



## THE MONUMENTS IN LATVIA DURING THREE OCCUPATIONS SINCE 1940

**M**onuments always become parts of rituals. They are tools in the hands of state power – in order to manipulate the consciousness of society. At the same time they can personify the will of the nation. What do want the Latvians? At least the destruction of the remainders of the three occupations, especially the last one. Therefore, the military equipment, tanks and cannons, which were based on pedestals in some town centres or along the roads were removed at first. In smaller villages the main problem of removing is the limitation of the local budget for such purposes.

Analysing the post-war monuments in Latvia, we have to point out that some values of the culture were created and they are to be preserved. Besides, it is worse to know how the monuments of the socialist epoch were built, i.e. the process of the construction, preservation and care taking. The motivation for the erection of a monument came from the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The controlled initiative from the municipalities was allowed. The aim of it was the chance to get the finances for public facilities, which were not possible to obtain for another purpose. On the other hand, the local governor could become popular among artists and architects – as patron of the arts. To minimize the favouritism, there were organized competitions and the winners could get the job for some years. For the most complicated urban situations, as they were nearby the historical core of Riga in the previous citadel, the process of designing lasted 15 years and the monument was not yet built, when the era of Perestroika came.

The preservation of monuments was the duty of the Ministry of Culture. The post-war political monuments were listed in the same way as archeological objects and pieces of architecture and art. For that category only some of the new-built monuments could get the significance of a monument in the sense of a cultural value, as the iconographic canons of the Communist Party did not encourage originality and creative imagination of artists. Every decade had its own feature. Up to the early sixties there was the demand of realistic figures or busts with the collar-stud. Later, when limited modernism was allowed in the urban space some megalitic heads of Lenin arrived. The principle of modern art – “Pars pro toto” – was realized. To make the image of the hero more majestic such accessories as flying wraps were used.

All monuments of Lenin were removed after autumn 1991. They are not inventorized, as the municipalities scare about the fact of stealing. Bronze and copper are thought after by thieves. Some municipalities decided very practically, as in Liepaja: The monument of Lenin was given to Mrs. Waltraut von Tiesenhausen – for the technical assistance to Liepaja.

It is clear that the idea-fix of arranging the rest of memorials of the post-war period in one place – as a sculpture garden will not be realized. Of course, Latvian art has some examples of fine sculpture in the realistic manner, as the famous bust “Lenin, the

dreamer“, made by Aleksandra Briede. Solid and lyrical in the same time, it lies in the funds of the Latvian State Museum of Art and will be preserved. For all that, the public is interested in the art of the Stalinistic epoch, what could be seen in the exhibition of paintings of the early fifties, prepared in autumn 1990 by the Museum “Arsenals” in Riga. On the other hand, it is perilous to rearrange open-air memorials considering the existing tendencies of neo-stalinism, similar to the tendencies of neo-fascism in Germany.

Peculiar is the case of transferring monuments. In such way there arrived in Riga one element of the famous Berlin Wall in autumn 1990 as a gift made by Berlin. The painted concrete block was set up in the main street of Riga-Lenina street. By the way, the old name of it – Brīvības (Freedom) street – was recently regiven to it. After a year it was moved to the Boulevard Circle, at the place of the bust of one of the most hated Latvian born communists, Arvids Pelse, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. The bust was taken away in autumn 1991, when after the collapse of the USSR, the real iconoclasm could start. Up to the end of the year the monuments of Lenin and his fellow-fighters were removed and their postaments destroyed.

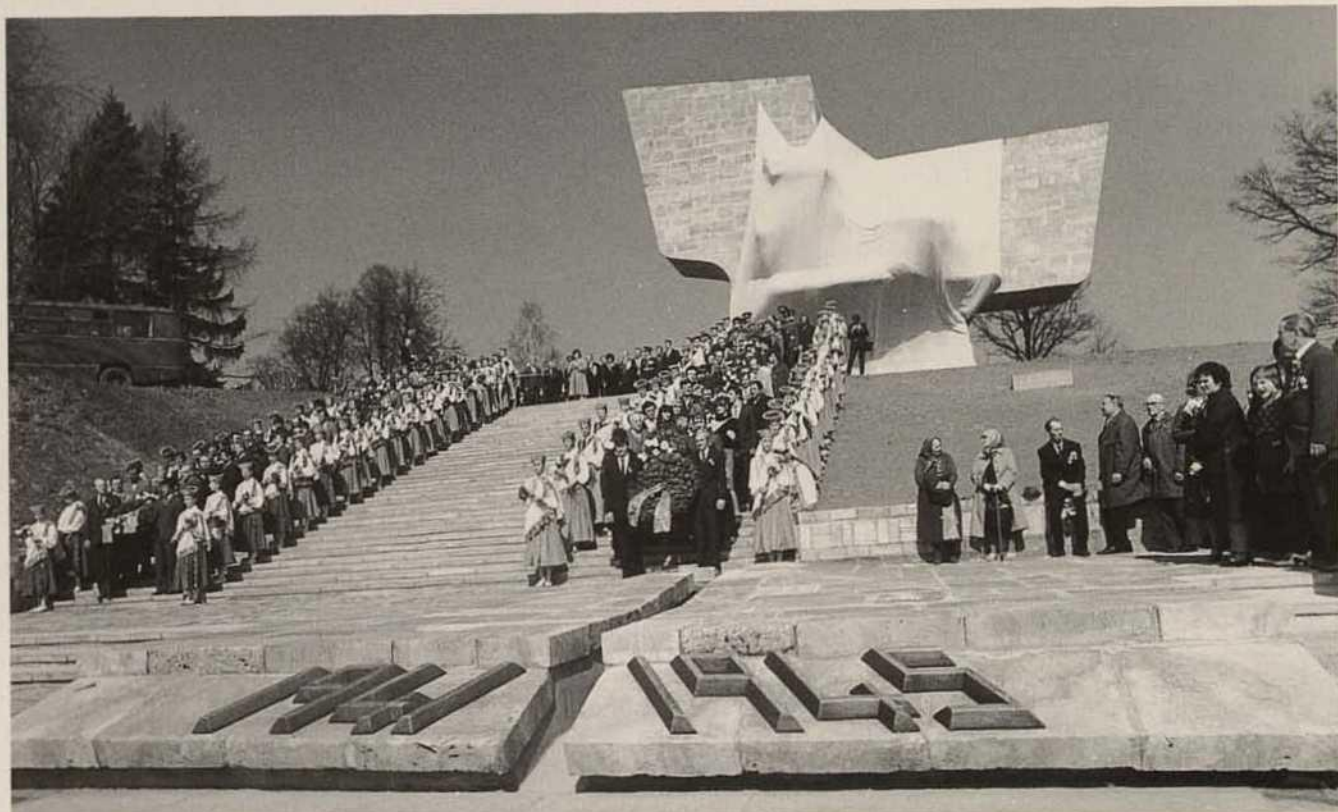
How to reconstruct the central squares of towns after removing these monuments – that is the question, addressed to the future. Some of them, especially in the smaller towns, were prepared for the setting of the figures of Lenin. Of course, they will become more lively. A lot of business advertisement will appear in the town landscapes, instead of the political ones in the past. Anyway it is a question of the changing life-style.

The period of transition in Latvia will change the attitude towards War Cemeteries. In Latvian usually exists the term “Brāļu kapi” (Brethren or Warrior Cemetery, “Bruderfriedhof” in German). The non-written rules of the occupation period government created the official point of view to those objects. They were divided into the Brethren Cemeteries of the Red (Soviet) Army and the rest. The first ones were included in the list of cultural monuments, together with the genuine values of Latvian prehistory. The second ones, antipodal, which included the war cemeteries of other military forces in Latvia, were not listed, yet registrated, and of course could not be preserved.

The Communist Party formed the procedure how the Brethren Cemeteries were to be tidied up. The most important accent was put on the help of the youth organisations: pioneers and komso-mol. The fact of taking care of the memorials of the army, who were the invaders in the year 1940, after signing the secret Hitler-Stalin pact, is dissembling and immoral.

The only way how to arrange the correct procedure of the inventorizing, listing, building and taking care of the war cemeteries might be the War Cemeteries Register of Latvia, which is to be prepared by the Documentation Centre for Monuments in Latvia. The existing data base includes all German and Russian war cemeteries of the First World War, as well as the ones of Red Army in the Second World War. Also half as much data of the

◁ *Monument of Lenin in Limbazi, erected in the seventies, destroyed*



*One of the Brethren Cemeteries in Latvia – large scale memorial in Valmiera during the opening ceremony in 1985*

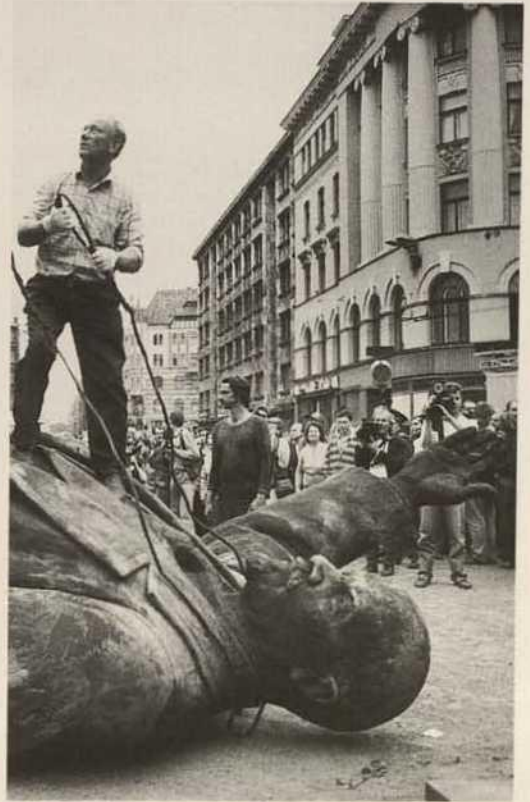
- ▷ *Monument of Lenin in Jurmala, erected in the seventies, now destroyed*
- ▷ *Monument of Lenin at the main street of Riga from 1950 till 1993*
- ▷ *Monument of Lenin during the process of demolition, August 1993*
- ▷ *The same street in the centre of Riga in the late thirties. The news-stand instead of Lenin's monument – will this be the future of this place?*

Wehrmacht Burials in Latvia are in the Documentation Centre. The Treatment between Latvia and Germany, Latvia and Russia and other states on the object of the care taking of war cemeteries is actual. Not only foreign countries, but Latvia too has burial places abroad, where deported persons died, both in East and West.

One aspect of War Cemeteries is most complicated. These are the Memorials, which are built and devoted to the Soviet Army as the liberator from fascism. In the post-war period there were

built a lot of monuments for this purpose, some of them as wide scale memorials: in Riga, Valmiera, Priekule, Valka, Tukums, Vietalva and others, totally up to 40. The art and architectural critics are to demonstrate their objectivity and judge them as the object of culture without any sense of politics. This process demands time, which is the best of judges.

The variety of forms of the monuments in the period between 1940 and 1990 corresponds to the complexity of the history of Latvia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first invasion of the Red Army in



1940 was too short to manage something like the destruction of monuments. During the second, the German invasion, some monuments were transformed. In Jelgava (Mitau) the monument, erected in 1938 and devoted to the Latvian independence was changed, as one of its heroes was the Black Knight, symbolizing the German invasion from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. After the war, in the second soviet period, it was demolished totally, together with the other ones, devoted to the Latvian independence. After May the 4<sup>th</sup> 1990, announcing the independence again, most of the pre-war time monuments were renovated.

The period of iconoclasm seems to go to its end. The biggest problem for Latvia in the field of preservation is the coordination of conservation politics by the Government, the local municipalities and public organizations, while new monuments are coming. The first ones were erected after the bloody events in January 1991, when five persons were killed in the very centre of Riga by the Russian commandos. Five solid stones stand at the places of the victims. People loved to put flowers at these places from the very day when this event took place. The artist and the architect only were to give the shape to this ritual.