FROM OPPOSITION TO INDEPENDENCE:
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN
LATVIA, 1986-1991

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Introduction

Prior to 1987, independent mass demonstrations in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia, indeed, in the entire Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, were unheard of. Not only were they strictly forbidden by Soviet authorities, but the fear wrought by decades of repression seemed to make oppositional collective action very unlikely. While pockets of resistance and individual dissident efforts dotted the Soviet historical map, the masses were docile, going out on to the streets only in response to compulsory parades and marches designed to commemorate holidays like May Day. In 1986, a policy of greater openness in society, *glasnost'*, was initiated by the new Secretary General of the Communist Party of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev. Among the changes brought about by *glasnost'* was a greater tolerance by authorities of open expression in society, though this too was limited, as the policy was intended to strengthen rather than weaken the union. The unprecedented mass social movements that emerged in the era of *glasnost'* combined the legacies of the past and an uncertain course in to the region's future, successfully challenging the Soviet state in pursuit of independence and hastening the demise of the world's last great empire.

This paper will provide a theoretical analysis and general history of the opposition period in Latvia and is structured as follows. Section one, "Why Latvia?", argues for the significance of the Latvian case to social movement theory and East European area studies research. It also lays out the guiding questions of this inquiry. Section two, "Social Movement Theory and the Case of Latvia," reviews the dominant theories in the field of social movement research and shows how extant theory both illuminates and is challenged by the Latvian case. Section three, "Identities and Solidarity: Culture, Narrative, and Resistance," considers the issues of collective identity formation and expectations of solidarity under authoritarian conditions and considers the relevance of new theoretical directions in the social movement field for studying these issues. Section four, "Opportunities and Resources: Opening the Door to Mobilization," examines the growth of political opportunities under Gorbachev, the role of informal organizations in collective action, and the importance of intangible resources to movements denied access to traditional mobilizational resources by a state that monopolized both tangible resources and the public sphere. Section five, "Framing Protest and Institutionalizing Opposition," looks at the creation of a master frame of opposition in Latvia, the importance of formal organization to the sustenance and expansion of mobilization, and the institutionalization of anti-Soviet opposition in the structures of governance. Section six, "Struggle for Status Quo: Communists and Countermovements," examines the roots and role of the hardline pro-Soviet Interfront movement in Latvia and considers why, despite its links to powerful institutions, it failed to launch a potent counteroffensive against pro-independence forces in civil society. Section seven, "Opposition and State Power: Parliamentary versus Military Force in Latvia," discusses changes in the focus of collective action near the end of the opposition period, including the opposition's shift from an offensive to a defensive posture in an attempt to guard its achievements from the threat of conservative communist retrenchment and the new

emphasis on formalized protest action like the nationwide referendum on independence that preceded the achievement of de facto independence. The concluding section will review the guiding questions put forth in this study and discuss the theories and historical events one might use to answer them.

Why Latvia?

The social movements of the late 1980s in Latvia were a source of awe and consternation to those both inside and outside the territory of the Soviet republic. The collective actions, primarily large-scale demonstrations, of the anti-Soviet opposition were astonishingly forceful and popular even before the mass uprisings of the populations of Eastern Bloc countries in the summer and fall of 1989. The high level of participation and commitment of an apparently atomized population and the success of the mass mobilization even in the absence of tangible resources and an open opportunity structure provides a challenge to those who would seek to explain this phenomenon.

This work will contribute to social movement research generally and the understanding of the Baltic opposition of the 1980s in particular in several ways. First, this study elevates the centrality of identity to social movement mobilization and solidarity. I suggest that mobilization was possible under difficult and risky conditions at least in part because a politicized collective identity that underpinned a sense of solidarity existed in Latvia (among Latvians) even prior to the mobilization of the middle to late 1980s. I argue that collective identities and solidarity emerged from a narrative of injustice that married historical transgressions against the nation to quotidian problems of Latvians to create a widely shared story that was accessed and activated by early opposition organizers.

Second, this work is a further elaboration on work that seeks to expand the meaning and role of culture in the analysis of social movements (Crighton 1985). Rather than taking material and professional resources as prerequisites for social movements, I consider the possibility that national culture and symbols, despite their status as a public good rather than an internalizable resource, can be utilized and manipulated by otherwise resource-poor constituencies challenging a resource-monopolizing state.

Third, my work reasserts the importance of formal organization as a unit of analysis in the history of protest action in this area of the world. Because early collective action did not emerge from formal social movement organizations (SMOs) and occurred under authoritarian conditions, Western-oriented theories like resource mobilization theory have not been central to examinations of collective action there. While formal organizations were not instrumental in mobilizing action in the Baltics, they were active at a later phase in the social movement cycle. The Popular Front in Latvia, a formal organization created in 1988, played an important role in the realization of opposition goals by expanding mobilization through the iteration of an inclusive master frame, the unification of

informal opposition, and the translation of power in the civic arena into power in the institutions of the state.

At this time, quite a bit of literature on the collective actions of the 1980s in the East Bloc is available, but considerably less has been written about the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union and much of what has been written comes from the academic traditions of history and political science (on Latvia, see Dreifelds 1996; Plakans 1995; Karklins 1994). Sociological analysis of the opposition movements in this area is lacking. This gap is critical because the experiences of the non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union, like the Baltic countries, differ in some important respects from the experiences of former East Bloc states like Poland and Czechoslovakia and East Germany, which have been extensively investigated.

With regard to the differences, several points are salient. First, the Baltics had less recent history of resistance to the state. While the post-World War II national partisan resistance, which lasted in to the early 1950s, and the brief experience of national communism in Latvia in the late 1950s are notable, they do not constitute a strong recent tradition of resistance like that of worker protest in Poland or the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. Second, Bloc states had no prominent competing opposition movements. In the Baltics, hardline pro-Soviet movements, composed largely of Russian military retirees living in the Baltics and their families, opposed both the reformist Gorbachev regime and the democratic opposition movements. Generally, these countermovements rejected the initiatives of *perestroika* and any movement toward republic or ethnic autonomy from the Soviet state and assumed a defensive posture. Third, with the obvious exception of Poland, where Solidarity's cycle of protest spanned nearly a decade, the Baltics had a longer period of opposition that required a longer mobilization than in the East Bloc states. While the opposition in states like East Germany and Czechoslovakia took power from the communist governments in a relatively short period of time and already wielded it by the end of 1989, the Baltic cycle of mobilization and protest spanned from late 1986 until mid-1991, when the Baltics achieved independence from the USSR. Fourth, the Baltic movements operated in a less favorable political environment (Oberschall 1996, 94) than did the movements of the East Bloc, where it was relatively clear by 1989 that Moscow was ready to let the Bloc states go their own way. As late as early 1991, the Baltics were under threat of force and, in January 1991, over a dozen Latvians and Lithuanians lost their lives in attacks by the Soviet Interior Ministry special forces. Fifth, the cultural landscape of the Baltics was at a considerably more advanced state of "Sovietization" than those of Bloc states. By this I mean to suggest that local cultures in the Soviet Republics were subjugated to a Soviet monoculture that encompassed all areas of cultural life and symbols, whereas Bloc states retained far more of their local linguistic, cultural, and symbolic individuality. Consequently, national identities were less likely to have been constructed and consolidated through public culture and institutions.

I shall begin my discussion of the Latvian case and its place in social movement research by putting forth several guiding questions: First, what underpinned expectations of group solidarity and what mobilized so many in spite of the threat of retaliatory force by the state? Second, how could apparently atomized and unorganized masses be mobilized within a state-circumscribed opportunity structure and without the benefit of traditional resources like formal organizational structures and money? Third, how did mass demonstrations arise and under what conditions did they arise?

Fourth, how was mobilization expanded and sustained over a five year period under non-democratic conditions? In the sections that follow, I will seek to answer these questions.

Social Movement Theory and the Case of Latvia

This section will review the dominant theoretical perspectives in social movement research and consider how they both contribute to and fall short of explaining the Latvian case. A closer examination of structural factors provides a useful point of entry into the consideration of mass mobilization in a context with a circumscribed opportunity structure and limited resources. Hence, I shall begin this review by looking at the state-centered approach to collective action, the concept of political opportunity, and resource mobilization theory.

The **state-centered approach** (Skocpol 1979; Foran 1993) offers a theoretical perspective that illuminates the dynamic qualities of opportunity, a key issue in the genesis of the anti-Soviet Latvian opposition, and highlights the notion that the stage on which social movements were realized stands atop a structural foundation. In *States and Social Revolutions* , Skocpol (1979) argues that revolutions originate in a context of generalized regime crisis that result from, in her cases, economic crises and military failures that heighten conflicts among elites and, consequently, reduce the state's repressive capacity and increase opportunities for resistance and revolution below. Clearly, the Soviet Union of the 1980s suffered both maladies: consumer shortages and generalized fiscal crises plagued the country and military defeat in Afghanistan, which heightened tensions within the army and stirred public anger, further weakened a state already short on legitimacy. Skocpol's linkage of opportunity expansion and state crisis is also salient in understanding that *glasnost'* was intended to strengthen a weak state with weak legitimacy. The increase in civic freedoms was foreseen as circumscribed not expansive and the growth of mass opposition to the state was a consequence not an intention of General Secretary Gorbachev's policies.

While theoretical examinations in this tradition, most notably Skocpol's, contribute to an understanding of the structural forces that opened opportunity spaces for opposition to the Soviet government in Latvia, they do not account for several important aspects of collective action. First, the intra-elite conflicts posited in Skocpol's theory as being operative in state crisis did not take place in Latvia until after the genesis of the protest movement. Albeit, while the split was not a

precursor to the growth of the movements, its occurrence and the alliance of government moderates with the protest movement contributed to the heightened power and demands of the opposition after this point. Second, and more importantly, this theoretical perspective neglects the process of mobilization and submerges issues of identity and ideology beneath issues of macrostructural fault lines and elite crises. Clearly, structural analysis of opportunity and its genesis goes a long way toward explaining collective action in a part of the world that had seen only brief, sporadic, and mostly ineffectual independent action for half a century, but it cannot provide a framework for explaining, for example, how masses were organized without tangible resources and why people participated despite the threat of force.

State-centered theory offers a picture of how regime crisis can set the stage for collective action from below and Tarrow's (1991) work on Eastern Europe, which highlights the concept of a **political opportunity structure**, follows a similar path in its suggestion that "[t]he onset of a wave of mobilization can be seen as a collective response to generally expanding political opportunities, in which the costs and risks of collective action are lowered and potential gains increase" (15). Tarrow's proposition, while seemingly logical in light of the fact that no mass action had been in evidence in the USSR prior to the Gorbachev period, is problematized by a closer look at the Latvian case. When collective action began in 1986, an expanded structure of opportunities with decreased "costs and risks" was not yet apparent: dissident arrests were still common and punishable transgressions included the broadly defined "anti-Soviet agitation and [dissemination of] propaganda" and "treason against the homeland." Even leaving flowers at the Freedom Monument, an interwar dedication "To Fatherland and Freedom," was forbidden. Considerable risk still existed because the limits of freedom in the public sphere were unknown. Hence, protests did not just take advantage of apparent opportunities, since the boundaries of those opportunities were unclear, but made opportunities for themselves. Opportunities were also enhanced by a growing perception of regime weakness.

That is not to say that important changes in the political climate were not wrought by General Secretary Gorbachev. Indeed, some social and political issues not previously open for discussion, including environmental pollution and (some of) Stalin's crimes, were permitted a public airing in the press and elsewhere and the new regime was clearly not as inimical to public initiative as its predecessors had been. The political landscape, however, was changing more slowly than the cultural landscape. Thus it was, I suggest, in the cultural landscape of late-Soviet Latvia that a collective identity that could transcend the loose kinship ties built around common language and history was being forged. In the 1980s, for example, both folk and popular music began to openly embrace themes that highlighted grievances broadly shared by Latvians. At this time, songs not normally permitted because of nationalistic references and new pop music with political themes reached wide audiences because of air play and public performances. The notion of a cultural landscape and opportunity structure, separate from though linked to the political

opportunity structure, can help to illuminate the process of creating collective identities and solidarity from loosely linked networks, like those of ethnic kinship, in cases where a closed political system precludes the open discussion of grievances and the formal organization of institutional opposition. Literature, music, art work, and theater are potentially political as well as cultural vehicles and can operate as sites of resistance as well as grievance frames that both reflect and energize resistance.

Resource mobilization theory has been a centerpiece of structural analysis of collective action. The resource mobilization approach grew out of the collective actions of the 1960s, which engendered a reevaluation of social movement phenomena. The new paradigm rejected earlier notions that participants were alienated, marginalized members of society, that their participation was irrational or discontinuous with institutions and structures, and that the appearance of new or newly recognized grievances engendered collective action.

Unlike its theoretical forerunners, resource mobilization theory posits grievances as ever-present and permanent products of power relations. The focus is not on strain, but rather on the availability of resources and opportunities. Resource mobilization can be divided in to the rational action approach and the political process model. The rational action approach argues that participation is guided in the first instance by utilitarian cost-benefit calculations, and it emphasizes the constancy of discontent and the variability of resources (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977). McCarthy and Zald's work posited formal organization as the unit of analysis, highlighting "the point of view of the SMO [social movement organization] or the movement entrepreneur, looking outward for resources and reflexively looking at constituents and the authorities for tactics and opportunities" (Zald 1992, 332).

In the political process model (Gamson 1975; Oberschall 1973) the unit of analysis collective action. This approach emphasizes the importance of indigenous organization and the existence of a favorable structure of opportunities, a condition that is of consequence in both democratic and authoritarian systems, as the structure of political opportunities may be influenced by both top-down and bottom-up processes.

Resource mobilization theory is relevant to the Latvian case in a variety of ways, not least in helping to illuminate why, despite the existence of deep and widely-held grievances in society, no independent mass social action of consequence was to be found in the Soviet Union in the decades leading up the mid-1980s. Authoritarian societies, like that of the (former) USSR, are typified by a limited political opportunity structure that precludes independent action with legal prohibitions, the threat of force, and the monopolization of both tangible mobilizational resources and the public sphere. All of these factors can be implicated in the failure of aggrieved populations to mobilize.

The mobilization that *did* take place against the Soviet regime remains, however, to be explained. The case at hand suggests that modified definitions of key concepts in resource mobilization theory, opportunities and resources, may be analytically useful in this regard.

As noted earlier, the notion of political opportunity can encompass more than what is made structurally available by governing elites. As Gamson and Meyer (1996) note, "[structural] opportunities open the way for political action, but movements also make opportunities" (276). Further, one may even expand the notion of political opportunity to include what is *not* available to the state in the public sphere. Oberschall (1996) has suggested that "lack of regime legitimacy is a political opportunity for opponents" (95). The legitimacy of the Soviet state, especially in the non-Russian European republics like the Baltics, was always weak because it was an externally imposed system widely perceived as alien to local cultures and traditions. By the 1980s, the regime's already weak legitimacy was further undermined by continuing economic stagnation (Lewis 1982, 125-47), Soviet involvement in a losing and costly war in Afghanistan, and widespread political corruption and cronyism.

In her study of anti-nuclear activism in Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia in the 1980s, Dawson (1996) suggests that "communist systems may be defined by the [Communist] party's control over both tangible and intangible mobilizational resources," the latter of which she defines as including "social networks, organizational skills, specialist expertise, and legal protection for [opposition] activities" (13-14). There is, however, reason to believe that Dawson's application of the concept to Soviet era mobilizations fails to take into account intangible resources embedded not in professional or juridical structures, but rather in history and culture. Crighton (1985), in an early study of Polish Solidarity, has suggested that in the near absence of tangible resources, intangibles were where "Solidarity's substantial assets lay" (120) and she explains the mobilization and consolidation of diverse population segments into a mass movement by "the coincidence of an integrated social structure, a history or national unity, and a level of moral consensus rarely found in industrialized settings" (122). Intangible resources are also found in the cultural store and may offer a potent source of power for indigenous populations facing down an alien antagonist, as was the case in the non-Russian republics of the USSR.

The cases of post-Soviet and post-East Bloc states suggest that a definition of intangible resources can be reasonably expanded to encompass the values of the cultural store, such as folk and religious symbols, historical landmarks, and traditional ceremonies. Clearly, the notion of culture as a resource has drawbacks, not the least of which is its status as a public good, the use of which cannot be controlled by movement leaders.[1] In this case, however, I argue that it was a limited public good in the sense that while it was potentially available to any constellation of Latvian anti-Soviet interests, it was not available to the Soviet state, whose utilization of Latvian culture and symbols would not have been recognized by the majority of the Latvian public as legitimate. The use of cultural icons by the Latvian opposition was widely construed as both a form and symbol of resistance to the state and, hence, culture was a source of power for a resource-poor opposition.

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[1] I thank Mayer Zald for this point.

The notion, prominent in the rational action approach, that aggrieved populations cannot (or are unlikely to) act in the absence of formal organizational resources seems to have limited applicability in the cases of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Clearly, no independent formal organizations from which to launch movements existed in the USSR at the time that collective action emerged in Latvia. A modified version of resource mobilization theory, however, that highlights the role of formal organizations, albeit at a later phase in the protest cycle, can be useful in the analysis of the opposition in Latvia and the other Baltic countries. In this model, formal organization is again a unit of analysis but it functions not to mobilize collective action, but rather to strengthen an already existing movement, to build a broadly encompassing master frame, and to unite diverse identities and interests. Pfaff (1996) has noted in a work on East German protest in the late 1980s that "[m]obilization can expand rapidly and unexpectedly when clusters of friends and colleagues join the protest together, but may have a surprisingly short duration as the primary ties between actors remain rooted in smaller-scale and informal networks" (99). If this is so, then one would expect that SMOs could have a critical function even in spontaneously conceived movements, albeit after initial mobilization and in a somewhat different role.

In Latvia, the consolidation of opposition forces under the formal umbrella of the Latvian Popular Front (*Latvijas Tautas fronte* or LTF) played an important role in the expansion of mobilization to the non-Latvian communities and the inclusion of those groups in the quest for an independent nation-state. Because of the heterogeneity of the Latvian republic, the creation of an inclusive collective action frame was of strategic importance to the opposition. Further, the LTF also united a wide array of groups and interests under an oppositional electoral platform. While the LTF was not permitted to register as a party for the first elections to the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989, they underwrote particular candidates, many of whom succeeded in winning seats for the opposition in the legislative body.

Resource mobilization theory, then, can contribute to the understanding of anti-Soviet mobilization, though it neglects some important aspects of this phenomenon as well. The theory underscores the important role of formal organization in social movements. Albeit, in the case at hand, formal organization is significant not for mobilizing the populace, but for sustaining mobilization, expanding the ecological scope of movements, and uniting diverse interests in opposition. The Latvian case also suggests that while resources are indeed a key factor in mobilization, the traditional definition of resources is too narrow and places too much emphasis on material, professional, and political resources, to the exclusion of resources derived from the cultural stock and historical memory and myth. Further, while resource mobilization theory addresses questions about the conditions under which mobilization can take place and the process through which collective interests and resources are tied together, it does not inquire about the construction and consolidation of collective interests and identities. In fact, the issue of identity was, until recently, left largely to the new social movement paradigm.

The **new social movement paradigm** emerged from a reevaluation of the social movement field engendered by collective actions in the West during the 1960s. New social movements located the source of opposition in the appearance of new grievances and the reaction to structural changes in late-industrial Western societies. What distinguished "new" from "old" social movements (such as labor), according to theorists, were different emphases in terms of values, action forms, constituencies, and aspirations (Klandermans and Tarrow 1988), as well as new identities, forms of organization and scenarios of conflict (Cohen 1985). Habermas (1981) has suggested that new social movements can be understood as reactions to the growing intrusion of political and capitalist mechanisms in private life. He implicates this colonization of the private sphere in the rise of new grievances and the consequent search for collective and individual identities in new social movement spaces. Melucci (1989) highlights the "politicization of private life" and suggests that new social movements embody post-modern values such as community and self-actualization and elevate goals which, rather than being universalistic or long-term, are centered around the search for and defense of identity spaces in the present. Cohen (1985) suggests that new social movements have raised a theme rooted in the conditions of modern society, that is "the self-defense of society against the state, the struggle for a post-bourgeois, post patriarchal and democratic civil society." She also recognizes the centrality of identity issues in new social movements, noting that, "in contrast to resource mobilization theory, in which already organized groups negotiate demands, the identity oriented paradigm [of new social movements] theorizes the process of identity formation which involves non-negotiable demands."

In the new social movement context, then, identity defense, formation, and consolidation is an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Cohen (1985) notes that a goal of the new social movements is the "reorganization of relations and redrawing of boundaries between public and private." This is not untrue in the Latvian case, though the new boundary foreseen by the opposition differed in that they did not hope to isolate their movement identity in the private sphere. Rather, they aspired to shift a private identity, the ethnic identity, in to the public sphere, where it would have a voice.

In as much as new social movement theory highlights the centrality of identity as an instrument of appeal to (potential) participants, it fills a void left by resource mobilization theory, which submerges the issue beneath pragmatic considerations of political opportunities and availability of resources. The Latvian case highlights the importance of identity formation and consolidation in autonomous spaces (that is, independent from the state), as does the new social movement paradigm (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989). However, while the new social movement paradigm provides a vehicle for recognizing and prioritizing identity factors in social mobilization, its focus on identity construction and consolidation as an end in itself ignores the instrumental function of identity in social movements. That is to say that, in the Latvian case as well as other Eastern European cases, collective identity was of strategic rather than just inherent value to the

movement. Calhoun (1994) has also made the point that new social movement theory may underestimate the potential power and reach of identity-centered movements: "The pursuits labeled 'identity politics' are collective, not merely individual, and public, not only private...They involve seeking recognition, legitimacy (and sometimes power), not only expression or autonomy; other people, groups, and organizations (including states) are called upon to respond." (21) Indeed, to the extent that most "new social movements" leave political footprints beyond the confines of their own identity communities, the modesty of theorists' claims may be exaggerated.

Johnston (1994) argues for another difference between the new social movements and "old regional nationalisms" (the latter category would, in his definition, include a case like Latvia) which, while problematic, is useful for highlighting some key points about the anti-Soviet opposition. Johnston suggests that, despite the common identity focus, the two diverge: "the key point concerning the new social movement perspective is that here [in old regional nationalisms], *a central aspect of identity is ascribed by virtue of the web of social relations one is born into instead of defined in the course of participation in the movement* . Nationalist subcultures provide networks of association that can serve as vehicles of recruitment and often persist into adult life. Insofar as nationalist movements remain social forces in modern societies, the cultural and social media of primary socialization must be factored into the theoretical equation" (275; italics are mine). Johnston's assertion that "a central aspect of identity is ascribed by virtue of the web of social relations one is born into" would appear to hold true in Latvia.

Johnston's assertion, however, that the identity of which he speaks necessarily differs from new social movement identity in that it is ascribed *"instead of defined in the course of participation in the movement"* is problematic. While it is true that the "networks of association [rooted in ascribed ethnic identity] the can serve as vehicles of recruitment" since they provide a potentially mobilizable pool, the Latvian case suggests that there is a collective identity defined through participation that, while clearly rooted in a pre-existing ethnic identity, is distinct from it. Notably, the ethnic Latvian identity that existed *prior* to mobilization was a politically powerless one, that is to say that public power could not be derived from that identity. One could have power in one's occupation or, if a member of the party, in one's political association or locality, but the collective ethnic identity was powerless because it was rooted predominantly in private life - that is, it had little currency in the public sphere. The pre-mobilization ethnic identity resided behind and below other identities in Soviet daily life. The identity forged in the fire of collective action, however, was one of power because it fused the ascribed, pre-existing identity with political currency and movement strategy.[2]

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[2] Gould makes a similar point in an argument on 19th century French mobilization. He suggests that "collective identities undergird normative commitments to social protest, but are at the same time the product of the very social relations that are both affirmed and forged in the course of protest. The collective identity of workers *as* workers only emerges if the social networks in which they are embedded are patterned in such a way that the people in them can plausibly be partitioned into 'workers' and 'nonworkers'; but once this is possible, social conflict between collective

Making a related point, Calhoun (1994) suggests that "to see identities only as reflections of 'objective' social positions or circumstances is to see them always retrospectively ...Identities are often personal and political projects in which we participate, empowered to greater or lesser extents by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organization" (28). Calhoun's recognition of identities as "projects" in which an individual or collective participates underscores the dynamic quality of identities and undermines the notion that preexisting identities are simply activated by mobilizational action or appeals. His approach suggests the possibility that mobilization energizes a process of identity creation and consolidation that responds to and creates resources, opportunities, and strategies .

Further, Johnston's argument cannot account for the participation of non-Latvians in the anti-Soviet opposition. A pre-movement ascribed identity cannot explain their recruitment for collective action. Hence, my second point: while ethnic identity provided a vehicle for mobilization, the master frame that drew boundaries around the movement identity was oppositional and inclusive rather than particularistic and exclusive. That is to say that in an ethnically heterogeneous environment[3] a movement identity identical to an ethnic (Latvian) identity would have been both socially risky and politically unfeasible. Hence, opposition was strategically defined, notably after the formalization of the opposition under the banner of the Popular Front, not in exclusively ethnic terms, but rather in terms of opposition to the state and its politics and policies and in favor of change, which could was variously understood as liberalization of the extant system or full independence. The inclusive collective action frame utilized by the Popular front resonated with a broad spectrum of identities and interests. That a movement identity is strategic implies, too, that it is dynamic, not fixed as ascribed identities are likely to be, and that it can assume various forms depending on the political climate that surrounds it and on its own stage of development. The issues of identity and political climate will be further examined in the following section.

Identity and Solidarity: Narrative, Culture, and Resistance

In this section, I will consider issues of the construction of collective identities and solidarity under conditions of authoritarianism. Latvia provides a useful case for examining these issues because there was no history of mass resistance in the 50 years since Soviet occupation began, surveillance of the population by security forces intent on rooting out independent action and initiative was stringent, and the "nationalities problem" had long since been declared "solved"

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actors who are defined in terms of this partition will heighten the salience and plausibility of the partition itself. The intensification of the boundary's cognitive significance for individuals will, in other words, align social relations so that the boundary becomes even more real." See *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*, p.5.

[3] The Latvian capital of Riga, where most of the collective action of this period took place, is numerically dominated by Russians. Latvians make up just over 1/3 of the population in Riga.

by Soviet authorities. While a few dissenters, known more often in the West than locally, spoke against the regime and in favor of democracy and independence, their numbers were few and many spent considerable time in prison. During the late 1970s, however, a small and independent folklore movement developed in Latvia. It was initiated by a small group of individuals concerned that Latvia's cultural heritage was being forgotten. While national song festivals occurred, they reflected a "sovietized" culture: songs about the nation or the national past were purged from the programs, the music of other republics had to be included, and traditional Latvian folk dances were mixed with elements of ballet. The folklore movement sought to bring back traditional culture in unofficial gatherings and programs.

While the activities of the folklorists represented the construction of small autonomous spaces, they were limited in both participation and scope. In addition, the early 1980s and General Secretary Yuri Andropov's short-lived tenure brought the reassertion of a more repressive climate that saw new dissident arrests and harsher punishments for political transgressions (Taurens 1996, 131). The transition, then, of a politically passive population in to a mass movement for change in the middle to late 1980s represented a fundamental transformation of the scene. The rapid mobilization of an apparently apolitical and atomized population against a repressive state and under repressive conditions begs explanation.

In considering the Latvian case and how rapid mobilization underpinned by broad expectations of solidarity under risky conditions was possible, it is useful to look at theoretical models that have emerged from researchers' attempts to reassert the primacy of identity in the mobilization of a wide spectrum of social movements, not just the "new social movements." Recent theory on social movements cultivates a new approach to analysis of collective action. I have already referred to several arguments made by Calhoun (1994) and I shall consider this and other arguments made in a similar vein below. New approaches highlight issues of identity but do not isolate them as issues of "new" self-limiting movements. Rather they recognize identity as a salient concept for the analysis of a broad range of collective action and consider its role in the processes of constructing collective action frames, participant identities (Gould 1995), and identity communities (Somers 1992; Calhoun 1994; Somers and Gibson 1994). These approaches cast identity in a new light, endowing it with embeddedness and dynamism where it was previously taken as fixed and essential (Calhoun 1994; Somers and Gibson 1994). A theoretical door is also opened to identity in the equation of rational action, such that actors' identities and consequent solidarities can undergird choices to mobilize even where an individual cost-benefit analysis (Olson 1965) and a dearth of material incentives might have precluded it (Friedman and McAdam 1992), as under conditions entailing a high level of personal risk (Gould 1995; Pfaff 1996). These approaches offer a theoretical underpinning for identity as a central analytical vehicle in social movements and, as such, provide a useful point of entry for examination of the Latvian case.

Somers and Gibson (1994) argue that "it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities..." (59). Somers (1992) posits that

> [n]arratives are, above all, constellations of <u>relationships</u> (connected parts) embedded in <u>time and space</u>, constituted by what I call <u>causal emplotment</u>. Unlike the attempt to explain a single event by placing it in [a] specified category, narrativity precludes sensemaking of a singular isolated phenomenon. Narrativity demands we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to others. Indeed the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by <u>connecting</u> (however unstable) <u>parts</u> to some notion of a <u>whole</u> (however incoherent or unrealizable). In this respect, narrative becomes an epistemological category (12; underlines in original)

I suggest, following her lead, that below the surface of conformity, a narrative about injustice suffered by the Latvian nation was constructed in Latvia and that it was linked the politicization of identities in an apolitical and inactive civic environment. The narrative was a story constructed and told at various sites, which I will elaborate below. Importantly, it saw to the creation of connections (however unstable, as Somers would say) between sites of discontent to construct a story of what it was to be Latvian in a colonial environment and to render participation in the Latvian identity a political rather than a passive act (much as, in new social movement theory, identity construction and claims are political acts in themselves).

Proceeding from the theoretical bases above, I suggest that an explanation of the rapid and unprecedented mobilization of protest and the expectations of solidarity by protest participants in Latvia in the late 1980s can be constructed using the notions of narrative and narrative identity posited by Somers (1992) and Somers and Gibson (1994). While the Soviet narrative of history, a story developed to legitimate and support the power of the Soviet regime in Latvia, dominated the public sphere, alternative narratives were constructed largely outside of the public realm. Notably, there was an alternative narrative of history that deviated from the dominant public narrative about socialist progress, justice, and the fraternal friendship of Soviet nations. This alternative narrative appropriated events and rendered them episodes (Somers 1992) in a story of Soviet injustice, social and economic stagnation, and oppression of the Latvian nation. The narrative allowed the marriage of macroevents, like the occupation of Latvia in 1940 and the mass deportations of civilians to Siberia, and microevents, like being passed over for a job promotion in favor of a Russian or being insulted for using Latvian for a public transaction, in a common story that, while widely known, began to be told in the public sphere only in 1986. The story also highlighted the issue of national survival and engendered and reinforced what Dreifelds (1989) called a "'now or never' mentality" (79) typified by Latvian writer Janis Peters' claim that if the opposition were to fail as it did in 1959 (when "national communists" tried to "Latvianize" the republic's government), then "we will not rise a second time" (quoted in Ibid.). The telling and retelling of the story in the public sphere helped to galvanize anti-Soviet opposition. By allowing the telling of the story, *glasnost'* opened

the door for those who identified with the story to mobilize with a reasonable expectation of solidarity.

Because the public sphere was monopolized by the state, much of the process of identity politicization took place in the private sphere. This process is important because it helps to explain how people came to identify with the "story" of which I speak above. As well, the process contributed to the further elaboration of the narrative. Below, I consider three dimensions of identity politicization: first, the function of cultural ties and the cultural landscape; second, the operation of practical links, or networks of private action and exchange; and third, the lack of legitimacy of the Soviet regime.

Earlier in the paper I referred to the concept of a cultural landscape, distinct from the political landscape, and I suggested that it was in this sphere that an emergent politicized collective identity that could transcend loose ethnic ties was forged. A loose ethnic identity was clearly present throughout the Soviet period. As Soviet occupation had not yet seen the passing of the generations that recalled independence and had a national identity ingrained by the experience, a Latvian identity was still present in most families with a Latvian background. The use of the Latvian language in the private sphere among friends and family and the private celebration of Latvian holidays like the summer solstice (public celebration was forbidden) underpinned tightly bound small-scale networks and a loose large-scale web of ethnic kin. It was also in the private sphere that dissatisfaction with the regime was expressed, as Latvian historian Taurens (1996) has suggested, through "personal lifestyle [e.g., decorative art, family traditions], political apathy, a retreat in to private life, or alcohol abuse..." (130).

Activity in the cultural sphere straddled the line between public and private in that it was state regulated, but it provided a vehicle for Latvian cultural traditions like folk dancing (albeit, "diluted" by the Soviets with elements like ballet, and, hence, termed by Latvians "fake-braid dances" in reference to the "real" braids of the idealized Latvian folk maiden) and for the subtle, between-the-lines expression of grievances by writers, poets, and artists in official publications such as *Literatura un maksla* (Literature and Art). By the early and middle 1980s, small but significant islands of autonomy were appearing in the cultural sphere. While independent political activity of any kind was still severely circumscribed, the cultural landscape was beginning to shift in the direction of more open expression of grievances. Popular music began to embrace themes that highlighted grievances widely shared by Latvians. The reach of this music was broad because much of it received public air play. For example, in 1986, a song called "Mother Tongue" (*Dzimta valoda,* literally, "language of birth") by the rock group "Livi" was hugely popular, in the words of one Latvian "a national anthem" of the time. The song reflected a shared concern that the Latvian language was losing ground in Latvia and highlighted a primal tie between language and life - "The language of my birth is my mother," went the refrain. That the song spoke to public grievances and against the regime was confirmed when, in early 1987, the Latvian Communist Party Central

Committee issued a statement that condemned the song's election as the most popular song of 1986 (Bleire 1996, 8). Together with earlier songs, like Raimonds Pauls' "There is Still Time" (*Vel ir laiks*), a seasonal allegory of Latvians' experience under Soviet occupation which was widely known but was not permitted public play, this music constituted a center that linked like-minded listeners through common experience and a shared grievance frame.

Youth culture in particular reflected the turn toward not just increased autonomy, but resistance. Rock music and art were among the most powerful vehicles of identity consolidation and politicization. The spring Art Days of 1987, for example, provided an official forum for artistic endeavors that made political as well as cultural statements. Students at the Art Academy in Riga organized a "live" artistic exhibit that featured students lying in the Academy yard, their heads and torsos covered and caged, their legs jutting out from the cages and propped on wooden boards, a readable metaphor for the stifling of free expression under the regime (Bungs 1987, 17-19). Rock music too had become both a messenger and symbol of resistance to the regime, especially in the wake of a rock concert by the group "Perkons" in the city of Ogre in 1985. After the concert, several youths demolished the inside of a passenger train. As a result, the Latvian youths received harsh sentences - the most severe: 3 years in a maximum security work colony (Stinkurs 1986, 139). The rock group was subsequently disbanded. A punk subculture also appeared in the 1980s, which embraced the slogan "where German tanks failed, Riga's punks will prevail" [that is, to drive out the Soviets, as the German army did in 1941, though the Soviets reoccupied Latvia in 1945].

Pfaff (1996) writes on East Germany that "[t]ightly knit networks nurture collective identities and solidarity, provide informal organization and contacts, and supply information otherwise unavailable to individuals. These networks take on particular importance in Communist societies...because in addition to constriction of social and political opportunities, chronic shortages and economic shortfalls make informal relationships the 'key to the provision of many goods and services' "(99-100). I take this as the starting point of my second proposition on the politicization of identity, but I qualify and elaborate it below. Notably, while these practical action links were the "key to the provision of many goods and services," they may have, but did not necessarily, as Pfaff suggests, "nurture collective identities and solidarities." One could well argue that rather than building solidarity, the constant need for barter and bribery increased feelings of alienation and bitterness. After all, the same second-economy mechanism that saw to the provision of a needed garden hose or a desired pair of panty hose also underwrote a demand for gifts by public officials even when a citizen sought services like a driver's license exam to which he or she was entitled.

On the other hand, some private exchange was solidarity-generating, though this differed from the aforementioned practical action links in that it sprang from an exchange of knowledge or information rather than just goods or services, especially were the knowledge was proscribed, as of

Latvian history. An example of this is the private book market that sprang up at the Ciekurkalns farmers' market in Riga in 1987. Latvian author Kolbergs (1993) describes the market as follows:

> ...for some reason, [marketers] began to trade in used shoes and clothing. But this wasn't enough for private initiative and [people] began to bring from their basements and attics hidden pre-war books and magazines for sale. That, which according to documents, would have been taken from the libraries and burned [after Soviet occupation], which should not even have existed [was for sale]. Suddenly, my generation was given back the historical and factual materials whose existence had been denied in the school books. When [the authorities] discovered [the market], it was shut down but spilled water cannot be gathered up again, and booksellers already knew one another and agreed upon trades, sales, and purchases among themselves (17).

In a system where "knowing" outside of the boundaries of state-approved teachings was a form of resistance, knowledge links between friends and families and associates could generate solidarity. I suggest, as well, that the same mechanism that pitted knowledge against power also politicized the identities of those who sought and held that knowledge by making "knowing" (for example, Latvian political history) a political act.

The third point that I wish to make concerning the politicization of identities and the generation of social solidarity concerns the lack of loyalty of Latvians to the regime and the lack of regime legitimacy among Latvians. The dearth of loyalty and legitimacy were based primarily on several aspects of Soviet life. Notably, there was the clash between history as it was taught, portrayed, and celebrated by the Soviet regime and history as it existed in the living memory of those who had experienced the interwar period of independence, World War II, and the occupation of Latvia. For example, the history of Latvia's forcible incorporation into the Soviet Union became the story of the fulfillment of the "people's wishes" (Taurens 1996, 111) and the "mandate" of 97.6% received in a (compulsory) vote for a new parliament (from a single Soviet-selected list) (Plakans 1995, 147). Just as narratives that connect and make sense of experiences build collective identities (Somers and Gibson 1994), narratives that run counter to lived experience can undermine collective identity (for example, a Soviet collective identity) and the legitimacy of the "storyteller" and, possibly, build links between those who tell a different "story."

Another aspect of life in Soviet Latvia that undermined Soviet legitimacy can be linked to Burawoy and Lukacs' (1992) observation about socialist "painting rituals" in Hungary:

> Precisely because workers have to act out the virtues of socialism, they become conscious of its failings. In painting socialism as just and rational they become critical of its irrationality and injustice. The necessity of an ideology to justify class domination leads to a critique of state socialism for failing to live up to its ideals" (147).

This observation highlights how, in forcing the workers of Hungary to participate in rituals proclaiming the system to be just, they were made increasingly conscious of its injustice. Latvia offers a similar case, albeit perhaps one that had even more acute contradictions. As in Burawoy and Lukacs' case, claims about the superior level of prosperity and a justice highlighted rather than

obscured the absence of a genuine level of either in Latvia. Because critique of the state in public was prohibited, private griping about the conditions of daily life became a political act as well.

Finally, public declarations and rituals proclaiming the brotherhood of nations in the Soviet Union were props on the stage of a reality that belied such claims. Karklins (1986) notes that in the USSR there was "an active publication campaign depicting the harmony between nations, their unbreakable friendship, and the great achievements brought about by their fraternal union...In contrast to the great mass of propagandistic material, uncensored reports about the quality of ethnic relations [were] scarce" (67). Among the facts that undermined claims of equality and brotherhood among ethnic groups in the USSR were the following: preferential treatment for Russians, especially in-migrants from other parts of the Soviet Union, in receiving new apartments while Latvians waited as long as two decades; the diminishing use of the Latvian language in places of work and government business and insults directed by Russians toward those who used the language in public places; and a climate of growing hostility between Latvians and Russians (Kolbergs 1993, 18-19).

The last point is especially salient. Just prior to the time of mass protest action, the "ethnic climate" (Karklins 1986) had worsened to the point that it was not unusual to see graffiti in public places like that quoted in Kolbergs (1993): *Kazhdij ubitij latish - odno posazhenoje gerevo* (every dead Latvian - [like] one planted tree; the implied meaning is that the city is improved by planting a tree and, as well, by killing a Latvian) or *Ruskim Rigu, gansam figu* (Riga for Russians, nothing for Latvian fascists) (19). Violence had also grown, but the local militia typically took little action against youthful perpetrators. An important event, in this respect, was the beating of Latvian high school students by Russian teenagers in April of 1987. Kolbergs, who investigated the event, not reported in the official media, writes the following:

> Riga's High School for the Practical Arts... rented the "Ziemelblazma" hall [for a school dance]. The evening was closed [to outsiders], the dance would have come off fine, but a group of youths had gathered around the hall. As the youths were armed with sticks and other weapons, and as they were shouting 'Kill Latvians; kill fascists!' and tried to break in to the building, and those that did tried to provoke fights, no one thought that they had peace on their minds, and the militia suggested that the dance end early and organizers agreed. At that time, some of the [students at the dance] left for home. And then it became clear that the bellicose youths were not just in the hall yard, but that they were well organized, that they were following shouted army-like commands, that groups of youths were stationed throughout surrounding streets and were blocking every route to the bus and train stops. They attacked [the Latvian students] in large groups...Two hundred youths [according to official estimates] with sticks, metal pipes, belts with heavy buckles, and other weapons jumped on the school kids just because they were Latvian. That this is the only reason was later confirmed by the attackers themselves (21).

Youths taken in to custody at the scene were not prosecuted despite the serious injuries some victims had suffered.

Incidents like the one related above were significant because they increased both resentment against the Soviet regime and Russian domination and solidarity in the face of adversity, especially

among young people. Several days after the incident at the dance hall, around 500 Latvian youths held a spontaneous demonstration in the heart of Riga "possibly intended to show their strength to the militia and their Russian peers" (Bungs 1987, 17). They shouted slogans like "free, free Latvia" and "long live Latvia" as they ran through the streets of Riga. As one of the very first public demonstrations of this period (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 307), it attracted (unlike the beatings) press attention and the newspaper *Riga's balss* (Riga's voice) carried a piece on the "disorders" (Bungs 1987, 17).

Avenues for the politicization of identities and the construction and consolidation of Latvian solidarity against the Soviet regime were open prior to the mobilization of a large segment of the Latvian population, particularly in the late Soviet period. Cultural ties and initiatives, networks of knowledge exchange, and the vacuum left by the near absence of regime legitimacy created fertile soil for the rise of alternative narratives and identities. Shared participation in alternative narratives undergirded solidarity when mobilization began under conditions of considerable risk.

Opportunity and Resources: Opening the Door to Mobilization

While the narrative of injustice and the identities and solidarity that emerged from alternative stories of history, kinship, and action are central to the story of mobilization in Soviet Latvia, it is also important to consider the enormous changes in political life and, consequently, the political opportunity structure, wrought by General Secretary Gorbachev's reforms. Though the policy of *glasnost'*, or greater openness, was limited in that it was intended to strengthen rather than weaken (or destroy) the union, it provided the medium in which the seed of widespread grievances could be nurtured.

Political opportunity as an analytical construct is multidimensional and broad. For the purposes of this study, I offer a basic outline of the concept based on Gamson and Meyer (1996) and specify the particular dimensions of the concept relevant to this case. Following Gamson and Meyer, I recognize political opportunity as having wide boundaries in that it "balances elements of structure and agency" and that "opportunities sometimes present themselves with no movement provenance, but movements are active in structuring and creating political opportunity" (276). Furthermore, some aspects of political opportunity are "deeply embedded in political institutions and culture," while others are shifting and volatile (277). Gamson and Meyer suggest that "[t]he core idea weaving together the disparate threads of political opportunity is the opening and closing of political space and its institutional and substantive location. Increased opportunity implies more space and fewer constraints" (Ibid.).

For this work, I specify four dimensions of political opportunity. While they are separately enumerated, they are not mutually exclusive: changes in one can clearly affect others. First, political opportunity may be a product of state structures that permit or proscribe activity in civil society. In the case at hand, the opening of the public sphere after decades of moribund civil society was signaled by the Chautauqua conference of 1986 and by growing tolerance of

independent activity in the civic arena. Second, governing elites may limit or extend political opportunities beyond civil society to include the institutions of governance themselves. In Latvia, this trailed by several years the extension of opportunity in the civic arena and was only apparent in the partly open field of contestation for seats in the Congress of Peoples Deputies in 1989. Third, political opportunity for opposition forces may be enhanced by weak regime legitimacy and public perceptions of weakness in the regime. In Latvia, the Soviet regime suffered a low degree of political legitimacy and conformity was founded more on fear than loyalty. The growing perception of regime impotence and the increasing sense that the regime was unwilling or unable to use force against the opposition underpinned expanded political opportunity in the Baltics. Fourth, movements may generate their own political opportunities, such that a successful collective action can make future collective actions an attractive proposition for potential participants. This proposition would appear to be supported by the massive increase in protest participants in Latvia from the inception of collective action 1986 to the end of the protest cycle in 1991.

Although it has been widely neglected in literature on collective action in the Baltics, the Chautauqua conference, held in September of 1986 in Jurmala, Latvia, is an important historical landmark in any analysis of the development of protest movements in Latvia and possibly in Lithuania and Estonia as well. The Chautauqua conference brought together private citizens and public officials from the U.S. and USSR in a "town hall" meeting. While the local audience of Latvians and Russians was hand-picked and did not speak out critically at the conference, large crowds gathered outside waiting for news or sought out participants looking for information or watched clips of the proceedings on television. American diplomats at the time commented that "they could not recall another occasion when such a sustained critique of Soviet policies was approved for domestic consumption" (Kalnins 1987, 53).

Among the remarks that created a stir was the U.S. President's Soviet affairs advisor's declaration that "the use of force and the absence of freely given consent are the reasons the United States has never recognized and will not recognize the legality of the forcible incorporation of Latvian, Lithuania and Estonia into the Soviet Union" (Matlock quoted in Kalnins 1987, 36). He also gave a "detailed background of Soviet occupation of Latvia, describing the 1940 elections in occupied Latvia as a 'farce'" (Kalnins 1987, 31). While Jack Matlock's remarks on non-recognition were not directly broadcast by the media, television news made reference to them without comment (Ibid., 38). United Press International reported that word of his remarks "spread like wildfire thorough Riga." Apparently, few Latvians were aware of the U.S. policy of non-recognition.

American participants were also provided by the American Latvian Association (ALA) with lapel pins to hand out to people both within and outside the conference: the pins depicted the American flag and pre-1940 maroon and white Latvian flag joined at the poles. During television coverage of the conference, the pins, worn by some delegates were shown in close up numerous

times for up to ten seconds, though television employees claimed that their purpose was to "show the Latvian people how the Americans were dressed" and "since most Americans were wearing the pins...they couldn't be avoided" (Kalnins 1987, 90). Many local Latvians approached delegates hoping to get a pin and shouted comments like "we are waiting for freedom, only you can help." Warned by a delegate of the consequences of such outbursts, a local Latvian responded that "we live in prison anyway" (UPI report quoted in Ibid., 73).

While the Chautauqua conference in Latvia did not have immediate consequences, that is, it did not set off demonstrations or other protest activities, it helped set the stage for later collective action. Latvian historian Lubova Zile writes that "the very fact that such a conference took place, that American representatives were permitted to come to the USSR, showed that socialist thinking had experienced a sea change" (1993 4:11, 42). Several points are of particular importance here. First, the U.S. delegation fundamentally undermined Soviet claims to legitimacy by reiterating their support for a policy of not recognizing the incorporation of the Baltic countries in to the Soviet Union. Matlock's remark questioned the foundation of the Soviet presence there and, as such, bolstered Latvian (and Baltic) claims of injustice. Second, while some conference delegates and local Latvians who sought them out were harassed by authorities, the conference demonstrated that a new level of openness had been reached and that even questions about the legitimacy of Soviet power could be broached (albeit, by outsiders). Third, during the conference, cracks in the mechanism of state control were apparent. Making a relevant point, Oberschall (1996) notes that:

> When a state has legitimacy, its agents enforce laws, follow administrative rules, and comply with executive orders not only because they might be disciplined if they didn't, but because it is morally right to do so. If the state is illegitimate, its agents conform to regime leaders from expediency and fear, just as the population does. In a crisis, when the regime weakens and the opposition might emerge the winner, the agents of the state lose fear of their superiors...Communications specialists and cultural gatekeepers start reporting news about previous non-persons. Censors pass material they would have banned earlier...The police no longer rough up demonstrators and fail to make arrests...Corruption is exposed once more. Such permissive controls embolden previously fearful and silent individuals and groups to speak out...Thus a crescendo of criticism and opposition spread in all institutions (100-101).

The broad and relatively open television coverage of remarks like those of U.S. delegate Jack Matlock and the repeated showing of the ALA pin with the forbidden pre-war flag on television were among the clearest though not the only examples of declining control.

A second important test of Gorbachev's policy of greater openness came several months later. On October 14, 1987, journalist Dainis Ivans and computer specialist Arturs Snips published an article in the newspaper *Literatura un Maksla* (Literature and Art) that harshly criticized proposed Soviet plans to build a hydroelectric station (HES) on the river Daugava in southeastern Latvia. The writers deplored the lack of expertise and the bureaucratic incompetence of those responsible for the project, noting that the damming of the Daugava would flood the surrounding arable land and forests and exacerbate pollution problems. The writers also invoked the spirit of

Latvian national consciousness, reiterating the significance of the Daugava in Latvian culture and consciousness: "We cannot allow technicians to determine singlehandedly the future of our common home, our river of destiny" (quoted in Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 304). In a 1991 interview, Ivans stated that he recognized from the start that the issue was more than ecological:

> At the time that I wrote about the building of the Daugavpils HES, [about] the permanence of the catastrophic consequences [of this], I understood that this problem is political and that it touched my homeland's economics, history, culture (*Diena*, May 2, 1991, 3).

In the weeks following the article on the Daugavpils HES, letters bearing over 30,000 signatures were sent in defense of the Daugava to newspapers and government offices. While the public responded with letters and meetings, the Latvian Council of Ministers responded by creating a commission to study the Daugavpils HES project. In January of 1987, the commission returned a negative evaluation of the project, questioning its economic and ecological feasibility. In November of the same year, the USSR Council of Ministers, noting that the impact on the ecosystem had been improperly assessed, halted construction of the Daugavpils HES.

Part of the unprecedented independent activism around the HES issue can be explained by the growth of political opportunities. The Chautauqua conference had shown that an unprecedented degree of openness was possible in the Gorbachev-era public sphere, but critical comments at the conference had come primarily from visitors to Latvia rather than local residents and the boundaries of internal openness were still unknown. Because of this, an explanation in which "reduced costs and risks" (Tarrow 1991) alone account for collective action is inadequate. Clearly, at this time, those who participated in collective action were taking risks, albeit, risks that would begin to show the expansiveness of opportunity and, hence, would pave the way for later mass protest.

Another important factor in mobilization was information, especially information that was previously hidden by the state. As a result of Gorbachev's policy of greater openness, information of both historical and contemporary significance that had been hidden or misrepresented by the Soviet state and Communist Party came to light. Speaking about the period of mobilization, historian Lubova Zile, who also participated in the opposition, describes the situation as follows:

> [as a result of the new policy of openness] new information appeared. We learned things we had not known previously. A large amount of information came out in to the open: about deportations, the destructiveness of collectivization, what had happened as a result of Stalinist politics. And all of that made us think, consider, evaluate ourselves, and we began to seek out other people who thought as we did. We began to unite...All the information that came to us, that rained down on us - that was what awakened us, that was the energy. No money was needed, and no one had any [money] in any case (personal interview with L. Zile, April 1997).

Zile is suggesting that the appearance of previously concealed information and the acquisition of new knowledge about history, politics, and society by ordinary citizens in Latvia provided a basis for unity, as well as "energy" for mobilization.

Another part of the explanation for the unprecedented independent action around the Daugavpils HES issue is the symbolic power of the river Daugava, invoked by the initiators of the

campaign and well-known to Latvians from songs like *Daugav'abas malas* (The Shores of the Daugava) and *Daugavina puto balta* (White Foam of the Daugava) and the epic of the *Lacplesis* (Bearslayer). The Bearslayer, a symbol of the Latvian nation, fights the *Melnais bruninieks* (Black Knight), who represents centuries of occupation and oppression in Latvia. At the story's end, still struggling, both fall in to the Daugava: the unresolved end symbolizes that the fate of the nation is still uncertain. The Daugava is widely held to be Latvia's "river of destiny." In this sense, then, the Daugava Ivans and Snips were asking Latvians to save was not just a river, but a symbol of the nation and national culture, what Anthony Smith might have called a "poetic space" (Smith 1986, 183).

In considering the role of symbols in collective action, the definition offered by Cohen (1974) is useful. He writes that symbols are "objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formations that stand *ambiguously* for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions, and impel men [*sic*] to action" (ix). The Daugava as a symbol was clearly multivocal. It was a potential ecological problem and, as such, could be symbolically linked to existing ecological problems with which the public was familiar, like widespread water pollution and the destruction of surrounding land caused earlier by the building of the Plavinas HES in eastern Latvia. It was also, as framed by the authors of the article, a symbol of Latvia and its historical and cultural heritage. The article used the well-known symbol of the Daugava to convey a powerful new message that tied these two symbolic dimensions together: the destruction of the land of Latvia is the equivalent of the destruction of the Latvian nation and culture that make a home on that land.

After occupation, one of the first undertakings of the new regime was to replace symbols of independent Latvia - the flag, national crest, anthem, and street names, among others - with Soviet symbols. While these symbols were to some degree accepted by local populations, they generated little allegiance. In a recent work, Cerulo (1996) makes a distinction between "normal" and "deviant" national symbols. She suggests that "because of their inconsistencies to the settings from which they emerge, deviant national symbols never come to be fully embraced by the national populations they represent" (119). Normal symbols, on the other hand, are "highly predictable, and this predictability generates comfort, making the symbols 'approachable' -- easy for an audience to receive, process, and accept. As such, normal symbols increase the potential for audience attachment and enhance the likelihood of effective communication." Furthermore, "the more normal a symbol's structure, the greater its potential to generate a strong audience connection and response" (129). The Daugava was a symbol that could evoke just such a response because it resonated with widely shared notions about the land and culture of Latvia and was an effective vehicle for communicating a message about perceived and actual threats to the survival of the nation.

Symbols like the Daugava, as I suggested earlier, may be understood, albeit in a limited fashion, as resources for social movement mobilizations. Crighton's (1985) suggestion in her

study of Polish Solidarity that intangible resources are emergent from the store of national culture and history is relevant to the Latvian case. In the near absence of tangible resources for mobilization, the Latvian opposition relied on intangible resources to which it had ready access and, importantly, that also conferred legitimacy on their claims and demands.

As noted, the anti-Soviet opposition had very limited access to tangible resources like mediums of mass communication and secure meeting spaces, though Radio Free Europe broadcasts from West Germany were used to disseminate news of collective actions in to Latvia. They also had few financial resources since neither participants nor sympathizers were financially well-off; high level government and party officials typically had the most material wealth and they were normally not inclined to support the forces that opposed them. Furthermore, the Soviet state monopolized the public sphere: while clubs, newspapers, and unions existed in the Soviet period, they did not constitute an independent public sphere, as all were linked to and overseen by the state or party. What the opposition initially had to work with was a nascent politicized identity based in ethnicity and culture, a mass of new information that came to light under Gorbachev, and a cultural store of myths, symbols, songs, and stories

Symbolic reclamation of the nation was a centerpiece of collective action in the early opposition period. While overt political demands were still risky and few in the opposition were prepared to ask for full national independence, symbolic demands, like those related to environmental protection, or symbolic deeds, like marking the Stalinist mass deportations of Balts, were important because they laid bare problems widely believed to be symptomatic of a larger problem, the Soviet regime itself.

Through 1986, public activity grew, but it was still limited in size. The first informal organization to appear at this time was Helsinki-86, which was organized in Liepaja in July of 1986 by three people, Linards Grantins, Raimonds Bitenieks, and Martins Bariss. Helsinki-86 defined itself as a human rights organization intended to see that rights were being recognized in accordance with the Helsinki Act of 1975. They invited others "who would like, in their free time, openly and without compensation, and with their own resources" to join that group (Zile 1993 4:11, 42). Through 1986, the group remained small and their activities were, while courageous, predominantly legalistic bids for regime recognition of rights rather than large-scale public activities. For example, in 1986, the group sought state permission to publish a journal, *Auseklis*, that would permit them to "inform society about the fulfillment of the Helsinki final act on human rights and about hidden or misrepresented historical events." The request was denied by the government. The same year, the group prepared a memo for the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR asking for help in "realizing the 69th article of the LSSR Constitution" which granted (theoretically) republics the right to secede from the USSR (Ibid., 43). Needless to say, such help was not immediately forthcoming.

In February of 1987, the Ecological Protection Club of Latvia (VAK) was formed with the goal of "uniting all those who wished to participate in the protection, rescue, and maintenance of cultural monuments, ecological and human development" (Staburags '88, 5). The group sought to fight environmental polluters and monument destroyers, even to the point of seeking juridical prosecution (Zile 1993 4:11, 44). VAK became more active as information about ecological catastrophes in Latvia came to light, but while the overtly apolitical topic of environmental pollution was permitted some public airing, public reporting of the actual activities of VAK was proscribed by the regime. Quoting from the VAK journal, Zile writes that the Latvian news agency Latinform "[prohibited] official mass information sources from publishing anything about meetings or other VAK activities" (Ibid.). Despite the official muzzle put on reporting, people came to meetings and participated in activities in degraded areas like Sloka, home of an All-Union paper mill, Olaine, where pharmaceuticals were manufactured, and Ventspils, a heavily industrialized port city with a rate of birth defects far above the national average.

While both Helsinki-86 and VAK drew public attention to important problems like human rights abuses and environmental pollution, their actual membership was paltry and public participation in 1986 was still limited. Throughout 1987, however, the scale and breadth of public action grew as it became clear that social control mechanisms were weak, social and political problems were many, and public mobilization through existing channels was possible.

Much of the early collective action centered around the symbolic reclamation of time and space. The first large demonstration in the Baltics took place on June 14, 1987. It was called by Helsinki-86 to mark the anniversary of the mass deportation of Balts to labor camps in 1941. As mass information mediums in the USSR could not be used to broadcast such an invitation, the call went out over Radio Free Europe (Zile 4:11 1993, 44) and by word of mouth. The demonstration was also set for 4:00, when people would be on the streets already, leaving work. Thousands of people came and left flowers at the Freedom Monument (*Brivibas piemineklis*), though Latinform reported that only a handful of people had appeared (Ibid.). Lieven (1993) has commented that the June 14 public action presented a dilemma to Soviet officials: "this first demonstration, ostensibly against a Stalinist crime rather than Soviet rule as such, was calculated to confuse the Soviet authorities: [Gorbachev] and the central press had for some time been engaged in denunciations of Stalin" (221). While not officially permitted, the demonstration took place with a minimum of disturbances, although all three Helsinki-86 organizers were called up in June for military training. When Grantins did not appear for his training due to poor health, he was arrested and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment (Zile 1993 4:11, 44).

The next demonstration called by Helsinki-86, however, was provocative because it marked the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the secret protocols of which had divided part of Eastern Europe, including the Baltics, into spheres of influence between the Soviets and Nazis. The Soviets still denied the existence of the protocols at this time. Before

August 23, Helsinki-86 again made its intentions known to the government in a prepared document. The organization asked for the publication of the secret protocols to the pact and stated their intention to invite people to leave flowers at the Freedom Monument (Zile 1993 4:11, 45). Fearing police reprisals, the group invited people to come to the monument in small groups throughout the day rather than in a large group, though the state had itself put up obstacles to a large gathering with a sudden street renovation nearby and large public buses parked around the monument area and surrounded with militia. The crowd of people who gathered, however, broke the cordon and thousands again demonstrated at the monument. Prior to the anniversary day, the Helsinki-86 organizers were taken to detention and during the day, hundreds more were arrested (Ibid.).

The calendar demonstrations, at least in their early incarnation, were symbolically rather than overtly political. Marking the mass deportations of June 14, 1941, was a way of "talking" symbolically both about Stalin's crimes (which was permissible) and the deportation of Latvian kulaks and dissidents that continued well after Stalin's passing (which was not). As history was something many Latvians felt had been "taken" from them by the Soviets, the reclamation of historical memory was a significant milestone. The calendar demonstrations, while called initially by Helsinki-86, rapidly gained momentum on their own and, in the absence of any significant tangible mobilizational resources, acted as their own resources for future action. Making a similar point about mobilization in Eastern Germany in 1989, Pfaff (1996) writes that "[p]rior to November 1989, there were no new large-scale areas of political participation opening up that could give rise to demonstrations other than the protests themselves" (96). This was true in Latvia as well. The next significant date on the Latvian historical calendar was November 18, which marked the anniversary of the official founding of the independent interwar state in 1918. Participants reported that at the August 23 commemoration, many demonstrators departed with the words, 'until November 18'" (Zile 1993 4:12).

There was extensive preparation on the part of the state for the anticipated November 18 demonstration and assurances by the Latvian CP to Moscow that "timely preventive measures to stop ideological enemies from utilizing the 18 November anniversary of bourgeois Latvia" had been put in place. Zile also notes that the KGB may have been responsible for circulating rumors, intended, most likely, to destabilize interethnic equilibrium, that "Latvian nationalists planned on November 18 to settle the score with non-Latvians [in Latvia]" (1993 4:12). The Latvian Communist Party Central Committee also organized what was called in internal documents a "protest meeting...in Riga against the interference of the United States in the internal matters of a sovereign republic" (quoted in Ibid.). The meeting, held at Red Riflemen's Square (*Strelnieku laukums*), was attended by 1500-2000 people, many of them bused to Riga for the occassion. A Latinform press rendering of the meaning of the event, which was closed to anyone without a pass in to the square, went as follows:

These revolutionary soldiers carved in granite [the red riflemen] symbolize the Latvian nation's trust in socialist ideas, their preparation to always stand in guard of Soviet power and the fraternal friendship of Soviet nations (Ibid.).

Fearing bloodshed and reprisals, Helsinki-86 backed off from calling a demonstration, though they invited people to leave flowers at the Freedom Monument and the National Theater (site of the official founding of the interwar state), adding that participants should be "calm and disciplined" and should leave the sites after putting down their flowers (Ibid.). Because the Freedom Monument was ringed by state militia on November 18, protesters commemorated the day by leaving flowers and candles at various other historical sites. The interwar flag of Latvia also appeared in various places that day (Plakans 1992, 170).

The collective actions of 1987, which grew from the initiatives of a small number of mostly working class dissidents and attracted several thousand participants, opened the door for the entry of cultural elites into opposition and much larger demonstrations the following year. As Dreifelds (1989) has noted, "[the early demonstrations] were certainly a catalyst in the reawakening of the Latvian intelligentsia, which by the spring of 1988 took on the leading role in articulating Latvian national grievances" (82-3). It has been suggested that "Latvia's Helsinki group was like an icebreaker that broke open the stream into which the Writers' Union [and other creative unions] could swim, taking with it a notable part of [Latvian inhabitants]" (Bruvers 1988, 23). In addition to the entrance of cultural elites into oppositional activities, this year also witnessed a serious and growing dissonance within the political elite, as the same calendar demonstrations that evoked official Communist Party condemnation in 1987 played host to sympathetic Communist Party officials in 1988.

In March of 1988, Latvia's creative unions called a meeting to undertake a dialogue on the consequences of Stalinism in Latvia and the role and responsibility of the creative intelligentsia in dealing with this issue. Dreifelds (1989) writes that "[t]he chairman, Janis Peters, invited the artistic community to explore the subtler manifestations of Stalinism, which [aimed] to 'prevent independent thinking, forbid an attachment to a nation and a language and...destroy historical memory and cultural heritage'" (83). Shortly after the meeting, on March 25, the Writers' Union organized a public action at the Cemetery of the Brethren (*Bralu kapi*) to commemorate the 1949 deportation of over 43,000 people from Latvia (Ibid.). Prior to the date, the press undertook a broad discussion of the historical event and publicized the upcoming Writers' Union commemoration. In contrast, Helsinki-86's planned demonstration at the Freedom Monument on the same day received no publicity in the official press despite organizers' notification of their intent to gather (Bruvers 1988, 23).

It appears that the state permitted and even, to a limited extent, supported the commemoration at the Cemetery of the Brethren while suppressing information about and harassing demonstrators at the Helsinki gathering for two reasons. First, it hoped to split Latvian public sympathies (Bruvers 1988, 23). Second, it needed to reassert some control over the direction of

public sentiment, shifting it away from Helsinki-86, which embraced radical demands for change, to an officially-sanctioned group like the Writers' Union, which, at least up that point, voiced moderate views. If this was indeed the regime strategy, it achieved only limited success. While the Writers' Union gathering attracted around 25,000 people, the Helsinki-86 demonstration was attended by about 5000 people and, in addition, some people going home from the Writers' Union commemoration also joined those who were at the Freedom Monument for a spontaneous meeting at which the pre-1940 Latvian anthem, long forbidden, was sung (Bruvers 1988, 24).

The continued centrality and power of informal organizations was underscored by the high profile of VAK in 1988. While Helsinki-86's calendar demonstrations continued to grow in popularity, this year also saw the first large-scale demonstrations organized by VAK. The group's first major action was the April 28, 1988, protest against the building of a metrorail system in the capital city of Riga. VAK and its supporters contended that the metro was both unnecessary and dangerous: the metro would have duplicated bus lines already in operation, possibly at the expense of lowering the area's water table and destabilizing the fragile foundations of historical buildings in the 800-year old city. The public action against the metro project was more overtly political than earlier activities against ecological threats because it also raised the issue of demographic minoritization in Latvia: the project would have brought thousands of migrant workers to Latvia, further jeopardizing the Latvians' bare 52% majority the republic (Dreifelds 1989, 85). Signs carried by demonstrators declared not only that "The metro is not a friend", but indeed that "The metro [is] one more step toward the destruction of the Latvian nation." The metro project was also subsequently canceled.

The success of the metro campaign encouraged VAK to organize protests against other ecological problems that were coming to light. Among the ecological grievances they highlighted were the pollution caused by the paper mill at Sloka, the pollution of the Bay of Riga and the Baltic Sea, and the proposed atomic electricity station in western Latvia. Dawson (1996) has suggested that the environmental movements in the Baltics (among other republics) were "surrogates" for nationalist movements. She defines movement surrogacy as "the hiding of political intentions behind an apparently nonthreatening cause in order to take the first steps toward mobilizing people to support more radical platforms" and adds that "as new opportunities for more radical collective action emerged...this strategy could be discarded in favor of more open support for the activists' true agenda" (18). The notion, however, that the environmental agenda was just a facade for a "true agenda" makes little sense. First, while the Soviet state was clearly less threatened by an environmental agenda than it would have been by a nationalist platform, it did not view environmental activism as "nonthreatening." On the contrary, Zile (1993 3:14) writes that

> [VAK's] activities in Latvia were of increasing concern to the Central Committee of the
> Latvian Communist Party [in 1988], therefore, under its orders, state apparatuses were
> directed to undermine the ecological protection actions undertaken by the so-called 'greens';
> [these actions] were constantly postponed or disrupted, even 'moved' off to the edge of
> [Riga] so as to cause less discomfort to party leaders (33).

Second, and more important, ecological consciousness and concern were rooted in both science and culture and resistance to dangerous and polluting practices was less a "surrogate" for national resistance than an integral part of it. That is, ecological disasters were a centerpiece of action: they constituted *genuine* problems faced by the state and nation (the untreated waste water from Riga, a city of over 1 million people, dumped in to the Bay of Riga daily and the tragically high rate of birth defects in the hyperindustrialized port city of Ventspils were just some of the problems about which people were concerned). Often unspoken, but widely understood, was that the solution to these problems lay not in a part and parcel approach to individual disasters, but rather in a regime change, in the re-establishment of a Latvian state that would, protesters believed, see to Latvia's interests rather than a Soviet colony that would see to Soviet interests. This was clear from Visvaldis Lams' remarks at the Writers' Congress of 1988:

> The [Soviet] bureaucrats are ready to drown the Daugava, they are ready to build Latvia full of factories it does not need, to which workers will be brought from thousands of kilometers away. They are ready to drown this whole nation...They are ready for everything. And while the power of this apparatus is not broken, we can talk [about the problems] all we want [but nothing will change] (quoted in Zile 1994 3:14, 35).

Ecological problems, while clearly a mobilizational issue themselves, were in 1988, as they had been in 1986, a symbol of national problems as well. To suggest that ecological issues were symbols of political issues like national survival, however, is not the same as saying that political intentions were "hiding" behind ecological issues. The destruction of the land was, in the public discourse of the movement, directly linked to the destruction of the Latvian nation both because of ecological consequences and because the building of some of the polluting industries, like an atomic plant in western Latvia, would have brought thousands of non-Latvian workers to Latvia, further altering the republic's demography.

In April 1988, Gunars Astra, one of the dissidents who had spent a considerable number of years in Soviet prison camps up though February 1988, died. Although it was often the case that Soviet dissidents were better known outside of their own countries (as they often made their appeals to the West), Astra had become widely known in Latvia in the short period of *glasnost'* . His funeral was attended by over 5000 people. The funeral itself was a powerful symbolic ritual marking the passing of one of the few individuals who had spoken for the cause of independence when such a thing was considered by the state to be treasonous. It was the first public gathering at which the national anthem was sung with orchestral accompaniment and it was the first public display of the still-illegal independence-era Latvian flag, which was draped over Astra's coffin (*Latvija sodien 1988*, 28-31).

Maintaining the momentum generated by the March 25 commemoration at the Cemetery of the Brethren, the Writers' Union organized a meeting in early June that called on other creative unions, including journalists and artists, to participate as well. Chairman Janis Peters opened the meeting by acknowledging public expectations and anxieties that surrounded the well publicized

gathering of the cultural elite, which had already taken tentative steps toward embracing change: "...the time of great questions has arrived [and] on our shoulders, [the shoulders] of the creative elite, lie thousands [of questions of] 'why?', 'how?', 'when?', 'how much longer?', and 'in what way?'" (quoted in Zile 1994 3:14, 33). The speeches, which were published in the media after the meeting, included one by journalist and Communist Party member Mavriks Vulfsons, who stood up to declare that, as one who had witnessed and participated in the events of 1940, he could attest to the falsity of the Soviet claim that that they had taken power in Latvia in a people's revolution. Rather, he stated, Soviet power was the product of a Soviet military occupation (Ibid., 35-6). This represented the first open challenge to the legitimacy of Soviet rule by a prominent political figure in Latvia. The resolution that emerged from the meeting also put forth strong demands, including a call for a reevaluation of historical events including the consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, more stringent controls on in-migration, and greater status for the Latvian language in the public sphere (*Latvija sodien 1988*, 35-7). In a speech to the creative unions in 1989, academic Janis Stradins recalled the 1988 meeting as one which "rang sharply across Latvia like an alarm clock,...it will be remembered in history as the meeting of Awakening" (Stradins 1992, 94).

On June 14, 1988, VAK organized a protest action that attracted a crowd of over 100,000 and included the appearance of Central Committee Secretary Anatolijs Gorbunovs. Demonstrators carried placards voicing a variety of grievances and demands: "We want independence for Latvia!", "A free Latvia in a united Europe!", "The Latvian nation and culture are on the verge of extinction!" (Zile 1994 3:14, 36).

Several significant collective actions followed that summer. Among the most notable was the July folklore festival, Baltica-88, where participants demanded that the flags of the interwar Baltic states be rehabilitated and all three flags were flown. Cerulo's (1995) suggestion that "normal" national symbols, those that are culturally-rooted rather than imposed (as Soviet symbols were), evoke powerful emotional responses is evidenced by many of the events of this period. An example, quoted from a correspondence describing the Baltica festival, is the following:

> The nation is awakening! Especially in the last few days...it can particularly be felt! National consciousness is growing, we are beginning to recognize that we are a nation, that we are power, no matter how few we [Latvians] are! And we recognize as well, that this is our last battle, that if we do not win now we will NEVER win! The return of the flag is just a single step ahead - the battle is just beginning. We need to move forward to the end, to a FREE LATVIA! (quoted in *Latvija sodien 1988*, 71).

In mid-1988, some VAK members split off to form a new group, the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK). Dreifelds (1989) writes that "[a] debate arose as to the nature of this new organization. One group wanted the organization to be democratic in orientation, another wanted it to have a nationalistic orientation. Eventually, both orientations were accepted as complimentary" (85). LNNK was openly nationalistic and its demands were more radical politically than those of groups since Helsinki-'86 had been. Notably, LNNK's cooperative endeavors with VAK reflected a new direction of opposition: the groups initiated mass demonstrations aimed at,

among others, re-legalizing the flag of independent Latvia. While the "poetic spaces" of the nation had been retaken with the "rescue" of the Daugava, the defeat of the Riga metro, and the reclamation of spaces like the Freedom Monument, at which it had previously been illegal even to lay flowers, and "authentic" time had been reclaimed with the commemoration of nationally-significant historical dates, the preeminent symbol of the Latvian nation and the Latvian *state* as an independent entity, the flag, had not yet gotten official recognition.

Success came quickly and on November 4, 1988, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR passed a resolution, "On the Cultural-Historical Symbols of the Latvian Nation," re-legalizing the flag (*Latvija sodien 1988*, 102). On November 11, the flag was raised above Riga Castle in an emotional and jubilant ceremony. On November 18, Latvian Independence Day, the flags of independent Estonia and Lithuania flew in Riga as well. On this day too, another old symbol was present: the man whose face was replaced by Lenin's and Stalin's in 1940, Karlis Ulmanis, Latvia's last president, appeared on posters carried by demonstrators, suggesting even more powerfully the reclamation of the symbols not just of nation but of state.

Framing Protest and Institutionalizing Opposition

While much of the resource mobilization literature takes formal organization to be a necessary precursor to mass mobilization, the experiences of the anti-communist opposition in Eastern Europe seem to suggest that loose networks and informal rather than formal organizations are the units of analysis best suited for these cases. Indeed, much of the literature on anti-communist mobilizations in Eastern Europe leaves formal organization out of the picture entirely, positing that mobilization was generated by informal sources. While this is partly true, the case at hand suggests that formal organization played an important role in the opposition period, albeit at a phase in the protest cycle not foreseen by resource mobilization theory. Rather than serving as a force for mobilization of collective action, in Latvia, formal organization operated to unite an already existing field of opposition movements under a shared frame of protest, to broaden the opposition's appeal and ecological scope, and to strengthen the movement in order to extend its power from the civic arena to institutions of governance. In this section, I consider the utility of formal organization as a unit of analysis in the Latvian case, examine the process by which informal organizations were consolidated under the LTF umbrella, and look at the master frame of opposition that emerged from the LTF. I also discuss the importance of the master frame in creating a more inclusive opposition and uniting diverse segments of society behind a campaign for institutional power.

In Latvia, the opposition was consolidated in the formal organization of the Latvian Popular Front (LTF). The June 1988 meeting of the Creative Unions became the foundation for the LTF, established in October of 1988 (Zile 1995 1:16, 50). The resolutions that emerged from the plenum were the stimulus for the creation of an organizing committee for a front in June of 1988. The group

included seventeen prominent intellectuals, clergymen, and human rights activists, including well-known figures such as Dainis Ivans, who had publicized the Daugavpils HES project in 1986; Valdis Turins, a history teacher and vice-president of VAK; Juris Vidins, a doctor and spokesperson for Helsinki '86; Ivars Zukovskis, a worker and editor of the unofficial journal, *Auseklis*; and Juris Rubenis, Lutheran minister and activist in the religious rights group Renaissance and Renewal. Dreifelds (1989) writes that, in response to the step,

> [Janis] Peters and the [rest of the] leadership of the creative unions moved quickly to thwart this effort and to put organizational initiative in the hands of individuals less visibly affiliated with protest and opposition groups (84).

Hence, the same program was undertaken, only under the signatures of a more "officially acceptable" group of signatories. As part of this effort, LTF support groups were mobilized at the grass roots level throughout the summer months and professionals and intellectuals were also recruited for the front (Ibid.).

The LTF founding congress was held in early October. On the eve of the meeting, 150,000 people filled the amphitheater in Riga to rally in support of the LTF. Latvian flags flew in the stands and an imposing banner showing the *Lacplesis* (Bearslayer) over the words "Away with the occupation" joined smaller signs demanding the rule of law and deploring continued in-migration. The rally also featured the reintroduction of nationalistic songs unsung in public for decades. One hundred thousand copies of a song sheet were printed by the LTF for distribution to those who would have forgotten or did not know the words to songs like "I Will Sing for You, Fatherland", "Our Land", "Awaken, Latvian!", "Quiet Silver Tracks" (a song about Siberian deportation), and "God Bless Latvia", the pre-1940 national anthem of Latvia (*Latvija sodien 1988*, 85-87). The public singing of songs as a unity-generating ritual has been little examined, but the sense of empowerment generated by masses singing mutually meaningful songs may be conveyed to some degree by a poem written by J. Kronbergs in 1988. Entitled, "The Singing Revolution," the poem describes how a drop of water hits a rock and rolls off, but many drops of water hit a rock and change its shape (Ibid., 84).

Among those who spoke at the Congress were Dainis Ivans, the Latvian Communist Party First Secretary Anatolijs Gorbunovs, poet Mara Zalite, and writer Janis Peters. Many of the remarks, like those of Peters, highlighted the importance of national sovereignty but continued to frame aspirations in terms of socialism, asking for "national solidarity and a truly socialistic society,...national self-determination and an association of free sovereign states" (quoted in Zile 1995 1:16, 51). Peters rejected the notion of a "Soviet nationality" as abnormal, likening it to a "zoological experiment" comparable to the bizarre biological experiments of Stalin-era scientist Lysenko (Ibid.).

The LTF congress highlighted the themes of democracy, sovereignty, and "true socialism." The LTF accepted numerous resolutions at the congress; some mirrored the basic ideas offered by the creative unions at the June plenum. The ideas, including calls for greater environmental

protection, limits on in-migration, and the publication of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, were recast at the congress as formal resolutions. New initiatives also appeared, including a call for Latvian 'economic sovereignty' and the abolition of all special privileges for high-ranking officials (Dreifelds 1996, 60). At the first LTF congress, none of the resolutions contained a demand for full independence. This step was to come at the second congress in 1989.

The LTF mobilized a larger portion of society than had previously participated in opposition. In part, this may be attributed to its creation of a resonant master frame. Snow and Benford (1992) suggest that collective action frames serve several functions. First, they operate as "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment." Second, they "function as modes of attribution by making diagnostic and prognostic attributions" (137). Finally, they "enable activists to articulate and align a vast array of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and meaningful fashion" (Ibid., 137-8).

Master frames, according to Snow and Benford (1992) share the basic characteristics of collective action frames, but their "punctuations, attributions, and articulations may color and constrain those of any number of movement organizations" (138). Master frames, however, have three variable features: attributional orientation, potency, and articulational scope (139-41). First, master frames "provide the interpretive medium through which collective actors associated with different movements within a cycle assign blame for the problem they are attempting to ameliorate" (139). In the case of the LTF, blame was assigned less directly than by implication. Even in 1988, taking on the Soviet government directly carried risks. The LTF highlighted widely shared problems like ecological destruction and economic shortages and widely shared concerns like the declining use of the Latvian language in official contexts, but it was broadly understood that the culprit behind these misfortunes was the Soviet state, its institutions, and policies.

Second, the potency of a master frame can vary, among other things, on the basis of its "empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and ideational centrality or narrative fidelity" (140). In this case, the basic frame of the LTF resonated with the widely shared narrative of injustice that articulated problems associated with the Soviet occupation and state. Its potency emerged, in part, from its acknowledgment that improvement, for a wide variety of identities and interests, required fundamental change.

The master frame that emerged from the LTF congress needed to synthesize the two dominant streams of opposition in Latvia. The first and more radical stream was represented by organizations like Helsinki-86, the Environmental Protection Club (VAK), and the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK). These organizations took a determined stance in favor of independence even early in the opposition period. To the extent that they embraced *perestroika,* they did so with the view that it was a short stop-over on the road to full independence. The

second stream, represented by the cultural elite and embodied by the creative unions, took a more moderate stance on changes, shying away from demands for full independence, and favoring a program that highlighted economic sovereignty and political autonomy within a federated structure.

The master frame was, hence, one which needed to be broad enough to encompass both moderate and radical interests. What emerged was not a political program, but rather a frame that tapped in to a spectrum of grievances. In the middle 1980s, the situation in Latvia looked grim from a variety of perspectives: cultural elites had politically-limited freedom to write and create; consumers lacked goods and goods lacked quality; young Latvians in Riga feared a growing threat from Russian gangs on the streets; farmers lamented the poor condition of agriculture; many Latvians were alarmed by the prospect of linguistic and demographic minoritization; and Latvia's inhabitants faced the prospect of old environmental threats as well as new ones. The LTF frame resonated across a wide spectrum because it articulated a sense that something had to change and, importantly, that there was reason to hope that change would come.

In the initiating issue of the LTF newsletter (later, newspaper), *Atmoda* (Awakening), two members of the creative intelligentsia, Marina Kostanecka and Janis Ruksans, wrote that

> [t]he hour has arrived! Today everything will be determined. Finally the historical opportunity has arrived to free ourselves from 'militaristic socialism' (*kazarmu socialisma*), to throw off the heavy yoke of stalinism and brezhnevism, to reanimate socialism's leninist norms and to form a new society that answers to the interests, needs, and desires of the nation. In the name of the next generation, ...in the name of our little Latvia, we turn to you with an invitation -- to unify all forces for good for the well-being of all" (Zile 1995 1:16, 50).

The undefined "interests, needs, and desires" were empty vessels in to which participants could pour their own visions, and the sense that it was time to throw off the yoke of the past (though perhaps not to reanimate "leninist norms") was a widely shared and unifying belief for those who saw danger in the status quo and hope in change.

Despite the cautious approach to speaking out clearly for full independence from the USSR, most participants saw the best hope for change in a free Latvia. In his opening speech at the LTF congress, Janis Peters called the development of popular movements for change in the Baltics an "irreversible reality." He added that the Baltic nations "are unified in their movement toward a true socialist society, toward national self-determination, and sovereignty within an association of free states. Only formation of a state where the rule of law is practiced can guarantee achievement of these goals, a state where arbitrariness is replaced by legality, and bureaucratic caprice [is eliminated]" (Zile 1995 1:16, 51). If, in 1988, many speakers danced around the fire of the word independence, but did not dare to go near it, by 1989, the term had made its way from the agendas of radicals to the speeches and publications of moderates like Peters who, in a letter to the World Congress of Latvian Writers written in June of 1989, spoke of Latvian "independence, which we are building step by step" (quoted in *Latvija Sodien 1989/1990* 1990, 198).

Finally, in terms of articulational scope, the LTF program highlighted what Snow and Benford (1992) have termed an "elaborated master frame" (140). This designates a frame "organized in terms of a wide range of ideas" and Snow and Benford suggest that "[b]eing more syntactically flexible and lexically universalistic than the restricted frame, the elaborated master frame allows for numerous aggrieved groups to tap it and elaborate their grievances in terms of its basic problem-solving schema" (Ibid.). The frame was strategically inclusive in contrast to the grievance frames of earlier informal groups like Helsinki-86 and sought to expand its scope to include non-Latvians who were opposed to the Soviet system.

While many of the dominant themes and addresses at the congress were iterated in nationalist language that highlighted the issues and travails particular to Latvians in Latvia, the LTF made the first overt effort of the opposition period to reach out to Latvia's minority populations. The congress did more than unite existing formal and informal organizations representing Latvian interests; it also undertook the task of strategically expanding the ecological scope of the movement by appealing to the minority populations, who made up about 48% of the total population and included non-Latvians who shared Latvians' concern about issues like shortages and the lack of basic civic freedoms.

Composer Imants Kalnins declared that

It is not fair to look down on those who have arrived in our country as 'only' migrants. Rather, it is fair to ask everyone who has opted to call Latvia home, regardless of the ethnicity he represents, to fight shoulder to shoulder with us in the battle to realize the ideals of this nation (Kalnins 1988, 5).

Ivans also included non-Latvians in his vision of a future Latvia:

That grace should lead Latvians and all other ethnicities of Latvia along this republic's blossoming path, a path that will truly secure this republic's sovereignty (Zile 1995 1:16, 52).

The regime's general weakness and low level of legitimacy among many Russians as well as Latvians was a resource for the opposition. The schematic strategically employed by the LTF was one of "us versus them" where the movement identity relied in part on defining itself against the symbols and structure of the Soviet state, rather than highlighting an exclusive movement identity. While the pre-LTF opposition had been founded on an exclusive national identity, the LTF changed direction in that it sought to define more people in to than out of the movement. The success of the strategy in bringing non-Latvians in to the anti-Soviet opposition was most apparent in the March 1990 referendum on Latvian independence, in which a majority of both Latvians and non-Latvians voted for the establishment of an independent state.

In Latvia, a master frame that could tap a wide range of grievances was important, but, arguably, not sufficient for mobilizing a massive movement. Also critical for transforming grievances in to action was the presence of prominent members of the cultural (and, less importantly, political) elite in the front. While there had been broad admiration for the initiative and

courage of Helsinki-86's members in challenging the Soviet state, Helsinki-86 had never gathered a large membership base and the number of demonstrators they attracted at their meetings, while they numbered in the thousands, was less than the number attracted by the LTF. Helsinki-86, led by a small group of working class Latvians not known in society prior to their action, was an "unofficial" group and had no links to elites who might provide a degree of protection. The LTF was, in contrast, officially registered and was openly supported by prominent cultural figures like Janis Peters and Mara Zalite, who were trusted by the public and whose presence in the front signaled that the risk of opposition was diminishing. While the leadership of Helsinki-86 had been variously beaten, arrested, and, in some cases, exiled from the country, the leadership of the LTF remained comfortably ensconced in their positions and suffered no repercussions for their opposition. If the leaders did not suffer, so would the membership not suffer consequences either.

Over 1000 delegates representing over 100,000 people participated in the first LTF congress. Just under one-third of delegates were members of the Communist Party and 10-12% were minorities. The congress also elected a Governing Council of 100 representatives, which in turn selected a 13-member board headed by Dainis Ivans and created 19 smaller committees to undertake specific tasks (Dreifelds 1989, 86). Popular goals were thus institutionalized in a sitting board and bureaucratized in a slew of task-oriented committees committed to realizing the goals passed up from early Helsinki and other informal group initiatives to the Creative Unions to the LTF.

The founding of the LTF was significant for the fact that it united radical and moderate forces in the opposition, but it was notable as well for the forces it split. In its acceptance and integration of communist reformers like Anatolijs Gorbunovs and supporters in the Russian-speaking community, it created an irreparable division in the Latvian communist party and a rift in the Russian community, part of which was made up of hardliners who took a determined stance against liberalization. Within several months of the LTF congress, the hardliners formed their own countermovement, the Interfront, which will be discussed in the section that follows.

Although it had been formally founded earlier, the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK) held its first congress in February of 1989. While the LNNK embraced a stance of cooperation with the LTF and its political initiatives, it took a more radical stand on the issue of separation from the USSR, maintaining that full independence was the only acceptable goal and keeping pressure on the LTF to make the issue the centerpiece of its program as well.

Despite the creation of a formal and bureaucratic social movement structure in the form of the LTF, popular activity continued to occupy a prominent place in opposition to the regime. Frequent demonstrations drew public and state (as well as, increasingly, Western media) attention to a broad spectrum of issues. Demonstrations commemorating Latvian historical events like the March 25 deportations continued and new issues, like the killing of civilians in Georgia by the Soviet Army and protests against the drafting of Latvians in the Soviet army, also spurred collective

initiatives. An LTF rally in March also attracted over 200,000 participants (Bleire 1996, 14). The fall of 1989 saw a mass rally against the policy of recruiting workers from other republics to Union enterprises in Latvia, the public raising of the pre-1940 Latvian flag over Riga Castle, and the commemoration of interwar Latvia's independence day, Novemeber 18, which was attended by over 500,000 of the republic's 2.6 million people (Bleire 1996, 18).

Latvian historian Zile, who also participated in the opposition movement, writes that the "LTF, the LNNK, [and] other groups born of the awakening [the period of opposition] understood that meetings and demonstrations would not bring Latvia sovereignty, that concrete work was needed" (1995 3:18, 30). The LTF, which united oppositional organizations that supported democratic and national interests, sought to expand its influence beyond civil society to the structures of governance and to institutionalize popular protest and the democratic context that tolerated its existence. Hence, the LTF undertook a campaign to elect sympathetic candidates to the newly created Congress of People's Deputies. Although prevented from registering officially as an independent party, the LTF underwrote informational and support efforts on behalf of some candidates in the March 1989 elections. The election results yielded a bounty for reformers: a majority of candidates were affiliated with the LTF program and the LTF itself estimated that fully 75% of the new deputies were reform-minded (Dreifelds 1989, 87).

This electoral victory underscores the importance of formal organization in the Latvian period of opposition. While, as I argued earlier, the rational action approach (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977) cannot be invoked explain mobilization of protest in Latvia, as mobilization was not preceded by the creation or action of formal SMOs, an inverted version of the model, in which formal organization operates to sustain, expand, and organize (in this case, for electoral challenges) an already existing protest movement is useful. The unit of analysis then expands from collective action to include formal organization because after late 1988, collective action, while still important in itself, cannot be fully understood apart from the goals and strategies of the LTF. Notably, this experience of the opposition period differs between the Soviet republics like the Baltics and most East Bloc states like Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary, where mass mobilization was overwhelmingly short-lived (because the goal of overthrowing communists was rapidly achieved) and informal.

Oppositional solidarity was further expanded with the meeting of the leaders of the Baltic popular fronts in Tallinn, Estonia, on May 12-13, 1989. The newly-formed Baltic Assembly accepted a resolution asking for demilitarization of and self-determination for the Baltics and agreed to cooperate and coordinate through a standing committee (Bleire 1996, 15). Baltic cooperation in the Congress of People's Deputies led to the creation of a special commission to probe the issue of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. The committee subsequently admitted that the protocols, which relegated the Baltics to the Soviet sphere of influence, did exist. It was only at the end of the year, however, that the committee connected the protocols to the 1940

occupation of Latvia, a time at which, writes Plakans (1995) "the independence momentum in the Baltic republics had increased to the point of making such 'official' admissions of past wrongdoing nearly irrelevant" (174).

At the grassroots level, Baltic cooperation manifested itself most clearly in the August 23, 1989, Baltic Way demonstration for independence. On that day, an estimated 2 million people, two-fifths of the native population of the region, joined hands in a human chain that stretched from Tallinn, Estonia, across Latvia, to Vilnius, Lithuania. This action highlighted and reinforced Baltic solidarity against the Soviet state, as well as raising the profile of the Baltics in the Western media and underscoring the popular image of a non-violent "singing revolution" in the Baltics.

By 1989, the rebirth of civil society was apparent in many sectors. While the LTF was the dominant and unifying force in independent political life, other groups continued to spring up for a variety of civic and political purposes. Older organizations like pre-1940 political parties such as the Social Democrats reappeared, as did international organizations like the Red Cross and the Boy Scouts. Mothers of young men of draft age founded a League of Women, which publicized and sought to protect draftees from abuses in the Soviet Army, putting forth as well a plan for alternative military service. A nascent free press was also apparent, as a multitude of new newspapers, magazines, and other publications appeared, embracing a broad array of topics and opinions.

A new and radical political force, the Citizens Committee (*Pilsoņu komiteja*), also appeared at this time. The committee, assembled from forces representing Helsinki-86, LNNK, VAK, and a more radical segment of the LTF, undertook a project, copied from an Estonian initiative, to register Latvian citizens in preparation for the reestablishment of independent Latvian statehood. The Citizens Committee sought to assemble a roll of pre-1940 citizens of Latvia and their descendants and they took their campaign to the Western exile communities as well. By the end of August, the committee claimed to have registered over 371,000 citizens (Zile 1995 3:18, 31).

The international context was changing as radically as the internal context of Latvian political and social life. The people's uprisings in Eastern Europe and the subsequent opening of the East Bloc that took place in the autumn of 1989 was encouraging, especially to those in the Baltics who sought full separation from the USSR. Gorbachev's policy of non-interference in the internal matters of former Soviet satellites was viewed as a positive sign. That same autumn, the LTF accepted a new platform that outlined a course toward full independence for Latvia.

Early 1990 saw some radical changes at the highest levels of the Latvian SSR's government. In January of 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic accepted a revision of the LSSR Constitution that gave the Communist Party the same status as any other political party or social organization in society and provided for the right of citizens to form political parties and create new independent organizations (Bleire 1996, 20). In this month, the Supreme Soviet also took up the question of the "State flag, hymn, and crest," which addressed

the issue of renewing the pre-1940 symbols which, while legal, did not have official status. The question was hotly debated and created an unusual coalition of opponents to the renewal of pre-war state symbols. While most of the opposition deputies stood firmly behind acceptance of the symbols as official, conservative communists and those affiliated with the Citizens' Committee lined up together against the action, the latter rejecting the move because they objected to the use of free Latvia's symbols in occupied Latvia and saw renewal in that context as debasement. The issue was resolved in favor of renewal in February (Zile 1996 3:22, 58).

In February, the Latvian Supreme Soviet accepted by a majority vote a declaration that Latvia's incorporation in to the USSR was illegal from the beginning and, further, that it was necessary to undertake steps toward making Latvia a free and independent state (Bleire 1996, 20-22). Economic decentralization also occupied an important place in state and public debate as the Baltic countries pushed to take full control of their own economies, a debate that was sharpened by ubiquitous and continuing shortages of consumer goods (Plakans 1995, 176).

On March 18, 1990, elections were held to the Latvian Supreme Soviet and, again, LTF-supported candidates participated. Although one could argue that LTF and other reformist forces already had strong links with and allies in the Latvian SSR government, the program of the LTF was directed at gaining elected power rather than coopting the inner circles of a government in which there was little confidence. Latvian historian Zile writes that

> LTF prepared for the LSSR Supreme Soviet election in March with determination, looking at them as a realistic opportunity to peacefully secure Latvia's freedom and independence by parliamentary means. At that time the LTF elevated the parliamentary strategy as its cornerstone and went along [that path] with confidence. The LTF took upon itself [the goal of consolidating] the Latvian nation and all other progressive political forces that accepted as their goal the independence of Latvia (1996 3:22, 58).

While issues like the renewal of symbols and the registration of (potential) citizens had created fissures, the anti-Soviet forces remained unified in their opposition, most under the LTF umbrella, and all striving toward a goal of independence. The elections (and later runoff votes) gave the LTF a strong voice in the Supreme Soviet: fully 131 of 201 seats were taken by candidates that had expressed support for the LTF platform. Conservative communists won 58 seats (Ibid., 58-9).

Less than two months later, on May 4, 1990, the LSSR Supreme Soviet, following the lead of Estonia and Lithuania, voted on a measure to renew the Republic of Latvia, setting forth a period of transition and asking for the creation of a committee in Moscow to negotiate the transition. With a mass of people gathered outside of the Supreme Soviet building and a loudspeaker calling out the results vote by vote, the progressive forces won the ballot with 138 votes. The 57 deputies of the conservative communist faction walked out of the chamber. Zile evaluates the significance of the vote as follows:

> [i]n this way, the USSR lost its power in Latvia and with that henceforth all state governance was handed over to the parliament: the Latvian Supreme Soviet was then the highest state power in Latvia (Ibid., 59).

An April 1990 opinion poll of 24,600 inhabitants of Latvia determined that fully 92% of Latvians and 45% of non-Latvians favored the action of the Supreme Soviet (Plakans 1995, 177).

With the declaration of sovereignty, the Supreme Soviet of Latvia created a situation in which political jurisdiction in the territory of the republic was claimed by two governing bodies, one seated in Riga and the other in Moscow. Over the next year and a half, this unusual political situation would bring new tension, as well as the first use of weapons in the opposition period.

Struggle for Status Quo: Communists and Countermovements

In the East Bloc, the confrontation between civil society and the state was typified by a struggle between forces for democracy and the communist state. In the cases of Latvia and its Baltic neighbors, however, the field of struggle was crowded with a multitude of conflicting interests. In the Baltics, local (republic level) communist parties and pro-independence forces were in conflict not only with each other, but also, to varying degrees, with the central communist government in Moscow and local pro-Soviet movements.[4] By the late 1980s, progressive and conservative wings of local communist parties were in conflict with one another as well.

In Latvia, the major pro-Soviet movement in civil society was the Interfront. The Interfront's process of mobilization differed from that of the Popular Front. The LTF, as noted earlier, followed a pattern where public mobilization a shared narrative of injustice and informal groups took place prior to the creation of a formal movement structure in the Popular Front. The diverse interests of the informals, as they were called, were represented within the new structure in an elected committee made up of representatives of different groups. The Interfront, on the other hand, proceeded from a formal basis: the formation of a social movement preceded public mobilization, as is more commonly the case in the West. The Interfront was founded at a January 1989 congress on the initiative a handful of Russians - most of them professionals or managers. It was foreseen as a mobilizational vehicle, though on what basis it would mobilize was not immediately clear.

Initially, the Interfront was made up of two wings. One was a progressive wing that supported Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost'* initiatives and sought change in Soviet society. These were people who advanced change but, they said, were not comfortable in the Popular Front where they felt unwelcome, mostly because they did not speak Latvian or did not speak it well. The other wing was conservative, made up of hardliners who looked askance at changes they saw as threatening to the Soviet order. The Interfront rapidly evolved into an essentially defensive movement and, hence, could not accomodate those Russians who, while wary of full Baltic independence, also saw a need for reform of Soviet economic and governing structures and an

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[4] In Latvia, the pro-Soviet movement was called the Interfront; in Estonia, the Intermovement; in Lithuania, Edinstvo (Unity). These were the primary organizations of pro-Soviet activists, though separate and associated organizations like the United Council of Labor Collectives (OSTK) in Estonia, which focused on economic issues, also existed.

expansion of civil society (Kurakina and Tikhomirov 1991). The leadership and constituency that remained after progressive forces were marginalized was influenced by and participated in the construction of a narrative that was hostile to the ideas and initiatives of both the Popular Front and Gorbachev, creating a sharp conflict of civilizational visions that vied for dominance in civil society.

The historical narrative embraced by those who supported the conservative program of the Interfront differed in important respects from that of the Latvian opposition. This narrative patched together (and, in some instances, misrepresented) particular pieces of history and ignored events elevated in the Latvian narrative. The centerpiece of the narrative was not that the USSR *occupied* Latvia in 1940 (as in the pro-independence narrative), but rather that the Soviet Army (whose veterans made up a significant proportion of those supporting the Interfront) *"liberated"* Latvia from German fascism[5] and from indigenous bourgeois nationalism (Karklins 1986, 53). Further, the anti-independence narrative iterated the notions that Latvia was a historical territory of Russia[6] and that the period of independence from 1918-1940 was a historical anomaly. An interesting illustration of the disjunction between the historical narratives of anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet forces is the following: in 1939 (or 1940), boxcars were dispatched from the USSR to Latvia bearing the stenciled inscription "bread for starving Latvian people." Photographs of these boxcars have been reprinted in historical texts. From Russian-language history texts, Soviet pupils were taught that the USSR was helping hungry Balts with food. Latvians, meanwhile, take this "history" to be a ruse, as Balts, who enjoyed a higher living standard than the USSR, were not starving in 1940. The boxcars, say Baltic historians, arrived empty and were used to take the fruit of Soviet plunder (for example, Latvian agricultural products) *back* to the USSR (Germanis 1976, 373). In addition, Balts generally felt that the Soviet occupation had destroyed not only their way of life but their "European" standard of living, but because the Baltics had the highest standards of living in the USSR, it was believed by some Russians that the Baltics were advantaged and that Latvians and their neighbors were (inexplicably) "ungrateful" for all the Soviets had done for them. As a disgruntled Russian wrote in a letter to the Soviet magazine, *Ogonyok,*

> ...to those of you who are not satisfied with their lot I would like to say, 'What do you have to complain about?' After the years of the war you [Lithuanians] didn't help rebuild Russia. On the contrary, you milked Russia dry to meet the needs of your own region. Just try to deny it   (cited in Cerf and Albee 1990, 209).

In Latvia particularly, where the popular front made serious efforts to attract Russians to their cause, the pro-independence forces had notable support among Russians. Beginning in late 1988, the Popular Front sponsored the creation of Latvia's National Culture Associations to

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[5] Latvia was a German-occupied territory from 1941 to 1945.

[6] Even after Baltic independence, such sentiments continue to be iterated. For example, Anatol Lieven quotes from a 1992 article in the Russian newspaper *Pravda* in which it is argued that Russia, "which once saved the Estonians from Nazi genocide," should not withdraw its military forces from that country which (with the other Baltic countries) is *"our* window on the West" (emphasis are mine). See Lieven 1993, 180.

support minority cultures and languages. It also published a Russian version of its newspaper, *Atmoda,* that carried most of the same articles as the Latvian version, but also included articles devoted to explaining aspects of Latvian history and making a case for independence (Clemens 1991, 169-70). In the 1990 elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet, Popular Front-backed candidates won 139 seats and Soviet Communist Party and/or Interfront candidates won 62 seats (Lieven 1993, 194).

Unlike the Popular Front, which had supporters and activists in the Russian community, the Interfront had very few Latvian supporters. In another sense, however, the Interfront was less a Russian movement than a Soviet one: it utilized Soviet symbols and highlighted the preservation of the Soviet state system. Further, rather than being founded on popular support, the Interfront was largely propped up by its association with still-powerful Soviet structures like the Communist Party, official trade unions, and the management of state enterprises. These institutions also afforded hardliners in the Interfront some protection in undertaking actions that appeared to have the intent of provoking confrontations with Popular Front supporters (Zile 1995 1:16, 54). A series of small explosions, including blasts at a Riga army garrison command building and the buildings of two district Communist Party committees, in Riga in December 1990 were believed by the reformist Latvian government to be the work of pro-Soviet loyalists intent on destabilizing the political situation in Latvia. Hardliners had reason to believe that they could benefit from an eruption of disorder in the republic: they hoped to that in such an instance, the authorities in Moscow would impose presidential rule.

In response to provocations, the leadership of the LTF passed a resolution, "On the political situation in the republic," in which they declared "the initiators of this provocative situation are representatives of administrative and party apparatuses and those who are trapped in the ideological propaganda of the years of the [Stalinist] cult and [Brezhnevite] stagnation, those retired military personnel who would benefit from the preservation of the stagnant economic model rather than the creation of a popular democracy; those who do not want to allow the people's deputies and workers to have true control over the means of production." (Zile 1995 1:16, 54)

While some issues that affected a large number of Russians, such as the passage of a Language Law declaring Latvian the state language in May 1989 (Bleire 1996, 15), served to increase non-Latvian support for the Interfront, it never became a broad-based movement. Lieven (1993) has suggested two reasons for this: first, workers in republic-level enterprises (many of whom were Russian) may have feared retaliatory dismissal from their jobs and, second, the widespread lack of credibility of managers and Soviet trade union officials among workers who were well aware of the relatively advantaged position of these officials who owned dachas and cars and shopped at hard-currency stores to which ordinary Russian workers never had access (193). Further, Kukarina and Tikhomirov (1991), themselves former supporters of the Interfront, write

that the authoritarian tendencies of the leadership and over-bureaucratization of the movement drove many members away.

While the Interfront assumed a threatening posture toward the pro-independence forces, it proved to be a rather impotent force. One of the most visible Interfront demonstrations took place on January 15, 1991, just two days after the killings of Lithuanian civilians by the Soviet Army in Vilnius. Under threat of military force, pro-independence forces turned Riga's streets in to barricades, seeking to protect the buildings that housed the free press and reform-minded parliament. In this atmosphere of siege, the Interfront called a meeting at the Army Sports Club stadium in Riga and announced to the 8000-10,000 participants that the Salvation Committee of Latvia (*Vislatvijas glabsanas komiteja*) was assuming executive power in the republic until new elections for the Latvian Supreme Soviet were held (Bleire 1996, 47). No realization of the Committee's declaration took place, however, and by the end of January a tense equilibrium had returned to Riga and the parliament continued to work, passing new legislation and making its way toward independence.

The anti-independence movements in the Baltics collapsed soon after the institutions like the communist party and official trade unions that provided support and supporters lost their influence. As well, some members of their leadership (especially those associated with the military, the Interior Ministry, and the KGB) left for Russia after the failed coup of August 1991 (Lieven 1993, 190-1).

While Tilly (1978), in a study of West European social movements, has suggested that there is a determinant relationship between access to wealth and power and a group's preference for offensive or defensive action, this link does not appear to hold in the case of Latvia. While the Interfront adopted a defensive posture to protect the position and material security of its members and sympathizers (many of whom were retired military officers) in society, participants in early oppositional activities risked their well-being in pursuit of interests contrary to those of the regime. While a part of the mobilization narrative of the Latvian opposition was grounded in a story about national survival, oppositional action cannot be construed as defensive (as has been suggested in, for example, Dawson 1996) because the status of Latvians under Soviet communism was widely construed as inimical to the survival of the nation. Hence, protection of the nation necessitated offensive rather than defensive action. In this case, the choice of a defensive or offensive posture would seem, instead, to be related to status rather than wealth. That is to say that the group (the Interfront) whose well-being was positively affected by the (pre-Gorbachev) Soviet regime opted for a platform to protect their status from changes wrought by Gorbachev and the independence movement and opposition groups (like the LTF and its forerunners) whose status and perceived survival was threatened by the extant order had an incentive to engage in risky action to challenge that order. Late in the opposition period, anti-Soviet forces did, however, begin to assume a defensive stance. That will be discussed in the section that follows.

Opposition and State Power: Parliamentary versus Military Force in Latvia

After the Baltic Supreme Soviets turned their backs on Moscow in the spring of 1990, the republic and federal level governments were locked in an intractable impasse as the Baltic republics expanded their autonomy with economic and political initiatives and Gorbachev, increasingly under pressure from conservative forces in his party, held fast against independence. Rumors of an imminent coup in Moscow circulated in the Baltics, but the newly-elected legislatures continued their work. To the irritation of the Soviet Army command, the Latvian Supreme Soviet voted to prohibit soldiers stationed in Latvia from voting in elections and handed down instructions for municipalities to halt supplies and social services to Soviet army bases. By late 1990, representatives of the army in the Baltics asked the Congress of People's Deputies to impose presidential rule in the Baltic republics (Plakans 1995, 178).

Early 1991 was characterized by a standoff between the newly-elected parliament of the self-declared Republic of Latvia and the Soviet military and other conservative forces. While the confrontation was primarily between state institutions at this point, collective action remained an important part of the opposition effort. The quality of collective action, however, had changed. Whereas previously it had been expressive and oppositional, it was now defensive: collective action was a response to the needs of the newly-elected Supreme Soviet and an effort to protect that which had already been achieved on the path to independence.

The problems of January 1991 began on the second day of the year when the special forces of the USSR Interior Ministry, the OMON, took the Press Building in Riga, halting publication of most newspapers. On January 8, the Latvian Supreme Soviet took a step to declare illegal the basing of Soviet soldiers on Latvian territory and the next day the White House also issued a statement criticizing Soviet intentions to bring new military forces into the Baltic countries. On the 10th, the League of Women organized a protest against the drafting of young men from the Baltics in the Soviet army and, on the 11th, the LTF organized a mass rally in support of the legally-elected Supreme Soviet and against military interference in the Baltics (Bleire 1996, 43-6).

The January 13 early morning attack by Soviet forces on the Lithuanian TV tower, which left 14 civilians dead, reverberated across Latvia and in Riga 500,000 people gathered to protest the use of Soviet military force in Lithuania. The LTF also invited Latvians to protect the Supreme Soviet, Ministers' Cabinet, various communications and press buildings, and bridges in Riga, a call that resulted in the construction of barricades, manned constantly by thousands of unarmed Latvians throughout the day and night, until January 27. It is estimated that fully 700,000 people participated in the construction and guarding of the barricades during that time (Bleire 1996, 46-9). Plakans notes that

> Latvians knew that their barricades and patrols offered no realistic obstacle if the Soviet army chose to act with all the means at its disposal. Rather, they symbolized the will to resist, an element, some said, that had been missing in 1940 when the Soviet armed forces

moved into Latvia without any noticeable resistance from the Ulmanis government or the general population (1995, 179).

During the "time of the barricades" (*barikazu laiks*), there were a number of attacks by OMON forces in Latvia, including an attack on the Riga Police Academy and assaults on people guarding the Brasas and Mangalu bridges in Riga. Some guards were also arrested and beaten by OMON forces. The most serious attack occured on the night of January 20, when OMON beseiged the Interior Ministry building in Riga, killing 4 people, mortally wounding a fifth, and injuring 9 others (Bleiere 1996, 46-9). The killings, while drawing condemnation from the Baltic governments and the West, did not result in punishment from the Soviet military or government. As well, several mysterious explosions in Riga that spring and some attacks on Latvian-Lithuanian border control posts were attributed to OMON, a small contingent of which remained in the Baltics (Plakans 1995, 179).

Throughout the spring and summer of 1991, the impasse between the Baltic governments and the Soviet regime continued. After the barricades, however, the confrontation became more institutional and protest moved from the streets to the ballot box. In early March, Latvia held a referendum on independence: of the 87.5% of the population that participated, 73.8% voted in favor of independence. Several weeks later, an all-Union referendum on the preservation of the USSR took place. Although Latvia refused to participate at an official level, it permitted those who wished to vote, including Soviet troops stationed in Latvia, to do so: 501,280 did and, of those, 95% supported the Soviet Union (Bleire 1996, 51).

In early August, Soviet President Gorbachev invited the Soviet republics to reconsider their stance toward membership in the USSR and to prepare to sign the union treaty on August 20. In response, the chairman of the Latvian Supreme Soviet, Andrejs Krastins, stated that Latvia would not sign the treaty because the Latvian nation had expressed its desire for full autonomy in the March elections and referendum (Bleiere 1996, 56).

The treaty meeting foreseen by Gorbachev did not take place as scheduled. On August 19, 1991, a National Salvation Committee formed by conservative forces in the USSR staged a coup. In Latvia, OMON forces occupied a number of state and media buildings over the next two days, though they did not take the Supreme Soviet. Hence, the Supreme Soviet continued to work, passing, on August 21, a law on Latvia's status as an independent state and declaring invalid an earlier resolution on gradual movement toward independent statehood. That same day, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Republic, Andrei Kozyrev, echoing the sentiments of Russian President Yeltsin, invited the nations of the world to recognize Baltic independence and, on August 24, President Yeltsin, on behalf of the Russian Federation, signed a declaration recognizing the Baltics as free states (Bleire 1996, 58). By mid-September, Latvia had been globally recognized and at the end of September, Latvia took its seat in the United Nations as an independent state, bringing to an end fifty one years of occupation and nearly five years of collective action in pursuit of this goal.

Conclusion

I began this discussion of the Latvian case and its place in area and social movement research by putting forth four orienting questions. At this point, I will briefly consider each question in turn. First, what undepinned expectations of group solidarity and what mobilized so many in spite of the threat of retaliatory force by the state? In the body of the paper, I discuss the broadly shared narrative of injustice that joined macroevents in Latvian history, like the occupation of 1940, and microevents of quotidian life in occupied Latvia and I suggest that *glasnost'* opened the door to the iteration of that narrative and the mobilization of those who identified with it. Further, I examine the process of identity politicization in the private sphere, with particular attention to the function of cultural ties and the cultural landscape, the operation of private networks of action and exchange, and the weak loyalty to and legitimacy of the Soviet regime in the Baltics. The experience of a shared narrative and shared experiences that contributed to the politicization of the Latvian identity were crucial to the creation of solidarity and the expectation of solidarity that made mobilization under conditions of risk possible.

The second question I posed at the beginning of the work was the following: how could apparently atomized and unorganized masses be mobilized within a state-circumscribed opportunity structure and without the benefit of traditional resources like formal organizational structures and money? In taking up the issue of opportunity, I suggest in the paper that political opportunity was circumscribed but expansive, by which I mean that while opportunities for free expression were greater under Gorbachev than they had been up that point in the USSR, their boundaries were unknown and direct challenges to the regime were, at least initially, risky. Hence, political opportunity for mobilization grew from a combination of the openness initiated by *glasnost'*, risk-taking by early informal social movements like Helsinki-86 which helped to test the boundaries of openness, the generation of increased opportunity as collective action increased and participation became a more attractive proposition for the masses, and the low level of legitimacy of the Soviet regime in Latvia.

In Latvia, mobilization clearly took place without the benefit of traditional mobilizational resources. The Soviet government monopolized the tangible resources - material support, access to mass media, and formal organizational structures - often taken to be prerequisites of successful mobilization. Thus, mobilization in the initial phases of the opposition movement was founded on the mass of new information that became available under Gorbachev; a cultural store of indigenous symbols, songs, and stories that could be used to access national identity and emotions and to convey new messages; and a nascent politicized identity that underpinned solidarity. As opportunities and collective action expanded, mobilizational resources also increased: by the time that Popular Front held its first congress in October 1988, the spectrum of resources available to the opposition had grown to include access to media, professional leadership, and a membership structure. Early mobilization, however, was less a product of bountiful opportunities and

resources than the outcome of broadly shared and urgent grievances that found an outlet in a limited but expanding opportunity structure and an expression in national mobilization for change.

Third, I asked how mass demonstrations arose and under what conditions they arose. Collective action, which found its most pronounced and powerful expression in protest demonstrations, arose initially under conditions of considerable risk. The popular response to collective action was both unexpected and unprecedented in Latvia and the entire Soviet Union. Latvia was the first site of calendar demonstrations, though they appeared later in the other Baltic countries. Helsinki-86's calls for commemorative demonstrations in 1987 were answered by thousands despite the fact that the actions could not be advertised in the mass media and were closely watched by Soviet militia. Word of the demonstrations was passed along by informal informational networks and broadcast by Radio Free Europe in Munich, West Germany. Later, the demonstrations needed no advertisement because the dates of historical significance were well known by the Latvian public: the departing words of many as they left the August 23, 1987, demonstration were "until November 18", Latvian independence day. After the creative unions joined the opposition effort, however, participation in demonstrations entailed negligible risk and demonstrations could be broadly advertised, at which point collective actions also grew in size to a high of 500,000 of the republic's 2.6 million people.

Fourth, I asked the following: how was mobilization expanded and sustained over a five year period under non-democratic conditions? Latvia had a longer period of mobilization than East Bloc states like Czechoslovakia and East Germany, where the opposition period lasted only months before the goals of protest were realized. The creation of a formal opposition organization, the Popular Front, in Latvia was crucial to the success of the movement because it unified radical and moderate streams of opposition, constructed an inclusive master frame that permitted the integration of a diverse spectrum of interests and identities under the opposition banner, and translated the power achieved by the opposition in the civic arena to political power in the institutions of government. The combination of these initiatives underpinned the successful, long-term mobilization of opposition. The strength of the formal organization and the continued collective action on the streets permitted the opposition to withstand the pressure of threatened conservative retrenchment and military aggression and to successfully pursue the goal of full independence and transformation of the structures of government, the economy, and society.

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