The libraries of Latvia during the second Soviet Occupation (1944–90)

Jana Dreimane


1. Introduction

Latvia survived Soviet occupation twice (1940–41 and 1944–90) over a period lasting almost half a century. The occupation forces placed significant restrictions on the activities of individuals and various social groups in all spheres, including culture. Libraries became one of the Soviet power’s political instruments, with the goal of forming a new type of man, *Homo sovieticus*, who would no longer have his own national and religious identity, who would obediently follow the instructions of the Communist Party, and who would live and work not for personal reasons but for Marxist-Leninist ideology. Libraries, like all other cultural, educational, scientific, and economic bodies, were no longer allowed to set their own goals and choose their own methods of work; under the guidelines of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Communist Party of Latvia (CPL), these were dictated by the sector’s supervisory authorities. On August 5th, 1940, Latvia became the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), part of the Soviet Union.

The period of Soviet occupation was not homogeneous. Up to Stalin’s death in 1953 the USSR was a totalitarian regime using repressive methods to impose Sovietization, the transformation of political, economic, social, and cultural life in line with the USSR model. As early as the first year of Soviet occupation (1940–41), referred to in Latvian as the “Horrible Year,” repression of so-called Soviet enemies began, and a one-party system and centrally planned economy were introduced; the national currency, the lat, was replaced by the currency circulating in the USSR, the ruble; private property was nationalized and the Latvian army and other bodies of the Republic of Latvia were disbanded and reorganized. Strict ideological control over culture was introduced: works regarded as unacceptable by the new authorities were removed from library collections, book shops and printers, to be replaced with pro-communist literature. Where possible, staff loyal to the occupying power were
appointed and those already in place “re-educated”: everyone had to attend political theses or lecture series and attend courses where the primary focus was on social and political issues. Library supervision became centralized: the library collections of local governments and organizations formed the basis of the new mass libraries (as public libraries were called during the Soviet period), which were under the control of the newly founded People’s Commissariat of Education.

In summer 1941 Latvia was dragged into intense warfare, which also affected its libraries. Two libraries burnt down in Riga. Riga City Library (Bibliotheca Rigensis, established in 1524) lost its historic building and several hundred thousand volumes.

The period of Nazi occupation (1941–44/1945) was similarly harsh on libraries: a new wave of library collection purges followed, this time of literature not acceptable to the Nazis. The ability of libraries to acquire new editions was greatly reduced: the number of titles and editions of Latvian books did not match demand, and it was impossible to obtain literature by the Nazis’ French, American, and British enemies. Foreign relations were allowed only with Lithuania, Estonia, and Germany. Library funding was so insufficient that it was impossible to restore any infrastructure destroyed by war. There were, however, no strict ideological requirements. During the final stage of the Nazi occupation in 1944–45 many Latvian intelligentsia (including library directors and employees) emigrated to the West to avoid the return of communist repression.

After the restoration of the communist regime in 1944–45, Sovietization, which had begun during the “Horrible Year,” was continued. One of the key measures was the ideologization of education, science, and culture by saturating all newly created information sources and events with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Agricultural collectivization, completed by the 1950s, and industrialization were enforced by introducing and developing heavy industry in the form of machine construction, metal processing, and the chemical industry; these proved unsuitable for conditions in Latvia, requiring an increased flow of migrants, so that in the period from the 1940s to the 1980s around 700,000 non-Latvians settled in Latvia.
Latvia became an important USSR military base. There was a whole range of different military organizations; more than seven hundred units were located in Latvian cities and districts.¹

Deliberate Russification was carried out by limiting the use of the Latvian language and promoting the use of the Russian language.² Without knowledge of Russian it was not possible for Latvians to work in any “intellectual” profession or be promoted to a managerial position, while non-Latvians were not required to know Latvian. Cultural and educational institutions were responsible for promoting the achievements of Russian culture and fostering the reading of Russian fiction. Correspondence with both higher-ranking authorities and subordinate bodies took place mainly in Russian. In the autumn of 1953 Nikita Khrushchev became the leader of the USSR after Stalin’s death and several months of intense battles in the corridors of power, heralding the post-totalitarianism period and a degree of liberalization in the regime, meaning the abandonment of terror as the main method of state management. Restrictions on communicating with foreign countries eased slightly. Liberalization contributed to the formation of a national communist wing within the CPL. Latvian national communists, including Vilis Krūmiņš (1919–2000), deputy chairman of the LSSR’s Council of Ministers, Eduards Berklavs (1914–2004), second secretary of the CPL’s Central Committee (CC), Pāvels Pīzāns (1919–1971), editor-in-chief of the newspaper Cīņa, Voldemārs Kalpiņš (1916–1995), Minister of Culture, Pauls Dzērve (1918–1961), Dean of the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences, and many others – leftist intellectuals of the 1930s who had joined the Party well before the occupation – strove to strengthen the position of the Latvian language, claiming it equivalent status with Russian, trying to restrict migration in Riga, and facilitating the involvement of Latvians in leading positions. National communists proposed reviving the pre-Soviet cultural heritage, making the most valuable Latvian literature available regardless of the political status of its authors. National communist activities in Riga caused outrage among non-Latvian speakers and military officers who wanted to settle in the city, but their options were limited.


The CPL’s pro-Russian wing, taking advantage of the situation and falsely accusing national communists in the CPSU administration, angled for power. In July 1959 the LCP CC’s plenum was convened and the activities of national communists were completely disowned; they were dismissed from their positions and transferred to less important jobs. Nevertheless, the changes in culture and politics instigated by the national communists were irreversible: the range of Latvian literature available and opportunities for the promotion of national culture increased. The national communists had a direct impact on several libraries: for instance, from 1959 to 1982 the State Library of the LSSR (now the National Library of Latvia) was directed by Aina Deglava (1909–1992), the wife of an LCP functionary, the national communist Arnolds Deglavs (1904–1969). Latvian became the main language of communication at the State Library. Although official documents, publications, and events were full of turns of phrase specific to Soviet ideology, Deglava was not afraid to hire politically unsound but highly qualified individuals and supported impartial research into the history of Latvian books and the library science sector and its results; she also encouraged the inclusion of manuscripts by then condemned cultural figures and scientists in library collections. However, key elements of the totalitarian governance model remained in occupied Latvia until the dissolution of the USSR in the late 1980s, including centralized administration and rigorous bureaucratic control, dictatorship by the CP, a centralized planned economy, and an elaborate repressive system, although this was no longer fully effective.

After a cultural renaissance in the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s, twenty years of stagnation followed. However, this stagnation had some positive effects. The use of communist ideology-related terms in official communication (both verbally and in writing) was perfectly polished, including mandatory reference to the existing CP’s congress decisions and Marxist-Leninist classics. However, the façade of communist ideology hid efforts to collect, preserve, and disseminate considerable cultural heritage, including Latvian folklore, and the publication of accurate information whenever possible. Public reference to Marxist-Leninist classics was mostly a formal rite rather than an individual expression of personal belief. After the ordeal of total terror and unsuccessful individual struggles against communist power, conformism became a key survival strategy. Information in the power-controlled media was interpreted (or falsified) in accordance with the ideological “canon,” while in the
informal cultural space more impartial information circulated. However, only a proportion of the population recognized the objective situation of occupied Latvia. People lived as though in two parallel worlds: in one they were surrounded by relatives, friends, and people they could trust, while the other was a public space controlled by the representatives of state power. The individual could not afford to mix these two worlds: although anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda (including storage and reproduction of anti-Soviet literature) were not as severely punished as in the Stalinist years, it was possible to lose one’s job in the “intellectual” professions, be denied higher education or career development opportunities, lose access to certain social benefits, or end up in jail, mental hospital, forced settlement, or exile. State organization openness and other reforms, encouraged by the new general secretary of the CPSU CC Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986, facilitated an increasingly open and critical discourse in all sectors. The objective of the changes promoted by Gorbachev was to stop the superpower’s economic downturn, but they led to the collapse of the empire, since the only thing holding it together was a repressive system and rigorous control. The general public became aware of the “abnormality” of the communist regime, and the desire to return to “normalcy,” epitomized by the independence of the Republic of Latvia, intensified. In 1988 this “Awakening” became widespread. Political organizations aimed at regaining independence were founded. In March 1990, their representatives gained the upper hand in the election of the LSSR’s legislative body, the Supreme Council. On May 4th, 1990, the Supreme Council adopted the Declaration “Par Latvijas Republikas neatkarības atjaunošanu” (“On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia”). The long and difficult path toward de-occupation and de-Sovietization had begun.

2. Libraries under Stalinism (1944–53)

An essential prerequisite for Sovietization – the demotion or dismissal of politically “disloyal” or “dubious” library staff – was already underway by 1946–48. Personnel changes took place throughout the library system. For example, in 1946 at least

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fourteen State Library employees were dismissed as unfit for their jobs: one was accused of anti-Soviet propaganda. In 1948 fifteen librarians were fired from the Riga City mass libraries, one of whom was then convicted. Most of the dismissed were leading specialists who had completed tertiary education and gained experience in the independent Republic of Latvia. They were replaced by members of communist organizations loyal to the new power. Employees who had completed their education and worked in Soviet Russia, and whose loyalty was unquestionable due to their “revolutionary” past or social status, such as the spouses of Soviet army officers and CP officials, were deliberately recruited to work in libraries. Preference was given to CP members. There were not many communists and komsomolets in libraries, but those that did work in them held influential positions. For example, on December 6th, 1951, members of the Communist Party and Komsomol (the All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth) at the State Library accounted for one-fifth of personnel (36 out of a total of 158 people), and most were department and sector leaders. Some communist department heads did not even have secondary education. The professionals they replaced (some of whom retired or transferred to another sector) did not remain unemployed; they found jobs in other libraries or, in some cases, were reinstated in their previous workplace as low-level workers. Some of the new library heads, despite owing their positions to their CP membership rather than their expertise, had already grasped that development without qualified professionals would be impossible.

Library Sovietization and the ideologization of library collections consisted of two simultaneous processes: the withdrawal of “harmful” literature from open library collections and its replacement by ideologized Soviet literature. The withdrawal of “harmful” literature started immediately after the occupation in summer 1944. In December, while part of Latvia was still under the rule of the Nazis, the first list of banned books and pamphlets was published. From 1944 to 1961 ten such lists were published, and separate orders were also issued.

5 The National Library of Latvia, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, collection of the State Library (RXA 164), no. 377.

6 “No apgrozības izņemamo grāmatu un brošūru saraksts Nr.1: dienesta vajadzībām.” Rīga, 1944. The only known copy of the list is kept in the collection of rare books and manuscripts of the National Library of Latvia (RXA 324, No. 87.). The list was submitted for printing on November 26th, 1944, and published in 700 copies.
As is evident from the lists of banned books, the Soviets first tackled Nazism, since works with this ideology were to be withdrawn with no need for a list. However, the content was not the only criterion for selection; equally important was the status of the author or that of any other producer of the book, such as the editor or the publisher. In particular, the lists of banned books contained many works by “national traitors” – expatriate Latvians such as Andrejs Eglītis (1912–2006), Kārlis Skalbe (1879–1945), Jānis Veselis (1896–1962), Jānis Klīdzējs (1914–2000), Ādolfs Klīve (1888–1974), Žanis Unāms (1902–1989), Arveds Švābe (1888–1959), Zenta Mauriņa (1897–1978), Konstantīns Raudive (1909–1974), and others, as well as politically persecuted figures such as Aleksandrs Grīns (1895–1941), Leonīds Breikšs (1908–1942), and Viktors Eglītis (1877–1945).

The number of items to be withdrawn grew rapidly. All the press of the Republic of Latvia (except for communist publications), materials printed by public organizations, textbooks, musical records, statistical books, telephone directories, address books, catalogues of publishing houses and bookstores, laws and law collections, even accounting documents, were banned. This process was of strategic importance. The next step was the falsification of historical and statistical data.

To ensure that the withdrawal of banned literature from libraries took place in a timely manner, the LSSR’s leading censorship authority, the Main Literature Board (MLB), held regular checks. In larger libraries censors examined catalogues provided for readers at random, while in smaller libraries catalogues, inventory books, and book collections were scrutinized. Upon the discovery of printed works to be withdrawn, a team of library staff was formed, equipped with all the MLB’s lists and orders, and carried out “purges” of the collection under the direction of a censor. In rural areas this process was managed by the MLB’s authorized representatives, who were assigned additional censorship duties.

“Harmful” literature was found in the country in smaller quantities than in the capital, because library collections there had already been depleted. It must be taken into account that periodicals published in the Republic of Latvia had already been removed from circulation in large numbers in 1940–41.
Libraries in Riga were thoroughly and frequently audited: for example, in 1947, 572 of the 908 libraries visited by MLB censors were in the capital. In the first quarter of 1945, 491,872 items were withdrawn from the capital’s libraries, and 41,525 copies from those of the six counties. Even in the early years, when the process of literature withdrawal was most active, the number of items seized from rural libraries amounted only to the tens, rather than hundreds, of thousands of printed items.

Every year the MLB announced that the withdrawal of “harmful” literature would soon be concluded. However, until the end of the 1940s one or more libraries were found to have “sabotaged” this work. In the large scientific libraries the intensive withdrawal of banned literature took place even in the 1950s.

Most of the “harmful” literature was taken to paper mills. Two or three copies of each of the banned works were allowed to be held in the restricted collections of four general research libraries – the State Library, the Scientific Library of Latvia State University, the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences, and the Jānis Misiņš library at the Academy of Sciences. In 1948 there were more than 111,000 items in the restricted collections. During the first years only the restricted collections at the State Library and the Jānis Misiņš library were available to readers; from 1950 the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences joined them in providing readers with access to its restricted collection. In 1954, when the Jānis Misiņš library became a department of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences, the restricted collections of both libraries were combined. This meant that there was one less restricted collection in Latvia, hence fewer copies of the banned literature.

A restricted collection (in Latvian, Speciāli glabājamās literatūras nodaļa, Literatūras speciālās glabāšanas nodaļa, or specfonds) was a library within a library. Its holdings were kept separate from the rest of the library collection; a special reading room was set aside for the restricted stock of literature, its windows secured with iron bars. Restricted collections were under the control of the MLB, to which work plans and

7 The National Archives of Latvia, The State Archive of Latvia (LVA), the collection of the Main Literature Board of LSSR (no. 917), inventory 1 a, file no. 5, p. 64.
8 Ibid., p. 13.
reports had to be submitted. However, the library’s administration was responsible for compliance with the MLB’s guidelines. The departments of restricted collections had separate, MLB-registered inventory books, catalogues, and card files. Their reference system was available only to employees and not to readers (though one exception was the corresponding section of the systematic catalogue). When they came into the special reading room, readers already had to know beforehand what specific sources they needed. Books requested were brought over to the reader one at a time and handed over upon signature. In the issued material the reader was only to look up information necessary for study and not read extensively for self-improvement; extracts from the material in special stitched notebooks were to be presented to the employees of restricted collections, though this requirement was no longer in force in the 1980s. Knowledge gained from this collection was not to be promoted in public lectures (for example, at universities) or publications meant for public circulation.

The employees of the restricted collections department, whose recruitment was approved by the authorities of the state security institutions, were the library’s censors: their task was to examine whether newly acquired literature contained anti-Soviet or undisclosed information. If so, this information was to be eliminated, i.e. sealed or cut out, or the whole edition was to be transferred from generally available collections to the restricted collection. While voluminous lists of banned literature were issued up to 1961, orders for the withdrawal of the works of certain politicians, writers, and professionals in other sectors were regularly received until the end of the 1980s. Employees of the restricted collections had to take part in the sorting of unprocessed literature, to select books for possible banning. Every “suspicious” printed work required a critical review. In the larger research libraries, with millions of items in their collections, the identification and withdrawal of “harmful” literature was a never-ending process. Reader services accounted for only a small portion of the responsibilities of the personnel in the restricted collections. It should be underlined that neither in the official reports of the libraries nor in the media was information available regarding the restricted collections, since officially there was no censorship in the Soviet Union.

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To speed up the ideologization and unification of library collections, from 1945 new literature was to be acquired by a central institution, the Library Collector of the Latvian SSR, whose duties also included the supplying of library equipment (catalogue cards, reader order forms, etc.). Research libraries were to use the book supply agency for scientific libraries in Moscow. Nevertheless libraries were not satisfied with this system, because it meant the supply of books was homogeneous, and it was often impossible to acquire the required number of copies. Libraries continued to purchase printed works in bookshops, although this habit was criticized and attempts made to stamp it out during the first years of occupation. Research libraries were allowed to purchase works from antiquarian book dealers, though the number of such sales points was reduced from five to two.

The ideologization and Russification of the collections of the largest research libraries – the State Library, the Scientific Library of Latvia State University, and the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences – were conducted by means of donated legal deposit copies from the Soviet Union, dominated by books and publications in Russian. Every year each of these libraries was replenished by more than 100,000 items, creating a glut in premises that were already bursting at the seams: the Scientific Library of Latvia State University regained its building, which had been seized by the Nazis in 1942, only in 1957. In later years great relief was granted by the switch to mandatory payable deposit copies, which allowed the libraries to choose the most appropriate literature corresponding to their profile and thus significantly reducing the amount of materials received, though it still surpassed other sources. Russian works gradually prevailed both in research libraries and in the mass libraries in the largest cities.

Immediately after occupation it became obligatory to separate the “old” foreign and pre-Soviet literature from the new Soviet literature, which significantly restricted the availability of printed works unauthorized by the regime. For example, in the State Library, “old” literature (including that processed by the censors) was moved from the main building to other, less well furnished, buildings. Older literature was placed in unheated and unfurnished premises for decades, since the efforts of employees were dedicated to processing newly acquired, largely ideological, books. “Old” foreign literature not only had to be sorted but, if deemed “suspicious,” censored: this work was mainly performed by the employees of the restricted collections. Similar sorting
also happened in the Scientific Library of Latvia State University and the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences. Library catalogues and card files were also used as a propaganda weapon. The systematic catalogues of the mass libraries were to be changed in accordance with the decimal classification tables designed for Soviet ideology and created by Lev Tropovsky (1885–1944), which were first issued in the Latvian language in 1946.\(^\text{11}\) The main principle of the Bibliothecal-Bibliographical Classification or BBK was that the only true knowledge is Marxism-Leninism, which led to the development of new indexes for Soviet subjects.

Research libraries were required to have two sets of catalogues, one for generally available works, which listed only those printed works accepted and recommended by the censoring institutions, and service catalogues, which included information about printed works that were not included in the lists of forbidden works but were not freely available to the general public. These included a large spectrum of “gray” literature in science, medicine, technology, military science, and statistics, as well as “non-valuable” or “outdated” literature – works on religion, theology, or fiction published in the independent Republic of Latvia. At the beginning of the 1950s the government institutions required the division of systematic catalogues into two parts, a general access catalogue and a service catalogue. The systematic reader’s catalogue included only literature recommended by the Soviet government, indexed in a defined ideological order: works on Marxism-Leninism first, then Soviet literature, then editions from “people’s democracy” countries, and literature from capitalist states at the end. The systematic service catalogue, which was only available to privileged categories of reader, included “non-valuable” and “outdated” literature cards, which were removed from the systematic catalogue open to general readers.

The Soviet state developed the library network extensively. Specialist children’s libraries, the first of which was set up in Riga in 1940, were founded on the basis of existing children’s literature departments in town libraries, and given administrative independence. Each region had to have at least one library for children: in 1988 there were 111 children’s libraries in Latvia.\(^\text{12}\) Usually, children’s libraries were separate

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\(^{11}\) Tropovskis L. N., 1946. Īsas decimālās klasifikācijas tabulas nelielām bibliotēkām. Rīga: VAPP.

from libraries for adults, thus restricting the access of young people to the latter. Book-lending points in Riga became libraries. There were no additional financial resources to stock these newly founded libraries, so they received some of the existing collections.

The communist authorities constantly emphasized that the library network was not sufficiently developed, nor did it correspond to the new administrative divisions arising from the administrative territorial reform implemented immediately after occupation. As a result, the mass libraries had to organize traveling libraries to bring literature to residents of “village communities, small-scale industrial and agricultural production circuits.” All collective farms had to have a library or at least a reading corner offering propaganda material. On March 1st, 1950, there were 742 mobile libraries in Latvia; however, almost half (48 per cent) of the mass libraries failed to organize traveling libraries, as there was a lack of material resources to do so. Most such libraries also failed to match readers’ interests, and they were little used.

In the first years of occupation, alongside collective farm libraries, trade union libraries were also established. These were unable to compete with the collections and levels of service in mass libraries, and thus gradually closed down, though 153 trade union libraries and 11 collective farm libraries still survived in 1990.

Another important development was so-called mass work, meaning the use of literature to propagandize political campaigns, Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the scientific and literary achievements of the Soviet Union. The themes and methods of mass work were dictated by the cultural authorities. For example, during the planting season, thematic readings, lectures, talks, and reading aloud sessions were organized to help listeners acquire best practice. Librarians were tasked with creating posters advising farmers on planting. In the organization of mass events, cooperation with the

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14 Ibid.


local intelligentsia was required, since collaborating with the new regime helped legitimize their occupations in society. Although top-level staff in Latvia’s libraries were supplemented by alumni from professional higher education institutions in Moscow and Leningrad (for example, in 1946–47 six Moscow State Library Institute alumni from Latvia worked in the State Library), their numbers were insufficient to rapidly Sovietize the libraries. As early as May 1946 the LCP CC asked the Committee on culture and the education institutions of the LSSR, which was in charge of the library system, to report on the possible development of a Library Science and Bibliography department at the Philology Faculty of Latvia State University. That summer, approval was received from the USSR Higher Education Ministry. At first library science classes were studied as add-ons to majors in other fields; enrollment of students in the Library Science studies program started in the school year 1948/49. In that year the fourth Library Science course was set up with a small group of students from various study programs who had decided to specialize in the library sector. Unfortunately the enrollment of first-year students was stopped in 1950, and the department was closed in 1954. In the school year of 1958/59 an extramural studies program in Library Science was launched, but the Library Science and Bibliography department, which was required for full-fledged studies, reopened only in 1978.

In 1946 the Riga Technical Secondary School for Culture and Education Employees (now the Culture College of the Latvian Academy of Culture) was founded, and made it possible for students to qualify as a mass library manager. However, the low prestige of the culture professions – salaries were low and access to social benefits was limited compared to doctors and teachers – did not encourage librarians to further their professional education. Employees in the culture field thus had to be forced to enroll, and the groups were filled only in 1950. The plan to introduce secondary education as a minimum requirement for mass librarians was not achieved for a long time; by 1955, only 59 per cent (822 employees out of a total of 1405) had had a secondary education.18


18 Ibid, p. 70.
Research work in libraries was reduced to a minimum. The development of retrospective bibliography such as a periodical articles index for Latvian science and literature, which had stopped during the Nazi occupation, was not continued; bibliographers had to focus on the recommended bibliography. Every year the State Library published a list of recommended books with content and subjects controlled by employees not only from the restricted collection but also from the Agitation and Propaganda department of the CC of the LCP. The subjects of the books listed were highly political: “Ko lasīt sakarā ar tautas tiesu vēlēšanām” (“What to read in relation to people’s court judge elections”), “Palīgs PSKP vēstures pētniekiem” (“Guide for researchers in the history of the Soviet Union Communist Party”), and “Marksisma–ļepinisma klasiķi” (“Classics of Marxism-Leninism”). Works by leading researchers – Kārlis Egle (1887–1974), Teodors Līventāls (1882–1956), Jānis Straubergs (1886–1952), and others – on the history of libraries and bibliography were criticized as inappropriate to the spirit of the times, and the researchers themselves were discredited or even suffered from political repression. Research work in librarianship was restricted to the translation of Russian Soviet library theory and the development of a Latvian terminology base for these translations.

3. The contradictory Khrushchev era (1953–64)

Under the rule of the new First Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev, cultural policy was as controversial as the guidelines and measures he set in other sectors. There were visible attempts at de-Stalinization, including revising lists of forbidden and “old” foreign literature, and moving politically neutral works from restricted collections to generally available ones. Research libraries were once again able to offer international interlibrary loans and book exchanges: for example, the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences had 209 literature exchange partners in foreign countries in 1959. International book exchange was the main source for acquiring foreign works, enabling the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences to receive such important periodicals as the Journal of the Royal Society, Physical Review, Annals of Physics, Chemical Abstracts, Chemie und

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59 The Central Archives of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, collection 23, inventory 1, file no. 34 a, p.1.
Industrie, and others. Likewise, the Scientific Library of Latvia State University established a book exchange with 257 foreign scientific institutions from 38 countries.\textsuperscript{20} The State Library had significantly fewer opportunities, with only 36 exchange partners in 20 countries.\textsuperscript{21} Mass libraries were only allowed to purchase literature from countries defined as “people’s democracies.” The first orders to transfer a number of forbidden books to collections available to the general public were received by libraries at the end of 1953. However, the next (ninth) list of “obsolete” books, 35 pages long, was issued the following year, and the forbidden books were intensively weeded from collections available to the general public. In 1955 it was proposed to review foreign literature published from 1917 to 1944, which was held in restricted collections. Works published during the independence of Latvia and the Nazi occupation years were also reviewed. For this a nine-person commission was formed, which included directors and heads of restricted collections at research libraries (most likely the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences and the State Library) alongside censors from the MLB, as well as one representative of the LCP CC and the Latvian Writers’ Union.

Annotations were drafted for every forbidden book. After acceptance by the commission, the list of literature suitable for declassification was submitted for approval by the LCP CC and a corresponding order was issued to return the books to public collections. The commission worked until the summer of 1957, when the revision of banned literature was continued by the MLB. The work was finished in 1960, and a new list of works with irrevocable “political defects” (3,100 titles out of 9,000 – approximately a third of all reviewed works) was created.\textsuperscript{22} This was published in 1961.

The use of restricted collections increased significantly during the Khrushchev thaw, especially in the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences. This can be explained by the fact that access to the literature in restricted collections was less burdensome: there was no requirement to receive authorization from the LCP CC,

\textsuperscript{20} LVA, collection 1340, inventory 15, file no. 37, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{22} LVA, collection 917, inventory 1 a , file no. 26, p. 15.
LSSR MLB, or state security organization. A letter from the reader’s place of employment or education and the permission of the library director was sufficient. Such permission was to be submitted to the library employees. According to MLB reports, the restricted collection was used by researchers and leading specialists from various fields as well as postgraduate students and members of creative unions. The restricted collection of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences had the largest number of readers and visitors (Table 1).

Table 1.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Readers</th>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>Loans</th>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1156</td>
<td>9315</td>
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<td>1955</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>–</td>
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In 1956 censorship was lifted from some of the capitalist country periodicals in the exact sciences. Research libraries received updated listings of publications free from USSR MLB censorship. However, library employees had to make sure that these publications did not include “harmful” information. If such information was discovered, it was reported to the USSR MLB. Librarians were authorized to destroy forbidden information and to draft a report afterwards. If the destruction of unfavorable information was not possible without causing significant harm to the publication, the particular issue or volume was to be placed in the restricted collection. Periodicals deemed harmless were to be kept in the collection accessible to the general public.

23 Ibid., files no. 11, 13, 14, 18, 20.
Control checkpoints were set up to inspect foreign literature. In these checkpoints every publication printed in a capitalist country was to be inspected. If the publication was found to be politically neutral, it was recorded in a separate register for foreign publications and issued to the reader. Only classics of world literature, works by Marxist-Leninist authors, and publications from other socialist states were free from inspection.

Requests by national communists to review their hidden cultural heritage emboldened librarians to identify and promote literature on the history of their regions. For example, Jaunpiebalga village library set up a stand on “Dzimtā novada kultūras darbinieki” (“Cultural employees of the native region”).24 Of course, the emphasis was initially on subjects beneficial to the government such as the revolution of 1905 and the “renewal” of communist power in Latvia in 1940 and their appropriate interpretation. However, the narrow Soviet historical canon was gradually expanded. Given that the collections of mass libraries, subjects, and working methods had been unified, local studies collections were the sole resource unique to each library, strengthening the library’s role in the life of the local community. Due to this, this new trend became very popular.

Eventually libraries were able to pursue research. The first terminology glossary for librarians was published,25 as well as a work on the history of Latvian bibliography,26 and work on retrospective bibliographies was taken up again. The State Library restarted work on the card file for the analytic bibliography index “Latviešu zinātne un literatūra” (“Latvian science and literature”), initially launched by Augusts Ģinters (1885–1944). Between 1963 and 1989 six volumes covering the period 1908–14 were published. From 1954 work at the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences intensified on compiling the index “Latviešu periodika” (“Latvian periodicals”). The first volume, on periodicals between 1768 and 1919, was issued in 1966 though it was


26 Egle, K., 1957. Īsa latviešu bibliografijas vēsture: (līdz 1917. gadam) (A brief history of the Latvian bibliography (up to 1917)). Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas izdevniecība.
in manuscript as early as 1961. During the Soviet occupation readers received two more volumes on publications between 1920 and 1940. Employees at the State Library and Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences focused on research in Latvian book history. A permanent exhibition, “Latviešu grāmatniecības vēsture” (“The history of the Latvian book”) opened in 1964. To promote the coordination of research, publishing, and research dissemination, a joint Commission for Book History (1966–90) was established. At Commission meetings the latest ideas were discussed, and conferences, other events to promote history, and selections of material were initiated.

Meanwhile, however, the dictatorship of the state continued: all aspects of library work, including collection priorities and the subjects of mass works, were dictated by culture supervision institutions in accordance with instructions from the LCP CC and the USSR Ministry of Culture.

The “education” of Homo soveticus was reinforced by two new additions: open access to bookshelves and reading guidance. Open access was gradually introduced from 1958. At first “obsolete” literature was carefully selected and removed from mass library collections, only core recommended literature being kept. It is believed that the majority of obsolete literature consisted of Stalin’s works and commentaries on them, which were to be removed from circulation after the 20th Congress (February 1956) of the CPSU.

If open access could not be organized due to inappropriate premises or lack of inventory, it had to be provided at the very least for socially important political literature and Marxist-Leninist classics. Even the State Library, which was located in a building deemed completely unsafe in 1954, introduced open access to the social-political literature reading room.27 From 1960 certain collections in such Latvia State University faculties as Chemistry, Biology, History and Philosophy, and Philology became available to readers.28

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28 LVA, collection 1340 (University of Latvia), inventory 15, file no. 34, pp. 5, 11.
Reading management became one of the most important aspects of the librarian’s duties – direct and purposeful influence on the choice, use, and perception of reading sources.

Reader forms initially asked for each reader’s occupation; several groups of readers were defined, such as pupils, workers, servants, housewives, senior citizens, etc., as were their requests. The interests of these groups were taken into account during book acquisition, of course, while observing the main tasks of ideological education defined by the Soviet State.

Usually pupils with behavioral issues or learning difficulties and individuals with limited literary interests were chosen for individual reading management. An individual reading plan was developed for each person selected for the program, including literature from different fields. The librarian had to supervise the plan and keep a note of which works were read. If the reader continued to read literature from only one field, unethical methods were used to correct this behavior. For example, people were informed that their library cards had been separated from the other cards due to the fact that by reading literature on a single subject they had become the worst readers in the whole library. Then they would be shown the library cards of “good” readers, who displayed varied interests.

4. Stagnation (1964–85)

Although the CPSU CC promulgated the total centralization of libraries only in 1974, this step dated back to the first half of the 1960s in the LSSR, when two central libraries, for adults and children respectively, were established in Riga with the provision of a single methodological management as their main objective. For this purpose, additional staff, known as methodologists, were introduced in the 1960s in the district and town libraries that became known as method centers. Centralization was introduced also in the acquisition system: it was first established that literature for village and township libraries should be acquired by district libraries, but the procedure was then changed, and village libraries received standardized sets of literature from the Library Collector.

An experiment in centralization in Riga’s Oktobris district was initiated in 1968. Administrative functions, acquisition and processing of collections, development of an information apparatus, and employee training were concentrated in one place – the
central library – but its affiliated libraries had to provide readers with service, mass
work, and reading management. The results of this experiment were held to be
effective, since refusals of requests for literature fell slightly. Centralization was also
introduced in other parts of Latvia; it ended in 1978, by which time thirty-three
centralized library systems had been established, twenty-six in rural areas and seven
in major cities.
Poetry Days were organized annually in Latvia from 1965 on, beginning with
celebrations marking the centennial of the great poet Jānis Rainis (Pliękšāns, 1865–
1929), with the active participation of libraries from the outset through poetry
readings and meetings with Latvian writers, actors, and artists. Discussions, debates
on current Latvian prose and poetry, and literature and art exhibitions served to attract
readers. These measures, as well as the abundance of local history resources, revealed
the potential of libraries as cultural institutions, despite their political engagement.
In the 1970s sociological research on reading began in Latvia. The first study,
“Grāmata un lasīšana lauku rajonā” (“Books and reading in a rural area”), carried out
by the State Library, was conducted in Kulģīga district in 1971–72.29 The study found
that 96.9 per cent of Latvia’s population were more or less regular readers. Most (76.9
per cent) were interested in literature, especially domestic and historical novels,
humor, and satire, which was also the largest category in mass library collections and
periodical literature. Most popular was Latvian Soviet and foreign literature, which
accounted for the largest share of periodical literature. Less than a quarter of the
population (24.6 per cent) used mass libraries; furthermore, city libraries had fewer
readers (about 18 per cent) than those in rural areas. This was due to the situation with
respect to books in occupied Latvia. The amount of published fiction was declining
from a low base, from 236 titles in 1971 to 175 in 1988, though the average number
of copies printed increased from 29,100 in 1971 to 41,500 in 1988.30 The price of
books, especially fiction, was low. Every citizen with an average income could afford
almost any book, as long as it was generally available. Many people built large

29 Sardiko, S., 1974. “Par dažām daļliteratūras izplatības un lasīšanas problēmām” (“Some problems of
Rīga: Latvijas PSR Grāmatu palāta; Latvijas PSR Valsts Grāmatu palāta, 1989. Latvijas PSR prese
personal book collections, frequently exceeding village library holdings. Except for specialized literature for educational or work purposes, libraries were not needed.

The results of the study showed that the most popular Latvian Soviet writer was Vilis Lācis (1904–1966), the head of the LSSR government. Of the respondents, 90 per cent had read his novel Putni bez spārniem (Birds without wings). The second most popular author was the Latvian prose master Jānis Jaunsudrabīns (1877–1962), an émigré writer. Ranking at the top of the re-read authors, right after Vilis Lācis, were the outstanding Latvian playwright and prose writer Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1863–1908), Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), French novelist Alexandre Dumas père (1802–1870), the portrayer of “monumental” class struggle Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–1984), and American realist Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), as well as a whole range of Latvian Soviet writers. The study found a correlation between the popularity of certain works and the assortment of new books, as the most read books had been published in recent years. This shows that the supply of books affects readers’ interests; the more one-sided the supply of the reading material, the narrower the readers’ interests.

In the light of the increasing communication between people in Latvia and their compatriots in exile, as well as the intensification of Western counter-propaganda, the availability of exile literature was restricted at the beginning of the 1970s—something that had not been officially done until then. Many exile publications were classified as anti-Soviet literature and given particularly secret status, to be kept only in a safe in the restricted collection at the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences in a separate office behind an iron door. The most prominent exile periodicals also ended up there. The Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences had to take over printed works by émigrés from the State Library, which was forced to hand over more than two thousand items, mostly books and periodicals published in the 1960s. Each top secret publication was available only with a joint LCP CC Foreign Affairs Department and National Security Committee permit for research or counter-propaganda purposes. Even scientists and creative union members had difficulties in obtaining this. In 1973 88 people, who had read a large proportion of the eyewitness memoirs of the period of the Republic of Latvia and Nazi occupation, obtained a permit.31

31 LVA, collection 917, inventory 1 a, file no. 128, p. 3.
In the 1980s, shortly before the Awakening, there was an attempt to further reduce the availability of exile literature. The intention was to hand over the exile literature stored in the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences to the elitist library at the LCP CC Party History Institute, which also had a restricted collection. However, it was arranged that one copy would remain in the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences.

Exile literature mostly circulated illegally. It was brought into Latvia not only by exiled compatriots but also by residents allowed to visit relatives abroad, although their luggage was painstakingly searched on the border of the USSR and at the Riga customs. In a carefully arranged chain, books of poetry and prose, academic publications, newspapers, and magazines traveled from one person to another. They were read not only by writers and literary researchers, but also specialists in other fields, such as librarians. Although exile literature was available to the Latvian population only occasionally, it enriched the knowledge of topics banned in the Soviet Union, maintained interest in exile, and encouraged people to look at Latvia’s situation with a critical eye.

5. On the road to freedom (1986–90)

1986–90 was a time of political and cultural awakening, a peaceful anti-communist revolution, when “the idea of Latvia’s independence emerged from the underground and won”, in the words of Latvian historian Heinrihs Strods (1925–2012). It was an important period for the library sector as well, with libraries radically changing their direction of development, values, and working methods. The institutions of Soviet ideological propaganda – executors of the orders of higher authorities – were turned into democratic educational and cultural centers. Social research on libraries and reading and statistics about the field showed a great divide between demand from society and supply from the book distribution circuit, including libraries. As censorship weakened and the extent of previously unavailable information became more and more visible, the divide deepened: the number of readers, visitors, and published books rapidly decreased.

The library crisis was also promoted by the contradictory attitude of government institutions. Libraries were seen as performers of important ideological work; the network was unusually vast but there was no funding for modernization of the
infrastructure. The most vivid illustration is the state of the premises of the State Library of the LSSR. Of the collection actively in circulation, 26 per cent was packed in plastic bags due to lack of space, and thus unavailable to readers.\textsuperscript{32} In the course of almost fifty years several new building projects were developed, but none were implemented. The building of the oldest and largest Latvian literature collection (the Misiņš department of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences) was in critical condition. The situation was as bad in twenty-two mass libraries. Another 113 libraries required full renovation. 28 per cent of libraries were no larger than a small apartment (50 m\textsuperscript{2}). Only 19 per cent of all public libraries were equipped with a reading room.\textsuperscript{33} In 1987-88, with freedom in the air, the press often discussed the alarming state of the State Library and other library premises, and society demanded immediate action from the heads of the LSSR. In December 1988 Gunnar Birkerts, a great Latvian architect living in the USA with experience in designing museums and libraries, was invited to design the new library building.\textsuperscript{34} After twenty-five years, in 2014, the long-awaited National Library of Latvia was opened. In 1993 the Misiņš department of the Academic Library of Latvia (former Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences) also gained larger premises, being moved to the building of the former LCP CC archive.

The shelves of the libraries and bookstores were full of books, but there was little to read. The number of first editions of fiction was low with, for example, just 77 titles in 1987. 70 per cent of young people from rural areas and 54 per cent of workers in the cities did not visit libraries at all.\textsuperscript{35} Literary erudition and an interest in reading were low among residents, especially among young people.\textsuperscript{36} They enjoyed reading works by Latvian authors, but were not interested in foreign literature, mainly because


they had little knowledge of it. According to the data of a social research study, “Bibliotekā un lasītāja mijiedarbība” (“Interaction between the librarian and the reader”), in the period from 1984 to 1986 readers and librarians read mostly Latvian Soviet literature, and mostly the same authors. Knowledge of pre-Soviet Latvian literature, which was considered as less desirable by the regime during the occupation, was much lower.

In 1986 the press of occupied Latvia published the first series of articles about authors whose names and works had previously been banned. The documents of the State Library indicate that the requirements of the department of restricted collections were considered a mere formality, meaning that the research subjects in applications were defined broadly. Of nearly 200 applications, only one was rejected due to failure to observe the requirements. Forbidden literature was still available only to certain categories of readers – journalists, writers, artists, culture employees, including librarians, scientists, higher education faculty members and students, and CPSU members with special achievements. The number of readers during the “atmoda” (“Awakening”) period increased slightly, but the demographics changed: almost half were now students. On September 10th, 1987, a commission to review forbidden books was formed in Latvia. The work of the commission was slow and scrupulous since, as at the time of the Khrushchev thaw, each forbidden publication was read and reviewed. Two thousand publications were reviewed by 1989, almost a third of which were made available to the general public.

A peculiar situation arose: after 1988 in the press and even in books, works by previously forbidden exiled authors such as Mārtiņš Zīverts (1903–1990) and Linards Tauns (1922–1963) were published, and the communication of institutions and private persons with compatriots abroad rapidly increased. The State Library received the first parcels from countries where émigré Latvians lived. However, reading exile publications in the restricted collection of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of


38 The National Library of Latvia, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, archive of the restricted collection of the Latvian State Library (RXA 324), no. 42.
Sciences still required a permit. The situation was the same in other restricted collections.
The impulse for change was triggered by increasing pressure from society, and by the re-establishment congress of the Latvian Association of Librarians (founded in 1923, liquidated in 1940) on May 5th, 1989, which emphasized the right to freedom of expression of every citizen, and the need to give the responsibility for restricted collections to the library administration and make these collections available to the general public. At the initiative of the new State Library director Andris Vilks, appointed in March 1989, the chairman of the Culture Committee of the LSSR, composer Raimonds Pauls, issued an order in September 1989 that transferred the governance of the State Library restricted collection to the director. In December of the same year the State Library director made a decision to transfer the literature of the restricted collection to the publicly available collection. In November 1989 an exhibition of books from the Latvian library in Uppsala, Sweden, opened in the State Library, which became a reading room for exile literature. More than a thousand books were available. Exile newspapers published requests to send publications to the libraries of Latvia. In 1990 the State Library received more than four thousand printed works. The collection of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences (which in 1992 became the Academic Library of Latvia) was also significantly enlarged. However, the integration of the restricted collections of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences and the Scientific Library of Latvia State University took place only after the independence of the Republic of Latvia was announced and the LSSR MLB liquidated on August 10th, 1990.

6. Conclusion

During the Soviet years the libraries of Latvia entered a period of long-term forced isolation from the Western world, thus limiting their ability to collect significant scientific, cultural, educational, and economic works, while access to most foreign

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40 Sardiko, S., 1994, p. 93.
publications was limited. Due to the centralized and strictly controlled system of book publishing and library collection building, the collections became uniform and filled with ideological literature, which did not attract any profound and lasting interest from citizens. The political tasks of libraries, depending on the goals of the occupation government, created a negative or indifferent attitude on the part of the public toward these cultural institutions as representatives of a foreign power. Personal communication and home libraries thus played a more significant role in obtaining information if the individual did not belong to the privileged categories of readers with access to classified and so-called “outdated” literature.

After the Republic of Latvia regained its independence, almost all mass libraries, apart from some special libraries, were governed by local municipalities. Library funding rapidly decreased, creating a challenge for efficient de-ideologization. The lack of financing during the first years of independence can be explained by the ingrained opinion that libraries, like all other cultural, educational, and scientific organizations, must be financed by the state. Attempts by librarians to build collections suitable for the interests of the different social groups, to modernize library equipment, and to support culture, education, and science gradually changed broader social attitudes.

Deliberate collaborators with the Soviet regime in the library sector were few, but those few held leading positions. Hidden resistance by most librarians against the occupying power is known to have existed: it took the form of passive go-slow resistance toward orders from the Soviet government, but unfortunately the implementation of these orders was unavoidable, given the loyalties of the top-level staff.

Since the new systems implemented by the occupying power were not initiated by the Latvian librarians but imposed from above with no thought to their suitability for local conditions and cultural traditions, most libraries quickly rejected innovations such as the LSSR Library Collector, centralized library systems, recommended bibliography, and reading guidance after regaining independence. Children’s libraries were the only exception, and in some places these libraries function to this day; however, as the family library model becomes more popular, these will most likely eventually be absorbed into adult libraries.

There were some benefits to librarians working under Soviet occupation: an opportunity to hire and use large numbers of library personnel for time-consuming
work without additional financing (retrospective bibliography, gathering and processing the archive collections of cultural workers, compiling and publishing detailed descriptions of the manuscripts archive, social reading research, etc.). The research ordered by the All-Union organizations also made it possible to study reading habits and library use in Latvia, although free discussion of library problems became possible only in the late 1980s.