 9th parliament election campaign], in: *Politiskā komunikācija, ētika un kultūra Latvijas Republikas 9. Saeimas vēlēšanās*, ed. by SKAIDRITE LASMANE, Rīga 2007, pp. 113–131, here p. 114.

One example of this kind of fight symbol is the poster created for the Parliamentary elections in 1925 for the centrist party Democratic Center (*Demokrātiskais centrs*, existing from 1922 to 1934) seen in Figure 2.⁴⁶ The use of this kind of symbol, along with the repetition of its message in other media, became rooted in public consciousness about the failure of democracy, thus easing the way for the apologists of an authoritarian regime.

In the second subgroup of fight symbols, more concrete characteristics can be seen. Here the aim of a fight symbol is to construct images of good and bad political parties and portray political adversaries. The previous example of the Democratic Center's poster represents the synthesis of the messages of the two fight symbol "subgroups". In this way the poster manages to emphasise two mutually complementary ideas – the idea of disagreements among parties and the definition of certain political enemies. In this case the street-level behaviour expressed through violent actions is the way in which the Democratic Center tried to devalue their opponents in the eyes of potential voters. At the same time by separating the fighters, and offering slogans promising to stop these fights, the Democratic Center increased its own value and promoted itself as a cultural and peaceful political force. In the case of the Democratic Center, the visual imagery in the posters complied with the party's political election platform, in which they declared that the goal of the Democratic Center was to organise the strengths of all Latvian people and not just a particular class, to overcome tensions between classes, and to build the lives of the Latvian people on the foundations of progress and social justice.⁴⁷ In addition, the tactic to use the fight symbol as an opposing value indicates the perception of these violent acts as a condemnable, but still regularly occurrence in society.

VI Symbols of Power and Domination in Election Posters

Another kind of fight symbol utilised in the election posters, falls more within the category of violence that Eric Hobsbawm characterises as "necessary or desirable"⁴⁸ violence. This implies that the use of violence according to strict rules may be acceptable in order to achieve the necessary aim. In the context of the party posters examined, this particular symbol was imbued with concepts of "power" and "domination" as positive and desirable phenomena. All the fights depicted involve the party which commissioned the advertising and its political opponents. The former is depicted as possessing strength and power which is used to vanquish its political opponents. In this kind of poster the commissioning party dominates in the whole narrative – it

⁴⁶ Cf. p. 554.

⁴⁷ IMANTS MEDNIS: Politiskās partijas Latvijas Republikā [Political parties in the Latvian Republic], in: Latvijas Arhīvi (1995), 3, pp. 17-24, here p. 20.

⁴⁸ ERIC HOBSBAWM: Revolutionaries. Contemporary Essays, London 1994, p. 212.

not only turns on its opponents with kicks, sticks and axes, but also humiliates them by depicting their helplessness and weakness. In this case violence is depicted as a positive phenomenon.

The political party which should be mentioned in this context is the Social Democrats. In their electioneering campaigns they used a variety of instruments of persuasion, becoming more advanced and innovative than their opponents. In the field of visual propaganda, besides conventional types of poster, the Social Democrats used also caricature-style posters. As emphasised by Frank Kämpfer, laughter is an important means of communicating an emotional message. Caricatures, as forms of malicious joke, symbolically disqualify political adversaries from political competition.⁴⁹ Examples of the use of caricatures as a separate campaigning type of poster are seen in Figure 3⁵⁰ and Figure 4⁵¹. With caricature-style posters the Social Democrats went even further – the posters created in this style were also duplicated in the Social Democrats' newspapers. By doing so, the Social Democrats managed to increase the visibility of their political messages for a low financial outlay and also benefit from the repetition of their messages – an approach that is considered to be a precondition for a successful information campaign.

Different demonstrations of power and striving for domination are also to be seen on other posters in which political opponents are absent. The artistic means used in this kind of poster created the idea that brute force also tends to be dominant in the political arena (Figure 5⁵²). This kind of iconography was strongly affected by leftist ideology and the premise incorporated in it, reflecting the revolutionary approach which sees violence as justifiable when it leads to the victory of proletariat.⁵³ This becomes clearer when looking at the Social Democratic posters from a comparative perspective with other European states. These posters, in the form of symbols used, did not differ from those depictions of workers in posters in, for example, the Weimar Republic or Soviet Russia.

Another example of a political attempt to demonstrate its strengths is the poster of the extreme right wing party Active Nationalists (*Aktīvie Nacionālisti*). It was established in 1921 as Nonparty National Center (*Bezpartejiskais Nacionālais centrs*), from 1925 renamed as National Union (*Nacionālā apvienība*) and in existence until 1934. In political rhetoric in the public sphere, both in newspapers and posters, this party figured as the main enemy of the Social Democrats. An example which illustrates the use of the power tactic is

⁴⁹ KÄMPFER (as in footnote 4), p. 114.

⁵⁰ Cf. p. 555.

⁵¹ Cf. p. 556.

⁵² Cf. p. 557.

⁵³ MATTHEW WORLEY: Introduction: Communism and Political Violence, in: Twentieth Century Communism. A Journal of International History 2 (2010), www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/twentiethcenturycommunism/articles/2whorley.html (last accessed 12.07.2011).

a poster made for the third parliamentary elections in 1928 (Figure 6⁵⁴). This poster portrays a man throwing away the members of other parties, thus demonstrating his strength and symbolizing the strength of the whole party. This poster was also the only one which, in addition to Communists and Social Democrats, depicted Jews as negative characters – a step on the road towards the Active Nationalists' gradual transformation into a more radical nationalist organization.

Despite significant differences in the ideologies of the Social Democrats and nationalists, the symbols they use to depict strength, power and domination are very similar. The depiction of workers in both Social Democratic and nationalist posters is achieved with the same symbolic forms – half-naked bodies, or men with rolled-up sleeves, which reveal strong, muscled arms. Similarities in symbolic expressions indicate the existence of general concepts in society which go beyond specific ideologies and are characteristics of the whole society.

VII Expressions of Violence in Communist Election Posters

The party which deserves the most attention in terms of violence and violent actions is the List of the Leftist Workers and Proletarian Peasantry (*Kreisās strādniecības un darba zemniecības liste*), established for the Parliamentary elections in 1928. This party was closely linked to the illegal Latvian Communist Party (*Latvijas Komunistiskā partija*), which financed all its activities.

From 1920 Latvia's Communist Party functioned as a section of the Communist International (Komintern), loyally fulfilling all its decisions and orders. In order to secure the functioning of Latvia's Communist Party in accordance with the wishes of the Komintern, specially prepared "revolutionaries" from Soviet Russia were sent into Latvia. The Communists declared their main aim to be the abolition of an independent Latvia and its incorporation into Soviet Russia.⁵⁵ This declared aim was also one of the reasons for legally banning the Communist Party's existence in Latvia. In general, Latvia's Communist Party, which during the whole interwar period functioned underground, was used as an organization which, in the event of world revolution, would be able to fulfill its functions. In the meantime, it acted as an internal spy organization in Latvia.

During the whole interwar period the Latvian Communist Party was very politically active. In 1928 Latvia's Communist Party remained banned, yet

⁵⁴ Cf. p. 558.

⁵⁵ IMANTS MEDNIS: Galēji kreiso politisko partiju darbība Latvijas Republikas Parlamentārajā periodā [Extreme left political parties' Activities in Latvia's parliamentary period], in: Latvijas Arhīvi (1998), 2, pp. 31-36, here p. 33.



Fig. 1: Kreisās strādniecības un darba zemniecības saraksts. Pret karu! Pret fašismu!
[Leftist Workers and Proletarian Peasantry List. Against war! Against fascism!],
1931 (Collection of Latvian War Museum, inventory number 516-IV)



Fig. 2: Melnais un Sarkanais prot tik plūkties, ne darbu darīt, tāpēc balsojiet tikai par demokrātisko centru un bezpartejiski sabiedriskiem darbiniekiem, kuri stāv par visu šķiru sadarbību [Black and Red only know how to quarrel and not how to work, that's why you should vote only for Democratic Center and nonparty public workers, who stand up for cooperation between all classes], 1925 (Collection of National Library of Latvia, shelf number IPTL1-341/8)



Fig. 3: Kaujas sauciens [Battle call], 1931 (Collection of Latvian War Museum, inventory number 584-IV). “In these horrible days, when Ulmanis is lifting what he can’t carry, Bāce is promising what he can’t fulfil, and Balodis is stabbing where he can’t stab.” “Rooster, you are a happy bird! You won’t even be forced to sing a second time, when every ‘Christian’ will forget his promises.” “New! New! All the Cossacks in Japan prayed to the Buddha and Confucius that the Kaiser would father a son, but to no avail. Will our ‘Popular Socialists’, ‘Christian Social Democrats’ and ‘National Revolutionaries’ have better results? Also because Riga won’t give birth to any councillor.” “When all the hypocrites go to hell everybody cries out ‘Alleluia’.” “Stalin is a devil, but is this a reason to stab him in the back with a dagger?” “Never before have the workers received so much love – this time so many politicians are competing for the votes of the workers. Of course, the worker – with the number 3, answers them: ‘Go to hell!’”



Fig. 4: Melnā koalīcija jāsadragā. Valsts izsaimniekošanai un onkulu būšanai jādara gals. Par to cīnās sociāldemokrātija [The Black Coalition must be destroyed. State squandering and nepotism must be stopped. This is what Social Democracy stands for], 1931 (Collection of Latvian War Museum). "But what do the Communists stand for? They attack Social Democracy, weaken its strengths and thereby strengthen the black coalition. You, voter, don't want this, do you? That is why you should vote yourself for Social Democracy, and invite others to do so. For Number 3"



Fig. 5: Lai dzīvo Latv. Soc.-dem. Strādnieku partija! [Long live the Latvian Soc.-Dem. Workers Party!], 1922 (Collection of Latvian War Museum)



Fig. 6: Šīs vietas izcīnītas latvjiem. Par stingru latvju tautas varu! [These places are reserved for Latvians. For the strength of the Latvian nation!], 1928 (Collection of Academic Library of University of Latvia).^{*} “This land is ours, these cities are ours! The Latvian Active Nationalists won’t give them away to the Jews – the Judases – the internationalists.” “We are not merely promising ... We will give as much as we can. Justice must live on earth!” “Vote for list 12 – the Latvian Active Nationalists”

^{*} There were no regulations in Latvia regarding the printed form of text. The usage of old font in posters depended upon the equipment of the typographer where the posters were printed. This is the reason why, even in some cases from the late 1920s and early 1930s there are posters which are still printed using the old text font.



Fig. 7: JĀNIS LIEPIŅŠ: Nost kara tiesu sociālistus. Pret fašismu [No to war, Socialists on trial. Against fascism!], 1928 (Collection of Latvian National Library, shelf number IPTL1-341/57)



Fig. 8: JĀNIS LIEPIŅŠ: Kreiso darba ļaužu saraksts. Nost karu! [Leftist Workers List. Against war!], 1928 (Collection of Latvian War Museum)



Fig. 9: Kaujas sauciens [Battle call], 1931 (Collection of the Academic Library of University of Latvia). “Weapons: daggers from Moscow, carnival masks from Italy, and Niedra’s potatoes from Germany.” “Don’t tease the lion. In March he will rise to his feet and tear you into pieces.” “Voter, do you want someone that spills your blood? The Communist Travelling Pharmacy: bringing bad words and bad diseases.” “The ‘Popular Socialists’ have found their suitable place in the Solomonsk circus. Three camels from which nobody will crawl through the eye of a needle.” “Supporters of Bergs systematically glue their posters over social democrats posters. Gentlemen work: glue you are and glue you will stay.” “Only with a torch can you find anyone who will vote for the Democratic Centre.” “It will be fun, when everybody will vote for number 3”



Fig. 11: RIHARDS ZARIŅŠ: Nacionālā Apvienība glābs Latviju no sarkanā pūķa [The National Union will save Latvia from the red dragon], 1925 (Collection of National Library of Latvia, shelf number IPTL1-341/19)

aided by the newly established List of the Leftist Workers and Proletarian Peasantry, it participated for the first time as an independent list in democratic Latvian elections. Yet even previously, from 1922 onwards, the Communists succeeded in being elected in municipal elections by having members of Latvia's Communist Party nominated as participants on other legal left-wing parties' election lists, namely, on different trade union lists.⁵⁶ Results for the Communists as an independent political party in the 1928 parliamentary election were good, and they gained significant support in the electorate. In total they gained 6 seats out of 100 in the 1928 elections and 7 seats in the parliamentary elections of 1931.

The Communists gained their votes from the Social Democrats, whose popularity in these years slowly decreased. The key to the Communists' success probably lay in their radicalism, which in a time of great depression managed to address workers who shifted their support from the moderate Social Democrats to the Communists with their clearly stated radicalism and their readiness to wage war against all. The Communist Party's posters are some of the most violent election posters created in Latvia's democratic period. The year 1928 marks the beginning of the spread of images of terror, war and death, which were perpetuated until the end of the Second World War and were utilised by different political forces.

The main slogans incorporated in Communist posters were "against fascism" and "against war". These slogans reflected the main ideological line, which was defined by the Latvian Communist Party at the end of the 1920s – to fight against the threat of a fascist coup d'état and war.⁵⁷ It also demonstrated its adherence to the ideological concepts defined by the Komintern in the 1920s, when such enemies as "fascism", "Social Democrats", and "imperialists" were introduced into the iconography of Soviet Russia.⁵⁸

The idea of fascism was closely connected with the idea of violence through visual imagery. One of the examples here is a Leftist Workers List⁵⁹ poster created in 1928 (Figure 7⁶⁰). It consists of a universal power symbol – the red fist widely used in socialist and communist iconography. Other elements construct the idea of violence: the shooting scene and of course the gallows with a hanging body. An important role is played by the colour scheme – red as a "sacred colour" in left wing iconography⁶¹ symbolizing the

⁵⁶ Ibidem, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁷ MEDNIS, Galēji kreiso (as in footnote 55), p. 33.

⁵⁸ VICTORIA BONNEL: *Iconography of Power. Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, London 1999, p. 210.

⁵⁹ The List of the Leftist Workers and Proletarian Peasantry used also shortened names of their party.

⁶⁰ Cf. p. 559.

⁶¹ BERND SCHÜLER: *Farben als Wegweiser in der Politik*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (2006), 20, pp. 31-38, here p. 33; N. A. SOBOLEVA: *Istoriografiya, istochniko-vedenie, metody istoricheskogo issledovaniya. Iz istorii sovetskoi politicheskoi simbo-*

party's readiness to fight against the terror, but black suggests negative connotations with fascism (also understood to include Social Democrats, who in other posters were referred to as social fascists in a similar way to Bolshevik posters in Soviet Russia, with the only difference that in Latvia "social fascist" was understood more narrowly to mean local Social Democrats, and not the German Social Democrats as in Soviet posters)⁶².

In order to preserve their image and recognition, the same colour scheme was used in all the posters created by the Communist Party. This trend is seen in the poster created in the year 1931 (Figure 1)⁶³. The same applies to the slogan which is also repeated in the same form as in the previous election campaign. This poster reflects the use of the same communication tactic – willingness to project the emotional experiences of the past onto the future. Images of cripples who had survived the First World War still were everyday reality and the experience and the sufferings of war were not forgotten. That was of course the reason that made it possible for the Communists to improve their popularity by promising to fight against the possibility of another war. An important aspect of the message is not only the promise to stop war, but also the intention to blame right wing parties and Social Democrats for the preparation of another war and also to associate them with the implications about the evil of imperialist capitalism in a wider sense. It is interesting that in comparison to the iconography represented in Soviet Russian posters during the same period after the end of the civil war⁶⁴, the posters in Latvia use much more intense visual expressions of violence, demonstrating how they could adapt their propaganda to the local situation to achieve their aims.

The last, but not least impressive, example of the use of violent images in election posters is one created for the parliamentary elections in 1928 (Figure 8)⁶⁵. It continues the same idea of war and bloodshed. In this poster particular attention is devoted to an emotional message producing fear of the possibility of war. This poster, seen against the whole spectrum of contemporary Latvian election posters, may well be one of the most violent expressions of Communist propaganda and an expression of their intention to use radical means to achieve their goals. In fact, these Communist communication techniques not only increased the party's popularity among the more dissatisfied elements of society which were ready to act more radically, but also spread fear among other parts of the population. This is the only poster whose content was discussed in the press. The press devoted special attention

liki [Historiography, research of historical sources, methodology of historical research. From the history of soviet political symbols], in: *Otechestvennaya istoriya* (2006), 2, pp. 89-109, here p. 92.

⁶² BONNEL (as in footnote 58), p. 212.

⁶³ Cf. p. 553.

⁶⁴ BONNEL (as in footnote 58), pp. 186-242.

⁶⁵ Cf. p. 560.

to the spilled blood and the guns, allowing the viewers to interpret the poster's message as one of the ways stopping the war by killing all people.⁶⁶

VIII Symbols of Violence as Anti-Image of Communism

The tactics of persuasion practiced and the violent images by the Communists were also taken into account in other parties' campaigns. These images became the signifier, not only of the whole party, but also of the idea of communism itself. Other parties took advantage of the violent expressions in Communist posters and turned them against the Communists themselves. This was done, not only by the Social Democrats who competed with Communists for votes, but also by right-wing and centrist parties, who tried to increase their popularity by combating violent Communists.

An example of "violent communist" image production is the Social Democrats' poster "Battle Call" (Figure 9)⁶⁷, in which a member of the Communist Party is depicted as possessing different kinds of weapons, thus strengthening the idea that the actual source of violence comes from the Communists. The use of a weapon as a symbol for the Communists is evidence of the stereotypical thinking that evolved during the interwar years. This practice also signified the intention of other political parties to propagate this idea, seeing it as a positive instrument which might benefit their own popularity.

A similar idea of the armed Communist is expressed in the extreme right wing Christian Union's (*Kristīgā apvienība*, party existed 1920-1934) poster "David and Goliath" created in 1931 (Figure 10)⁶⁸. Here the character of Goliath personifies left-wing parties, which are marked with the parties' election list numbers on the beast's arm and cap. Goliath carries and uses a wide range of different weapons – a gun, knife, club and rifle. Along with the idea of violence that radiates the beast, it is also depicted as a dumb creature. And of course the religious connotations taken from the Bible, implying Goliath's impending failure, increase the effect of this poster.

Another example of the idea of the red beast, which poses a threat and consequently should be slain, is seen in the National Union's poster (Figure 11)⁶⁹. Its main aim was left-oriented political parties, especially Communists and Social Democrats. These parties are symbolised by the red dragon, which is slain by the national hero. This poster is also special in terms of its choice of symbols, demonstrating the influence of foreign cultural trends. Despite the strong National Union's political platform, in which nationalism and the inspiration from pre-Livonian times played the central role, the scene of the

⁶⁶ Kā baušļenieki saprot plakātu uzsaukumus [How the inhabitants of Bauska understand the slogans of posters], in: Zemgales Balss (1928), 226, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Cf. p. 561.

⁶⁸ Cf. p. 562.

⁶⁹ Cf. p. 563.

poster is taken from a famous Christian motif already presented in early communist iconography in Russia⁷⁰ – St. George and the Dragon – and not from Latvian folk tradition.

The similar idea of destroying the red beast is expressed in a Latvian Peasant Union's (*Latviešu zemnieku savienība*, party existed 1917-1934) poster.⁷¹ In contrast, this poster does not illustrate violent actions. It marks an interesting trend, which can also be seen in other central and moderate right-wing parties' posters – the avoidance of any reference to violence. Despite the fact that the text on the poster says that peasant party will deal with the red monster, the artistic means employed in the poster do not imply a willingness to use force.

All the last three examples reflect an important trend in political iconography in Latvia – the more one political force supported nationalistic ideas, the more allegorical its visual symbolism became. There are no monsters, dragons and snakes in left-wing political parties' posters, in contrast to those of the right-wing parties. The left-wing parties – Social Democrats and Communists – tended to be as realistic in their visual imagery as possible, while preserving the appeal to the emotions as an instrument of political persuasion.

IX Expressions of Violence in the Streets during Political Campaigning

Throughout Latvia's parliamentary period all political campaigns at every election were accompanied by different kinds of violent acts. The most harmless were the street fights among those people who were responsible for placing posters in the streets. Most of the parties had specially organised groups of people to place and protect their posters.⁷² These groups also tore down competitors' posters in order to increase the visibility of their own messages. This practice, which in 1929⁷³ was forbidden by law, created tension among parties. Another source of conflict was incidents which occurred dur-

⁷⁰ BONNEL (as in footnote 58), p. 70.

⁷¹ The poster is found in: VALDA KVASKOVA, GUNTA MINDE, VALDA PĒTERSONE, PĀRSLA PĒTERSONE: Iespieddarbi un zīmējumi Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīva kolekcijās [Printed works and graphics in the collections of the Latvian State Historical Archives], in: *Latvijas Arhīvi* (2009), 3, pp. 95-112, here p. 108. In one part of poster a peasant is portrayed, holding a Peasants Union's flag in his hand and with a crowd of people behind him. On the other part of poster is depicted a red monster, looking at the crowd of people. The slogan of this poster states "Spit red flames as much as you want – we will deal with you! Vote for the Peasants Union!" Due to copyright reasons, an illustration of this poster cannot be published.

⁷² Latvian State Historical Archives: holding 3710 (Democratic Center), description 1, file 251, p. 4 (year 1925).

⁷³ 1903. gada 22. III Sodu likumi (as in footnote 34), p. 192.

ing numerous election meetings which were interrupted by their political opponents.⁷⁴

Brute force was used as the main weapon in street competition, and this was practiced both by left- and right-wing activists and in some cases by centrist party members. There were cases when this tension grew into more serious and violent conflicts.

The first tragic event connected with election campaigning was the killing of the Social Democrat Kārlis Kurzemnieks before the first democratic elections took place in 1920. The person who committed this criminal act was never found and sentenced, but the public repercussions of the event were huge. The Social Democrats reacted to it with emotional rhetoric in which they tried to put the blame on their fiercest political adversary, the Peasant Union, by declaring that this party with their criticism had provided the moral justification for the use of force against the Social Democrats.⁷⁵ This tragic event in fact proved beneficial in consolidating the Social Democrats internally, and helping them to gain more support from voters in the upcoming elections.

In the same year another incident occurred, when an unsuccessful assassination attempt was made against Prime Minister Ulmanis, who was also one of the most high-profile leaders of the Peasant Union. But, unlike the Social Democrats, the Peasant Union was not able to integrate this incident into its campaign of political agitation.

A few years later another sensational event shook the general public – the killing of a 19-year-old member of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, Aleksandrs Masaks, in February 1925. The death of this young boy was the result of a street fight between extreme national activists (Latvian Nationalist Club) and Social Democrats, which grew out of some small clashes among party supporters who were distributing their leaflets in the streets, transforming a fairly innocuous conflict with clubs into a gun fight.⁷⁶

Despite the tragic nature of the event, it turned into the most visible public display by the Social Democrats, allowing them to use the death of their young party member in the party's municipal election campaign. The Social Democrats managed to arrange a large-scale public funeral for their lost member where all important Social Democrat leaders were present and one of

⁷⁴ Kurpnieks paliek uzticams saviem amata rīkiem [Cobbler, stick to your last], in: *Latvijas Kareivis* (1929), 40, p. 1; *Libavskie vybory i predvybornye bezporyadki* [Elections in Liepāja and election campaign disturbances], in: *Segodnya* (1921), 14, p. 4; 4. Saeimas vēlēšanu aģitācijas triki, skandāli un noziedzības [4th Parliament election tricks, scandals and felony], in: *Iekšlietu Ministrijas Vēstnesis* (1931), 523, p. 3.

⁷⁵ ZELČE, Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu kampaņa: 1920. marts (as in footnote 18), pp. 94-95.

⁷⁶ Politisko kaislību asiņainie upuri [The victims of political passions], in: *Latvijas Kareivis* (1925), 38, p. 1; *Nosodāmas sadursmes* [Condemnable collisions], in: *Jaunākās Ziņas* (1925), 37, p. 4.

the most famous national poets Rainis held a speech in honor of the young boy. It was estimated that the total number of people who attended the funeral was 30 000-40 000.⁷⁷ The biggest and most influential Latvian newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas* published photos of this funeral. The next such funeral to be organised was for foreign minister Zigfrids Anna Meierovics on August 27, 1925. Meierovics was considered to be one of the most important national politicians of Latvia – a politician who had managed to gain recognition of Latvia's independence internationally. Examples of these deaths show how murder can trigger a huge emotional response and how it can be instrumentalised to achieve political goals. In fact, violence and participation in violent confrontations gained strong symbolic value.

X Conclusions

The appearance of violence in election posters in correlation to the societal acceptance of these expressions of violence proves that it was an issue in the everyday life of interwar period in Latvia. The symbols of violence in election posters corresponded to the reality on the streets. Violent confrontations of opposing political party members both innocuous and brutal were fully transferred and represented in symbols of violence throughout political posters. Public violent clashes between political adversaries persisted despite the significant decrease of criminal activity and acts of violence outside the realm of politics after 1920. This proves that the overall level of tolerance was low and to some extent even violent solutions were acceptable to Latvian interwar society. Further analysis of the symbolic expressions of violence in election posters demonstrates three main conceptions of violence:

First is the impersonal violence present in the fights among political adversaries and perceived in negative terms. It was used to reinforce the idea of instability in the Latvian political environment. It criticised physical violence and presented a stable and strong party outside the depicted struggle as a desirable alternative.

The second conception uses violence as a source of fear and intimidation. In comparison to other political parties this conception of violence was used only by Communists. In fact, this kind of violence became the signifier of communism itself and was used in other parties' election posters as an anti-image of communism, causing an actual "battle of symbols".

The third conception of violence sees it as a source of power and domination. It was used to stress the political importance of the represented political organization. This concept of violence was represented in a more personal fashion and to some extent it was even desirable in the view of the political parties who used it. Examples of violence as a positive expression indicate its casual use for settling differences in interwar Latvian society.

⁷⁷ SSS biedra Aleksandra Masaka apbedīšana [The funeral of Workers Sport Guard's member Aleksandrs Masaks], in: *Jaunākās Ziņas* (1925), 43, p. 3.

All these tolerable expressions of violence could be explained by the society's experience in the First World War, the period of "independence struggle" and Bolshevik terror on Latvian soil. The violence experienced during these periods resulted in society's acceptance of certain violent forms of behaviour, which consequently were present in different spheres of life during the whole parliamentary period in Latvia.

Zusammenfassung

Gewalt als politische Agitation: das Beispiel des politischen Posters in Lettland, 1920-1934

Dieser Beitrag richtet seinen Blick auf den Gebrauch von Plakaten in den Wahlkämpfen während Lettlands parlamentarischer Ära von 1920 bis 1934. In diesen Jahren bildeten sich politische und wirtschaftliche Prozesse und Verhaltensmuster aus, es etablierten sich die politischen Institutionen, die für die staatliche Entwicklung verantwortlich waren, und Lettland durchlebte einen Lernprozess hinsichtlich der öffentlichen Teilhabe am politischen Geschehen; all dies hatte Auswirkungen auf die Gesamtentwicklung der Lettischen Republik. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wird Plakaten als Bestandteil von Wahlkämpfen gewidmet, wobei die Frage nach der Verwendung unterschiedlicher Ausdrucksformen von Gewalt im Mittelpunkt steht – der bildlichen Darstellung auf Plakaten sowie den praktischen Ausdrucksformen auf den Straßen als Überzeugungsmittel im Wahlkampf. Das Hauptinteresse gilt der visuellen Bildsprache der politischen Parteien und der Rolle der dafür verwendeten unterschiedlichen Gewaltsymbole. Folgende Symbole für Gewalt fanden sich auf den Wahlplakaten wieder: verschiedene Arten von Waffen (Schusswaffen, Messer, Äxte, Knüppel), tote Menschen, Blut, Schießereien sowie Kampfszenen. Eine der Besonderheiten im Gebrauch dieser Symbole bestand darin, dass sie sowohl positiv als auch negativ konnotiert waren, immer abhängig davon, welche Botschaft der dazugehörigen Partei das jeweilige Poster vermitteln sollte. Im Zusammenhang mit den unterschiedlichen Darstellungen von Gewalt wird den kommunistischen Plakaten in Lettland besondere Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet, da sie, verglichen mit den übrigen Wahlplakaten in dem berücksichtigten Zeitraum, am eindrucksvollsten und aggressivsten erscheinen. Der Beitrag untersucht außerdem, wie die anderen Parteien auf die Plakate der Kommunisten reagierten; zumeist wurde anhand dieser Plakate ein Negativbild der Kommunisten gezeichnet. Zu einem wichtigen Bestandteil der Wahlkämpfe wurden Straßenschlachten, die als eher harmlose Rivalitäten zwischen politischen Kontrahenten ihren Anfang nahmen und dann zu Konflikten ausarteten, die mitunter Todesopfer forderten.