

THE DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION  
OF THE BORDER STATES

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PART III: LATVIA

BY  
MALBONE W. GRAHAM

PUBLICATIONS OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES  
IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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## PREFACE

THE ACCOMPANYING ACCOUNT of the diplomatic recognition of Latvia is the third in a series of studies dealing with the borderlands of the Russian Empire and the way in which they became independent in the course of the World War. The account parallels, in its treatment of the phenomena of war and revolution, the companion studies on Finland and Estonia. The Latvian struggle, however, was complicated by factors which did not enter fundamentally into the diplomacy and strategy of the other two countries, outstanding among them being the activities of the Soviet Red Guards and the Baltic army of General Rüdiger von der Goltz. Although the post-Armistice Soviet incursion created additional military difficulties for the Letts, it raised no major diplomatic problem and, owing to the lack of direct contact between the Allies and the Soviet government, it did not enter the arena of international discussion. The Baltic army, on the contrary, had definite political objectives, which it did not scruple to attain by brutal intervention in Latvian affairs. Its military role is only indirectly touched upon here, but its political objectives loom large in the Paris Peace Conference period. The deliberations of the Allied Powers on the question, as disclosed in the proceedings of the Baltic Commission, are here publicly revealed for the first time. For the privilege and opportunity of publishing this material I am indebted to the directors of the Hoover War Library at Stanford University, to whom I wish to acknowledge my appreciation and gratitude.

The list of those to whom I am basically obligated for the information herein contained is extraordinarily long, and would make up an extended catalogue of persons in widely separated places. Beyond the expression of my grateful appreciation to Professor Antonius Piip of the University of Tartu, Estonia (to whom I am deeply in debt for numerous side lights, particularly on the role of his wartime associate and colleague in London, Zigfrīds Meierovics), I shall confine my acknowledgments to those Letts who, with unflinching willingness and courtesy, have helped me in this task. May I formally record my gratitude and appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Karlis Ulmanis, now president of Latvia; Mr. Alberts Kviessis, former president of Latvia;

Mr. Hugo Celmiņš, former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs; Mr. Karlis L. Seja, former minister of foreign affairs, and Latvia's first minister to the United States; Dr. Vilhelms Munters, now minister of foreign affairs; Professor Hermans Albats, secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Dr. Alfreds Bilmanis, Latvian minister to the United States; Mr. Fridrichs Vesmanis, sometime Latvian minister at London; M. J. Feldmans, sometime Latvian minister at Paris; Mr. Vilis Šumanis, now Latvian minister at Helsinki; Mr. Olgerds Grosvalds, long-time Latvian minister at Paris; and, very basically, to Mr. Karlis Ducmanis, formerly permanent delegate of Latvia to the League of Nations, now a member of the Latvian Supreme Court.

I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Peteris Oliņš, Mr. Vilis Masens, and Dr. A. Stegmanis of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for detailed technical information and explanations of relevant documents; to Mr. M. Stumbergs of the Latvian *Valstsbibliothek* for facilitating access to rare and invaluable materials; and to Mr. Arturs Lūļe, consul general of Latvia in New York, for many and varied courtesies.

For such errors of fact or interpretation as may occur in this work I am alone responsible.

MALBONE W. GRAHAM

November 18, 1937

## INTRODUCTION

THE RISE OF THE LATVIAN REPUBLIC, no less than that of Finland or Estonia, was the product of long-range historical forces which converged almost simultaneously in the war-wracked world of 1917-1918. The three independence movements, seen in the larger historical perspective, followed almost without deviation a symmetrical pattern. This involved an initial roughshod process of conquest, followed by a protracted struggle for cultural survival lasting over two centuries. This unequal struggle, directed first against the masters of the *land*, whose feudal yoke hung heavily upon the peasantry, turned later into a conflict with the masters of the *country*, whose efforts at forcible assimilation encountered a scarcely less implacable resistance.

Alike in Estonia and in Latvia, the struggle for emancipation from the Baltic barons formed the historical pediment of the liberation movement. Out of its partial success in the abolition of serfdom there developed a new cultural force: a new generation arose, springing from the soil, eager to defend in the Republic of Letters the claims of the sons of Livonia, Latgale, and Courland to intellectual enfranchisement. Following this cultural renaissance there came into being a new social class, a militantly nationalist bourgeoisie, which did not scruple, in the hour of Russia's adversity, to make common cause with her revolutionaries against the cultural denationalization practiced by the Czars in the Balticum. Here the broad cultural movements in Finland, Estonia, and the Lettish lands met the granitic resistance of an unyielding social and political order.

What gave peculiar significance to the share of the Letts in the Revolution of 1905 was the convergence of the anti-Balt and anti-Czarist movements, respectively championing agrarian and social revolution. Once merged in a common stream, these two currents in Lettish life, previously flowing separately—at least until the turn of the century—produced an astonishing effect in eroding the legal levees and dikes of Russian society. The high point was reached in the carefully formulated demands for autonomy—strong language in the world of 1905—which served as significant precedents for the political action of the Letts, both within Russia and abroad, from 1914 to 1917.



Defeated by 1907 in the struggle for mastery, the Letts bowed to the inevitable; their leaders marked time in the Duma, while cultivating diplomatic contacts near the Czarist court. Many of their leaders went into exile, compulsory or self-imposed, thus broadening their political background and forging new weapons for the renewed struggle which, whether viewed from the bourgeois or the proletarian standpoint, was inevitable. The first Czarist move toward leniency, in a grant of amnesty in 1913, brought back to the homeland the leading émigrés, and the struggle was intensified—until August, 1914, brought the denouement.

The developments in Latvia after the outbreak of war are traced in the pages which follow. They fall into the same pattern as those of the Finnish and Estonian independence movements. There is the same impounding of nationalist sentiment during the three years preceding revolution in Russia; there is the same striving for crystallized constitutional autonomy in the midst of a colloidal and dissolving world; finally, there is the same desperate resolve to stake all on the declaration of independence, followed by a quest for friends in one of the darkest moments of world history. The final simultaneous collapse of German and Russian military power, accompanied by efforts of the extreme nationalists of both countries to retrieve by violence the political and economic losses incident to revolution, set the stage for the Lettish diplomatic campaign. Latvia finally emerged from the debacle of the reactionaries' plans, owing as much to the fortitude and tenacity of her own statesmen as to the collapse of the preëxisting political order. To have, in 1919, men of the stamina and temerity of Chakste, Meierovics, and Ulmanis was in itself no mean asset for Latvia. With leaders of less vigorous mold, the independence movement might easily have failed, despite the many factors predisposing to its success.

One factor, not mentioned in the diplomatic correspondence of the 1919 period, deserves stress here. I refer to the Bolshevik control of Riga from the end of 1918 to May, 1919. Whatever may be thought of the character of Bolshevik rule there, the fact remains that it forestalled and prevented the reoccupation of the city by the Russo-German reactionaries and adventurers at that time. Although it failed to cast the metropolis in an enduring Soviet mold, the Soviet occupation circum-

vented the effort to make of the Lettish lands the final bastion and outpost of *Baltentum*, as only old-line Russians and Germans dreamed it. With Riga firmly in German hands, the hope of an independent Latvia would appear to have been altogether unattainable. It can at least be said of the Soviet regime that it vicariously saved Latvia from becoming an appanage of the future Third Reich. For that service a whole generation of Letts owes the defunct Soviet a debt it can never repay. Thus Riga was destined to remain neither White nor Red, but basically the symbol of a people determined to break loose from the shackles of slavery to either Teuton or Slav and to develop their distinctive culture pattern free from any alien domination. In the long retrospect of history, Latvian national diplomacy fixed with juridical finality that correlation of political and military forces which, by 1919-1920, finally permitted independence. Bravely, at times even defiantly, it fought with little more than the weapons of the spirit of nationality to make of the devastated provinces of imperial Russia much more than temporary military buffers or links in the *cordon sanitaire*. In the end, it brought into being and secured from the highest councils of the nations the imprimatur of legality for a united country.

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