

Restricting Russians: language and immigration laws in Soviet Latvia, 1956–1959

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In 1956, a prominent faction within the leadership of Soviet Latvia, the Latvian national communists, launched two ambitious initiatives designed to redress perceived Stalinist Russification policies – a language law and residency restrictions. This article examines and evaluates these two policies and asks if they were part of a “Latvianization” program that deliberately targeted Russians for denial of residency permits and required Russians to gain Latvian-language competency within a two-year timeframe or face the threat of dismissal. In an effort to restore the primacy of the Latvian language, the national communists created a law enforcing knowledge of Latvian and Russian for Communist Party and government functionaries and service sector personnel. Using the Soviet legal system, the national communists also attempted to halt the influx of predominantly Slavic immigration to the Latvian capital, Riga. By instituting passport restrictions on settling in the city, the national communists sought to limit Slavic migration in order to maintain Riga’s Latvian character and reduce pressure on the city’s housing supply and municipal services. Existing studies deem passport restrictions in other Soviet cities a failure. The author argues, however, that the national communists’ scheme was generally successful, dramatically curbing migration to Riga during its operation.

Keywords: Russification; national communism; Latvia; migration; Soviet periphery

The Thaw era in the Soviet Union ushered in by First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev involved a limited liberalization of Soviet society and politics. Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s cult of personality at a closed session of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereafter CPSU) in February 1956 encouraged leaders in the Soviet republics to carry de-Stalinization to the Soviet periphery. In Latvia, the 20th Party Congress offered the so-called Latvian national communists (a faction within the Latvian leadership that emerged from 1953) the necessary Leninist ideological armor to initiate their own reform program. Khrushchev’s Thaw permitted the national communists to conduct their own concurrent “Latvian Thaw.”

While the national communists formed between 1953 and 1956, they were limited in their ability to enact significant reform until the extraordinary 20th Party Congress. The profound effects of the Congress gave the national communists the flexibility necessary to launch several policy initiatives in an effort to realize their vision for Latvia. In this

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article, we shall explore the two most controversial policies of the national communists, which had a distinctly ethnic dimension. These initiatives developed as a response to Russian dominance of the Latvian Communist Party (hereafter LCP) and perceived Russification policies under Stalin. This article asks if the national communists pursued a nationalist “Latvianization” policy through their reform program.

The consensus among historians is that the national communists enjoyed limited, generally symbolic, success in enacting their reforms before provoking Moscow (King 1965, 195). This was purportedly due to the brief period of their hegemony, and resistance to the implementation of their policies from the Russian-dominated LCP bureaucracy (Riekstiņš 2009, 195). This understanding, however, was predicated upon an analysis of official newspapers and dissident reports by émigrés and Western academics with their attendant alignments. The access afforded to researchers in Latvian and Russian archives since the late 1990s now reveals a more active and aggressive reform campaign initiated by the national communists, and an equally determined counteroffensive waged against them from within the LCP (Purs 2012, 68). This article makes use of Soviet statistics and post-Soviet research data, previously unseen in English language scholarship, to support the author’s argument about the relative success of the national communists’ passport regime. Statistical data about migration during the Soviet period were compiled from registration figures collected from places of residence. Annual data are scarce and were published in secret collections, which only became available after the fall of the USSR. For greater accuracy, the author has included a range of post-Soviet research figures on migration, where possible, for comparison with Soviet data. There were tangible political effects from national communist rule and though some policies were short-lived, in key areas such as migration and cadres, the national communists were able to improve the position of Latvians vis-à-vis Russians in Latvia.

The language law

Before World War II, German, Latvian, and Russian were common languages in Riga. Yet, by the mid-1950s, a decade of Soviet rule and large waves of Slavic migration saw Russian become the dominant language in many spheres of life in Latvia. Most political, educational, and cultural events were held in Russian. The names of some streets, and signs on institutions, businesses, and shops were written only in Russian. In many ministries, such as finance and trade, Russian was the language of communication. The language issue was most acute in vital public services such as the police and hospitals. In the Riga Medical Institute, many newly certified doctors could not speak Latvian, which complicated communication with patients (Berklavs 2011, 99). Russian was the lingua franca in many *kolkhozy* (collective farms), *sovkhozy* (state farms), and MTS (Machine Tractor Stations).¹

The industrial sector was the worst offender. Despite approximately 70% of industrial workers being Latvian, the technical literature in the light, fuel, construction, textile, meat, and dairy industries was only published in Russian. Latvia’s House of Scientific and Technical Propaganda did not produce a single page of information in Latvian. The Fuel Industry Ministry printed operating instructions for machines only in Russian (Berklavs 2011, 99).² Most enterprise directors were Russians and, therefore, gave instructions and other administrative notices exclusively in Russian.³ According to a 1955 *Agitprop* (Agitation and Propaganda Department) report, despite Latvians comprising more than half the workers and engineers at VEF (State Electro-technical Factory), political work was conducted mainly in

Russian. The report blamed the LCP Central Committee (hereafter CC) for neglecting propaganda work in Latvian.⁴

From his first speech as Latvian Komsomol (Communist Youth Organization) First Secretary in 1946, future national communist leader Eduards Berklavs complained about the lack of effort among Russians to learn Latvian (Prigge 2015, 28). When the national communists began to emerge as a force in Latvian politics in the summer of 1953, Berklavs, then a Secretary on the Latvian capital Riga's *gorkom* (City Party Committee), used the opportunity of the June 1953 plenum to confront Latvia's language problem. Berklavs spoke of the need to learn both languages, fully aware that many Latvians possessed a good command of Russian. He noted that cadres' insufficient knowledge of Latvian (only 800 of Riga's 20,000 agitators worked in Latvian) meant Party agitation was ineffective in penetrating the local population. Berklavs also criticized migrants for their inability to learn Latvian:

We have not devoted the attention it deserves to the question of the acquisition of Russian and Latvian. Almost nine years have passed since liberation. That is enough time in which each person, if they were willing, could have acquired another language ... That is why today there should no longer be a language problem.⁵

Known for his controversial comments, Berklavs did not shy away from explaining why the language problem persisted. He brazenly told the Russian-majority CC (only 42% were Latvians) the Latvian bureau (the republic's highest policy-making authority) had already made two resolutions on the question, "but beyond that, nothing further has been done. The CC is not interested in the implementation of [the bureau's] decisions."⁶ Berklavs's fellow emerging national communists joined him in pouring scorn on Stalin's nationality policy and Latvia's language problem from the rostrum at the June 1953 plenum.

Soviet authorities imposed alterations to Latvian orthography to make it more similar to Russian. On 5 June 1946, the Council of Ministers passed a law removing the palatalized "r" (ŗ) from the Latvian alphabet. The debate resurfaced in 1957 when another law eliminated the indicator "c" for the palatalized "h" sound (Jansone 2010, 749). Donald Horowitz (1985, 219) considers that the status of a language denotes the status of the group that speaks it. Latvian was not dying out, but the national communists feared that if Latvian were relegated to the status of a rural and cultural language, not only would it adversely affect Latvian identity, but it would also make Latvians second-class citizens in their own republic. Letters to Moscow described the declining usage of Latvian in cities (Riekstiņš 2012, 112). With ignorance of Latvian high among Slavic migrants, in shops, and on the street, Russian increasingly became the *lingua franca*.

In the summer of 1956, articles in support of Latvian-language learning appeared in the press. An article in the newspaper *Sovetskaia Latvija* by philologist K. Gailums (1956) offered practical advice on learning Latvian from textbooks to radio and on self-taught and classroom strategies. Nikolai Shalaev (1956), Secretary for Aizpute district, was a Russian who sympathized with the national communists. He wrote an article about his experience of learning Latvian and emphasized the importance of doing so.

For each of us who live and work in Latvia, Latvian language skills should be urgently acquired. Particularly Party officials, heads of enterprises, institutions and organizations, everyone who has to communicate with people on a daily basis. Knowledge of the language of the people among whom you live and work is necessary to listen to people, to better understand their needs and requests ... But if you don't want to learn, it's disrespectful ... it's absolutely unacceptable! We must persistently study not only the language but also Latvian culture and history. (Shalaev 1956)

This suggests a subtle national communist press campaign to prepare the population for more stringent measures to encourage Latvian-language acquisition.

Once Berklavs became Riga *gorkom* First Secretary in December 1955, and following the radical alteration of circumstances in their favor following the 20th Party Congress, in the winter of 1956 the national communists were able to enact their first, and arguably their most controversial, major piece of legislation.⁷ It seems resolute action on the language issue was prompted following the attendance of Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman Vilis Krūmiņš, Berklavs's ally and a high-ranking national communist, at an Estonian Communist Party plenum in October 1956. Krūmiņš reported to the Latvian CC bureau about recent changes in Estonia and drew parallels between shortcomings in nationality policy in Estonia and Latvia, among them language and cadres policy. On 12 November, there was a heated debate at a bureau meeting, indicating that a resolution on the language question was forthcoming. In his speech, Berklavs presented a large amount of statistical data on the composition of the Riga *gorkom*, which revealed that Latvians comprised only a small stratum of the *gorkom* and its leadership. Berklavs complained about the "ever-increasing flow of Russians to [Latvian] cities, especially Riga." He stated bluntly, "Riga is losing its national identity and is being converted into a Russian city with Russian as the dominant language." Other national communist leaders agreed. Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman Kārlis Ozoliņš attributed the dominance of Russian to insufficient Party work in Latvian, concluding that the Party was dividing along "sectarian" lines. The meeting ended with an agreement to make a decision on the use of both Latvian and Russian by all employees in the Party, government, and economic apparatuses at the next bureau meeting.⁸

On 19 November, there was another dramatic bureau discussion characterized by extraordinary comments from national communists. Latvia State University Rector Jānis Jurgens drew an unflattering parallel between feudal nineteenth-century Latvia, where German barons spoke with Latvian peasants in German, and Russian *raikom* (District Party Committee) secretaries who had worked in Latvia for 10 years but still did not know Latvian. Krūmiņš claimed "Party activists want to eliminate Latvian because Latvians study Russian well, and therefore all Latvians will communicate in Russian." The national communists realized that persuasion alone would not induce migrants to change their attitude toward Latvian. Berklavs (2011, 97) considered that a language law without sanctions "would be of little use. In the past it did not create adherents." Only an official decree, one that could not be ignored by members of the Party, could enforce Latvian-language learning. Instead, for the first time, he proposed a two-year period to learn the language for "Russians and not real Latvians," and if they did not comply, then they would be "removed from their jobs and invited to leave the republic." By "not real Latvians," Berklavs was referring to the so-called "*Latovichi*," ethnic Latvians who were either born or resided in the USSR during the interwar period. LCP First Secretary Jānis Kalnbērziņš, who wanted to distance himself from this sort of dangerous talk, reported the content of these discussions to the CPSU CC Party Organs Department for Union Republics in Moscow, which monitored Party activity in the Soviet republics. In his report to Moscow, Kalnbērziņš maintained that, in contrast to the national communists' assertions, the CC considered the mood among workers quite healthy and individual nationalistic manifestations did not characterize the overall situation on the national question. Second Secretary Filipp Kashnikov reported that after the 19 November meeting, State Control Minister Anton Ozoling, CC Agricultural Department Head Zhuko, and other non-Latvian speakers approached him and Kalnbērziņš with requests to the CPSU CC for transfers.⁹ No doubt, these officials feared rising Latvian nationalism, decided it was preferable to leave.

At the 19 November meeting, rather than address resolving the language question directly, the national communists introduced a decision on “shortcomings in the conduct of Leninist national policy in the republic.” There was opposition to this proposal from the Stalinists on the bureau, however, and as a concession, a commission was created to prepare a draft resolution entitled “the study of the Latvian and Russian languages by employees of state and Party organs.”¹⁰ Berklavs used this commission to draft the language law he unveiled in late November 1956 at the Riga *gorkom*.

Moscow was fully aware of these developments. In November 1956, Department for Union Republics Baltic Sector Deputy Chairman Mikhail Gavrilov met with Baltic leaders. Gavrilov’s subsequent report on 27 November examined the causes of the spread of nationalist and anti-Soviet sentiment in the Baltic republics. Unsurprisingly, in his report, Gavrilov condemned the “non-Party views expressed by Berklavs, Ozoliņš, and others” at the 19 November meeting. He described their statements as “politically harmful nationalist attacks.”¹¹ Interestingly, there was no reaction or interference from Moscow following Gavrilov’s report. In the spirit of the more relaxed atmosphere of Khrushchev’s Thaw, the Latvians were allowed to decide how to solve the language question for themselves. Furthermore, according to national communist Culture Minister Vol-demārs Kalpiņš’s (1988) memoirs, after the creation of the language law, in December 1956, Khrushchev received Kalnbērziņš, Ozoliņš, and Latvian Council of Ministers Chairman Vilis Lācis in Moscow. Lācis reputedly discussed the language law with Khrushchev among other proposals. Khrushchev acknowledged that the Latvian government’s concerns were legitimate and agreed in principle that cadres needed to know the local language (Bleiere et al. 2006, 396). Although archival evidence is unavailable to corroborate this, it is consistent with Khrushchev’s conciliatory position toward the national communists on many issues between 1956 and mid-1959.

The resolutions

On 30 November 1956, the Riga *gorkom* bureau adopted a resolution entitled “On learning Latvian and Russian by cadres serving the general public.” Party secretaries, cadres, and agitators connected to enterprises and institutions were the targets of this bilingual initiative. The resolution stated:

The placement of cadres is still unsatisfactory. In many commercial organizations, in enterprises dealing with communal services, in medical facilities ... a significant number of employees who on a daily basis are in contact with the working masses know only one language.¹²

The resolution noted that one of the most important and practical characteristics to be considered in employing cadres was knowledge of both languages. Cadres were to take into account national peculiarities in their work with the populace and propaganda was to be published in both languages (Berklavs 2011, 98).¹³ The resolution decreed that all those working in professions which served the general public must possess conversational language skills in both Latvian and Russian. The resolution affected a broad stratum of employees outside of the Party and government, including service industry workers, trade union chairmen, managers of public businesses and establishments, bus and tram drivers, tradesmen, utilities workers, housing managers, medical facilities, pharmacies, hairdressers, shops, and the police.

The legality and prospects for the realization of Berklavs’s resolution at the Riga *gorkom* were enhanced by the national communists’ ability to convince the bureau to adopt a resolution on 6 December 1956 “On the need for Party and Soviet officials and

economic managers to learn Latvian and Russian.” The 6 December resolution replicated the provisions of the *gorkom* decision on 30 November, applying them to the whole republic. Berkblavs (2011, 98) claims that rural areas successfully attempted to follow Riga’s example and create their own specific language laws and that the bureau adopted those proposals. The bureau resolution complained of numerous examples throughout Latvia where business was conducted “only in Russian, disregarding the workforce’s ethnic composition.” This was said to have caused discontent among Latvian workers and allowed bourgeois nationalists to incite ethnic strife between Latvians and Russians. Crucially, directives from the 20th Party Congress on the need to abide by the principles of Leninist national policy were used to justify the resolution.¹⁴ The statute called for the condemnation of “violations of Lenin’s principles of nationality politics found in past decrees.” The resolution accused the republic’s *gorkomy*, *raikomy*, and *rainspolkomy* (District Executive Committees) of being unconcerned that cadres who had worked in Latvia for many years did not know Latvian and were not learning it. All local Party organizations, ministries, organs of Latvia, and all other aspects of Latvian society, including schools and cultural organizations, were ordered to begin addressing the language problem no later than 1 January 1957.¹⁵

Despite the resolutions referring to the two languages, they were principally aimed at ensuring proficiency in Latvian, since a majority of Latvians in leading positions already spoke Russian (Riekstiņš 2009, 177). The law required proficiency in Russian to make it palatable and not appear directed at Russians. William Prigge (2015, 53) believes the law was not nationalist in character: “While the language policy itself cannot be termed bourgeois nationalism, it did signal that Latvia would no longer tolerate linguistic Russification.” Yet, it is clear Russians were specifically targeted and that the law constituted linguistic “Latvianization,” which makes Prigge’s assertion difficult to accept.

The most extraordinary feature of both the Riga *gorkom* and CC bureau directives was that they stipulated a timeframe, as Berkblavs suggested at the 19 November meeting. The law assigned “to the Party organization secretaries ... the task of initiating the learning of the Latvian and Russian languages among cadres so that they can acquire these languages within two years time starting from 1 January 1957.”¹⁶ An important clause was inserted concerning sanctions applicable to those who avoided learning these languages or failed to achieve conversational proficiency within the allotted time. The issue would then be raised as to their suitability to occupy a position bringing them into direct contact with the public.¹⁷ Enterprise directors, state offices, and organizations were to assess all new employees’ language skills.¹⁸ The time limit and sanctions were the most fiercely contested aspects of the law. Berkblavs (2011, 97) defended his resolution by explaining that if the law had no sanctions, then it would be toothless and could be ignored or circumvented. Unlike previous resolutions, these were not merely hollow edicts devoid of instructions for their implementation. Ministries and large enterprises were responsible for organizing Latvian and Russian language courses in institutions, organizations, enterprises, MTS, and *kolkhozy*. The education ministry was to prepare and distribute coursework and develop a curriculum to facilitate language acquisition. This was to be in the form of textbooks for adults, with conversational dictionaries and vocabularies prepared by the education and culture ministries.¹⁹

The language law had enormous scope. It affected at least 30,000 Soviet specialists in Latvia, requiring them to acquire a command of Latvian (King 1965, 194). Berkblavs (2011, 97, 99) admitted that despite simultaneous efforts alongside the language law to halt the flow of migrants, the major problem remained the overpopulation of Riga, but there was no legal basis to expel migrants. One detects in Berkblavs’s language the hope that if

migrants to Riga disliked the language law, they would simply leave. He suggested Russians at the Riga Medical Institute who did not want to learn Latvian would go to Russia to train as doctors. The language law was not merely aimed at ensuring Latvians could use their language in day-to-day activities or to improve propaganda to boost Latvian Party membership. The national communists intended to radically strengthen the Latvian language's role in public life. The resolutions stipulated that Party, soviet, Komsomol, and *kolkhozy* meetings be held in both languages. Furthermore, these meetings' resolutions, reports, speeches, and draft decisions were to be published in both languages.²⁰ The law represented an overhaul of society and a redressing of the balance between indigenous and Union influences on the republic's functioning.

The failure of the language law

Ultimately, the 1956 Riga language law was unsuccessful. The law existed for two and half years and in that time made very little impact. Though data on the subject are scarce, it appears there was no discernable uptick in Latvian-language competency. Although the 1959 census did not include a question about second-language proficiency, the 1970 census did. The census revealed that 26 years after the re-establishment of Soviet power, just 18% of all Russians in Latvia spoke Latvian, as opposed to the 47.2% of Latvians who spoke Russian (the figure rises to 62.5% among 11- to 39-year olds) (Dreifelds 1977, 139).

Some historians, however, consider that the language law was not a complete failure. It seems the law was used to remove some obstinate officials. Gundar King (1965, 194) describes the language requirement as “probably the most potent lever used in removing or neutralizing Russian influence ... There are indications that it was used primarily to remove inefficient, dogmatic party hacks.” Similarly, Prigge (2004, 228) claims that “prior to 1959, a large number of Russians did indeed lose their positions” because of failure to comply with the law.

Yet, by summer 1959, six months after the end of the two-year period stipulated for service sector and Party employees to have gained conversational proficiency in Latvian and Russian, little had changed. A report from May 1959 about the situation in the Communication Ministry noted that a significant portion of the Ministry's leaders and technical engineers could still not speak Latvian. Of Riga Telegraph's 226 employees, 144 (64%) did not understand Latvian, including the chairman and chief engineer. The report admitted there were “formal Latvian language courses. Language groups have been established but lessons do not take place on a regular basis and attendance is low. A significant number of workers do not even participate in the language program” (Riekstiņš 2012, 69). The issue appeared to be a failure to enforce the law. In October 1958, Krūmiņš enshrined national communist cadres policy in a plenum resolution. The resolution required similar measures as the language law: senior officials must possess both Latvian and Russian languages, especially those cadres involved in propaganda work. The resolution acknowledged a most unfavorable situation in language competency and cadres work, demonstrating that almost two years after the language law came into effect, new, similarly ineffective resolutions were attempting to solve the problems of their predecessors because of a lack of progress due to implementation.²¹

Moscow tolerated national communist initiatives for two and half years under the conditions of the Thaw. The purge of the national communists in July 1959, however, rendered the “Latvianization” of economic and political institutions a short-term experiment. One reason the language law was unsuccessful is because it failed to penetrate the administrative

bureaucracy's lower levels, allowing officials to obstruct the law's implementation. In a letter to Khrushchev, former Marxism–Leninism university lecturer Jānis Dīmanis complained that the language law failed because of a loophole on the ill-defined level of competency required. He wrote: “*Raikom* instructors openly ‘revolted’ and a gnashing of teeth took place at the Riga *gorkom* conference. Discontent was inevitable, as the decision created the tactic of learning a convenient ‘basic’ Latvian which satisfied everybody, while achieving nothing in practice.” Dīmanis continued:

Public opinion is being strongly manipulated, intimating the CC's decision is due to nationalist pressure ... The republic's Russian press and personnel are quiet; the cat has their tongue. They are obviously very interested in nothing coming of the decision ... The justification was that if Latvians didn't want to look like nationalists, then they must know Russian; that they shouldn't harass Russians to learn Latvian. (Riekstiņš 2012, 112–113)

Dīmanis astutely critiqued the law's problems and insinuated that hostility from within elements of the Party leadership encouraged Slavs not to learn Latvian. National communist trade union council chairman Indriķis Pinksis lambasted the language situation in Riga's proletarian district in April 1959, claiming trade unions in Riga reported that Latvian workers were not spoken to in Latvian. Pinksis accused the proletarian *raikom* of not implementing the language law. As examples, he cited visits from foreign delegations to the district. On visiting the textiles factory Rigas audums (Riga Fabric), an Albanian delegation asked “Why do only Russians work here?” Their hosts replied that Latvians comprised 70–80% of the factory's workforce, to which the Albanians responded “But why do they all write in Russian?”²² A Finnish delegation to VEF similarly asked, “Is the state language in your republic Russian? Why Russian?” The Latvian officials told their guests that they used their own language, to which the Finns replied, “[Then] why is all the writing in Russian?”²³ The conspicuous absence of Latvian and the preponderance of Russian in these factories gave these foreign delegations the impression that Latvians did not use their own language. Reputedly, Proletarian raikom secretary Matveev did not speak or attempt to learn Latvian, and at a Party conference asked, “Why is there so much talk about Latvian. It is necessary to speak the language of the Party, Russian.”²⁴ On 23 August 1958, the Ministry of Agriculture compiled a list of 63 *kolkhoz* directors and key specialists who could not speak Latvian (Riekstiņš 2012, 67–68). It is possible this list was compiled in accordance with the language law's provisions for monitoring language competency.

Substantial migrant turnover contributed to the lack of progress because migrants considered their time in Latvia temporary. For example, in 1955, 43,900 people arrived in Riga, but 34,100 departed (*Rīga skaitļos* 1991, 17). As we have seen from reports about language classes and census statistics, the Slavic population obstinately avoided learning Latvian. It is difficult to tangibly assess the extent of opposition toward the law because from 1957, most of Latvia's media fell under national communist auspices.

Frustration with the language law's implementation by no means weakened the national communists' resolve. They continued to incrementally introduce more Latvian into daily life despite their failure to induce Russians to learn Latvian *en masse*. Egil Levits (1998, 52) believes that due to national communist efforts, “the Latvian language was able to slightly recover its position in the public sphere,” but the “decision was not practically realized.” Recognizing the language law's failure to improve knowledge of Latvian, Berklavs (1993, 16) reflected, “at least it stopped [people] ignoring Latvian.” One anecdote that illustrates the impact of Berklavs's language policy was about the nickname given to vodka during the national communist period. It was called “Berklavs” because the brand “Crystal Clear” stopped using Cyrillic letters in Latvia. People asked each other in line

“how many bottles of ‘Berkļavs,’ 2 or 3?” This indicates that the populace recognized national communist efforts to improve the status of the Latvian language. While this is only anecdotal, at the July 1959 LCP plenum, *Gosplan* (State Planning Committee) chairman Augusts Čulītis revealed that print on drinks’ labels (his example was fruit water) had been solely in Latvian for some time under the national communists.²⁵ This was a subtler process of “Latvianization” than the language law.

The passport regime

In the 1950s, the torrent of newcomers flowing from the Russian Republic into Latvia slowed following Stalin’s death, for the first time since 1945. The slump in Slavic migration between 1954 and 1955 is often attributed to the uncertainty caused by the power struggle between Khrushchev and Lavrentii Beria. Soviet migration data indicate that net migration to Latvia slumped by 75.6% in 1954 to 2000; in 1955, the outflow surpassed the inflow by 1300 (Eglīte and Mežs 2007, 411). Yet, there was an additional cause for the abrupt fall in migration. The CPSU sought to control where people lived, with an internal passport system designed to manage migration through administrative means (Buckley 1995, 896). Therefore, to move to and live in Riga, it was necessary to obtain a *propiska*, a residency permit. The ostensible rationale for the system was to regulate the countryside’s massive depopulation by those attempting to escape rural poverty.

On 21 October 1953, Soviet Premier Georgii Malenkov announced order No. 2666–1124s relaxing the Stalinist passport regime across the country by reducing the number of cities and regions with passport restrictions.²⁶ A limited passport regime directed at those coming to Riga from rural areas had been in effect since July 1949.²⁷ On 18 November 1953, the Latvian Council of Ministers issued resolution 1187-s, which preserved the passport regime, exempting Riga from the USSR Council of Ministers’ decision.²⁸ This decision was co-authored by national communist Jānis Kacēns, the Council of Ministers’ head of administrative affairs. This allowed Latvian authorities limited control over registration in Riga and contributed to the subsequent fall in migration between 1954 and 1955. In 1954, Riga’s police arrested 15,000 unregistered “aliens” and removed 2500 from the city. In 1955, the number of removals doubled to approximately 5000 (Le Bourhis 2013, 10). The resolution, however, proved incapable of restricting migration in the long term and could be circumvented. In 1956, an influx of 26,600 people surpassed the six preceding years combined (Eglīte and Mežs 2007, 411). Instead, the principal significance of resolution 1187-s was that it formed the basis of far-reaching and comprehensive decisions enacted by the Riga *gorkom* and Latvian bureau under Berkļavs’s direction between 1956 and 1959, which significantly restricted registration in Riga.

Riga, along with most major postwar Soviet cities, experienced chronic housing shortages. The waiting times for apartments were years; many people lived in poor conditions in places not intended as living spaces. In the immediate postwar years, there was little housing construction. Latvians blamed Russians for the housing shortage. At a Party meeting at VEF, engineer Andrianova said “workers complained that many Russians came to Latvia and now there are not enough apartments.”²⁹ Historian Jānis Riekstiņš (2009, 177) claims that apartments were preferentially given to newcomers because municipal housing departments were largely staffed by new Russian arrivals who prioritized other Russians for housing. Riekstiņš’s claim is difficult to substantiate, but the rapid increase in Latvia’s population undoubtedly strained the housing stock. According to Soviet figures, net migration to Latvia between 1951 and 1955 was 50,200 people (excluding persons drafted into the Soviet Army, draft returnees, prisoners, and convicts). Post-Soviet research

gives a slightly higher figure of 56,400 (Eglīte and Mežs 2007, 410). The urban share of the population grew dramatically from 35% in 1939 to 56% in 1959.³⁰ Seventy-three percent of Russians in Latvia lived in urban areas and comprised 48% of the urban population in 1959. By contrast, 75% of the rural populace was Latvian (Widmer 1969, 466–467). By the mid-1950s, Latvia was splitting into two parts: a Russian-dominated urban Latvia and a Latvian-dominated rural Latvia. Under these circumstances, the national communists tackled both the housing crisis and migration. They knew restricting residency and thus slowing immigration (which accounted for 53.5% of population growth between 1951 and 1955) would allow for a better resource distribution in Riga (Eglīte and Mežs 2007, 417). Furthermore, such initiatives would have a dual purpose, helping to maintain Riga's Latvian character and improving the citizenry's lives through better living conditions including improved housing and municipal services.

Due to the scarcity of statistics, it is only possible to give a sense of the “de-Latvianization” process underway in Riga that precipitated action by the national communists. Riga's population ballooned from 349,000 in 1940 to 580,400 in 1959. Between the 1935 and 1959 censuses, the Latvian share of Riga's population fell from 63% to 44.5%, while the Slavic (Russian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian) share increased from 8.6% to 45.4% (*Rīga skaitļos* 1991, 10, 12). Prigge (1997, 30) considers that “demographic Russification troubled the Latvian people most because it threatened the survival of the nationality itself.” In his memoirs, Berklavs (2011, 96) describes the overcrowding he saw in Riga: “Shops, hairdressing salons, clinics and bathhouses – lines everywhere became increasingly longer. Trams, buses, trolleybuses, people were crushed like herring in barrels.” Berklavs goes on to frankly explain his rationale for the residency restrictions and their legality:

We did not refuse to register anyone who was entitled under All-Union law. Specialists who were invited to Latvia were registered. We did not want to take the labor force away from the war ravaged or economically weak regions of Russia, where manpower was needed more. Finally, we did not want to register a massive flood of people who lacked basic manners and culture, who by their actions compromised the great Russian people to the detriment of the genuine friendship of peoples. (Berklavs 2011, 178)

Berklavs decided to use the Soviet system's controls on population movement, in conjunction with his language policy efforts, to his advantage. Between January 1956 and May 1958, as Riga *gorkom* first secretary (effectively the city's mayor), Riga was Berklavs's fiefdom. Berklavs held one of the LCP's most powerful posts and was in a position to take radical action to block further immigration by refusing to consider applications for residency permits.

The passport regime can be characterized as a nationalist policy because it attempted to prevent migration based on nationality. Despite applying to all migrants, including Latvians from the countryside, the intended targets were non-Latvians (Prigge 2004, 217–218). Berklavs (2011, 96–97) argued residency restrictions were “perfectly in keeping with Lenin's nationality policies and friendship of nations idea because Riga could not secure the necessary living conditions for incoming immigrants.” One seriously doubts such measures would have had Lenin's approval. In his memoirs, Berklavs (2011, 103) recounted a factory visit. He was making a speech about prioritizing housing for native Rigans to loud applause. A Russian woman interrupted and told Berklavs in tears that she was an honest worker with two children but had nowhere to live. “What am I to do?” she asked Berklavs:

Berklavs: “Were you offered work in this factory?”

Woman: “I came myself.”

Berklavs: “When? How long have you worked in this factory?”

Woman: “About two months ago. I’ve worked [here] for over a month.”

Berkļavs asked the audience to raise their hands if they had worked in the factory for over five years and lived in Riga for over 10 years but still did not have an apartment or had very poor living conditions. There was a forest of hands in reply. “I think you have the answer to your question. If your life in Riga is worse than where you came from, go back! We didn’t promise you anything. And we can’t promise you anything now,” Berkļavs said to cheers. Berkļavs, the controversial populist, was ready to play the nationality card.

The passport regime in action

In June 1956, Berkļavs chose to restrict migration to Riga by using Party statutes. He recognized that most of the hostility toward his plan would come from Russian department heads and the second secretaries of Riga’s *gorkom* and *raikomy*, placed there deliberately to prevent parochial actions by first secretaries. Berkļavs worked in conjunction with the Justice Ministry, Riga *gorispolkom* (City Executive Committee) Chairman Vilhelm Lecis, Lecis’s deputies Victor Kreituss and Aleksandr Timarev, and Riga’s Police Chief Mechislav Matsulevich to find an interpretation of the law, which would restrict migration. While we can only definitively count Kreituss as a national communist from among these men, Berkļavs (2011, 203, 115) stated that when he created his passport regime team, he searched for “cultured ... independent, zealous Riga patriots.” Matsulevich and Timarev were committed to their task and would not risk the consequences of denying Russians registration just to conscientiously fulfill their superior’s directive.

Berkļavs (2011, 96–97) investigated the legality of making *propiska* more difficult to obtain by complicating stipulations for registration and expanding the list of categories of persons not to be registered. Citizens would be denied permission to settle in Riga upon their attempt to register with the local police as required by Soviet law when arriving to reside in a new city. Berkļavs used the housing shortage as a pretext to claim that Riga could not accommodate further migration until more living space became available. Resolutions stipulated 9 m² as the “sanitary norm” (fixed dwelling space minimum) for apartments and 4.5 m² for hostels to prevent overcrowding by nonresidents.³¹ Therefore, by increasing the number of those ineligible to live in Riga, enforcing their removal by the police, and preventing new migrants from arriving, there would be less demand on housing.

To overcome resistance to proposals from Russian officials, Berkļavs sought to protect his forthcoming regulations with permission from Moscow. Berkļavs prepared a letter, which Council of Ministers Chairman Lācis signed, asking Moscow to clarify whether Berkļavs’s powers as Riga *gorkom* first secretary extended to population regulation. A positive response was received confirming the matter fell within the Riga government’s jurisdiction (Berkļavs 2011, 96–97). This was characteristic of the Thaw period, in which the Kremlin was more accommodating toward local initiatives. Moscow was not alarmed by Berkļavs’s proposals in 1956 and 1957 because they corresponded with Khrushchev’s attempts at decentralization. At a meeting between Latvia’s leaders and Khrushchev in December 1956, Khrushchev agreed to reduce the flow of migrants (Kalpiņš 1988). Moreover, in Krūmiņš’s memoirs, he attests that in conversation with the Soviet premier in the summer of 1958, “Khrushchev expressed the need for a passport regime in Latvia” (Krūmiņš 1990, 93). The unprecedented conditions created by the 20th Party Congress offered considerable decision-making latitude to the republics. Berkļavs saw his opportunity and seized it. When the time came to inform Riga’s *gorkom*, district secretaries, and the Justice and Interior Ministers of his plans, Berkļavs cited Moscow’s consent and his

legal ability to do so in the city statutes. The disgruntled Russian secretaries were powerless to oppose.

The adoption and implementation of decisions on the passport regime required close coordination between Riga's *gorkom*, *gorispolkom*, and police. Cooperation among the leaders of these organizations was on an informal and personal level, the way the national communists preferred to operate. A folder of the *gorkom*'s secret correspondence for 1957 contains messages between Police Chief Matsulevich and Berklavs about the execution of the city authorities' decisions on the passport regime. Berklavs placed Matsulevich's police department in charge of the registration process rather than the district police, whom Berklavs did not necessarily control. Together with Matsulevich, they concocted ways to avoid registering migrants. Berklavs and Matsulevich composed the text of the *gorispolkom*'s original decision about registration on 27 June 1956. Berklavs wrote, "we agreed to register only those who not registering would violate existing All-Union directives. Refuse everyone else." Matsulevich and his deputies were the only officials allowed to register citizens. Every Monday Berklavs met Matsulevich to inspect registration applications. Each Monday there was nothing to report. Berklavs (1993, 16, 2011, 96–97) noted jubilantly that "part of the time more migrants departed than arrived." With Riga restricted, this meant 28% of the republic's population and 49% of the urban population were covered by the restrictions (Buckley 1995, 907).

There were numerous amendments and attempts to extend and close loopholes in the passport regime by extracting further concessions from Moscow. In December 1956, emboldened by their success in passing the language law, the national communists requested the Council of Ministers to allow the expansion of restrictions to include those attempting return to Riga who had left to reside elsewhere.³² In January 1957, on Berklavs's behalf, Kalnbērziņš and Lācis asked Moscow to extend the passport regime to the cities of Liepāja, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Ventspils, and Riga's satellite towns of Ogre and Sigulda. This was because those denied residency in Riga were trying to settle in these areas. Berklavs also pushed for stiffer punishments for registration violators. Though these requests were not approved, Riga's existing passport regime was unaffected. Taking advantage of Moscow's lenience, the national communists implemented many of their requests unilaterally.³³

As Berklavs expected, the passport regime faced resistance from within the Party on the legal basis of restricting migration. The Council of Ministers' legal group Chairman S.G. Skobkina alleged that the original *gorispolkom* decision contained illegal provisions giving secret instructions prohibiting registration on Riga's coast, and neither the Latvian Council of Ministers nor city soviets had the powers to freely interpret passport regulations. *Gorispolkom* Chairman Lecis justified the *gorispolkom*'s actions by explaining that the decision was modeled after Latvian officials witnessed a similar decision by the Leningrad soviet during an exchange visit.³⁴ According to historian Eric Le Bourhis (2013, 15), by invoking the Leningrad example, Riga's authorities considered Riga comparable to Leningrad, with the same rights.

The Soviet military and Jūrmala

To achieve their aim of prioritizing Latvians in housing distribution, the national communists worked to reduce the numbers of retired (primarily Russian) Soviet officers and demobilized soldiers settling in Riga. This followed a wave of demobilizations within the Soviet Army in autumn 1955. In connection with demobilization, local *gorispolkomy* and *raiispolkomy* were obliged to provide officers with jobs and housing for their families. In

1955, 2700 officers arrived in Riga seeking employment, while there were 700 housing applications (Le Bourhis 2013, 5, 7). To ensure their needs were met, the Latvian SSR military commissar requested that 10% of all newly constructed housing be reserved for demobilized officers. About one-third of the 308 officers demobilized and requiring accommodation in autumn 1955 had not previously lived in Riga.³⁵

By spring of 1956, of 16,000 families in the housing queue, 2007 were demobilized officers' families. At Berklavs's urging, Latvian authorities sent a letter to USSR Council of Ministers Chairman Nikolai Bulganin and Khrushchev, explaining that Riga's population had doubled since 1945 but available housing only increased by 5% during that period. They requested limits on the numbers of demobilized or retired officers, because the USSR Minister of Defense Georgii Zhukov called for the provision of 50,000 m² of dwelling space, but only 5500 m² was available in 1956. Knowing many officers had not resided in Riga before, but that those who did might have some familiarity with Latvia, Berklavs asked that the right to choose Riga as their permanent place of residence be granted only to those officers who lived in Riga before their military service.³⁶ In 1957, authorities requested 20,000 m² of living space.³⁷ A second similar request was sent in January 1957, but both received negative responses.³⁸

In his conflict with the military, Berklavs took advantage of Zhukov's dismissal in October 1957 and the reassertion of Party control over the Army. To Riga's authorities, the influx of discharged officers with priority entitlements to housing was depriving local families of access to residential accommodation (Le Bourhis 2013, 5). With Moscow remaining neutral, Berklavs and his fellow national communist, *gorispolkom* Deputy Chairman Kreituss, decided to act. In early 1957, the bureau and *gorispolkom* tried to restrict the registration, employment, and preferential allocation of accommodation to enlisted servicemen, demobilized soldiers, and officers.³⁹ Berklavs's passport regime clashed with the effects of Khrushchev's 1957 decision to reduce the Soviet military's size, which encouraged a flood of demobilized officers to attempt to settle in Riga where they confronted Berklavs's restrictions, causing considerable discontent (Bleiere et al. 2006, 397).

It appears Berklavs enjoyed some limited success in reducing the flow of retired military personnel, earning the enmity of the Baltic Military District (BMD) headquartered in Riga. The BMD repeatedly asked the *gorkom* and *gorispolkom* to register 200 demobilized military builders who were living in barracks and dormitories. The requests were denied because Berklavs's regulations prohibited the registration of demobilized servicemen in Riga ("Iz arkhivnykh fondov" 1989, 83). Of 1210 retired officers who required housing on 1 February 1958, near the apogee of national communist power, 369 were still waiting by the year's end.⁴⁰ In contrast, after the national communists' ouster, provisions for officers considerably improved. In the first eight months of 1960, 1312 officers were registered in Riga, 723 received jobs, and 780 received apartments. A further 350–400 flats were reserved for distribution in 1960, but this was deemed insufficient. Acting BMD commander General Baukov requested the sanitary norm's reduction to assist in the allocation of accommodation.⁴¹

These figures mask the reality that most military personnel attempted to retire to Jūrmala, Latvia's seaside resort town, which gained city status in November 1959 and was not counted in these statistics. The relative wealth and prosperity of Riga and nearby Jūrmala made these communities popular retirement destinations for military officers. During the national communists' tenure, Berklavs successfully stymied the Soviet military's aims in Jūrmala. Berklavs resisted pressure from All-Union tourist organizations that wanted to establish a large tourist center in Jūrmala. He denied permission for the construction of All-Union holiday establishments, rest homes, and sanatoriums on the beach

(Berkļavs 1993, 16). Berkļavs (2011, 116) derided these supposed “honors,” believing Russification was the real purpose of this construction by encouraging more tourists, sports camps, and competitions to be held in Latvia, which he believed would result in people permanently residing. After the national communists’ defeat, a large number of All-Union recreational facilities were built in Jūrmala. Writing in the early 1970s, Berkļavs described the result, “the local population was flooded with masses of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. Riga’s seashore has been converted into an All-Union resort, almost no local inhabitants remain there” (Saunders 1974, 433). Berkļavs (2011, 215–216) claims the national communists’ legacy in this matter was their successful reduction in the disproportionately large share of dachas (summerhouses) owned by non-Latvians and military officers. From 1957, newly arrived citizens were barred from purchasing dachas at Jūrmala.⁴² The conflict with the military over settlement at Jūrmala and Riga embittered the military toward the national communists. From 1957, they joined forces with Stalinists in Moscow and Latvia to engineer their downfall.

Khrushchev’s Thaw was not a linear program of progressive liberalization. De-Stalinization involved considerable zigzagging because of conservative opposition and uncertainty among Khrushchev’s team about how to achieve their objectives without destabilizing the system. From 1956 until 1959, that meant loosening the bonds on decision-making in the republics. Yet, this encouraged concerted opposition to Khrushchev from conservatives in the Kremlin who forced him to recentralize the system in 1961. In Latvia, the conservative opposition successfully portrayed the language law and residency restrictions as examples of dangerous nationalism in the Soviet republics that persecuted Russians, and used this as ammunition to purge the national communists from the Latvian leadership in July 1959.

Conclusion

The passport regime was a major factor in reducing immigration to Latvia, though it was not the only one. Unlike political power, Khrushchev felt secure enough to distribute economic power to the republics in an extraordinary decentralization project in 1957. The *sovmarkhoz* (Regional Economic Council) reforms decentralized considerable decision-making power to the USSR’s regions and republics. The *sovmarkhoz* reforms increased the Latvian government’s direct control over industrial output from 25% to 98%, a radical shift (Widmer 1969, 475). This created the conditions and opportunity for the national communists to decide much of Latvia’s economic development and combat migration by undercutting the rationale for importing labor from outside Latvia.

Interestingly, the literature deems the *propiska* system a failure in its “attempt to regulate patterns of population movement and urban growth ... So long as motivations for migration persisted, even the strictest passport regime did not help.” (Buckley 1995, 910) According to Cynthia Buckley (1995, 896), a macro-analysis of population trends indicate that passport restrictions exerted only a slight influence on aggregate urbanization patterns and migration flows. Basil Kerblay’s (1983, 233) contention that the *propiska* system constituted a system “which was highly unpopular without proving a real obstacle to migration” is generally accepted by Western scholars. It appears, however, that these studies overlooked the national communists’ passport regime in Latvia, which enjoyed considerable success.

Ascertaining the degree of success is difficult because of the unknown number of potential Russian arrivals if it had not been in force. According to Buckley, the circumvention of passport regimes was facilitated by labor shortages throughout the USSR, which made

employment easy to find. In Latvia, the national communists were aware of this. Berklavs (2011, 102) aimed to achieve further increases in manufacturing output through improvements in labor productivity and organization, along with new equipment and technology, to avoid importing Russian labor. Buckley (1995, 905, 909) also cites bribes to officials in passport offices as another popular method of bypassing controls. This is why in Riga Berklavs controlled the process through his allies Kreituss and Matsulevich, who shared his convictions. This may be the key to the passport regime's success in Riga: the carefully selected national communist officials responsible for its operation were highly motivated.

The passport regime in Riga appeared to buck the trend and operate relatively successfully. We can measure the *propiska* regime's results in the restrictions' enforcement. The residency balance (the number of registered persons in the city in relation to the number of permits issued) reveals a striking decline. The balance rose by 12,700 in 1955 before the implementation of the passport regime. In contrast, in 1956, the balance decreased by 700 people, and in 1957, it plummeted by 10,500 persons (Le Bourhis 2013, 14). Within the first month of the restrictions, January 1957, Riga registered only 1500 new residents and shortly thereafter, a ten-fold reduction was achieved (Bleiere 2004). Berklavs triumphantly claims that in one particular month only four people were registered. After just a few months of the regime, there were periods when there was a net loss in population as departures exceeded arrivals (Berklavs 2011, 97, 215). Prigge (2004, 217–218) concurs, writing “migration to Riga virtually ceased during Berklavs's tenure, and continued to be almost non-existent under his successor, Aleksandrs Straujums.”

Soviet figures show a dramatic slowdown in the numbers arriving in Latvia. In 1957, there was net migration of 7400 people (down 19,200 from 1956), just 100 in 1958, and 6600 in 1959 (though the restrictions were repealed from July) (Eglīte and Mežs 2007, 411). For the whole of Latvia, during the period 1956–1960, there was net migration of 19,400 (excluding draftees, returnees, and prisoners), some 30,800 less than 1951–1955. Net migration tripled to 61,600 in the period 1961–1965 after the national communists were purged, illustrating the passport regime's impact. Post-Soviet research gives a substantially higher figure for net migration of 66,200 for 1956–1960, accounting for 50% of population growth, but this figure includes gulag returnees (Eglīte and Mežs 2007, 410, 417). Over 21,000 people repressed for “counter-revolutionary crimes” returned to Latvia between 1956 and 1957 (Plakans 2007, 199).

From the many individual cases quoted by officials opposed to the restrictions, the system appeared to be functioning effectively. For example, in one case from 1957, after graduating from Moscow State University, Romashin was sent to work in Latvia's hydro-meteorology office. His registration, however, was progressively reduced, first for one year, then extended for six months, then three months, and in January 1959, his residence permit was denied. Romashin was fined twice for remaining in Riga (“Iz arkhivnykh fondov” 1989, 83). Such incidents were bound to inflame tensions. Khrushchev himself attacked the restrictions at the June 1959 CPSU CC plenum. He described an encounter with a tearful Russian woman during his visit to Latvia in early June 1959. She and her husband were not permitted to register in Riga. Khrushchev replied he was unaware of the restrictions (which contradicts Kalpiņš's assertion that Khrushchev agreed to the limits on migration in December 1956) and would enquire. Officials reputedly told Khrushchev that the couple were not registered because there were no apartments available, though the woman told Khrushchev her family purchased a home, which led Khrushchev to conclude they were not registered “because they were Russian.”⁴³ The *propiska* restrictions' ethnic dimension was not lost on the Soviet Premier.

Berklav's passport regime caused considerable conflict with various regional authorities and agencies, the military, and factory managers, and led to criticism of the Latvian leadership from central Latvian organs (the State Committee for Control, the Council of Ministers Administration Department, and the Prosecutor's office). This friction was a product of the extraordinary decision-making freedom, representative of the Thaw, with which Berklav's alliance of city authorities operated. They decided the passport regime's criteria and independently determined its functions (Le Bourhis 2013, 12, 17). Essentially, central authorities and the national communists were unable to understand each other's motivations.

The passport regime was far from an unmitigated success. Both King (1965, 51) and Prigge (2015, 106) believe that it was only partially effective, citing evidence that migrants continued to arrive without proper documentation and live in Riga illegally. As such, they would not be counted in Soviet migration statistics. In April 1959, 20,000 people were still living in Riga without a residence permit. Reputedly, police officers subjected them to fines and repeatedly warned them to leave Latvia. The situation was reflected in the press. *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth) published an article entitled "So Riga is full," expressing outrage that citizen Troshnikov brought his wife from Pskov Oblast to live in Riga. The article's author awaited "such a wonderful day when people without residence permits, will leave Riga and go back to where they used to live."⁴⁴ Latvia's Gosplan set maximum labor limits for all of Riga's industries. *Cīņa* (Struggle) reported, however, that factory managers attempted to circumvent this, noting that "some people publicly agree with the notion of productivity increase but almost immediately run to Gosplan for permission to increase the numbers of workers" (Dreifelds 1977, 142).

In a repeat of the uncertainty following Stalin's death, the insecurities of the mid- to late 1950s temporarily stymied Russian settlement in Latvia. According to Misiunas and Taa-gepera (1993, 112), the combination of a nationalist revival spurred by the national communists' rise and the impact of Berklav's passport regime ensured tens of thousands of Slavs returned to their homelands between 1956 and 1959. Although Soviet statistics claim 145,800 emigrated from Latvia between 1956 and 1960 and post-Soviet research offers a figure of 247,500 people, both are lower than their respective figures for the preceding five-year period, perhaps suggesting the national communists were not wholly successful in discouraging immigration (Eglīte and Mužs 2007, 410).

The 20th Party Congress acted as a catalyst for national communist ambitions. These circumstances combined with the improved political position and cohesiveness of the national communists by late 1956 allowed them to enact their most controversial and radical policies with mixed results. Undoubtedly, the language law and residency restrictions caused discord in ethnic relations. The rising tide of Latvian nationalism in the 1950s partially discouraged Russian migration. The language law and *propiska* regime took place against the background of a Latvian cultural revival instigated by the national communists and constituted an attempt at "Latvianization." The most remarkable aspect of these two blatantly nationalist policies was that they were ever implemented in the first place in a Soviet republic. That these regulations and laws survived in operation for two and a half years in the face of opposition from the Soviet military and local Russian and "Latovichi" politicians, but without any decisive interference from Moscow, is even more striking. This throws into question our understanding of Russian dominance within the Soviet political system and suggests that in the mid-1950s the center-periphery relationship in the Soviet Union, in contrast to the Stalin era of hyper-centralization, dramatically shifted in favor of the republics, albeit temporarily.

Notes

1. Latvijas Valsts arhīvs – Partija arhīvs hereafter LVA-PA, fonds 101, apraksts 19, lieta 30, lapa 3–5 – f. 101, apr. 19, l. 30, lp. 3–5.
2. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 30, lp. 4.
3. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 59, lp. 6–10.
4. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii hereafter RGANI, fond 5, opis 16, delo 698, list 91 – f. 5, op. 16, d. 698, l. 91.
5. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 16, l. 9, lp. 298.
6. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 16, l. 9, lp. 299, 59.
7. Berkļavs was a Council of Ministers Deputy Chairman between June 1954 and December 1956, when he returned to the Riga *gorkom*.
8. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 59, l. 59.
9. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 59, l. 60, 208.
10. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 59, l. 60.
11. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 59, l. 60, 208–209.
12. LVA-PA, f. 102, apr. 14, l. 8, lp. 83–84.
13. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 59, lp. 6–10; LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 30, lp. 3.
14. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 59, lp. 6–10.
15. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 30, lp. 3–6.
16. LVA-PA, f. 102, apr. 14, l. 8, lp. 83.
17. LVA-PA, f. 102, apr. 14, l. 8, lp. 84.
18. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 59, lp. 6–10.
19. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 30, lp. 4.
20. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 30, lp. 5.
21. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 21, l. 18, lp. 38–39.
22. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 21, l. 52, lp. 46.
23. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 21, l. 52, lp. 46.
24. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 21, l. 52, lp. 41.
25. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 22, l. 15, lp. 81–82.
26. Latvijas Valsts arhīvs hereafter LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 849, lp. 178.
27. LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 439, lp. 158.
28. LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 855, lp. 129–130.
29. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 54, l. 170.
30. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki hereafter RGAE, f. 1562, op. 36, d. 5, l. 31.
31. LVA, f. 1400, apr. 4, l. 732, lp. 192–194.
32. LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 1101, lp. 93–94.
33. LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 1132, lp. 19–20.
34. LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 1176, lp. 3–4, 6.
35. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 76, lp. 5, 128.
36. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 19, l. 76, lp. 108–109.
37. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 21, l. 82, lp. 17–18.
38. LVA, f. 270, apr. 1-s, l. 1132, lp. 15–19.
39. LVA, f. 1400, apr. 4, l. 732.
40. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 21, l. 82, lp. 3, 59.
41. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 23, l. 141, lp. 81–82.
42. LVA, f. 1400, apr. 4, l. 690, lp. 129.
43. RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 374, l. 143.
44. LVA-PA, f. 101, apr. 22, l. 15, lp. 12.

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