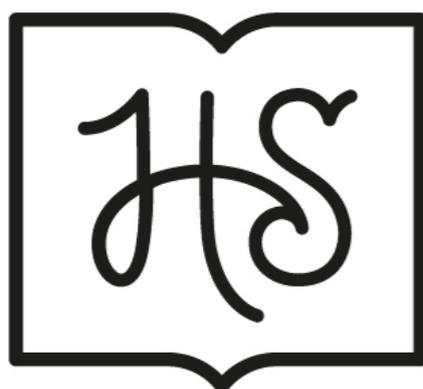


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Teaching History During War Time – Preparation of history teachers at the University of Latvia during World War II

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ABSTRACT

Teaching History During War Time – Preparation of history teachers at the University of Latvia during World War II

This article examines the preparation of history teachers at the University of Latvia during World War II. I address the general situation of education and the preparation of history teachers, in particular, at the University of Latvia during World War II and the immediate post-war years. Latvia experienced three occupations between 1940 and 1944: two Soviet (1940-1941 and again from 1944, which lasted until 1991) and German occupation from 1941-1944. During the first year of Soviet occupation, authorities concentrated on the rewriting of history resulting in complications in the teacher education system. Latvian historiography and Latvian history writing suffered immediately upon German occupation as well, but the German civil authorities paid relatively little attention to the actual process of teaching history and preparation of history teachers at the University of Latvia. My research focuses on issues of language, politics, and power in history teaching and how it affected the immediate task at hand – preparation of history teachers. My sources included documents found in the Latvian State History Archives (LVVA), Latvian State Archives (LVA), and pedagogical press, and interviews with history teachers who experienced the changes that occurred at the time.

Introduction

School has traditionally been viewed as an instrument of socialization; part of the process is instilling a sense of belonging to society in general or a specific social group. One issue commonly agreed upon is the significance of the teaching of history, because it is inextricably tied not only to the past, but also gives understanding of the values of modern society and resulting assessment of those values, which, in turn, facilitates the development of a sense of identity – an awareness of belonging to a social group and/or nation.

Historic fact as a foundation for history did not become relevant until the 19th century when positivism was introduced into the study of the past (Popkewitz 2001, p. 154), and value was placed on individual initiative and human purpose in the direction of the affairs of civilization.

(Popkewitz 2001, p. 159) The choice of what should be taught suddenly became more relevant in a society that was discovering and redefining its identity and that could be used as a tool to influence this process.

Political regimes have often rewritten history to validate their worldview, and how this is presented is a window revealing the belief system and ideals of the regime and what it expects its citizens should believe and accept. This coincided with an increased awareness of the individual and nation building in Europe and was instrumental in creating generations of Latvian intellectuals, who influenced the development of Latvian pedagogy. Their struggle was primarily against Germanization and/or Russification of the Latvian people and for the creation of a national system of education to support the general development of nationalism. During the 19th century: “National-historic narratives swirled through the public sphere, all over Europe, and in great and relentless density... and ...all of society, the entire public sphere was immersed neck-deep in a nonstop multimedia cult of national self-articulation and self-celebration.” (Leerssen 2006, p. 203) History was romanticized, and European historians played an important role as nation builders. This national-historic preoccupation extended into all spheres of public life, including education, in the Latvian territory of the Russian empire. More specifically, issues of identity centered on Latvian language, culture, and history.

As a result of this national awakening, the German landed gentry, mostly through their own negligence, lost control over what they had considered to be the accepted social order where Latvians were posited in the lower class. Russian pedagogues were also acquainted with the enlightened humanist ideas that had spread throughout Europe, but had not succeeded in popularizing or implementing them in the Russian education system, which, outside the Baltic provinces, remained in a comparatively poor state for many years. However, both the Germans and Russians had come to realize the potential of history teaching as a means to instill values favourable to advancing the growth of their pan-movements. They would utilize these values in more dramatic ways in the next century.

The founding of the new Latvian state in 1918 necessitated the creation of a Latvian education and history-teaching program. It was nationalistic in orientation and hearkened back to the call by 19th century intellectuals for a Latvian interpretation of Latvian history. History teaching was an important part of the curriculum, and content of history textbooks was of prime concern to educators and government officials. While history teaching was meant to inspire patriotic and nationalistic sentiment, it did not purposefully denigrate other peoples who played a role in Latvian history. Creative teaching methods were encouraged, and the nation as a whole was encouraged to play a part in the creation of a Latvian interpretation of Latvian history.

During the interwar period, the majority of European countries had adopted some form of dictatorship, including Latvia. Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis seized power in a bloodless coup d'état in 1934. Patriotism and nationalism, as a goal of history teaching, was heightened during this era, and some control upon teachers and methodology was initiated. History textbook authors continued to be culturally representative of the system and continued to enjoy a relatively high degree of academic freedom, though reduced from the previous era.

The egalitarian and culturally diverse education system that had existed during the 1920s¹ began to be eroded by nationalistic and authoritarian policies.

Education was the basis for this nationalist philosophy, but history teaching, considered to be an integral part of developing patriotism and nationalism, took on a decidedly hero-oriented slant. History textbooks were more carefully viewed for appropriately nationalistic content, and focused on the accomplishments of individuals and Latvian history, but continued to remain relatively un-biased in their descriptions of relations with other nations and nationalities. Progressive teaching techniques were abandoned in favour of more traditional teaching methods, but this was not due only to the nature of the authoritarian regime, but rather reflected a general pedagogic trend throughout Europe. Ulmanis' rule used authoritarianism and the hero cult to continue the development of nationalism that had already begun during the parliamentary period. He rid the education system of the 'messy-ness' (Kronlīns 1935, pp. 454-490) of democracy and solidified a streamlined institution for the education of the youth who, in turn, would build the glory of the nation. This was interrupted by the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940.

Soviet occupation of Latvia (1940-1941)

The Red Army marched into Latvia in June 1940, and rigged elections in July 1940 brought about the creation of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). Over 500 teachers experienced repressions, another 1500 were fired or resigned voluntarily, and approximately 6000 teachers were moved to different schools, affecting two-thirds of the total number of teachers in Latvia. (Pavlovičs 2004, p. 99) Not only did the mass transfer of teachers affect the education system, but the sudden shift from a Latvian nationalist education system to a Soviet system, explicitly socio-centric in its bias towards the proletariat and ethnocentric in its glorification of Russian culture, while simultaneously devaluing other cultures, rendered useless many of the materials, particularly many textbooks used in independent Latvia.

Education under Soviet occupation was based on strict political and ideological principles. Research in general education practices, as well as the teaching and content of history lessons, were based solely on Stalin's interpretations and directions. The goal of history teaching was to create a Soviet interpretation of Latvia's history as a means to instill Soviet patriotism. The purpose of history teaching was to gain knowledge of Soviet history from a Marxist/Leninist perspective.

Restructuring of the University of Latvia began immediately after occupation. A new rector sent from Soviet Russia, Jānis Paškevics, was appointed. Paškevics' academic qualifications were based on experience in the Red Army and the Higher Party School. The first faculties to be disbanded were theological study faculties, and their students were also expelled. The University of Latvia was renamed Latvia State University (LSU) in September and new

¹Minorities enjoyed a great degree of autonomy in the field of education and both Latvia and Estonia were hailed as forerunners in the field of minority education at the Geneva Minority Congress in 1927 (Šilde, A. *Pirmā republika*. Rīga: Elpa. 1982/1993, p. 257)

statutes were adopted that were essentially a translation of Moscow State University statutes, adopted in 1938.² Faculties were renamed, and new faculties, reflecting Soviet ideology, were created. Political and military education became obligatory courses of study, as did Russian language courses.

Faculty members and department heads were dismissed (10.2% of the total), and replaced by specialists imported from Soviet Russia, who, like the new rector, had attended Soviet political education institutions. A record number of first year students matriculated – 7898 – but other students, who were considered undesirable, were forced to leave. This affected many students who were members of fraternities and sororities that had been disbanded. Faced with a new Soviet-style education system, other students left, as well.³

LSU statutes adopted in 1940 called for the creation of a History Department that would teach history and history associated courses – art history, dialectical and historical materialism, pedagogy and psychology, USSR history, and Latvian history. LSU was the only institute dedicated to the preparation of secondary school history teachers until 1954 when Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute (founded in 1952) opened a department for the preparation of history teachers. This department was closed in 1960 leaving LSU as the sole preparer of secondary school history teachers. Primary school teachers were educated in several “pedagogical secondary schools” or teacher institutes. Graduates of these schools were not certified to teach in secondary schools where secondary school students were required to write history exit exams in their last year. In addition, all potential students had to sit university entrance exams that were highly political in nature, thus requiring a more thorough inculcation by appropriately trained teachers.

Latvian historians and history teachers faced an unprecedented dilemma. They had no acceptable teaching materials and, thus, were resigned to adopting and using the safest and only materials available – those supporting Stalin’s view of history. These were initially available through translation only, as Russian historians were considered reliable, and Latvian historians and teachers were suspect because of their ‘bourgeois’ past. These translations, along with the works of repatriated Latvian historians and pedagogues, were published in *Padomju Latvija Skola* (PLS) [Soviet Latvian School] and were the sole acceptable source of educational material.

The first issue of *PLS* was published in August 1940 and included discussion of all the elements of the new education system. *PLS* encompassed everything any teacher in Latvia needed to know about teaching in the ‘newly liberated and rejoined to the Soviet Fatherland’ Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. The majority of the articles in the journal were methodological in nature.

Education of Soviet youth required proper history education, and an article discussing history teaching gave a clear overview of the eschatologically driven methodology of the new order. This article stressed the need to “...raise the new nation’s citizens not only for the transition

²Pirmais padomju gads [The First Soviet Year]. <http://vesture.lu.lv/1939-1949/apraksts/raksts/pirmais-padomju-gads/> viewed on May 20, 2015.

³Ibid.

period – socialist society – but rather for the final developmental stage – communism”.⁴ The article described how history should be taught – in chronological order and reinforcing through memorization the most important events, historic figures, and dates. Rational civic history should not be presented in abstract sociological terms that mirror abstract definitions of economic systems. The author noted that changing the history curriculum would be a relatively simple task, because Latvians no longer had to continuously search for historic truths, as a complete curriculum and methodological approach to the teaching of history could be taken from the 20-year development experience of the “great fatherland”. Much of this truth included reinterpretations of Latvian history, particularly relations with Russia.

In an article on Soviet school textbooks, the author noted:

USSR schoolbooks differ from bourgeois schoolbooks in their methodological construct. The lesson of Soviet schools and books is to give students the most important information about the basis of knowledge, and, simultaneously, teach the student, the future active builder of socialism, how to employ the knowledge gained in school in the practicalities of everyday life. This principle is used to create textbooks... And with this we will instill love for our native land.⁵

An article on history curriculum explained that Latvian schools would not have to search for new textbooks, but would be able to adopt ready-made educational textbooks and methodology which the great fatherland, the USSR, had spent 20 years developing.⁶ The author continued by stating that the books used in independent ‘bourgeois’ Latvia not only did not reflect a true vision of historic events, but also were remiss in teaching proper patriotism, because they failed to teach students practical lessons for everyday life. Soviet books would do so.

The previously cited regulations about Soviet schoolbooks, adopted on 9 August 1940, stated that books would be published in the mother tongue of all the Soviet peoples, no matter how few speakers there may have been, but this was clearly not a priority. Several entries stressed the importance and necessity of learning Russian not just to be able to access great works of literature, but also because history textbooks would not be translated into other languages for the non-Russian speaking population. The importance of knowledge of Russian continued to be stressed in a critique of the “monumental World History” – a work encompassing 28 volumes being prepared by the Academy of Sciences (in Moscow). (Pētersons 1941, pp. 77-81) In order for Latvians to be able to access this research, they would have to unceasingly learn Russian because translating and publishing the whole work in Latvian would not be possible in the near future.

In addition, the reader was constantly reminded that Russian was the only language in which Russian culture, history, and the principles of Marxism/Leninism could be fully appreciated. According to several authors, this in turn would improve Latvian culture. The new Soviet Latvia had few Russian-speaking teachers. To assist in administering this new curriculum, the Ministry of Education issued a directive on 9 August 1940, which allowed any person who

⁴Piezīmes par vēstures mācību [Notes on the teaching of history]. 1940, *PLS*, 1, p. 37.

⁵Padomju Savienības skolas mācību grāmatas [Soviet Union schoolbooks]. 1940, *PLS*, 1, p. 56.

⁶Mācību metodes Padomju Savienības skolā – Mācības metožu loma un nozīme [Teaching methodology in Soviet Unions schools – the role and significance of methodology]. 1940, *PLS*, 1, p. 42–48.

had received any type of teacher training during the era of the Russian empire to teach Russian without proving their ability to do so.⁷ Because previous literature was largely no longer acceptable or available, the government encouraged the population to learn Russian.

German occupation of Latvia (1941-1944/45)

Many local Latvians greeted the Germans with joy thinking they would be liberated, but the German occupation would prove differently. People hoped education would return to the pre-war system, but almost immediately changes were made reflecting the new occupation. (Pavlovičs 2004, pp. 99-113) Initially, some teachers, who were able, returned to their former teaching positions, but a witch-hunt soon ensued, affecting many teachers who had organized even one single pro-communist event in school. At least 500 teachers suffered during this period. German censors reviewed, adapted, and re-released the pre-war books that had not been ruined or destroyed by the Soviets, but paper was scarce, and many students did not have books. The only completely new course was a general history course with a new history book. Many sources indicate that the Nazi regime spent much time 'righting the wrongs' created by the previous Soviet occupation. This was reflected in the student body of the University, as well. Archives show that members of the proto-fascist movement Thunder Cross, outlawed by Ulmanis after his coup in 1934, were allowed to be admitted to the University for the second semester of the 1941/1942 academic year.⁸ Admissions information also noted that those who had participated in the Battles for Freedom after World War I would be given priority for admission in 1942/1943.⁹ This, no doubt, was a move designed to gain the trust of Latvian patriots.

Righting of wrongs also included reissuing documents acquired during Soviet occupation. Minutes of the meeting of the Dean's council on 16 March 1942¹⁰ included discussion on exam results and documents received during the Bolshevik occupation. A decree on school documentation stated:

In order to organize the disorderly Bolshevik school system and to help school pupils sooner forget the period of Bolshevik rule, all Bolshevik-style documents from the 1940/41 academic year – graduation diplomas, completion certificates, temporary certificates, and other diplomas and certificates are to be handed in for exchange for new documents by 31 August 1942.¹¹

In addition, the instructions given to schools noted:

If concrete facts show that during Bolshevik rule, certain students were wronged due to their nationalist stance [*latviskās nostājas*] by purposeful lowering of grades, or if successful students did not even receive a graduation certificate, the pedagogical conference can right these accordingly. The pedagogical conference can also not replace the graduation certificates of those secondary school graduates, who consistently and radically expressed their hostile position against the Latvian people, or

⁷Noteikumi pamatskolu krievu valodas skolotājiem Nr. A-2477 [Directive for primary school Russian language teachers]. 1940, *PLS*, 1, p. 87.

⁸LVVA, 7427, apr. 7, l. 12, p. 169.

⁹Ibid., p.193.

¹⁰LVVA, 7427, apr. 7, l. 17, p. 64

¹¹Ibid., p. 135-136.

who are guilty of persecution of other students or teachers. This is also in effect for adult education, night school, and elementary school graduates.¹²

Clearly, the Nazi regime was playing on the sympathies of many Latvians, who had suffered at the hands of the previous Soviet regime in hopes of support. However, future actions would indicate that the German occupiers did not hold the Latvians in such high esteem. This became clear in actions taken in the field of education.

Latvian historiography and Latvian history writing suffered immediately upon German occupation when *Großdeutschland* leadership representative Dr. N. von Holst ordered the closing of the Latvian History Institute in August 1941 and requisitioned the Institute's books, maps, card catalogue, and valuable furniture and books shelves.¹³ Nevertheless, Latvian history and history methodology was scheduled to be taught in the University's Faculty of Philology and Philosophy during the 1941/1942 academic year. Scheduled courses included Latvian history, history methodology, history seminar, Roman and Greek history, and the history of pedagogy and didactics,¹⁴ and the lecture schedule included Latvian history, history methodology, modern history, ancient Baltic history, as well as seminars in archeology, Roman history, and pedagogical history.¹⁵ However, none of these scheduled classes took place in the autumn of 1941 because the faculty was busy reviewing and inventorying the library.¹⁶ Archival records indicate that many former history students requested transfers to different faculties, supporting the de facto non-existence of Latvian history education at the University.

A Latvian history textbook, *Latvijas vēsture V pamatskolas klasei*, for Grade 5 was published in September 1942 and did not indicate an author.¹⁷ It covered the period of Latvian history from the Ice Age to the beginning of Russian rule in a short 120 pages. This abbreviated version of Latvian history did not contain phrases or descriptors of Germans in negative terms, such as occupiers, but rather as missionaries and traders,¹⁸ and portrayed the actions of the local Baltic tribes in relatively passive terms.

As German rhetoric entered the public and educational spheres, the historic role of Germany in the creation of intellectual Latvians was stressed. Nazification of the Latvian school program increased, and education suffered as the school year was drastically shortened due to wartime activities. Changes in the school structure affected not only minorities, but in 1942, the use of Latvian dialects in schools was outlawed.

A new curriculum was issued including German lessons and intensified physical education. The education system soon also incorporated work requirements as an admissions prerequisite. The University entry requirement brochure for the academic year 1942/1943 indicated that all university students, current and new, were required to complete two months

¹²Ibid., p. 133-134.

¹³LVA, P-791. f., 1. apr., 45. l.

¹⁴LVVA, 7427.f., 7. apr., 26. l, p. 4-6.

¹⁵LVVA, 7427.f., 7. apr., 26. l, p. 62-66.

¹⁶LVVA, 7427.f., 7. apr., 8A. l

¹⁷*Latvijasvēsture V pamatskolasklasei* [History of Latvia for Elementary School Grade 5]. Rīga: Latvju Grāmata, 1942.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 40-41.

of agricultural work in the summer. Exempted were those who had a steady job and could be replaced, those who had special practicums for their field of study, the physically ill (proved by a doctor's note), and those for whom the family situation would be worsened by leaving for two months.¹⁹ Young males were offered secondary school diplomas or the opportunity to skip a grade if they enlisted in the German army in 1943.

On 29 January 1942, the Generalkommissar of Riga notified the rector of the University of Latvia that the academic institution was furthermore to be known as *Univeristät in Riga*. In addition, the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy notified the rector that the History Department's course schedule for the 1942/1943 academic year had not been modified, as required, to suit wartime needs, as the Generalkommissariat had not sent the necessary directives.²⁰ Yet, pedagogy and the history of pedagogy in Latvia was taught, albeit with the appropriate stress in pedagogy on the teleological historic significance of the creation of *Großdeutschland* and in history on race theories and the significance of the Latvian nation's historic ties with northern races.

The report on the situation in the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy at the start of the 1943/1944 academic year contains several points discussing the activities and future of the History Department during German occupation.²¹

Point Three notes that the special wartime education plans include history specialization, but this was complicated by changes in the faculty. Prof. A. Tentelis had died and prof. A. Švābe and docent M. Stepermanis – who taught Latvian and modern history – were prohibited from reading lectures or leading seminars, leaving only docents Ed. Šturms and G. Lukstiņš to read lectures on ancient and Greek and Roman history. Medieval and modern history was entrusted to lecturers chosen by the German civil administration. Lectures or seminars on Latvian history had not taken place in two years and were not scheduled again the next year.

In Point Five, the History Department was notified that results of regular course exams, as well doctoral exams could be evaluated by existing faculty, but final exams required a special examiner as selected by the German Generalkommissariat.

Point Six discusses the notification that as of 1 January 1944, the Faculty's right to confer diplomas or academic degrees was suspended, and all lectures and seminars that did not serve the specific purposes of the wartime educational plan were also cancelled. A comment to this regulation notes that this action reveals the academic degradation of the university that would result in its transformation into a preparatory institute for head-teachers.

Point Seven notes that the suspension of the right to confer degrees, at least for the duration of the war, denies the faculty the opportunity to educate and prepare new teaching cadres, which ultimately means the gradual liquidation of the faculty.

These documents reveal that despite the politicization of both history and history teacher preparation, the German civil authorities paid relatively little attention to the actual process of teaching history and preparation of history teachers at the University of Latvia. Course and

¹⁹LVVA, 7427, apr. 7., l. 12, p.182.

²⁰LVVA, 7427.f., 7 apr., 27. l., p. 342-343.

²¹LVVA, 7427.f., 7. apr., 28. l., p. 307-308.

lecture titles are not overtly politicized, and the documents reveal a lack of discussion of the process by which the local population will be reeducated in the German worldview of history. This deficiency could be attributed to a pre-occupation with wartime military operations, as well the reticence by German occupying authorities to reveal the true historical interpretation of Latvia's role in post-war German-occupied Europe.

The German occupation of Latvia lasted three years, and although the teaching of Latvian history and preparation of history teachers was planned, this did not occur the entire period of German occupation. Latvians were expected to be thankful to the Germans for reestablishing Latvian schools, but this occupation was the basis for many recriminations by the Soviet Union after the re-occupation of Latvia by the Red Army in 1944, and a rich source of materials used condemn Nazism and its Latvian 'collaborators' and once again glorify the victorious Russian nation.

Soviet re-occupation of Latvia (1944/45)

Riga fell in October 1944 and Soviet authorities wasted no time in restoring the system previously installed in 1940-1941. The Faculty of Philology and Philosophy was reorganized into the Faculty of History and Philology, and evening and distance education departments were created to facilitate the education of the young. The Faculty was renamed the Faculty of History in 1944,²² and unlike the University in general, which continued to employ a majority of pre-war teaching staff, the majority of the faculty was made up of Latvians repatriated from Russia for the purpose of inculcating the 'local' Latvians with proper Soviet ideology; they were undeniably more reliable than the local teachers who were viewed with suspicion. Many of these staff members spoke little or no Latvian (Keruss 2010, pp. 71-77), further complicating the education process.

The separate Faculty of History created in 1944 had five departments: USSR History, Latvian SSR History, Ancient History, Medieval History, and Modern History. In 1947, the USSR Ministry of Education decreed that the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern history departments be combined to form a general History chair, which was in turn divided, in 1949, again into two – Ancient and Medieval History. Latvian SSR and USSR History were combined in 1949 creating the USSR History department. In 1954, the History faculty of the Latvian Pedagogical Institute was incorporated into the LSU Faculty of History, which in turn, was united with the Faculty of Philology creating the Faculty of History and Philology.²³ These frequent changes may indicate the unstable nature of a system that had recently undergone a drastic shift due to World War 2.

Students applying to the Faculty for the 1944/1945 academic year had to sit exams in general history, geography, and their mother tongue, and graduate students had to complete a colloquium on the USSR Constitution. Exam question topics required fairly extensive knowledge and understanding of Marxist-Leninist historical interpretations – *The role of the*

²²LVA, 1340.f., p. 3-4.

²³LVA, 1340.f., p. 34-35.

Latvian nation during the Great Patriotic War, The Latvian nation's struggle against German oppressors, New construction projects in Soviet Latvia, and other similar topics. Documents note that there was only a short period of time between the announcement and the actual writing of these exams, and the majority of students arrived with only the knowledge they had acquired during the previous period of Soviet rule. Accordingly, the results were quite varied, and student work revealed few precise facts, the prevailing ideology was not clearly, or only superficially explained, knowledge of historical facts was stronger than understanding of their significance, and language forms and structure were generally stronger than content. However, the examiners took the war situation into consideration and did not set high, but rather mild passing requirements.²⁴

The interviewed teachers who were educated during the Stalinist era describe a fractured education because of personal histories and expressed a generally negative attitude towards the teacher education system of the era. This criticism focused on highly politicized curriculum content and methodology, as well as language issues that were ultimately based in issues surrounding power – more specifically, a sense of powerlessness in many aspects of their education and teaching career as arbitrary factors over which they had no control suddenly played a major role in determining their education and career paths.

This situation continued throughout the Stalin era and criticism was publicly expressed in pedagogical press. The issues addressed continued to be one and the same focusing on language issues, pedagogic formalism, and teacher ineptitude.

Kārlis Straziņš, the People's Commissar for Education, admitted in 1948 that teaching the curriculum in Russian may have been too difficult (Straziņš 1948, pp. 18-23), but that was not the fault of the books or the curriculum, but rather a lack of commitment by the teachers to acknowledge the importance of complete comprehension of the content. The preeminence of the Russian language was discussed in great deal in many aspects of education, but in-depth discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper. In an effort to increase the amount of material regarding the Soviet interpretation of Latvian history, the Ministry of Education issued general directive nr. 179 on 23 December 1948, which focused specifically on the inadequacies of the teaching of history.²⁵ All members of the education system including the editorial boards of *PLS* and *Skolotāju avīze* (Teacher Newspaper) were given specific instructions and timelines how to improve the teaching of history. *PLS* was instructed to include more articles on Latvian history. Despite this directive, *PLS* published only one article about Latvian history in the next issue and none again until issue Nr. 5 in 1950. *Skolotāju avīze* was equally neglectful in such publications. An actual Latvian history textbook was first published in 1956. (Straziņš 1956)

However, pedagogically significant texts were widely translated from Russian in order to achieve the unified pedagogy and politicized understanding of society characteristic of totalitarian regimes. Despite acknowledgement of a language barrier, expectations of

²⁴LVA, 1340.f., 11. apr., 1. l.

²⁵Latvijas PSR izglītības ministrijas pavēle Nr. 179 – vispārīga. 1949. *PLS*, 2, p. 110-111

thorough political knowledge and understanding did not abate in following years, as witnessed by LSU History Department minutes found in the Latvian State Archives.

Strazdiņš published several articles reprimanding teachers on their poor performance. He observed that the biggest problem was “formalism” whereby students were taught basic facts, but not an understanding of the deeper meaning. Teachers had not yet fully become convinced of the undeniable socialist victory and did not have the required burning desire to become defenders of the socialist system. (Strazdiņš 1945, pp. 10-16)

Students had two opportunities to sit entrance exams for the 1949/1950 academic year and the exam questions were identical for both sessions: *Soviet Latvia's 10 years, Lenin as leader and human in the works of Gorky and Mayakovksy, Leninist-Stalinist Communist Youth in the struggle for communism, Soviet patriotism in modern literature*. The entrance exam question topics indicate not only the importance of knowledge of historic facts, but also the important role of literature in the correct interpretation of history and the formulation of a sense of history. Similar topics appear in entrance exams for other faculties, and comments about the results reveal the candidates inability to explain the societal and historical significance of literary works as well as “...gross political mistakes and... political analphabetism”.²⁶ Articles in pedagogical press also chastise history teachers and pupils’ on their poor knowledge of politics and scientific theories.²⁷

This indicates that teachers had not embraced socialist thought, the communist education system, and Soviet patriotism. Teachers needed to be motivated because the lesson is the heart of the education system and every lesson must develop in every student a Marxist way of thinking and Marxist world view. (Strandiņš 1948, pp. 3-9) My interviews with teachers also indicate that the Soviet worldview and interpretation of history was not as easily instilled in students, as the ruling order would hope.

Several of the teachers noted that rote learning was common in a system where form was stressed over content, and students would often memorize standard phrases to include in written compositions or repeat upon request. One teacher noted that teachers on opposite sides of the Soviet Union could assign a topic about a historical event history to their students, and the results would be virtually identical. Soviet language was hegemonic and constituted the only true representation of reality that was shared by all Soviet people, and from an audience perspective, language had only one function – to describe reality and state facts about the world. Several teachers spoke of bright students who would use Marxist/Leninist/Stalinist arguments to highlight flaws or inconsistencies in their discussion of the progression of history. The teachers could only remain silent.

History students were required to complete a teaching practicum in their last year of studies and minutes from Pedagogy Department meetings during the first semester of the 1948/1949

²⁶LVA, 1340.f., 11. apr., 13. l., p. 67.

²⁷Par stāvokli un pasākumiem vēstures mācīšanās uzlabošanā mūsu skolās – Latvijas PSR Izglītībasministrīja {On the situation of and activities for improvement of history teaching in our schools}, *Skolotāju avīze* [Teacher Newspaper], January 12, 1949, p. 2; Piseckis, I. Kritiskas piezīmes par vēstures mācīšanu dažās Rīgas skolās [Critical comments on the teaching of history in several Riga schools]. *Skolotāju avīze* [Teacher Newspaper], May 5, 1950, p. 3.

academic year indicate that the Faculty of History was the only faculty in which courses on pedagogy and methodology took place more than one semester. However, these documents reveal a lackadaisical attitude towards practicums: “Until now, the various faculties, as well as the LSU curriculum department, have paid no attention to pedagogical practicums leaving them strictly in the hands of methodology and pedagogy departments.”²⁸

Several minutes of meetings also indicate that students regularly missed lectures during their practicums, because the departments had not coordinated scheduling,²⁹ which indicates a general lack of organization of student teaching practicums.

Repeated indications about the lack of organization in pedagogical practicums would lead one to believe that the work of faculty was not closely observed, but minutes of meetings express severe criticism of ineffectual practice by members of faculty. These criticisms indicate the struggle for power and constant search for enemies, characteristic of the Stalinist era. “One must admit, that the Pedagogy and Psychology Department also feared calling things by their real names and avoided using Bolshevistic fervour to reveal deficiencies in faculty practice...”.³⁰ Criticism appears in the pedagogical press as well, and several articles sharply criticize teacher unpreparedness and call offending directors and teachers by name.³¹

History education in Soviet occupied Latvia had adopted a foreign and seemingly artificial interpretation of history based on class struggle and with an overtly and omnipresent focus on Russia’s exaggerated role in Latvian history. Keruss describes the teaching of history and faculty activity during the Stalinist totalitarian regime as distinctly politicized and dominated by power struggles within the University in the search for enemies. (Keruss 2010, p. 111) Civil human relationships had become warped during the Stalinist era and this was reflected in the heavy price paid by academics in their research that suffered due to ideologization and systematization. (Keruss 2010, p. 117) This ideologization and systematization transferred to teacher preparation and also succeeded in making history, particularly modern and Latvian history, a boring and even dangerous subject to teach.

Conclusion

My research reveals that both occupying forces believed history teaching was crucial to the development of identity. However, equal attention was not paid to the preparation of teachers, who are responsible for the inculcation of youth and dissemination of the ruling order’s worldview, but rather much effort was placed into the reorganization of the University of Latvia History Department to emphasize the validity and superiority of the ideals and social status of the occupiers.

During German occupation, this ultimately resulted in the postponement of teaching Latvian history, in particular, and the degradation of the University of Latvia to an institution for the

²⁸LVA, 1340.f., 23. apr., 2. l., p. 7.

²⁹LVA, 1340.f., 23. apr., 3. l., p. 16-17.

³⁰LVA, 1340. f., 23. apr., 1. l., p. 20.

³¹Boļševistisku modrību skolas darbā [Bolshevik-like vigilance in educational work], *Skolotāju avīze* [Teacher Newspaper], January 4, 1949, p. 3.

preparation of teachers. Ideology was important, but German authorities appear to have been pre-occupied with wartime activities, resulting in relative inactivity as regards history teacher preparation and forced acceptance of a Nazi German worldview. Even though they made attempts to garner some sympathy among the ethnic Latvian population, it is clear that German activities would have ultimately influenced history education and history teacher preparation to reflect Nazi ideology.

Soviet occupation also focused on restructuring, but much more emphasis was placed on the inculcation of ideology – proletarian internationalism – with constant reminders of the failings of the previous system – bourgeois nationalism. Unlike the Nazis, who played on ethnic Latvian sentiment, the Soviet occupiers did quite the opposite. Constant stress on the superiority of Russian culture and language clearly indicated the second-rate status of Latvians and their history. The politicization of history in general and Latvian history, in particular, and the preparation of history teacher resulted in formalism in teaching practice. Overt repressions and public admonishment of ‘incorrect’ political views instilled fear in faculty and students alike, particularly during the war and immediate post-war years. The University of Latvia would continue to operate under these conditions long after the war ended.

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