

The baltics: nationalities and other problems essay



“” The Baltics area is fraught with cross ethnic mergings, conquerings by different groups, and control by both small groups like the Teutonic and Livonian knights and by larger entities like the nations of Sweden, Poland, and Russia during the roughly eight centuries of Baltic history. There is no ideal way to depict these very diverse groups of people and areas, so this is an attempt to first look at the area as a whole as it developed, in the briefest kind of way, then shoot forward in time to examine each of the three Baltic countries separately prior to World War II and after, and then an examination of the situation as it is today and in the recent past of the past two decades.

“ Until the twelfth century the marshes and forest-lands along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea were left in the more or less undisturbed possession of a number of pagan tribes. The Esths and Livs in the northern regions belonged to the Finnish branch of the Ural-Altaic family, while another group farther to the south, subdivided into Letts, Borussians and Lithuanians, ... was of Indo-European stock. The Borussians, who moved southward to what is now East Prussia, were early subdued and assimilated

by the Germans, while the Letts tended to push northward into Livonia.”(1)

The area we now call the Baltics remained sparsely populated and predominantly non-Christian until about the middle of the 13th century, when the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Knights began the first incursions into the region. “ The first invaders of these regions were the Danes, who conquered the northern half of Estonia in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. German merchants and missionaries had meanwhile penetrated into Livonia, where a bishopric was established at Riga in 1201. From then onwards the greater part of areas now occupied by the states of Latvia and Estonia gradually fell under the dominion first of the Knights of the Sword, and then of the Order of Teutonic Knights, to whom, in 1346, the Danes sold their share of Estonia. These Orders colonized the territory, converted the inhabitants to Christianity, and made them their serfs.” (2)

“ In Lithuania, on the other hand, the Teutonic Knights were never able to make much headway except in the Memel (Klaipeda) territory, of which the

frontier was permanently fixed after the defeat of the Order by Vytautas –

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

one of a succession of Lithuanian Grand Dukes who, in the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, built up a united and powerful state..." (3)

The changes and grouping in the Baltic region began " during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, and continued to the first centuries after Christ.

However, the weaker tribes were gradually absorbed by the stronger and crystallized into larger national units." (4) " Also in answering the

ethnic question, one is aided by fragmentary historical sources, which

mention the individual Baltic nations and tribes which lived in certain

areas, as for example the Aistians(100 AD), Galindians and Sudovians

(second century, AD), Semigallians (870 AD), Prussians (ninth century AD),

Curonians (875 AD), Yatvingians (983 AD), Lithuanians (1009 AD), Galindians

(1058 AD), Sambians (1075 AD), Selians (1208 AD), Skalvians (1240 AD),

Nadrovians (1250 AD) and others." (5)

" Basically, although there is relationship between the Lithuanians and

Latvians, there is none whatever between either of these peoples and the

Estonians, whose language and culture approximate to those of Finland. As

regards religion, the Lithuanians are almost entirely Roman Catholic; the Latvians and Estonians are mainly Protestant. Estonia and Latvia look to the Baltic, and have maritime and fishing interests; Lithuania is almost entirely an inland and agricultural country – her only port (Klaipeda, or Memel) has a preponderant German population.” (6)

“ After the death of Vytautas in 1430, Lithuania rapidly fell into a position of dependence on Poland, with which country she had already been nominally connected under a personal union since 1386.” (7) That had been accomplished by the Poles co-opting a Lithuanian Prince, Jogaila, to avoid their kingdom being swallowed by the Teutonic Knights. “ Following secret negotiations, Jogaila issued a declaration which is accepted as the Kreva Union Act (August 14, 1385) whereby Jogaila agreed to baptism and to marriage with Hedwig (the heir to the Polish throne). Furthermore, he agreed to the baptism of his family and the nobility of Lithuania, in addition to paying 200, 000 florins to Prince Wilhelm (of Austria) for breaking the betrothal to Hedwig; also he agreed to the return of all Polish lands taken by the enemies, the release of all Polish prisoners, and

the pledge to keep the Lithuanian and Russian regions united with the Kingdom of Poland. Although this last contingency did not go down well with his subjects, Jogaila was able to have his way (he later took the Polish names, ie Christian names of Wladyslaw and Jagiello)." (8)

" In 1569, under the Union of Lublin, (Lithuania) lost her independence altogether, and until the partitions of Poland in 1772-93, she shared a common history with that country. One of the most enduring results of the Polish regime was the establishment of the Roman Catholic religion in what had hitherto been a practically pagan state, at a time when Lutheranism was being introduced by the Baltic Barons in Livonia and Estonia." (9)

" In the sixteenth century the power of the Teutonic Knights in the latter provinces began to weaken under repeated assaults from the Russians, which reached their high water mark under Ivan the Terrible between 1558 and 1584. In 1521, Estonia had already accepted the protection of Sweden; and in 1560, after the dissolution of the Teutonic Order, Poland annexed Courland and Livonia, although a large part of the latter was afterwards wrested from her by the Swedish King, Gustavus Adolphus, in 1626." (10)

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

“ Finally, the eighteenth century saw the defeat of Charles XII by Peter the Great at Poltava (1709) and the gradual passing of control over the Baltic Provinces from the declining Swedish Empire and Poland to Russia. Riga was captured in 1720 and reval soon after. Livonia and Courland were ceded to Russia by the peace of Nystadt in 1721; Courland gradually became for intents and purposes a Russian protectorate, and in 1795 acknowledged the suzerainty of Catherine the Great (II). In the course of the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 the whole of Lithuania proper passed into the hands of Russia, although Memel remained part of Prussia, in which it had been incorporated in the sixteenth century. The period of Russian domination, which lasted down to the outbreak of the World War, opened ominously, although conditions improved somewhat during the first half of the nineteenth century.” (11)

“ In Lithuania the partition of Poland was followed by a period of Russification; the Orthodox religion was introduced, and Catholic ecclesiastical property was to a large extent handed over to the Orthodox Church; the University of Vilna and the higher schools were closed; and the

use of the Lithuanian language was forbidden in all schools. In 1861 the peasants were liberated and granted the right to hold a small amount of land; but after the Polish insurrection of 1863, which was sternly suppressed by Muraviev; it was decreed that only adherents of the Orthodox religion might hold land, and the following year the writing of Lithuanian in Latin characters was forbidden.” (12)

“ In the other Provinces the situation of the peasants was even worse than in Lithuania, owing to the presence of the Baltic Barons, who were always loyal subjects of the Tsars, and who from the outset took a leading part in the administration of the Russian Empire. Under Russian rule the Barons secured the restoration of all privileges of which they had been deprived under the Swedish regime; moreover, they now created a closed corporation, consisting of 172 families which alone had the right to own land. Various attempts made by successive Tsars to improve the lot of the peasants were frustrated by the Barons, and serious rebellions were put down in 1783-4 and again in 1802. after the latter, Alexander I issued an ordinance in 1804 limiting serfdom, but its effects were nullified by the

Barons. Laws abolishing personal serfdom altogether in Estonia (1816), Courland (1817), and Livonia (1819) did little to improve matters, since freedom was of little use to peasants with no claim to either tenancy or ownership of land. In 1849, however, Alexander II enacted a new Agrarian Law abolishing forced labor and providing for the purchase or hire of certain lands by the peasant communes. Under Alexander III (1881-94) a determined policy of Russification was initiated, aimed as much at the German as at the native population; indeed, the later native movement of 1905 may be traced largely to the indirect encouragement it now received from the Russian Government's anti-German policy. Russian law and police organization was substituted for the existing German system, and the Russian language was made compulsory in schools. On the other hand, Letts and Estonians were allowed to hold government posts. Towards the end of the century, too, there was an improvement in the material status of the peasantry; the Russian railways brought trade to the ports of Riga and Libau, and in the towns a small proletarian class grew up which was ripe for the spread of revolutionary ideas. As in Lithuania, nationalist

movements were set on foot, and Young Lett and Estonian parties were formed.” (13)

“ With a series of measures from the 1840’s to the 1860’s that enabled peasants to acquire leased land as personal landholding the social structure began to be differentiated from that in the rest of the Russian Empire. The concurrent abolition of compulsory guild membership for urban craftsmen allowed the development of an Estonian and Latvian urban class.

The coming of the railways, which increased the significance of Libau (Liepaja), Riga, and Reval (Tallinn) as ports and industrial cities, also changed the character of the population in the Baltic provinces. A Latvian and estonian middle class began to crowd out the Germans, and a Latvian and

Estonian proletariat appeared. Reval, already more than 50% Estonian in 1871, became nearly 70% Estonian by 1897. Riga’s Latvian population during

the same period nearly doubled – from about 23% to 42%. education in the native languages expanded with urbanization. ” (14)

“ The Estonian and Latvian national consciousness received an indirect

boost from the Russification policy pursued under Alexander III. The provincial administration, courts and education systems, all bastions of German privilege, were the principal targets. Increased political activity by the Estonians and Latvians resulted in electoral successes at the municipal level. In 1904 Estonians for the first time gained political control of a major city by constituting a majority in the municipal council of Tallinn. Between 1897 and 1906 Latvian majorities were elected in four large Latvian towns.” (15)

“ The Lithuanian national renaissance emerged in radically different circumstances. Although in one portion of the country – the Suvalki province, which had belonged to Napoleon’s Grand Duchy of Warsaw – the peasants were freed during the first decade of the nineteenth century, emancipation with the right to limited landholding came to the rest of the country only in 1861. A social struggle with the Polonized nobility ensued. Russification, aimed primarily at the Polonized nobility, had been constant since the 1831 revolt (of Poland against the Russians – my note). However, this was not always beneficial to the Lithuanian national renaissance.

During the revolt of 1863 the Lithuanian peasantry showed itself to be more revolutionary than its Polish counterpart. thereafter, Russianization also hit the national renaissance. In 1865 the publication of Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet was prohibited, a measure that was not repealed until 1904. Attempts were made to settle Russians in rural areas and to proselytize for the Russian Orthodox church. The rights of the Catholic Church were restricted. In 1894 Roman Catholics were prohibited from holding administrative positions.” 16

“ The disorders that swept the Russian Empire in 1905 affected the entire Baltic region, but the degree of turbulence varied considerably between Lithuania and its neighbors to the north. Urban unrest was particularly severe in Tallinn and Riga. Students at the University of Dorpat (Tartu) hoisted red flags. Petitions were circulated for freedom of the press and of assembly as well as for a universal franchise. A Provisional Revolutionary Government was formed in Riga. Jacques swept the countryside – the targets were the German nobles and the clergy. Some 184 manor houses were burned and 82 nobles killed. At Tukums Latvians

fought Russian troops for two days. The revolt was brutally suppressed –

900 persons were executed and thousands were either imprisoned or exiled to

Siberia.

The disorders in Lithuania, largely confined to rural areas, lacked the

social-protest aspects of the revolution to the north and were directed

primarily at Russian schoolteachers and Orthodox clergy. Excesses were

comparatively few. The political aspects of the 1905 Revolution in

Lithuania was highlighted by a massive National Congress of 2000 delegates,

which met in Vilnius (Wilno or Vilna) in December 1905. It resolved to work

for autonomy, a centralized administration for the ethnic Lithuanian area of

the empire, and the use of the Lithuanian language in administration.

Like the revolt itself, the postrevolt reaction was at its mildest in

Lithuania. Measures undertaken to establish a rural class of prosperous

farmers throughout the empire even benefited many Lithuanian peasants. At

the same time small German landholders were encouraged to immigrate into

Latvia and Estonia as support for the status quo. All three Baltic

nationalities were represented in the four Dumas. the events of 1905 had

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

forced many of the Estonian and Latvian leaders into exile, however. The general cultural relaxation after 1906 and the elimination of restrictions against the press in the native languages allowed national consciousness to grow steadily among the three peoples.” (17)

The first World War broke loose the chains of Russian domination over these “ countries” and they became independent for the first time in centuries in the days after the revolutions of 1917 in February and October. “ All three people’s sucessfully seized the rare historical opportunity – provided by the collapse of the Russian and German empires – to create their own states. In 1918, before the end of the war, Lithuania and Estonia declared their independence on February 16 and 24, respectively. Latvia followed suit on November 18. In each case the goal was accomplished in a different way.” (18)

“ The countries then had to battle with at least the Germans and the Russians, and in Lithuania’s case, the Poles, for another year or so before finally achieving peace, and sovereignty. On February 2, July 12, and August 1, 1920, respectively, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia concluded

peace treaties with Soviet Russia. In these treaties Lenin denounced Russian claims of sovereignty over the Baltic territories. Thus the first nation to actually complete the war of independence was Estonia, while Lithuania – because of its involvement with Poland – was the last. the Lithuanians, as a consequence, were the last to proceed with nation-building as well.” (19)

The next twenty years were to see the continued growth of parties in the three states, some continuing from origins in the late 19th century, a growth in parliamentary governments, some flirtation with dictatorship, a clash or two (in the case of the Lithuanians) with the Poles, and the briefest period of independence. The Baltic’s fate was sealed by the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August, 1939.

The Pact basically conceded, in secret protocols, that the Soviet Union would have a “ sphere of influence” in the Baltics, Romania, Finland, plus the eastern half of Poland, while the Germans got to grab Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and western Poland. From 28 September to 10 October, the Soviets forced the three states to accept Pacts of Defense and Mutual Assistance.

They were forced to accept large garrisons of Soviet troops; 30, 000 in Latvia, 25, 000 in Estonia, and 20, 000 in Lithuania. (20)

Though there had been a framework for cooperation since 1934, the Baltic Entente, they had not worked together much. In the months following the Soviet treaties, a portion of the Latvian and Estonian treasuries were shipped to the West, archives of Estonia made their way to Stockholm, and some anti-Soviet activity occurred. In May 1940, the Soviets, on a pretext, began pressuring the Baltic states to meet a series of demands to satisfy claims they had been making. On 15 June, 1940, Molotov issued an ultimatum to Lithuania, and the following day did so to Latvia and Estonia. He accused them of colluding in December, 1939 and March, 1940 in Foreign Minister's meetings and breaking the pacts by these meetings, publishing the Baltic Review, and "plotting to turn the Baltic Entente into an anti-Soviet alliance." "By 18 June, the occupation of the Baltic states was complete." (21)

The Baltic states takeover provides a model for what was to happen to Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Poland and Romania after

the war. A combination of fifth columnists and Russian commissar types transformed the Baltic states first into “ People’s Governments.” A series of dubious political moves, “ spontaneous” demonstrations by Communist sympathizers, Soviet workers and military personnel basically showed Presidents of the three countries the futility of not accepting the Soviet’s designated Cabinets and other leaders. (22)

Though Stalin’s purges of the parties in the late 1930’s had removed many Baltic Communists, “ the Lithuanian Party of some 1500 members was numerically the largest of the three.” Next came Latvia. “ The Latvian Party had about 1000 members at the time of its legalization.” “ According to the official party history, the Estonian party numbered only 133 members.” (23)

“ Elections” were held in July, 1940, and “ Officially, results were to the Kremlin’s satisfaction: in Lithuania, 95. 5% of the electorate allegedly voted and gave 99. 2% of its votes to the (Working People’s) League; in Latvia, the figures were 94. 7 and 97. 6%, in Estonia, 81. 6 and 92. 9%.” After the elections had been held, open discussion of Sovietization and

being incorporated into the Soviet Union began. “ All three People’s Assemblies convened on 21 July, 1940.” Within two days, all three states had, “ by acclamation,” established a Soviet socialist government and applied for admission to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. By 6 August, all three applications had been accepted by the Supreme Soviet. (24)

The Soviets held the Baltic countries for about one year. Only days before the Germans invaded and occupied the region, an operation headed by the deputy of the Security Police, I. A. Serov, began the deporting of large numbers of Balts. “ According to Serov” s “ Instructions” of 1941, the arrests and removal of all deportees had to be performed quietly and quickly in a single night, within not more than three hours, and in the case of families the father was to be separated from his wife and children.... They were transported in goods trucks, given no food and water, and taken mostly to prison camps beyond the Urals. Nearly 10, 000 people were deported from the whole of Estonia, 15, 000 from Latvia and 25, 000 from from Lithuania on the night of 13-14 June, 1941. ... In all, within the 12 months of Soviet rule

in 1940-41 59, 700 people disappeared in Estonia, of whom around 1, 000 were

executed. In Latvia, 34, 250 died or disappeared. In Lithuania 30, 500. Most of these deported from the Baltic States in that year and after the war perished, and less than 20% returned after Stalin's death." (25)

Within a year of this region being seized by the Soviets in their quasi-legal manner, Germany invaded the region, and had taken most of the area under their control by the end of August, 1941. This began three years of occupation. Though this invasion briefly stimulated revolt against the Soviets prior to the German takeover, in the end all the forces, Soviet or Baltic, had been swept away by the powerful German war machine. " It is quite clear from the documents in German archives that the long-range goal of the Nazi leadership was to annex the Baltic region to the Reich, to expel two-thirds of the population, and to fuse the remainder gradually with German immigrants." (26)

Baltic First Directors were appointed, often being swiftly replaced when they were found to not serve German interests to the degree the Nazis desired. the same thing occurred with the bodies of Counselors the Germans

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

selected. Then, the Germans seized property, rationed food, suppressed cultural life, took over the direction of Baltic education, suppressed newspapers and book-publishing, and caused “ compulsory drafts for labor service.” By 1944, “ a total of 126, 00 Baltic workers had been sent to Germany. the national breakdown may have been 75, 000 Lithuanians, 35, 000

Latvians (especially from Latgale), and 15, 000 Estonians.” (27)

The cost in lives, especially among the Baltic Jews, was quite large in proportion to the population. “ In total about 250, 000 Baltic Jews, of whom only about 10, 000 survived, were deported or killed during the German occupation. Among the ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, an estimated 25, 000 were killed in local camps, and 10, 000 were transferred to

concentration camps in Germany.” (28)

Most of the prominent members of the three countries governments were weeded out in that year the Soviets controlled the area from 1940 to 1941.

One suspects the use of the term “ deported” means, in most cases, “ died” in

some Gulag camp or another. The presidents of Estonia and Latvia, 10 of the 11 Cabinet members of the Estonian government, all but 28 members of the Estonian Parliament, 9 of the 10 former heads of government in Estonia, The Prime Minister of Estonia, the Latvian and Estonian Commanders-in-Chief of the Armed forces, 20 members of the Latvian government, 31 members of the

Latvian Parliament, 14 members of the Lithuanian government, and 22 party leaders in Lithuania all were seized and deported by the Soviets. Only the Prime Minister and a former Prime Minister of Estonia escaped, as did the President of Lithuania. (29)

The Soviets took over the areas again in 1944, though a small portion of Courland stayed in German hands until May, 1945. Soviet control was established by the use of the political police, the MVD (after 1946), and “ screening commissions” who “ investigated the past and the political views of every inhabitant above the age of 12 in order to decide whom to deport and whom to arrest. Formal charges fell in two categories: “ war criminal” and “ enemy of the people.”(30)

Roughly 30, 000 were deported from Estonia, and early in 1945 38, 000

were deported from Latvia. “ In August and September 1945 an estimated 60, 000 men, women and children were deported from Lithuania, followed by 40, 000 in February, 1946, and the worst was still to come. About 60, 000 may

have been deported from Latvia in 1945-46.” (31)

Soviet control was swiftly re-established after the war. Overall

control was utilized through national “ bureaus” established 11 November, 1944 by the Central Committee of the CPSU. “ The ranking native executors of

these policies were the First secretaries of each republic’s Communist

Party organization. Janis Kalnberzins in Latvia, and Antanas Snieckus in

Lithuania, had occupied this post since 1940. In Estonia, Nikolai Karotamm

replaced Karl Sare, who had been captured by the Germans and declared a

traitor by the Soviets for divulging information to the Germans. ...

Despite their spotless party records ever since underground days, the

native First Secretaries were now assigned Russian Second Secretaries to

act as Moscow’s watchdogs.” (32)

Almost as swiftly as the Soviets regained control in 1944, so did a

resistance movement begin. Though this movement never totalled more than . 5

to 1% of the populace, the movement lasted eight years, with a few stragglers hiding out in the woods, like their counterparts among the Japanese who hid out on islands after World War II, until the late 1970's.

In 1945, 30, 000 men were roaming the forests. Altogether, about 100, 000 Lithuanians, 40, 000 Latvians, and 30, 000 Estonians became " Forest Brothers." or " Forest Brethern." They operated in bands from lone men doing

guerilla activities in rural areas to 800-man bands fighting in the cities,

as one band did in the Tartu district of Latvia in 1945. Amnesties were offered in late 1944 and early 1945, and two more in 1945 and 1946, but most who surrendered were deported. Only the last amnesty offer in 1955 was

more or less genuine. (33)

" By 1949, the Lithuanian guerilla groups could no longer paralyze the functioning of local Soviets. In Latvia and Estonia this ability had been largely lost by the end of 1946. By the end of 1949, the Latvian guerilla

resistance had been largely crushed, " though a battle was fought the following year in Courland. " In Estonia, fighting continued well into 1953." (34)

Collectivization, reconstruction, industrialization were all part of the post-war scheme of things in the Baltic nations. The infra-structure had not been damaged as had been the case in Byelorussia. " There were also

non-economic reasons. Ideologically, the industrial proletariat was considered superior to the peasantry and was expected to be more supportive

of the Soviet regime. From a colonial imperialist viewpoint,, industrialization offered a path for settling large numbers of Russians among a reticent local population. ...In particular, it made little sense to deport Baltic farmers to Siberia, and then import Russian labor to the Baltic cities." (35)

The population base changed after the war. As there were numerous casualties sustained in the guerilla war, and a large number of deportations of the native populace, large numbers of Russians and other non-Baltic

peoples were brought in, “ along with large numbers of Russianized Latvians and Estonians whose families had settled in Russia in Tsarist times.” (36)

“ About 400, 000 Russians and 100, 000 people of other nationalities immigrated to Latvia from 1945 to 1959, most of them probably before 1953.

This amounted to 25% of the pre-war population. ...The Latvian’s share of their country’s population was probably around 83% in 1945, but dropped to about 60% in 1953, due to immigration and deportations.” (37)

“ Approximately 180, 000 non-Estonians arrived in Estonia in 1945-47, and at least 33, 000 more immigrants came in 1950-53, adding up to an increase of 19% over the pre-war population, or 25% of the reduced population of 1945. The share of Estonians in their country’s population decreased from about 94% in early 1945 to 80% in 1949, plunged to 77% during the 1949 deportations, and continued to slide to anbout 72% by 1953.

In more rural Lithuania, the local labor pool seemed to supply most of the relatively modest increase in the industrial work force. ... Due to heavy guerilla and deportation losses, Lithuania’s population probably

decreased from about 3. 1 million in 1940 (within postwar borders) to 2. 6

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

million in 1953, about 75% of whom were Lithuanians.” (38)

After Stalin’s death, party growth was slow, and lacked participation

by ethnic Balts. Latvia and Estonia had been able to bring a small amount of expatriates back to run the party in their countries, but Lithuania had relatively few of these individuals who had survived Stalin’s purges.

Briefly, in 1953, Moscow felt comfortable in allowing Second secretaries of the party, all of whom had been Russian since 1945, to be ethnically represented again. However, this change of heart was short-lived. Russians came back into those positions in Lithuania in 1955, in Latvia in 1956, and in Estonia, a Russianized “Yestonian” was able to hold on from 1953 until 1964. (39)(See Appendix)

In 1956, dissatisfaction spilled over into the Baltics area from the revolt in Hungary and the disturbances in Poland. As November began, and as

the Hungarian revolt was being crushed, demonstrations were occurring in Lithuania in Vilnius and Kaunas, offering Lithuanian patriotic statements and shouts of “Long Live the Hungarian Heroes.” Toward the end of November,

similar outbursts occurred in Riga on Latvia's Remembrance Day. Party leaders in both countries blamed the behavior on bourgeois nationalists.

(40)

The de-Stalinization that occurred at the 1956 Party Congress and the disturbances in Poland and Hungary were indications that the peoples of several different regions of the USSR and the satellites wanted change.

Revivals of nationalism, nationalist aggressiveness, ethnic culturalism all began to emerge through 1957 and 1958. In the summer of 1958, Khrushchev apparently began to pull back from the heretofore relaxing posture towards the nationalities. In November, a new education law was proposed. " Among its provisions was a clause – " Thesis 19" – which immediately aroused the sensibilities of the non-Russians and generated intense debate throughout most of the Union republics. Since 1938 teaching in Soviet schools had been in the native language but Russian had been a compulsory subject. " This " plot" by the authorities was immediately seen as a way to enhance Russian while diminishing the importance of the native languages, often a critical step in complete Russification. (41)

Though Thesis 19 was not incorporated into the all-Soviet education

law, it was to be embraced. Latvia disagreed. So, beginning in July, 1959,

a purge began which by November had removed 2000 government and party

people, including the Party chief Kalberzins. The new Party First

Secretary, Arvid Pelshe, accused his former associates of deviating from

“ the right path in carrying out Leninist nationality policy.” (42)

“..., there was at least one nationalistic demonstration by

non_russians on a mass scale during this period. It occurred in July, 1960,

in Lithuania when Mikhail Suslov, then a member of the Party’s Presidium

and who, after the war, had directed the pacification of this republic,

visited Kaunas. Protests and disturbances broke out, troops were called in,

and several youths are reported to have been killed by the soldiers.” (43)

The purges continued through 1960, with people coming and going at the

top rather rapidly in Latvia, but much more quietly in the other two

republics. In Lithuania, a “ Lithuanization” of the party began after the

death of Stalin, and survived the anti-nationalism campaign of the early

1960’s. Russian participation in leadership rose from 21. 7% in in 1958 to

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

28. 4% in 1961, though all these numbers were considerably lower than the one-third participation in 1952. In 1964, Lithuanians in the LiCP were at about 60%, by 1968 this percentage had risen to 66. 2%. In Latvia, the number of natives in the party in 1967 were at 45% (including Russian Latvians) while in Estonia in 1966 the percentage of Estonians in the ECP stood at about 52%. (44)

Culture suffered after the period know as “ the Thaw”- roughly 1955-59 – more and less depending on which country one was in. Latvia suffered the most from the purges, and only in the late 1960’s did writing and other forms of expression began reappearing without immediate attacks by the state. Estonia went through most of that period relatively blossoming compared to the Latvian experience, while all kinds of celebration and examination of Lithuanian life went on through the 1960’s period.

In all three nations, to one degree or another, the Sixties were a time of creative ferment, massive festivals of song and cultural unity, and expansion of contacts abroad. the capitals were opened to foreign travel, a very small amount of legal immigration was allowed, some travel back into

the countries by exiles was permitted, and industrialization and immigration by Russians and other non-Balts from the Soviet Union were the predominant behaviors of the decade in the three nations. “ In agriculture, centrally enforced attempts to grow maize gave way to a return to the dairy-centered approach of the independence period. Urbanization increased, birth rates decreased, divorce rates soared, and Protestant religious practices plummeted.” (45)

“ Of the three Baltic republics, Estonia and Latvia tended to exhibit quite similar social characteristics, while Lithuania tended to follow the same path of development, though with some lag.... the percentage of the labor force in agriculture was decreasing. In 1968, it stood at 22% in Estonia and 24% in Latvia and Lithuania, compared to 27% throughout the USSR. In this regard, Lithuania had already caught up with Latvia.” (46)

1970-80

In general, the Baltic states collectively had somewhat of a lackluster decade in the Seventies, primarily punctuated by quiet changes in office from one set of bureaucrats to another – men really not well known by their

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

own countrymen. Top posts in all three countries were held by primarily Russianized natives.(47)

Contradictory behaviors occurred in the Baltics in that decade; centralization drew the Baltics more within the Soviet orbit, and immigration slowly decreased the amount of native Balts in all three countries. Yet, the Balts were able, more than many of the other republics or the satellite nations, to pursue a lifestyle and culture more findable in the West than under the aegis of the Soviet Union. Also, more direct links to the West were formed in this period despite an ongoing Soviet system of fairly strict oversight of Baltic life. (48)

The idea of a “ Soviet people” continued despite the slackening of the anti-nationalism campaign from the center in the 1960’s, and the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964. The Baltic republics apparently saw this hopefully, only to see a renewed effort at Russification and extinguishment of national culture and language. (49)

“ Interaction between birth rates and immigration continued in 1968-80 to be of far reaching importance for Baltic social, political, and cultural

processes. Urbanization continued, but service industries replaced production as the main growth sector. Many new aspects common to all technologically overdeveloped countries emerged, but the basically established Soviet and Baltic patterns were maintained.” (50)

The general population base of the Baltics began to slowly transform in the 1970's. The influx of Russian and other non-Russian immigrants strongly under the sway of Russian thinking decreased from the rate of the 1960's, but continued. Lithuania's rate of influx of these kinds of people increased. “ The differences could be explained in terms of the birth rates in the Baltic countries and in Russia.” (51)

Immigration had an effect on the demographics of Latvia and Estonia;

11, 000 into Estonia compared to a birthrate of 2, 500 for Estonians and

4, 000 non-Estonians in the country. In Latvia, the peak rate in the

Seventies was 1973-74, 15, 000 immigrants compared to a “ natural increase”

of 2, 000 Latvians, and 4, 000 non-Latvians. In Lithuania, the birthrate by

1980 had surpassed the decreasing Russian birthrate (18 per thousand

against 15) and net immigration was also up in the 1970's (7, 000 per year

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

against 4, 300 per year in the 1960's.) (See Appendix B) (52)

“ In 1959, Estonia's population had been 75% Estonian. By 1970 there was an alarmingly rapid decrease to 68%. The third postwar census in 1979 showed a further decrease, but a noticably smaller one, to 65%. Already down to 62% in 1959, Latvians represented 57% in 1970 and 54% in 1979. ...

The Lithuanians continued to preserve a strong majority position in their country. They actually increased their their share in Lithuania's population from 79% in 1959 to 80% in 1970 and 1979, partly through a slow assimilation of the Polish minority.”

Republic trends in national cities were reflected by the breakdown of populations in the capital cities (see Appendix C). In Tallinn, the Estonian share dropped from 60. 2% in 1959 to 55. 7% in 1970, and 51. 3% in

1979. In Riga, Latvians' share of the population declined from 44. 7% in 1959 to 40. 9% in 1970, with no number given for 1979, but presumably lower than the 1970 figure. The 40. 9% Latvian population in Riga in 1970 was offset by 42. 7% Russians, so that more in that capital spoke the latter

language than the native one. In Vilnius, always a multi-national city throughout its history, Lithuanians made up 33. 6% of the population in 1959, 42. 8% in 1970, and 47. 3 % in 1980. (53)

Throughout the 1970's, the Baltics were subject to more control from Moscow, and oddly at the same time, greater autonomy at the individual and plant level. The Balts would academically demonstrate at what they considered “ excesses of centralization” all the way up to sharp protests to the Supreme Soviet for inefficiencies and shortcomings. (54)

“ The powerful cultural rebound of the early 1960's was followed in 1968 by a period of more mature and less spectacular development. Conditions continued to be the most difficult inLatvia, where the battle for cultural autonomy was still undecided.” A series of publishings, bannings, calls for democratization of socialism, suppression of “ ideologically erroneous works” was following by a gradual lessening of criticism directed at critics of the system. Poetry, prose, plays all became more open, pronounced national in tone, marked by moments of chill (1969 in Estonia, 1971 and 1974 in Latvia, and 1972 and 1975 in Lithuania.). (55)

Significant dissent began arising in below the surface activities

throughout the late 1960's and 1970's in all three countries against the

authorities, both in the country and in Moscow. These sub rosa protests

took several forms, from refusing to speak Russian if addressed in that

language to placing flowers at places the regimes were trying to lower the

visibility and significance of to cheering at sports contests for

non-Soviet competitors. Introduction of the colors of the pre-war flags

into souvenir items was another subtle way of protesting against the

Moscow-dominated regimes.

In 1972, in Tallinn, the protests became more overt. A Czech hockey

victory over the Soviets led to demonstrations in the streets by " several

hundred students shouting, " We won!" " A soccer match in 1977 set off a

demonstration against the then-new Soviet constitution, with fans hitting

the streets shouting, " Down with the Constitution of the occupying power."

Concerts often also set this kind of reaction off. In Tartu in Estonia, one

thousand students demonstrated in 1976 when a concert was cancelled

because of its " political nuances." In the Latvian city of Liepaja in 1977,

a Estonian rock group was not allowed to perform, whereupon the audience wrecked the place, and ran through the streets shouting “ Freedom!.” Riots occurred in Lithuania in 1956 and in 1960, but in May, 1972, a student named Romas Kalanta poured gasoline on himself, set himself ablaze and later died. The day of his funeral began the rioting, as several thousand youths battled the KGB, police and paratroopers, and 500 were arrested. Within days, three more self-immolations happened in other cities in Lithuania. (56)

In December, 1971, dissidents sent to Moscow a petition from Lithuania.

! 7, 000 signed despite severe problems to these people from the KGB. These

were transshipped to Brezhnev via Kurt waldheim of the UN. Two more followed in 1973, sent to the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and signed by 14, 000 Lithuanians; the other went to the Commissioner for Religious Affairs in Lithuania, and contained 18, 000 signatures. From 1973 to 1979, these appeals appeared to vanish in the country, only to reappear in 1979, regarding a church in Klaipeda, signed by 150, 000, 4% of the country’s population. (57)

“ The first intimations of Latvian opposition date from the early 1960’s.” Three individuals were tried for plotting an armed uprising; all were sent to prison. 8 more Latvians got eight to fifteen years for allegedly plotting to “ form an organization, to be named the Baltic Federation, to oppose Russification and economic exploitation of the Baltic republics.” In 1969, a Latvian youth, Ilya Rips, set himself on fire, and survived, later being allowed to emigrate to Israel. At least a dozen Latvian journalists received sentences in 1970-71. The most notable Latvian dissent may have been the “ Letter of the Seventeen Communists,” published July-August, 1971, “ addressed to party leaders in Romania, Yugoslavia, France, Austria and Spain.” Later, a Roman Catholic petition signed by 5, 000 of the church’s membership came to light, as did the existence of three Latvian political dissent groups. All three emerged in 1975 via letter.

One, the Latvian Independence Movement, had on its agenda oppression, Russification, moral degradation, alcoholism, and family instability. The Latvian Democratic Youth Committee surveyed the steps that would lead to

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

reestablishing independent Baltic states. the third group was the Latvian Christian Democratic Organization, promoting the leasing of Christian lives as a prime condition of independence. A fourth organization, the Organization for Latvia's Independence, emerged via pamphlet in 1977, and called for the republic's secession from the Soviet Union. (58)

Estonian dissent became known by samizdat essays and memos that appeared in the West in the later 1960's. (All three countries had many samizdat publications from the mid-160's onward.) Starting with an essay that appeared in July, 1968 entitled "To Hope or to Act," on through Soviet officers convicted in 1969 for founding a "secret organization," to the emergence of two "resistance groups" in 1972, Estonian dissent grew. The Estonian National Front (ENF) and the Estonian Democratic Movement (EDM) reportedly had published a program in 1971, but it never appeared in the West. In 1974, the Soviets responded by arresting several members of both groups. Five EDM members were tried in 1975 and given suspended sentences

for advocating the overthrow of the Soviets. In 1977, 18 naturalists sent an anonymous letter to colleagues in Europe complaining of ecological

damage perpetrated by the Soviets. One dissenter was sent to a psychiatric ward in the early Seventies for daring to protest Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from the USSR. In 1980, 40 major creative artists in Estonia sent a letter to Pravda – which refused to print it – protesting violence in Tallinn.

They called for an open discussion on Russo-Estonian relations, discussed food shortages, and laid out a whole platform of complaints against the Soviets. (59)

The Soviet state had a great deal of concern about the “nationalities question.” In 1969, a Scientific Council for Nationality Problems had been created within the USSR Academy of Sciences. In 1975, this group met to “outline a five year plan for research on nationality problems,” after existing on paper but not in fact in the interim years. (60)

In 1977, the new Soviet constitution was adopted. “The new Constitution broadened Moscow's jurisdiction over the governments of the Union republics

(Art. 73). The latter were also deprived of the nominal right to maintain their own military formations, and to pardon or grant amnesties to citizens sentenced by a Union republic's judicial organs. Furthermore, although the

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

union republics retained the right to secede from the USSR (Art. 72), this guarantee was in effect neutralized by the new definition of the USSR as a 'unitary' state whose 'sovereignty'... extends to all of its territories.' (Art. 75). Brezhnev did make the claim that the republics were being given certain additional rights, but in practice this was to have no real meaning." (61)

Through the late Seventies, the Soviet authorities struggled with an increased amount of activity from dissident minorities in various republics; Georgia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, the camps, and Lithuania. Language conferences in various locations in 1978 and 1979 only tended to heighten suspicions about further Russification. Two dissident works, one by a Ukrainian, Iurii Badz'o called THE RIGHT TO LIVE, the other by Lithuanian Vytautas Skuodis called SPIRITUAL GENOCIDE IN LITHUANIA were seized, the authors arrested and put in prison. Protests against the regime's Russification policy continued unabated. (62)

"The end of the 1970s saw a turn for the worse in other respects as well. Towards the end of 1979 the Soviet authorities launched a major drive

against dissent that was to continue into the 1980's and result in the arrest of hundreds. Clearly disturbed by the upsurge and variety of open dissent since the mid-1970s, the Kremlin had to contain this 'epidemic.' To what extent this crackdown was linked to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, or the approach of the Olympic Games in 1980 is difficult to say. What was evident, though, is that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan effectively destroyed what was left of 'detente' with the west and, as a result, the Soviet authorities became even less concerned about their 'human rights' image. This was especially evident from the fact that the emigration of Jews, Germans and others from the Soviet Union was now drastically reduced. What did worry Moscow, however, was the fear of possible 'contagion' from Iran, Afghanistan, and Poland. This, and the deterioration of relations with the West, led to a return of the 'siege mentality.'

Despite the toughening of policy towards dissent ... the non-Russians refused to be muzzled. If anything, their resistance became more radical and militant. In August 1979, 45 Baltic activists issued a declaration in

connection with the 40th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in which they called for a restoration of the independence of the Baltic states. The following month 20 Baltic activists sent a message of support to Lech Walesa who was then emerging as a leader of Poland's 'peaceful revolution.' Baltic dissidents were also among the first to condemn the invasion of Afghanistan. In January 1980, 21 of them addressed an appeal to the UN Secretary General comparing the occupation of Afghanistan to the fate that had befallen Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

There were further Baltic actions in the early 1980s. In 1981, for example, 35 Lithuanians and one Latvian sent Walesa a greeting on the first anniversary of the formation of the Polish free trade union movement Solidarity, and 38 Baltic activists signed an appeal for the creation of a 'Baltic nuclear-free zone.' National dissent was conspicuous in all three of the Baltic republics but especially in Lithuania, where it assumed mass proportions and in some ways resembled the situation in Poland. The Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church provided a rallying point in the struggle for human and national rights, and since November 1978 an unofficial

Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believer's Rights had played a prominent role. Samizdat publications proliferated, with over ten samizdat journals appearing regularly. There was even a striking parallel to the Polish workers' celebrated struggle to build a church in Nowa Huta: in 1979 148, 149 Lithuanians signed a protest against the closing of their church in Klaipeda." (63)

In the early 1980's, no less than four leaders held power in the Soviet Union, and persecution, arrests, continued Russification and a general denial of " minority rights" were the basic stance of the Brezhnev period (to November, 1982, when he died), the brief Andropov period (11/82 to 2/84, for the last eight months of his regime he was ill, with barely a finger on the pulse of the nation), and the even briefer period of Chernenko's regime (2/84-3/85) right up to the days just before the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the CPSU. (64)

" In December 1984, when Chernenko was visibly ailing, Kommunist published a major article signed by him that evidently represented a consensus in the leadership's thinking about what the Party's long-term

strategy and new programme were. It added more gloom to Andropov's sober

appraisal of what the future held for the USSR. the lietmotif of the article was that the achievements of communism had put off indefinitely and that the interim would consisy of what Chernenko euphemistically termed ' a historically long period od developed socialism.' Stressing the ' colossal amount of work' that still lay ahead and ' the difficulties and contradictions' that would have to be overcome, the Soviet leader stated that from now on the road to communism would be constructed ' without a shadow of utopianism.' The two cruicial tasks for the foreseeable future were, on the one hand, to raise the efficiency of production and accelerate the country's economic development, and on the other, to instil a better work ethic by further inculcation of the population with ' socialist' values.

That same month, Chernenko's heir apparent, Mikhail Gorbachev, elaborated on these priorities in a keynote address to an all-Union conference on ideology. Dwelling primarily on the need to improve and modernize the country's economy, he seemed to emulate Andropov in his

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

stress on the need for order and better organization, discipline and political vigilance. Although Gorbachev mentioned the need to abandon 'obsolete approaches and methods,' he had nothing new to say about nationalities policy. He simply described the sphere of national relations as 'the most complex area of social relations' and placed at the top of his list of outstanding problems the 'rational distribution of productive forces and their further integration into the overall national complex.' Thus, at the time of Chernenko's death in March 1985 and Gorbachev's takeover, there did not seem to be any real grounds to expect changes in the nationalities policy." (65)

Though Gorbachev called for glasnost, or openness, in the new Soviet society, in some ways it came slowly. In May of 1985 however, Russian and Latvian youths clashed in Riga and there were anti-Soviet protests. But, "...the new cultural thaw was largely restricted to Moscow and Leningrad." (66)

In September, 1985, the debate about the Baltics "sharpened." "... The Latvians were given a fillip by the US-Soviet conference held in the

Latvian seaside resort town of Jurmala.” This meeting saw the US spokesman say that the United States “ has never and will never recognize the forcible incorporation” of the Baltics into the Soviet Union. (67)

During Gorbachev’s first year in office, several leading dissidents from non-Russian areas got stiff prison sentences for dissent. Among them were a Lithuanian, Vladas Lapeinis, who got seven years in jail, and an Estonian, Jann Korb, who got eight years imprisonment. In February of 1986, when Gorbachev had been in power 11 months, he told a French Communist newspaper that there were no political prisoners in the USSR. (68)

The first couple of years after Gorbachev took over brooked no real change; indeed, moves to celebrate the former independence days of Lithuania and Estonia in 1989 aroused the ire of their Soviet overlords, though no move to suppress the celebrations was taken. The first demonstration of the Gorbachev era in the Baltics was in Talinn, in August, 1987, when Estonians protested the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, and its basic illegality towards the Baltics. (The Soviets continue to claim that the three Baltic Parliaments “ asked” to be incorporated in the USSR, but

the Parliaments in question were “ captive” to the Soviets).

The Estonian Popular Front held its first Congress in October, 1988.

The Latvian National Independence Movement had 10, 000 members by mid-1989.

Sajudis in Lithuania was formed at the same time as the Popular Fronts of the other two republics, ... conceived in the summer of 1988 and held its first congress in October. Of the three fronts, Sajudis has the most solid support from its population.(69)

In 1989 and 1990, elections in the three republics produced majorities of independence-minded individuals in the Supreme Soviets (Parliaments) of the three Baltic states. Those Parliaments in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania convened, and in varying ways, made moves toward eventual independence.

Lithuania went the farthest. On 11 March, 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet union, and soon thereafter, both its Baltic neighbors declared their intent to be separated from the Soviet union also, though by different methods.

CONCLUSIONS –

The Baltic region has been under domination for most of recorded

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

history by either pre-Russian elements of what is now the Soviet Union, Russia in one permutation or another, various groups of knights of primarily Germanic origin, or the Poles in one form or another. Only the period 1918-40 in modern times has seen the Baltics “ independent” in the way they again seek to be in 1990-91.

The Baltic peoples have tried, however, in resistance to the Germans in the 1941-44 period, and to the Soviets up to the mid-1960’s, to achieve statehood anew ever since the now-infamous deal between Stalin and Hitler immortalized as the Molotov and Ribbentrop Treaty of 1939 carved up their then-independent nations and made them “ ask” to join” the Soviet Union under duress.

Since the Sixties, the protests have gone on, and been repressed, by all the subsequent Soviet leadership that followed Stalin in the Kremlin. When Gorbachev came in 1985, preaching openness (glasnost) and restructuring (perestroika), the Baltic peoples began Popular Fronts, as were being formed elsewhere in the Soviet Union. They sought seats to represent secessionist views in their respective republic’s Supreme Soviet’s. They

won those seats. They voted to secede – and Moscow said, “ No.” Gorbachev rammed through the USSR’s Supreme Soviet a complicated post facto law to deal with the mechanics of secession. Lithuania had just “ declared independence” a few weeks before. Gorbachev sent the army in, began an economic blockade of Lithuania, and to lesser degrees, the other two Baltic countries.

The moves made in 1990 were not considered legal by President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, hence the justification in placing large numbers of troops in the three republics. After several months, in January, 1991, in separate violent incidents in both Lithuania and Latvia, civilians were killed by crack Soviet troops in confrontations with Baltic civilians.

Those activities are continuing as these words are being written. No resolution has been found.

In the past year, the jostling from both the three Baltic states, and three other republics of the Soviet Union – Georgia, Armenia and Moldava – to be free of the Soviet Union has been ongoing, occasionally violent, and not the only areas of discontent for the Soviets. The other nine republics,

however, agreed in principle to sign a “ new union” treaty with Moscow (the 9 + 1 agreement), and then Moscow stated its intent to charge the dissident six hard currency for resources at “ fair market” prices. Negotiations of an irregular nature have gone on behind the scenes most of 1991, without much result.

In early June, 1991, troop movements again were begun by the Soviets in Riga and Vilnius, and then a few hours later withdrawn. How the actuality of secession is handled is perhaps moot, many observers feel that the obdurate Balts will settle for nothing less than total independence now, not five years from now, and not in some shoddy, hard-currency deal that overlooks considering the thousands who died in Nazi camps and Soviet gulags whose value is incalculable. If money passes hands, the “ new” Soviet state will be stained by the immorality of demanding money for fixtures, but offering none to compensate for the thousands of Balts the Soviet state unjustly destroyed, often without a word to families about their fate, in the Stalin years and after, until quite recently. Baltic political prisoners are in Soviet jails and prisons as these words are typed.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-baltics-nationalities-and-other-problems-essay/>

This question of independence will not go away. Despite a long history of being dominated by every nearby state larger than they, even by marauding bands of knights being a sub-state for a few hundred years – the Balts wish more than ever in this era of self-determination rhetoric to be able to determine for themselves what way they wish to live. In referendums deemed illegal by the Kremlin in February and March of 1991, no less than 73% of each republic voted to be independent, with 80% of their electorate voting. The mandate is clear. After centuries, the Balts are on the verge of true independence – sovereign states in the modern world community.