


DEFEAT OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNISTS IN LATVIA IN 1959 AND THE KOMSOMOL*

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The article addresses the Latvian Komsomol's leadership change in the context of the National Communists' 1959–1961 persecution. At first, the mass dismissal from office was only supposed to apply to a specific group of officials, since the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of Latvia did not anticipate strong opposition. During the plenary session on 22 September 1959, however, the Komsomol CC proposed a substitute candidate in place of Moscow's second secretary nominee. The number of Komsomol leadership members who lost their positions as a result of this action increased. Moscow had backed a programme between 1953 and 1959 that sought to boost the proportion of Latvians in the Komsomol, develop Latvian cadres, and carry out ideological work with Latvians in Latvia. Although the goal of this campaign was to bring Latvian youth closer to the Soviet system, it was denounced as nationalistic.

Keywords: National Communism in Latvia, Komsomol, *nomenklatura*, nationalism, Khrushchev's politics, Russification

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Introduction

Studies on the 1959 National Communist defeat in Latvia examine repressions against the Komsomol¹ leadership as a component of the “cleansing” of the Party *nomenklatura*.² The documents analysed in this article demonstrate that the replacement of the Komsomol leadership met an unexpected resistance at the Komsomol Central Committee (CC) plenary meeting on 22 September, which alarmed both Moscow and the Communist Party of Latvia (CPL) leadership. The objective of the paper is to analyse aspects of National Communist politics that precipitated the 1959–1961 Komsomol leadership purges and to thoroughly examine the way in which they were executed.

National Communism and Komsomol

The majority of studies on National Communism in Latvia concentrate on Lavrenty Beria’s “New course” launched in May and June 1953 and the implications it had for evolution of National Communist tendencies in the policies of Latvian Communist leadership. The planned policy change by Beria in the Baltic shook Latvia’s SSR *nomenklatura* to a large extent because it publicly and unequivocally reaffirmed what many already knew: there were few career options for native Latvians. Though discrimination was not so visible in comparison with the Party and administrative *nomenklatura*, it was nevertheless present in the Komsomol apparatus. While 62.7% of the Komsomol apparatus’s functionaries, on 1 January 1953, were ethnic Latvians,³ this percentage primarily came in the form of lower-ranking posts and from rural areas. Just 38.9% of the Komsomol CC’s functionaries were ethnic Latvians, which was even fewer than the 42% of Latvians at the CPL CC.⁴ Furthermore, a significant portion of Latvian members of Komsomol committees were born in the USSR’s “old”

1 Official name: The Latvian Leninist Young Communist League (Latvijas Ļeņina Komunistiskās jaunatnes savienība – hereinafter “Latvian Komsomol”) – a republican branch of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (*Vsesoiuznyi leninskii kommunisticheskii soiuz molodiozhi – VLKSM*).

2 Apine 2000; Prigge 2015; Loader 2017; Loader 2018.

3 Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs – Latvijas Valsts arhīvs (Latvian National Archives – Latvian State Archives), further: LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1306, 96. lp.

4 “Regarding the Republic’s deficiencies in its political, economic, and cultural development”, decision of the plenary meeting of the CPL CC on 23 June 1953, LNA-LVA, PA-101-16-1a, 16.–20. lp.

republics. Their attitudes toward Soviet rule and values differed from those of the local Latvians as a result of their increased exposure to Sovietisation and Russification. As a result, their impact on local Latvians was constrained. As regards local Latvians, demands for a “clean” biography had a big impact on their chances to compete for leadership roles.

Following Beria’s arrest, changes were made to the Komsomol leadership and politics on the whole as part of the anti-Beria campaign. The outcomes of the 2–7 July plenary meeting of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) CC, which was called to denounce Beria, were discussed during a joint plenary meeting of the Latvian Komsomol CC and the Riga City Committee of the Komsomol on 16–18 July 1953.⁵ Herberts Valters was chosen as the second secretary during the meeting, replacing Moscow bureaucrat Vitaly Shaposhnikov, who was also barred from the Central Committee.⁶ The LCP CC Bureau decided, on 21 July, to approve Shaposhnikov’s dismissal. The Komsomol plenary meeting decision cited his summoning back to Moscow to be at the disposal of the *VLKSM* CC as the official reason for his removal; however, a note in his personal file suggests that his calling back was because he did not speak Latvian.⁷

Drawing from the former second secretary of the CPL CC Vilis Krūmiņš’s recollections, Geoffrey Swain attributes this political reversal to him: “The appointed new Second Secretary of the Party, the former Komsomol Leader, immediately resumed the previous Komsomol policy of endorsing ‘core’ nationality”.⁸ However, Krūmiņš was following Moscow’s political line that wished to point out that the CPSU leadership, specifically Nikita Khrushchev, had taken the initiative to promote local officials and respect the national languages of the Baltic republics, and that this policy would continue after Beria was arrested, at least until Moscow’s national politics would be elaborated in a more detailed way.⁹ In general, “instead of the gendarme methods of the late Stalin years the regime now leaned toward more constructive methods of engaging the local populations”.¹⁰

The Latvian Komsomol CC Bureau’s decision, on 5 August 1953, outlined the main tasks in accordance with these guidelines. These included: improving ideological work among young ethnic Latvians and implementing it in Latvian; working methodically to promote local cadres of indigenous nationality, i.e. those

5 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-880.

6 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-880, 46. lp.

7 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-6514, 1. lp.

8 Swain 2012, 1268.

9 Zubkova 2008, 330; Loader 2016, 1780–1782.

10 Gorlizki, Khlevniuk 2020, 207.

who are fluent in the language and who are aware of the culture, customs, and mentality of the Latvian people; and making each Komsomol organisation into an autonomous organisation that resonates with young people's interests. While the Soviet Union's efforts to combat bourgeois nationalism and foster friendship and revolutionary vigilance¹¹ were not ignored, there was a discernible shift towards fostering the empowerment of ethnic Latvians.

However, even limited indigenisation inevitably led to a rise of nationalistic sentiments among the population and *nomenklatura* in national republics. To limit these risks, Moscow found a solution by appointing Slavic second secretaries to Party organisations in non-Slavic republics.¹² The nomination of Filip Kashnikov to the position of the second secretary of the CPL CC in 1956 was a clue that Moscow intended to tighten its control over Latvia. Nevertheless, the Komsomol leadership continued to be localised and Latvianised. Valters held the position of the second secretary until December 1958, when he was appointed as the deputy head of the CPL CC Propaganda and Agitation Department. In January 1959, Jānis Brencis, who was previously a secretary of the Komsomol CC, became the second secretary.¹³ Within the Komsomol CC and on the staff of the Komsomol committees of major cities and districts, the proportion of local Latvians grew over time. Vladislavs Ruskulis' appointment as the first secretary of the Komsomol in April 1958 further solidified the trend to enhance local cadres. Prior to this, Elmārs Bēmanis, an ethnic Latvian who was born in Moscow in 1926, held the position.

Amidst a backdrop of turbulent public opinion, various factors influenced the situation. These included the liberalisation of the Soviet political system after Stalin's death, the foreign political context (such as the Hungarian Uprising and its subsequent suppression in autumn 1956), and the challenges posed by the Soviet occupation in Latvia. These challenges included a low standard of living, changes in the ethnic composition due to migration, worsening social problems, discrimination against Latvians and their language and culture, and the process of Russification. Latvians commonly blamed their problems on migration and the Soviet system. In 1957, a rather widespread opinion was expressed by a student at the Riga Pedagogical Institute that it was not possible to purchase shoes, butter, and sugar. Even subscribing to newspapers was not easy due to a scarcity of paper. The student linked these shortages to the presence of numerous Russian migrants. And even more, the student claimed that any discussions regarding

11 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-883, 131.-133. lp.

12 Gorlizki, Khlevniuk 2020, 208; Gribkauskis 2020, 161, 187-200.

13 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-95, 15., 18. lp.

industrial accomplishments were lies because he believed that Soviet industry policy was completely faulty.¹⁴

A journalist from the newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne*, Kārlis Reimanis, who was a Komsomol veteran but not a member of the Party, provided a detailed description of the situation in Latvia in March 1957. He conveyed this information through a letter sent to the main CPSU CC newspaper *Pravda*. The focus of the letter was on the primary concern of Latvians: the significant influx of Russians and individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, which posed “a genuine threat of assimilation and Russification, all under the guise of promoting friendship among different ethnic groups”. Reimanis described the daily reality in the following manner: “Latvians face pervasive discrimination at nearly every stage of their lives. Allow me to provide you with just a few illustrations. A Latvian who does not possess fluency in Russian no longer holds the position of command in his own country – Latvia. He requires urgent medical care – the medical nurse on duty responds to him in Russian; he proceeds to the militia [police; D. B.] station, where individuals who are ignorant of Latvian are present; he enters a store – the saleswoman is unable to understand him, as she exclusively speaks Russian. The Café Sigulda was recently opened on Gorky Street (which was previously named after a prominent figure in the Latvian National Awakening movement¹⁵). The establishment is referred to as ‘national’ and the interior design reflects this theme. However, if you were to engage in conversation with a bartendress, it becomes evident that she is unfamiliar with the Latvian language. It appears to be a trifle, albeit with distinct and notable features. If a Latvian individual lacking proficiency in the Russian language were to seek employment in a Soviet or Party organisation in Voronezh or Tula, he would be rejected due to his inadequate linguistic abilities. However, in similar situations, Russian individuals entering Latvia are not required to possess knowledge of the Latvian language. Paradoxically, there is a significant presence of Russian-speaking Soviet, Komsomol, and Party officials in Latvia who lack proficiency in the Latvian language. Despite this, they hold positions that require regular communication with the local population”.¹⁶

Reimanis composed the letter with a naive expectation, shared by many Latvians at the time, that local officials were solely responsible for any wrongdoing and that the Kremlin was uninformed. If Moscow had complete knowledge of

14 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1073, 141. lp.

15 Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891).

16 Reimanis 1989b; Sprōģis 2005b.

all events taking place in Latvia, such a situation would not be possible.¹⁷ *Pravda* returned the letter to the CPL CC in Riga. Reimanis was called in for a meeting with Arvīds Pelše, the propaganda secretary of the CPL CC, along with Nikolajs Bisenieks, the CC Secretary, and Ivan Veselov, the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department. Reimanis faced criticism during the meeting primarily for disseminating the letter to the central press, rather than for its content.¹⁸ Veselov described Reimanis's disposition during the CPL CC plenary meeting in October 1957 as both "unhealthy" and susceptible to correction.¹⁹ In 1958, Reimanis was among the 144 Komsomol veterans and activists who were selected by the Latvian Komsomol CC Bureau to receive the *VLKSM* Honorary Certificate (*Pochetnaia gramota* in Russian) on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Komsomol. He was acknowledged as "one of the finest and most proficient journalists and columnists in the editorial office of *Padomju Jaunatne*".²⁰ However, in March 1959, Reimanis was removed from his position as editor-in-chief of the humour and satire supplement *Asā Slotā* (The Sharp Broom). As the National Communist persecutions began, a meeting of the newspaper's editorial office's Party organisation, on 18 July, demanded his complete dismissal from the job.²¹

The leniency towards Reimanis in 1957 can be attributed to the consensus among Latvia's leadership, which was greatly influenced by the events in Hungary, that it was necessary to address the discontent of the ethnic Latvians. During the October 1957 CPL CC plenary meeting, propaganda and agitation secretary Arvīds Pelše acknowledged that there had been instances where Latvian language rights were violated. These violations had provided an opportunity for bourgeois nationalists to voice their concerns about Russification and big-nation chauvinism. He did, however, say that the Party was making a concerted effort to deal with and resolve this issue.²² Moscow did not object to this policy, or it had not yet formed a stance. Some of the measures taken to address the situation included the decisions adopted in 1956 by Riga City Party Committee and the CPL CC Bureau. These decisions demanded that employees of the administration and sectors serving residents had to master Latvian within a two-year

17 Sproģis 2005a, 03.05.

18 LNA-LVA, PA-101-20-5, 32. lp. Reimanis recollected that editor of *Padomju Jaunatne* Kaugurs also was present (Reimanis 1989a).

19 LNA-LVA, PA-101-20-5, 32. lp.

20 Decision of the Komsomol CC Bureau, 20.08.1958. – LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1112, 103. lp.

21 LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-57, 160., 162. lp.

22 LNA-LVA, PA-101-20-5, 17. lp.

period.²³ Yet, the government apparatus and the Communist Party of Latvia were becoming more and more divided politically, which is why these attempts to appease the public finally backfired.

This division arose between individuals who were inclined to support the opinions, values, and interests of the local population of the Republic, and those who were swayed by the ideology of Soviet universalism,²⁴ i.e. priority of the collective interests and values of the USSR as globally most advanced and victorious, often at the detriment of local interests. Additionally, there was a growing consensus in Moscow – especially after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising and the Polish unrest – that giving in to “nationalists” was counterproductive.²⁵

A “National Communist trend” in the Komsomol activities manifested itself in an increased emphasis on the involvement of Latvian youth in the organisation. It is worth mentioning that during the latter part of the 1950s, there was a consistent decline in the number of Komsomol members in Latvia. This decline was likely caused by the demographic effects of the Second World War. Early in 1956, there were 122,986 Komsomol members overall, and by early 1958, there were only 117,950.²⁶ Furthermore, it appeared that the proportion of ethnic Latvians in the Komsomol was decreasing. During the same period, the number of ethnic Latvians in the Komsomol decreased from 62,839 to 59,474, and their proportion fell from 51.1% to 50.4%.²⁷ Both demographic factors and a decline in the proportion of Latvians in the country as a result of mass immigration can account for this. However, it is possible that fewer young people of all nationalities joined the Komsomol in general. With Khrushchev’s “thaw” allaying their fears of repression, many young people felt they could withstand pressure to join the Komsomol, particularly if they had no intention of studying at university or institute. Thus, the Komsomol CC discovered, in May 1956, that in Liepāja City, of the 2300 school students who were of the appropriate age, no more than 40% were Komsomol members, and in the secondary school No. 1, where Latvian was

23 “The Riga City Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia decision regarding the requirement that workers in the service industry learn both Latvian and Russian”, 30 November 1956. LNA-LVA, PA-102-14-8, 83.-84. lp.; Decision of the CPL CC Bureau “Regarding the acquisition of Latvian and Russian language skills by Party, Soviet, and economic personnel”, 6 December 1956. LNA-LVA, PA-101-19-30, 3.-6. lp.

24 I borrowed this term from Lithuanian researcher Vilius Ivanauskas. See Ivanauskas 2014.

25 Loader 2022, 17-18.

26 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1111, 46. lp.

27 Ibidem.

the language of instruction, the proportion was as low as 25%.²⁸ Investigations in 1957 discovered a similar state of affairs in secondary schools in Aizpute District, as well as in a number of *sovkhoses*, *kolkhozes*, and industrial, transportation, and construction companies.²⁹ Russian was the sole language of communication in numerous industrial, transport, and building enterprises, where ethnic Latvians were a distinct minority. The interest of Latvians in joining Komsomol was not heightened by the fact that all Komsomol work was conducted in Russian.

In order to draw young ethnic Latvians to the Komsomol, new approaches and themes were incorporated into the organisation's operations. This trend was precipitated by Moscow's policies during the latter half of the 1950s. The practices that were adopted from the independent Latvia played a significant role in the Komsomol's efforts to broaden its appeal in Latvia. For instance, students at universities and other higher education institutions were allowed to wear colourful caps that brought back memories of the headdress worn by Latvian high school students and members of student organisations prior to the Second World War. A greater focus was placed on presenting the ideological message in a more attractive manner. Held in Riga in 14–16 June 1958, the Festival of Students of Vocational Schools was one of the most remarkable and eye-catching events. A carnival procession featuring young people dressed as a range of well-known literary characters launched the festivities. On the Komsomol Embankment (now known as the 11 November Embankment), there was a masked ball after the march. On the following day, amateur group performances by vocational schools took place in Vērmanes and Arkādija parks, followed in the evening by a torch march and a rally in Cathedral Square. The speakers at the meeting included Jānis Brodelis, the head of the administration of the Labour Reserve (vocational schools), Eduards Berklavs, the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Vladislavs Ruskulis, the first secretary of the Komsomol. A sports festival featuring vocational schools was scheduled for the third day.³⁰ The event, despite its departure from previous Soviet celebrations and the extensive use of national costumes and symbols, nevertheless promoted the concepts of Soviet patriotism and the role of youth in the construction of communism. Ruskulis saw such events in 1989 as an effort to get young people involved, expressing the hope that “national self-confidence will rise along with political activity”.³¹ Essentially, it was an effort to increase the political activism of youth. However,

28 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1038, 228. lp.

29 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1072, 45.–46., 87.–91. lp.

30 Liepa 1958.

31 Helmane 1989a, 28.02.

in 1989, the claim of enhancing national self-awareness did not carry the same meaning as in 1958–1959. Aiming to foster Latvian Soviet national self-confidence, the aforementioned initiatives of the 1950s attempted to blend Soviet and Latvian values. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the captivating performances was to illustrate that it was possible to reconcile the Soviet regime with Latvian identity.

A similar approach was taken in the organisation of the Coming of Age festivals. While its form perfectly mirrored a Lutheran confirmation, it also conveyed the ideological and historical narrative of the Soviet Latvia. Dobele District organised the first-ever Coming of Age Festival in Latvia in 1958. A sort of “lesson of faith” course that integrated fundamental Soviet political and social values preceded it: “It was run as a three-day seminar for eighteen-year-olds, which included presentations on the moral posture of the Soviet youth, the heroic struggles of the Komsomol, a tour of Riga and Sigulda, meetings with artists, and a concert of the choir of old revolutionaries at a campfire in Komsomol park. Additionally, the participants watched an outdoor cinema show. They were instructed on appropriate behaviour and attire, taught to dance, and demonstrated the newest fashion trends.”³²

A rather noticeable depoliticisation of the Komsomol’s fundamental activities resulted from the tendency to consider the interests of youth. Discussions about books and movies, group moviegoing, and playhouse outings were the dominant or even sole activities in many primary organisations. For instance, practically all Komsomol primary organisations discussed current literature and domestic issues like “cultural behaviour, taste, comradeship and friendship, etc.”,³³ according to an account of Cēsis District Komsomol organisation’s work that was compiled by the Komsomol CC on 4 December 1957. The work plan of a group of girls from Ērgļi village, from 10 January 1958 to 1 January 1959, also reflects this tendency. Of the 11 themes planned to be covered, only one was political (on international issues), with the remaining ones referring to dressing with taste, cooking, personal hygiene, and housekeeping.³⁴

In order to collaborate with the younger generation of the so-called “creative intelligentsia” (writers, visual artists, musicians, etc.), new approaches were also sought. Thus, under the auspices of the Komsomol CC, the creative youth club *Būsim pazīstami* (Let’s Get Acquainted) was founded at ‘Printers’ (*Poligrāfiķu*)

32 Freimanis 1958.

33 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1073, 204. lp.

34 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1112, 153. lp.

Central Club in 1958 as a gathering and discussion venue for young musicians, writers, and artists.³⁵

The outcomes of the CPL CC plenary session held on 7–8 July 1959, which denounced “localist” and “nationalist” tendencies in Latvian politics, did not mean giving up on all new ideological endeavours. Many of them made it through and flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. Retaliations were aimed at specific officials, as well as specific organisations and concepts deemed to be “bourgeois” and “nationalist”.

Removal of Vladislavs Ruskulis from office

Initially, purges in the Komsomol appear to have been restricted to the replacement of a small number of people: Vladislavs Ruskulis, the first secretary of the Komsomol, was to be replaced, as was Jānis Brencis, the second secretary (by a Moscow official) and Konrāds Sondors, the first secretary of Riga City Komsomol Committee. Sondors and Ruskulis were likely fired because of their perceived close relationship with Berklavs. Kristaps Kaugurs was also a prime candidate for dismissal as chief editor of *Padomju Jaunatne* and member of the Komsomol CC Bureau, since the CPL CC plenary decision advocated for “strengthening with cadres the editorial [board; D. B.] of *Rīgas Balss* and *Padomju Jaunatne*, as well as the magazine *Zvaigzne*”.³⁶ There could have been other “scapegoats” in district committees or outside the *nomenklatura*, like Reimanis, who received harsh criticism during the CPL CC plenary meeting in July. That being said, the original list of individuals targeted for immediate removal was not very large. On 15 July 1959, delegates from the CPL CC and the VLKSM CC started regularly attending Komsomol CC Bureau meetings to supervise the process of power transfer.

The first action in “purging” the Komsomol leadership was the removal of the first secretary. Ruskulis had not been accused of endorsing “nationalistic” ideas. This tactic may have been chosen in part because information was lacking to support such claims. Ruskulis was a vibrant and charismatic secretary. His record as the Komsomol leader was almost perfect. He had led the Latvian Youth’s 2000-strong harvesting team in Kazakhstan in 1956 and the Latvian delegation at the Global Youth and Student Festival in Moscow in 1957. He was awarded with two Certificates of Honour from the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR

35 Suta 1994, 6; Osmanis 1959.

36 LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-10a, 30. lp.

and decorated with a medal “For the Acquisition of Untouched Lands”.³⁷ An accusation of nationalism could have brought up questions about how the CPL CC had permitted such a person to be appointed as a Komsomol leader. Therefore, formal discreditation occurred instead of accusations of ideological transgressions. Ruskulis was accused of neglecting to mention in his handwritten autobiography that two of his uncles had collaborated with the German occupiers during the Second World War: one had been convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison, and the other had left the country and lived abroad. Ruskulis is purported to have disclosed these facts upon his acceptance as a Party candidate; however, he allegedly ignored them in his autobiography upon his subsequent acceptance as a full member of the Party.³⁸ Even though “the traditional stock of political charges like concealment of social origin... narrowed”³⁹ after Stalin's death, it could still be used against *nomenklatura* members, although possession of undesirable relatives could be pardoned if their existence was not withheld. In the fall of 1956, Ruskulis was already confronted with accusations that he had previously concealed autobiographical information; however, at the time, his arguments were deemed sufficient.⁴⁰

Presumably of left-wing political leanings, Ruskulis's father had opposed his relatives' cooperation with the Germans. The father was detained for refusing to comply with mandatory food deliveries during the German occupation, and passed away in or while being transferred to a concentration camp in Germany. Vladislavs joined the Komsomol in 1947, and in 1948 he was appointed the secretary of his school; there were altogether only three Komsomol members at the school. In his autobiography, he claimed to have participated in “all political and economic events organised by the Party and government in rural districts of the Republic”,⁴¹ presumably alluding to 25 March 1949 deportations. He enrolled in the Latvian State University's law programme in 1951. In 1952, he was chosen as the second Komsomol secretary of Riga City central Kirov District. One year

37 The sole instance that tarnished otherwise the flawless reputation of Ruskulis was a reprimand issued by the CPL CC Bureau on 21 October 1958, as a result of an incident in Dagda District, where he sustained injuries in a brawl at a kolkhoz club. The disciplinary action was imposed for the erroneous conduct during a brawl and for the appearance of intoxication in a public place. Nevertheless, this incident was not employed to substantiate his removal from office, possibly due to the opinion that his intervention in the incident was justified under the circumstances. See LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-7890, 30. lp.; PA-101-21-59, 284.-285. lp.

38 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-7890, 21. lp.

39 Gorlizki, *Khlevniuk* 2020, 173.

40 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-7890, 18.-21. lp.

41 *Ibidem*, 7. lp.

later, Ruskulis was elected as the first secretary of Kirov District. In August 1956, he became the Komsomol CC's propaganda and agitation secretary and was promoted to the position of the first secretary in May 1958. Remarkably, the biggest turning points in Ruskulis's career occurred when Berkļavs served as Riga City Party Committee Secretary (1951–1954) and the first secretary (1956–1958). It is reasonable to assume that Berkļavs's support aided Ruskulis in advancing his career.

On 18 August 1959, the CPL CC Bureau decided to remove Ruskulis from the position of the Latvian Komsomol first secretary and imposed the Party punishment on him, which consisted of a strong reprimand with a note added to the Party member's registration card.⁴² The relevant decision was taken by the Komsomol CC at its plenary meeting on 22 September 1959.⁴³ Members of the Central Committee would not contest a decision taken by a higher-ranking authority because party discipline prohibited it. They did not even attempt to defend Ruskulis because they knew it would have been in vain. Augusts Zitmanis was elected as the first secretary in his place. As a locally-born and raised ethnic Latvian, he had joined the Komsomol in June 1945 and was loyal to those who opposed the National Communists.⁴⁴

Change of the second secretary of the Komsomol CC and "mutiny"

At the plenary meeting of the Latvian Komsomol CC on 22 September, it was also planned to replace Jānis Brencis, the second secretary of the Komsomol, with Nikolai Karpov, the official of the VLKSM CC, who supervised Latvian organisation.⁴⁵ Brencis had previously agreed to an arrangement promising him a transfer to become a CPL CC instructor. The VLKSM CC was represented at the plenary meeting by Viktor Mironenko, head of the Department of the Komsomol Organisations for the Soviet Republics; others present at the plenary session included Vilis Krūmiņš, still the second secretary of the CPL CC, and Aleksandr Aleksandrov, deputy head of the CPL CC Department supervising the Komsomol (the second secretary of the Latvian Komsomol in 1948–1952). Krūmiņš was assigned the primary responsibility for implementing the leadership changes.

42 LNA-LVA, PA-101-21-59, 48. lp.

43 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1151, 3. lp.

44 LNA-LVA, PA-101-64-289.

45 LNA-LVA, PA-101-50-28; Nekrologs Nikolajam Karpovam [Obituary of Nikolajs Karpovs]. *Cīņa*, 16.05.1982.

Unlike in the case of Ruskulis's removal, the Moscow candidate for the election of the second secretary encountered entirely unanticipated opposition, the details of which cannot be obtained from the official minutes (*protokol* in Russian) and transcript (*stenogramma* in Russian) of the plenary meeting.⁴⁶ The currently available minutes show that the election went rather smoothly, with a majority of the 56 CC members who cast ballots (out of 94) electing Karpov, despite 13 voting against and one abstaining. It was mentioned in the transcript that some CC members pointed out that Karpov was not a member of the Latvian Komsomol CC and that the Komsomol's statutes stipulated that only elected members of the CC could be chosen as secretaries; the explanation that in this case the appointment had been approved by the higher instance, the VLKSM CC, seemed to satisfy the members of the plenary meeting.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, it seems that the official minutes and the transcript of the plenary meeting were altered at a later date. Certain peculiarities serve as a confirmation of the suspicion. All members of the Komsomol CC Bureau were granted the authority to serve as chairs during the meeting. Ruskulis and Brencis were at the top of the list, as the names of the Bureau members were listed in order of their rank. In accordance with the Soviet tradition, the attending senior officials of the CPL CC and the VLKSM CC were appointed as honorary chairs. The transcript only mentions three individuals: Krūmiņš, Aleksandrov, and Karpov, and Karpov's position is described as the supervisor of the Latvian Komsomol organisation.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the minutes identify seven individuals, including Karpov as the second secretary and Zitmanis as the first secretary of the Komsomol, despite the fact that they had not yet been elected to their respective positions.⁴⁹ Further inconsistencies are evident when the transcript is compared to the minutes. For example, the minutes indicate that the dismissal of Ruskulis and Brencis and the election of new secretaries are the final items on the agenda; however, they are the first items in the transcript. The three pages that recount Karpov's election, are different from the rest of the transcript. Although the transcript was intended to be a comprehensive account of all the topics discussed during the meeting, it contained less than seven pages of text, despite the fact that

46 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1151.

47 Ibidem, 24.-28. lp.

48 Ibidem, 22. lp.

49 Ibidem, 2. lp.

the process of electing the first and the second secretaries lasted for four hours, from 10:00 to 14:00.⁵⁰

The actual course of events was considerably more dramatic and can best be characterised as an open “mutiny” by the Komsomol CC members, who opposed the appointment of a functionary sent by Moscow to assume the post of the second secretary. Thanks to the openness (or indiscretion) of Piotr Belov, editor-in-chief of the Komsomol Russian-language newspaper *Sovetskaia molodezh*, during a republican Komsomol activists meeting on 9 October 1959, it is possible to piece together the events, at least roughly. Also, an interview conducted in 1989 with Sondors, one of the “mutiny” organisers, revealed important information.

Karpov’s opponents did not raise any issues concerning the demand that the second secretary be a Russian. However, they proposed that it could be a local Komsomol official with Russian background. The candidate they put forward was Anatoly Raskolov, the second secretary of the Riga City Committee of the Komsomol (who, although declared as an ethnic Belarusian in the documents, was apparently taken for an ethnic Russian).⁵¹ Furthermore, given that Karpov was not a member of the CC, they invoked the prohibition on co-optation, citing numerous instances in which the CC had reprimanded district committees for practicing co-optation. The most recent instance had occurred less than a month before. On 26 August, the Latvian Komsomol CC Bureau initiated a request to revoke the Gulbene District Committee’s decision to coopt the second secretary candidate.⁵² The fact that Zitmanis was already coopted into the CC during the same sitting of the plenary meeting on 22 September in order to be elected the first secretary, and that CC members did not object, seriously undermined the persuasiveness of this argument.

50 One of the anonymous reviewers of this article asked a legitimate question: why was the transcript doctored when the Party controlled its own closed records? Of course, the people who manipulated the transcript were certain that all these documents sealed as classified would never be open to the general public. However, archive files were available to the party bosses as well as to their peers who could use them in the inter-*nomenklatura* wars. In the event that Moscow’s political trajectory alters, Latvian leadership may also be protected by the absence of compromising evidence. Manipulations with documents during purges on National Communists in 1959 happened on many occasions. One such case was a total disappearance from all archive files of the research programme developed in 1959 under the leadership of Pauls Dzērve, see Bleiere 2022, 130. The talk of bringing back the “Leninist norms” of Party life also explains why it was undesirable to record an outright violation of these norms on paper.

51 See LNA-LVA, PA-101-68-432.

52 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1152, 330. lp.

There is no doubt that prior experiences in choosing second secretaries had an impact on Sondors and other organisers of Raskolov's alternative nomination. In the Latvian Komsomol, in the 1940s and 1950s, the second secretary of the Komsomol had a lower status than the second secretary of the CPL, even though the former was considered a kind of a counterpart of the latter. The post of the second secretary of the Komsomol was not included in the CPSU CC *nomenklatura* until 1960.⁵³ The second secretary's relatively low status is likely a reason why Moscow allowed a local Latvian to hold this position for an extended period of time (1953 to 1959). The majority of the second secretaries who were sent by Moscow to Latvia in 1944–1953 did not originate from the VLKSM CC apparatus. From September 1944 to March 1946, Aleksey Shilov held the post of the second secretary. Prior to this, he had been the head of Sverdlovsk City Komsomol Committee. He was an engineer with a few months' work experience in the Komsomol apparatus. He lost his job in Latvia because his performance was considered to be unsatisfactory and due to a "lack of understanding of the interests of Latvian youth".⁵⁴ From May 1948 to March 1952, Aleksandr Aleksandrov was the second secretary. He had come to Latvia in 1946 as the deputy head of the Komsomol Staff and Organisational Work Department. He had previously been the second secretary of Omsk Oblast Komsomol Committee.⁵⁵ The second secretary of Saratov Oblast Komsomol Committee, Vitaly Shaposhnikov, was appointed to this post in the Latvian Komsomol in March 1952.⁵⁶ The editor of VLKSM *Komsomolskii rabotnik* magazine, Pavel Moskovsky, who was stationed in Latvia in 1946–1947, was the only second secretary who belonged to the VLKSM CC apparatus.⁵⁷ This experience suggested that, at least in theory, it could have been possible to choose the next second secretary from among the leadership of the Latvian Komsomol, given that he was an ethnic Russian.

Belov accused Sondors of rigging the vote to reject the second secretary candidate put forth by the CPL CC and VLKSM CC. It should be noted that disobeying a higher authority in the Komsomol and the CPSU was considered a political crime. Nevertheless, the VLKSM or CPL CC were unable to render a binding decision in this instance, as the statute did not specify that only a candidate who had been approved by higher authorities could be nominated for election. Moscow had the authority to nominate its candidate; however, it was

53 LNA-LVA, PA-101-23-133, 248.–253. lp.

54 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-6604, 8. lp.

55 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-7145.

56 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-6514.

57 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-2982.

theoretically feasible that other candidates could have emerged. Belov asserted that Sondors had approved of Karpov's candidacy at the CC Bureau meeting even though he abstained from voting in the plenary session. Belov also charged Valters, a member of the CC, with abstaining from voting and claimed that voters seated near him had cast ballots against Karpov.⁵⁸ From Belov's statement, one could assume that Valters's abstention had had some effect on their behaviour.

Sondors claimed that "the vast majority of CC members had cast ballots in support of Raskolov. But he was not declared elected. Rather, a break in the plenary meeting was called, and the CC members were worked on as a result. The CPL CC and *VLKSM* CC were only able to get their desired outcome after a new discussion".⁵⁹ Belov also confirmed that Vilis Krūmiņš, the CPL CC second secretary, "implemented the Party line with great difficulty" for two hours following the announcement of a break in the meeting.⁶⁰ As a result, Karpov was elected by the members of the CC, as expected. The outcome of the revote seems to have been the same as what was noted in the minutes of the meeting.

The "mutiny" was an attempt to conform to the rules, a sign of the political ethos common to the Baltic republics: obedience to the law and a willingness to operate within its bounds.⁶¹ In this regard, Berklavs, for instance, displayed a typical attitude, recalling that his tuition at the Moscow Supreme Party School had served as the catalyst for his disbelief in the Soviet system because he "realised that many rights were stipulated by the law but not observed in practice when comparing more deeply what was written in the constitution with what was happening in life...".⁶² Put another way, one could characterise this way of thinking as having trust for institutions. Having worked in the Soviet system for a long time, the National Communists knew that not all of the rules stated in statutes, the constitution, and other documents were being implemented. They learned to break the rules when it served their interests. However, they held the belief that "fair play" was achievable, and with the opening of the Soviet system, there was optimism for the establishment of more equitable rules of play, particularly following the CPSU's 20th Congress in 1956. The Latvian Komsomol leadership was forced to acknowledge, at the plenary meeting on 22 September, that such beliefs were illusory.

58 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1154, 89., 90. lp.

59 Helmane 1989b.

60 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1154, 90. lp.

61 Zubkova 2014, 30.

62 Berklavs 1998, 66.

Consequences for the “rebels”

What happened on 22 September undoubtedly shocked the Moscow Komsomol CC and the leadership of the Communist Party of Latvia. It is reasonable to assume that they interpreted what had occurred as a covert protest against the criticism of the National Communists during the CPL CC plenary meeting on 7–8 July 1959, in addition to viewing it as a betrayal by subordinates. The first step in preventing any further possible excesses was to try to deescalate the situation while simultaneously intimidating the officials of the Latvian Komsomol. Pelše presented the main report to an audience of republican Komsomol activists on 9 October 1959. By means of intricate political manoeuvrings, he linked the opinions and actions of the accused in the July plenary to both Nikolai Bukharin’s right-wing economic opportunism and Kārlis Ulmanis dictatorship (1934–1940), which was viewed as fascist by the Soviet Latvian ideologists. Restrictions on immigration to Riga and the requirement for officials to learn Latvian were further connected to the right-wing *Pērkonkrusts* organisation, the catchphrase of which from the 1930s was “Latvia for Latvians”. Calls to increase the manufacturing output of consumer goods for republic residents were associated with Bukharin, whose opinions were seen as revisionist (Bukharin was not granted political rehabilitation until 1988).⁶³ Pelše thus suggested that rather than being merely Communists who made mistakes, Berklavs, Dzērve, and their like-minded allies were potential enemies of the Soviet system, prone to both fascist ideology and Soviet revisionist deviations. Komsomol officials were reminded that they could be perceived as anti-Soviet radicals if they attempted to defend the National Communist agenda, and as a result, they could face severe consequences. Pelše noted that “some comrades” argue that despite attacks on nationalists, no action was taken to counteract Grand Russian chauvinism. He emphasised that the biggest threat at the moment was the “plague of nationalism”. The LCP CC would defend itself against acts of Russian chauvinism when they happen.⁶⁴

Speaking at this meeting, the majority of Komsomol functionaries formally endorsed the need to oppose nationalism and advance friendship and rapprochement between Latvians and other peoples living in the Soviet Union. But they showed little interest in providing information about “nationalists” within their own ranks. However, a few people stood out. Thus, nationalists were observed among the staff of Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute, as well as among the staff of the Latvian State University and among Komsomol functionaries

63 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1154, 22.–23. lp.

64 Ibidem, 28.–29. lp.

in Riga, according to Pēteris Ostris, the secretary of the Komsomol Committee of Daugavpils City and former Komsomol secretary of Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute. His criticism centred largely around Valters, who was accused of saying “there is no need to admit [ethnic] Russians into the Komsomol, we should admit only [ethnic; D. B.] Latvians” at Daugavpils City Komsomol Conference in 1957 while serving as the second secretary of the CC. “We were simply horrified [by this assertion; D. B.]. Valters was so frightened after this case that he stopped visiting us”.⁶⁵ Pavel Onuphriev, the secretary of the Komsomol Committee for Ludza District, also launched attacks against Valters.⁶⁶ The most articulate was Belov, who was especially passionate about exposing bourgeois nationalists within the Komsomol ranks. He emphasised that during their tenure as Komsomol CC secretaries, Berklavs, Indriķis Pinksis, Pāvils Čerkovskis, and Pauls Dzērve had made concerted efforts to instil feelings of nationalism in the youth. He mentioned Zigmunds Osmanis, then a CPL CC instructor and the former secretary of Riga City Komsomol Committee, as a fervent supporter of Berklavs. As previously stated, Belov turned on Valters, who had abstained from the vote, and Sondors for organising a vote at the meeting on 22 September. For some reason, Belov was also very critical of several sports functionaries.⁶⁷ Strong criticism directed towards Valters suggests that the CPL CC may have considered him to be the mastermind behind the “mutiny”. This hypothesis appears to be quite plausible given that neither Osmanis nor sports officials suffered any major consequences regarding the accusations, while Valters was punished.

Pelše and the Moscow supervisors of the Komsomol certainly realised that activist gatherings alone would not stop such excesses in the future. It was crucial to punish the culprits and ensure that no one dared challenge the orders of the highest authorities. But it was not desirable to publicly target members of the “mutiny”, taking into account that voting against Moscow’s nominee did not violate *VLKSM* statutes. Consequently, the primary strategy decided upon was to first demote the penalised individuals to a lower *nomenklatura* position, then, after some time, to move them to a non-*nomenklatura* position, a two-step dismissal strategy employed also in case of several senior National Communists.⁶⁸ Only a small number of CC members – apparently those thought to be the masterminds of the “mutiny” – were directly accused of misbehaving during the 22 September plenary meeting, albeit in a subdued manner. Again,

65 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1154, 52.-53. lp.

66 Ibidem, 115. lp.

67 Ibidem, 87.-97. lp.

68 Loader 2018, 252-257.

CPL CC functionaries were uncertain that these accusations would be an adequate justification for the VLKSM CC or CPSU CC to remove these individuals from office, so they were reinforced with additional charges of negligence and incompetence.

Although Brencis, the former second secretary, was not charged with any political offenses, he was nevertheless subjected to a rather severe punishment. He was hired on 22 September as a CPL CC instructor, but on 29 September he was appointed the editor of *Padomju Jaunatne*, succeeding the fired Kaugurs.⁶⁹ As a result of his purported inability to supply the publication with an “ideologically high political and professional level”⁷⁰ of content, Brencis was already dismissed on 8 March 1960. He did not receive a formal offer of employment, but he was not removed from the *nomenklatura* either. Eventually, Brencis managed to get a job at Riga Film Studio through his own efforts.

On 8 February 1960, Sondors, the first secretary of Riga City Committee, was dismissed. His removal was justified by the CPL CC Bureau by his “lack of political maturity” and “non-Party behaviour” during the Komsomol CC election for the second secretary.⁷¹ On 11 January 1960, Valters was fired from his position as deputy head of the CPL CC Propaganda and Agitation Department, using a similar justification – “lack of political maturity”.⁷² Additional evidence was presented against him, alleging that he had misplaced a pamphlet containing the text of the CPSU CC resolution. Since all party documents were classified, even though the resolution was not particularly important, this could be considered a serious violation of security regulations.

It is highly probable that the pamphlet was stolen on purpose. This suspicion is supported by the fact that Emīls Arājs, the first secretary of Liepāja City Komsomol Committee, was also removed for similar offenses. Arājs was the target of a plot on the level of a detective novel. A number of membership index cards in Liepāja City Committee had twice vanished from a purportedly unintentionally open safe. These events allegedly demonstrated Arājs’s inability to keep secret materials secure. Furthermore, students from the builders’ vocational school staged a large-scale brawl with the militia and volunteer squads (*družinniki*), which served as evidence that the Komsomol’s work in Liepāja was woefully inadequate. The fight may have been purposefully organised. All of this was used to justify Arājs’s exclusion from the Komsomol’s leadership ranks

69 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-95, 20., 22. lp.

70 Ibidem, 24.-25. lp.

71 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-1-5246, 10., 12. lp.

72 LNA-LVA, PA-15500-2-8105, 48. lp.

and, eventually, from the Party *nomenklatura*. This was claimed to be due to his “lack of leadership” and insufficient “political vigilance”, as well as the fact that on 22 September 1959 he had “spoken out against the recommendation of the CC of the CP of Latvia on organisational matters”.⁷³ Zitmanis specifically identified Arājs and Pēteris Bondarevs, the first secretary of Madona District Committee, as violating significant Komsomol regulations in his report presented at the XIII Congress of the Latvian Komsomol in March 1960. Perhaps they displayed some kind of repentance, because he also acknowledged that they had changed their behaviour.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this did not avert their expulsion from the *nomenklatura*.

The CPL CC Bureau dismissed Arājs in January 1961. The CPL CC Bureau employed a rather simple tactic to remove Bondarevs: they did not put him forward for re-election because he had reached the Komsomol membership age limit of 28. In practice, Komsomol functionaries typically kept their jobs until they were between the ages of thirty and thirty-three, and in some cases, until they were thirty-five. In November 1961, Bondarevs was assigned to work as the head of the culture department of Madona District Executive Committee.⁷⁵

The connection between the rejection of Karpov's candidacy and the subsequent retaliation against concrete Komsomol officials is evident in the aforementioned cases; in contrast, it is less apparent in other cases. Of the 94 CC members who were eligible to vote, 56 attended the 22 September 1959 plenary session. This implies that 43 individuals may have been regarded as disloyal if only 13 individuals had voted for Karpov in the first round. Could we ascertain whether all of them were subject to penalties? Although we have not identified any additional instances in the Komsomol CC, city, or district committee records in which an official's actions during that plenary meeting resulted in their replacement, additional research may provide other details. However, there were definite changes in the first and second secretaries of numerous Komsomol district and city committees between 1960 and 1961. Their formal justifications were non-political and encompassed the following: the desire to stay in their original profession, the desire to change careers, and the attainment of the maximum age for Komsomol membership. Only 14 voting members from the previous convocation remained when the XIII Congress elected a new CC in March 1960.⁷⁶ After the plenary session on 22 September 1959, and the XIII Congress, the Bureau

73 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1195, 231.-232. lp.; PA-15500-2-29, 10. lp.

74 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1181, 36. lp.

75 LNA LVA, PA-15500-2-89, 9. lp.

76 LNA-LVA, PA-201-1-1181, 164.-167. lp.

included only four members from the previous composition: Ilmārs Būmanis, Chairman of the Presidency of the Council of the Union of Sports Societies and Organisations; Alfrēds Ivanovskis, Deputy Head of the Komsomol Organisations Department of the CC; Mirdza Kārklīņa, Secretary of the Komsomol CC from 1954 to 1959 and editor of *Padomju Jaunatne* from 1960 to 1963; and Piotr Below, editor of *Sovetskaia molodezh*.

The political capital accumulated by the sacked Komsomol executives was not completely wiped out. They were transferred to positions that did not belong to the CPL CC *nomenklatura*, but in some cases were still sufficiently prestigious. Ruskulis was initially assigned the *nomenklatura* post of Vice-Chairman of Bauska District Executive Committee. He then oversaw legal advisory board of Bauska District, served as a *kolkhoz* chairman for a while, and finally moved to the position of *kolkhoz* Party secretary.⁷⁷ Brencis eventually became a documentary screenwriter and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Cinematographers Union.⁷⁸ Sondors was a lecturer on Marxism and Leninism at the Riga Polytechnic Institute; however, in 1974, he moved to Riga Institute of Medicine to serve as the head of the corresponding department. During the *perestroika* era, the department was renamed the “social sciences” department.⁷⁹ Valters was Deputy Director of the Chief Film Letting Office.⁸⁰ Bondarevs worked in museums, in line with his training as a historian, and in 1974 he joined the CPL CC Institute of History of the Party, where he reached the post of deputy director.⁸¹ Arājs was a principal at a secondary school in Liepāja for many years.⁸² Kaugurs until his death in 1985 worked as the editor of the publication *Autoceļi*, published by the Ministry of Road Transportation and Highways.⁸³

While some of the punished individuals were eventually able to improve their career conditions, they were expelled from the *nomenklatura* and would never be allowed to return. They were deprived of the opportunity to occupy high positions within the republic. Books and articles about Komsomol history could not include Brencis, Ruskulis, Sondors, and Valters, because, up until the mid-1980s, they were regarded as “non-persons”. A few of them endured various forms of humiliation. For instance, even though strong Party reprimand for Ruskulis was

77 Helmane 1959a.

78 Filmas.lv.

79 Helmane 1989b.

80 Riekstiņš 2004.

81 Latvijas padomju enciklopēdija 1982, 88.

82 IrLiepāja 2017.

83 Nekrologs Kristapam Kauguram [Obituary of Kristaps Kaugurs]. *Rīgas Balss*, 22.10.1985.

revoked by the CPL CC Bureau on 5 April 1963,⁸⁴ he had already been removed from office in February 1963 due to not being nominated for the executive committee elections. And this was justified by citing the same crime – concealment of his personal information – that was a reason for punishment in 1959. Ruskulis also said that in 1972, when he attempted to relocate from Bauska to Riga, he was informed that he was still not welcome there.⁸⁵

Conclusions

After 1953, the politics of Latvia's Komsomol showed what can be referred to as a National Communist trend. It manifested as an increased emphasis on the involvement of the ethnic Latvian youth in the organisation and a noticeable turn towards empowering Latvians in organisational leadership. Following the CPL CC plenary meeting on 7–8 July 1959, an assault on National Communist tendencies also began in the Komsomol. The emphasis in the Komsomol's work on promoting "core" nationality to *nomenklatura* was thereby rejected, and efforts to assign a more Latvian, local character to the Komsomol work were suspended. To gradually establish a unified Russified Soviet identity, the objective of the attack on the Komsomol was to promote Soviet universalism, which entailed prioritising the interests and values of the entire union.

Without a doubt, the National Communists and their endeavours to elevate the status of the Latvian language, culture, and the promotion of ethnic Latvians to *nomenklatura* were supported by the leadership of the Komsomol and its members, particularly the younger generation of intellectuals and students. The National Communists, who had previously led the Komsomol, were well-liked by the Komsomol leadership, particularly Eduards Berklavs. Internally, many Komsomol functionaries disagreed with the condemnation of Berklavs and other National Communists at the CPL CC plenary meeting on 7–8 July 1959. This disagreement affected the manner in which they responded to the intention to change the Komsomol's policies and leadership.

The largest number of recollections about 1959 purges have been published by prominent National Communists Vilis Krūmiņš and Eduards Berklavs. However, neither of them brought up the "mutiny" of the Komsomol CC members in September 1959 in their accounts. Krūmiņš's discretion could be attributed to his role in these events. But why did not Eduards Berklavs mention the case? One

84 LNA LVA, PA-2160–24–589, 6., 8.–9. lp.

85 Helmane 1989a.

possible explanation could be that his removal from his post and from the LCP CC Bureau isolated him from information about events at the top echelons. In his memoirs, he wrote that “there was nobody to talk to any longer. All our former colleagues had turned their backs on us.”⁸⁶ Additionally, Berklavs’ isolation from information regarding the republican leadership was exacerbated by his compulsory relocation to Vladimir in September 1959.

Based on an investigation of the available documents, it can be concluded that the CPL CC leadership and its Moscow guardians perceived the replacement of the Komsomol leadership as a simple formal step. The Party’s institutions saw the Komsomol as the object, not the subject, of their policy, thus, perhaps the CPL CC did not anticipate open resistance. At first, the plan was to replace the editor of *Padomju Jaunatne* and a few high-ranking employees who were likely considered allies of Berklavs. The reversal of the Komsomol leadership’s Latvianisation included sending a functionary from Moscow to take the position of the second secretary. The replacement of the first secretary Ruskulis at the Komsomol CC plenary meeting on 22 September 1959 went off without a hitch. However, the CPL CC leadership was taken aback when CC members nominated an alternate candidate in protest against the election of the second secretary Nikolai Karpov. Consequently, those in the Komsomol leadership who actively organised the “mutiny” were also removed from their positions.

Only a small number of the Komsomol CC members were charged with “lacking political maturity”, but the majority of them were fired from their positions under various non-political pretexts, making it impossible to calculate the total number of people affected by the “purges”.

The protest by the Komsomol functionaries was short-lived and quickly put down. Generally speaking, the “rebels” had little capacity to dissent. They were easily divided and persuaded to reposition themselves by the CPL CC representatives because they sought to keep their place in the power structure and utilise the political capital that had been amassed. Furthermore, their adherence to the Soviet regime, driven by both career and ideological expectations, left them unprepared for sustained protest and opposition action.

The defeat of the Nationalist Communists at the plenary meeting on 7–8 July 1959, and the events that followed, demonstrated that the rules of the game in the Soviet system were established by those at the top of the hierarchy of power, who might not rely on precedent or the rules they had themselves established. This was fully expressed by the radical shift in perspective from 1953 to 1959 regarding the policy of the selection of the Komsomol leadership in Latvia, which included

86 Berklavs 1998, 157.

the choice of the Central Committee's second secretaries. Although earlier Moscow had supported a policy that aimed to prepare local cadres, implement ideological work with ethnic Latvians in Latvian, and increase the share of Latvians in the Komsomol, after 1959 such a policy was denounced as nationalistic, even though in reality it served to integrate Latvian youth more deeply into the Soviet system.

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NACIONĀLKOMUNISTU SAGRĀVE LATVIJĀ 1959. GADĀ UN KOMJAUNATNE

Daina Bleiere

Rakstā aplūkota Latvijas komjaunatnes vadības nomaiņa nacionālkomunistu vajāšanas kontekstā 1959.–1961. gadā. Sākumā bija iecerēts, ka process aptvers ierobežotu amatpersonu loku. LKP CK nerēķinājās ar atklātu pretošanos. Tas, ka 1959. gada 22. septembra plēnumā komjaunatnes CK locekļi atteicās atbalstīt Maskavas atsūtītā otrā sekretāra kandidatūru, izvirzot alternatīvu kandidātu, paplašināja komjaunatnes lideru loku, kurus atbrīvoja no amatiem. Ja līdz 1959. gadam Maskava bija atbalstījusi politiku, kuras mērķis bija palielināt latviešu īpatsvaru komjaunatnē, latviešu kadru sagatavošanu un ideoloģisko darbu īstenot latviešu valodā, tad pēcāk šāda politika tika nosodīta kā nacionālistiska, lai gan faktiski tā kalpoja, lai ciešāk piesaistītu latviešu jaunatni padomju iekārtai.

Atslēgas vārdi: nacionālkomunisms Latvijā, komjaunatne, nomenklatūra, nacionālisms, Hruščova politika, rusifikācija

Kopsavilkums

Pētījumos par nacionālkomunistu sagrāvi Latvijā 1959. gadā tiek aplūkotas represijas pret komjaunatnes vadību kā daļa no partijas nomenklatūras “tīrīšanas” procesa. Rakstā analizētie dokumenti liecina, ka komjaunatnes vadības nomaiņa, kas pēc 1959. gada 7.–8. jūlija Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas (LKP) Centrālās komitejas (CK) plēnuma bija daļa no republikas vadības attīrīšanas no nacionālkomunistiem, komjaunatnes CK plēnumā 22. septembrī ieguva īpašu asumu, kas satrauca kā LKP vadību, tā arī Maskavu.

Nacionālkomunistiem un viņu idejām par latviešu valodas, kultūras un nomenklatūras lomas palielināšanu nenoliedzami bija atbalsts komjaunatnes vadībā un arī ierindas komjauniešos, it īpaši studentu un inteliģences vidū. Komjaunatnes vadībai bija labi kontakti ar nacionālkomunistiem, kuri paši savā laikā bija bijuši komjaunatnes vadītāji, īpaši ar Eduardu Berklavu, kurš kā Rīgas pilsētas partijas komitejas pirmais sekretārs un Ministru padomes priekšsēdētāja vietnieks joprojām spēja īstenot savu ietekmi uz organizāciju un bija populārs komjaunatnē. Tas bija viens no apstākļiem, kas ietekmēja komjaunatnes vadības reakciju uz 1959. gada 7.–8. jūlija plēnuma lēmumiem, kuriem daudzi iekšēji nepiekrita.

Pieejamo dokumentu analīze liek izdarīt secinājumu, ka LKP CK vadība un tās Maskavas kuratori komjaunatnes vadības nomaiņu uztvēra kā viegli izdarāmu, formālu pasākumu. Sākotnēji bija paredzēts atlaist tos komjaunatnes vadības pārstāvjus, kuri tika uzskatīti par Berklava klientiem, t. i., republikas komjaunatnes pirmo sekretāru Vladislavu Ruskuli un Rīgas pilsētas komitejas pirmo sekretāru Konrādu Sondoru. Tika

uzskatīts par nepieciešamu nomainīt vairāku preses izdevumu redaktorus, to skaitā arī laikraksta "Padomju Jaunatne" redaktoru un LĻKJS CK biroja locekli Kristapu Kauguru. Bija paredzēts pastiprināt Maskavas uzraudzību un komjaunatnes CK otro sekretāru Jāni Brenci nomainīt ar Maskavas atsūtītu funkcionāru. Iespējams, ka LKP CK nerēķinājās ar atklātu pretošanos, jo komjaunatnes organizāciju partijas institūcijas uztvēra kā savas politikas objektu, bet ne subjektu. Tas, ka 1959. gada 22. septembra plēnumā komjaunatnes CK locekļi atteicās atbalstīt Maskavas atsūtītā otrā sekretāra Nikolaja Karpova kandidatūru, izvirzot alternatīvu kandidātu, bija pārsteigums LKP CK vadībai. Rezultātā paplašinājās komjaunatnes vadības loks, kurus atbrīvoja no amatiem.

Kopējo "tīrīšanu" apjomu nav iespējams noteikt, jo tikai dažiem komjaunatnes CK locekļiem tika izvirzītas konkrētas apsūdzības par "politiska brieduma trūkumu", vairums tika atbrīvoti no amatiem sakarā ar galējā komjaunatnes biedru vecuma sasniegšanu, pāriešanu citā darbā un citiem šķietami nepolitiskiem argumentiem. Komjaunatnes gadījumā šāda neafišēta kadru tīrīšana bija vieglāk īstenojama nekā partijas sistēmā, jo tās nomenklatūrai pastāvēja vecuma ierobežojums amatu ieņemšanai (maksimāli līdz 35 gadu vecumam).

Komjaunatnes funkcionāru protests bija īslaicīgs, un to samērā viegli izdevās neitralizēt. Viņi arī nebija konsekventi prasībā ievērot noteikumus, jo neiebilda pret VĻKJS statūtu pārkāpumu, kooptējot Centrālās komitejas sastāvā Augustu Zitmani, bet iestājās pret tādu pašu pārkāpumu Karpova gadījumā. Visumā "dumpinieku" pretošanās potenciāls bija ļoti ierobežots. Viņi gribēja saglabāt savu stāvokli varas sistēmā, realizēt uzkrāto politisko kapitālu, tādēļ viņus izdevās diezgan viegli sašķelt un pierunāt mainīt nostāju. Turklāt viņi nemaz nebija gatavi konsekventam protestam, opozicionārai darbībai, jo atbalstīja padomju režīmu ne tikai karjeras, bet arī ideoloģisku apsvērumu vadīti. Viņu politiskais kapitāls daļēji saglabājās, jo, lai gan viņus izslēdza no nomenklatūras, tomēr ļāva saglabāt zināmu stāvokli sabiedrībā un dažos gadījumos laika gaitā to uzlabot.

Nacionālkomunistu sagrāve 1959. gada 7.–8. jūlija plēnumā un tās sekas parādīja, ka padomju sistēmā spēles noteikumus definēja tie cilvēki, kas atradās varas hierarhijas augšgalā, un viņi varēja nerēķināties ar iepriekšējo praksi un pašu izvirzītajiem noteikumiem. Tas pilnībā izpaudās kardinālajā attieksmes maiņā pret 1953.–1959. gadā īstenoto politiku Latvijas komjaunatnes vadības atlasē, tajā skaitā – Centrālās komitejas otro sekretāru izvēlē. Ja līdz 1959. gadam Maskava bija atbalstījusi politiku, kuras mērķis bija palielināt latviešu īpatsvaru komjaunatnē, latviešu kadru sagatavošanu un ideoloģisko darbu ar latviešiem īstenojot latviešu valodā, tad pēcāk šāda politika tika nosodīta kā nacionālistiska, lai gan faktiski tā kalpoja, lai ciešāk piesaistītu latviešu jaunatni padomju iekārtai.