

SUMMARY

*The Coup d'état in Valmiera on 21
January 1927: the Local and General
Significance of these Events*

On 21 January 1927 Latvian society was shaken by news of a “fascist” *coup d'état* in Valmiera. All political circles immediately came out with sharp criticism. Different opinions were expressed about its initiators. What actually did happen in Valmiera? The events started in the buffet of the Traders' and Manufacturers' Association on the evening of the 20 January. Some men expressed their doubts about military discipline in the army and soldiers' readiness to obey their officers' orders. Afterwards Lieutenant Edgars Oliņš returned to his army unit and woke up his company. He armed the soldiers and led them to the city. Soldiers had occupied the railway station, the post and telephone office and some other city institutions when Oliņš was disarmed and arrested by his regimental commander and his troops returned to their billet. This *coup d'état* lasted only about half an hour and the citizens got to know about the events only from central newspapers.

If the military aspect of the *coup d'état* seemed to be simple to understand, its political aspect was more complicated. Here we basically have to consider two facts. Firstly, the first and the only left government had come to power in Latvia in December 1926, which aggravated the political situation at once. Secondly, after the military *coup d'état* that occurred in Lithuania on 17 December 1926 Latvian left-wing political forces were worried lest similar events should be repeated in Latvia. Therefore the government's reaction to the *coup d'état* was strict. At the same time different political forces held on to their different versions.

The first to emerge was the version of the left social-democrats. It considered the events in Valmiera as a serious fascist *coup d'état*. Based on several facts that proved the existence of a “fascist spirit” in the Latvian army, this version nevertheless ignored the very strange character of the events, for the “fascist” forces consisted of only 30-40 soldiers and the whole episode ended quickly. The second version was the conservative one. Conservative political forces considered this *coup d'état* as an incident that was organized and led by only one single mentally unbalanced adventurer. The third version came from the extreme political right. They considered the events in Valmiera as a provocation. Regarding the question of who actually profited from the *coup d'état*, the finger of blame can be pointed at the left political forces in Latvia, for they definitely derived the biggest “political profit” from the events in Valmiera. However, they were not the only ones. Significantly, the first warning about the possi-

bility of a fascist *coup d'état* in Latvia was published in the Soviet newspaper "Izvestiia" already on 18 January 1927. In fact this noisy, rapid and unsuccessful *coup d'état* gave Soviet diplomats the opportunity to exert pressure while Soviet-Latvian negotiations were being held about a neutrality treaty.

Given this political background, however, the Valmiera affair eventually proved to be an episode of only local significance. Yet it gains another meaning in the context of the similar experience several other European states were faced with during the interwar period. Particularly close parallels can be drawn with the fascist *coup d'état* that occurred in Brno/Czechoslovakia on 21 January 1933. Two years later a strikingly similar script might have been repeated in Estonia in December 1935 when the organizers of a potential *coup d'état* led by the Freedom Fighters organisation were arrested. These unsuccessful *coups d'état* showed some similarities not only in the course of odd events but also in the form of harsh government reaction that was definitively not caused by any real threat and had obvious political aims. The fact alone that this strange experience of right-wing *coups d'état* repeated itself in several European states indicates that it became a kind of tactical method of politics in the given period.