

WHEN SOLDIERS OPEN FIRE ON A PROTEST. MASSACRES IN RIGA, TALLINN, AND MINSK IN 1905

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This article compares three of the most horrific shootings against protesters in Riga, Tallinn, and Minsk during the Revolution of 1905. The aim of this comparison is to find similarities in these events that would reflect the tsarist authorities' principles on the use of deadly force against protesters in general. The article also claims that shootings against protesters in the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire all together had more influence on radicalising the situation than it has been acknowledged in studies that give a general perspective of the Revolution of 1905.

Key words: Revolution of 1905, violence in revolutionary events, shootings against protesters, 13 January massacre in Riga, 16 October massacre in Tallinn, 18 October massacre in Minsk.

INTRODUCTION

The Revolution of 1905 was not as violent as the upheavals that followed the Bolshevik *coup d'état* of 1917, but, nevertheless, the first Russian Revolution brought a hitherto unprecedented degree of violence. All accounts of the number of people who were killed during the Revolution of 1905 are estimates that cannot give us any precise number, but it is obvious that altogether thousands of people lost their lives.¹

¹ Karjahärm 2015a, 125.

Violence was committed by various sides during the Revolution. Revolutionary organisations set off bombs and killed officials², workers attacked their supervisors³, peasants burned down landlords' manors.⁴ In times of chaos, people took part in looting and robbing.⁵ In many cities pro-tsarist mobs committed pogroms against Jewish communities.⁶ Battles between army units and insurgents took place.⁷ The government sent punitive expeditions that killed, beat, and exiled people into Siberia, often without any serious investigation of their actual involvement in what they were accused of.⁸ One especially tragic form of violence was when soldiers opened fire on a protest killing a large number of people at once.

This article concentrates on three shootings at protests in the Baltic provinces and Belarus. One of the aims of this article is to show similarities in these events that would reflect the tsarist authorities' principles on the use of deadly force against protests in general. The article also analyses the effect of these tragedies on society and shows how such events were used as propaganda by the opposite sides of the Revolution. The shootings that are being compared – Riga (13 January), Tallinn (16 October), and Minsk (18 October) – are the ones that in Latvia, Estonia, and Belarus, respectively, had overwhelmingly the largest number of victims.

Although shootings against protests in 1905 have been studied as isolated tragic events, they have never been compared from a regional perspective. Besides that, historiography of the Revolution of 1905 is lacking a study that would focus on the influence that the shootings against protesters had on the society

² Geifman 2012, 25.

³ Aitsam 2011, 44–45.

⁴ Schedewie 2012, 137; Karjahärm 2013, 117–118.

⁵ Floyd 1969, 79, 81.

⁶ Rawson 2006, 136.

⁷ Pushkareva 2005, 305.

⁸ Tyutyukin 2005, 381–382.

in general. Contemporary Belarusian historiography does not have any study that specialises on the topic of the Minsk shooting. In Latvia the most important work about the Riga shooting has been done by Līga Lapa, who has offered not only a detailed insight into the event, but also a critical analyses of some statements of prior historiography.⁹ Estonian journal *Tuna* published, in 2015, an article about the shooting in Tallinn.¹⁰ The last article prior to that, focusing on the event, was written by an Estonian communist Hans Pöögelman in 1930 in the Soviet Union.¹¹

The shootings that are the focus of this article took place in the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire. The Western borderlands were areas that saw the most violence. Poland and Latvia saw the most furious uprisings in all of the empire.¹² In Estonia the uprising was much less violent, but the number of people killed by the hands of the state was still very high.¹³ Finland and Lithuania were more peaceful compared to other areas in the region¹⁴. In Belarus there were many violent clashes,¹⁵ in Ukraine some of the most horrific pro-tsarist pogroms as well as the most notorious anti-tsarist mutiny in the navy took place.¹⁶ Abraham Ascher has pointed out that, out of all of the punitive expeditions sent out by the central government to various parts of the empire, the largest ones were sent to present-day Latvia and Estonia.¹⁷

Shootings against a crowd of people in Riga, Tallinn, and Minsk were not the only ones in the region. Poland saw many

⁹ Lapa 2007b, 96–119; Lapa 2007a, 87–108; Lapa 2008.

¹⁰ Kann 2015.

¹¹ Pöögelmann 1930, Nos. 123–126.

¹² Figes 2014, 185.

¹³ Kann 2020a, 25.

¹⁴ Baikelis 2011, 105, 107.

¹⁵ Chigrinov 2010, 556.

¹⁶ Hever 2008, 153; Pavlov 2008, 324–325.

¹⁷ Ascher 1988, 331.

tragic occasions where authorities opened fire against a crowd of people. The most notorious are the shootings in Warsaw and Łódź, but these happened in other Polish cities as well.¹⁸ Although there was no tragedy of that magnitude in Lithuania in 1905, similar events with fewer casualties did take place there as well; there were shootings in Vilnius and Šiauliai.¹⁹ In Belarus there were also shootings in other cities such as Vitebsk, Smarhon, and Polotsk.²⁰ In Vitebsk a clash between the workers and the army took place on the same day as the most tragic shooting in Minsk.²¹

It is clear that the deadly force used by the authorities was at times extremely disproportional. Sometimes soldiers' bullets hit not only participants of a protest, but also passers-by or even children who happened to be in the area.²² This article underlines with examples that such shootings did not have any pacifying effect on society, but rather the opposite. So why did they occur? Did they happen because the authorities in general supported a policy of being extremely harsh in putting down any public resistance? Did many unfortunate conditions just lead to tragic events at a time when there was much chaos and things easily got out of hand?

RADICALISING EFFECT

On 19 October 1905, two days after Tsar Nicolas II published a manifesto promising a constitution and political liberties to Russia's citizens, a telegram from Minsk City Council was

¹⁸ Kann 2020b, 62–63.

¹⁹ Karjahärm, Krastiņš, Tyla 1981, 43, 50; According to Zigmantas Kiaupa's book *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius: Baltu lanku leidyba, 2005) five people were killed in the Vilnius shooting.

²⁰ Chigrinov 2010, 556.

²¹ Kovkel', Yarmunsk 2000, 179.

²² Kann 2015, 95.

sent to the capital. In this telegram the council expressed gratitude for the manifesto, wished a long and happy reign to His Majesty and informed him of a very sad event in Minsk where the army “without any reason and without any warning” had opened sustained fire against a peaceful crowd of people, which had resulted in a great number of casualties and put the whole city in desperation and grief.²³ A few days later, a newspaper in Tallinn published a short account of the tragic event in Minsk, as did many other newspapers in the Russian Empire. The story claims that, before the shooting, the crowd had behaved in a disorderly manner and had destroyed property. Only after giving the people an opportunity to part ways did soldiers open fire on them as a means of self-defence.²⁴ It is hard to say how much this account was believed among the readers in Tallinn who were going through similar distress in their own city. Only a few days earlier, nearly a hundred people had been shot dead in the heart of Tallinn as soldiers opened fire on workers who had gathered in the market place near the building of the city council.²⁵ After the shooting, the governor of Estonia Aleksei Lopuhhin ordered posters to be stuck up in the city putting all the blame for the event on the participants of the protest.²⁶ Tallinn City Council did not agree with this account of events and wrote to the Minister of the Interior on 20 October, saying that the people who had been killed in Tallinn market place had not only behaved in a peaceful manner, but had also been of great help to the city government in keeping order.²⁷ The council also demanded an investigation to be carried out to find out the reasons for the shooting.²⁸

²³ Telegram from Minsk City Council to the Council of Ministers. Arshanski, Barashka 1926, 17.

²⁴ Teataja, 22.10.1905.

²⁵ Kann 2015, 94–95.

²⁶ *Uus Aeg*, 19.10.1905.

²⁷ *Eesti Postimees*, 19.10.1905.

²⁸ Kann 2015, 96.

News of the shootings at protests spread far beyond the city where they had taken place and the information came not only from newspapers. For example, socialist activists spoke to a workers' crowd in Tallinn informing it of the June events in the Polish city Łódź²⁹ where an uprising had broken out after the army had opened fire on a crowd of people.³⁰ Such events had a radicalising effect on society. As is well known, the catalyst for the Revolution of 1905 in Russia was the shooting at a protest in St. Petersburg near the Winter Palace.³¹ News of Bloody Sunday caused an unprecedented wave of strikes. On many occasions, state violence incited more violence from the part of revolutionaries or society in general. Violence from the part of revolutionaries resulted in more repression from the authorities. It grew into a vicious circle of violence and radicalisation. Bloody Sunday has always received much attention in studies that give a general account of the Revolution of 1905. Other massacres – including the ones that took place in the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire – are usually mentioned in one or two sentences as isolated tragic events and sometimes are not even mentioned at all.³² Taking into account the radicalising effect of the shootings, it seems that their importance has been underestimated in the historiography of the Revolution of 1905. If one looked at their combined influence on different areas of the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire, it would become obvious that their effect of radicalising the situation had a significant impact on the history of the Revolution of 1905 in general.

²⁹ Kaup 1957, 27.

³⁰ Hüchtker 2011, 93.

³¹ Kusber 2011, 67.

³² For example, the following important studies about the Revolution of 1905 contain a whole chapter on Bloody Sunday, as one could expect, but the massacres in Riga, Tallinn, and Minsk are only mentioned in one or a few sentences, or not mentioned at all: Korelin, Tyutyukin 2005; Ascher 1988; Harcave 1970.

The beginning of the Revolution in Poland is marked by the event in Grzybowski square in Warsaw on 13 November 1904 (1 November in the Julian Calendar) when a workers' protest against the recruitment of men for the Russo–Japanese war resulted in shooting between soldiers and an armed socialist group.³³ When it comes to the radicalising effect of the event, the fact that revolutionaries from the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*) opened fire first is not as important as the fact that the army shooting on people caused distress and anger against the authorities. This event, with dozens of casualties, became a trigger for unrest in a society that had economic, national, and agrarian tensions. After the shooting in Warsaw, many violent clashes took place in other Polish cities and many new armed socialist groups were formed.³⁴ As already mentioned above, the catalyst for the Łódź uprising in June of 1905 was the opening of fire on a crowd of people by soldiers. The Łódź uprising became one of the largest uprisings in the Russian Empire in 1905. Authorities sent thousands of soldiers to Łódź to violently suppress the resistance. Inhabitants of the city built barricades and fighting lasted for days.³⁵

On 13 January – only four days after Bloody Sunday – there was an exchange of fire in Riga between armed revolutionaries and the army, who was blocking the movement of a protest near the bridge over the River Daugava. After a soldier got hit with a bullet, the army shot on people for several minutes³⁶ and some people tried to escape over the frozen river; dozens of people were killed.³⁷ Aivars Stranga has brought attention to a probable link between the assumption that the shootings both in

³³ Majewski 2015, 33.

³⁴ Zdrada 2015, 764–765.

³⁵ Wojtasik 2007, 45.

³⁶ Lapa 2008.

³⁷ Bērziņš 2000, 338–339.

St. Petersburg and Riga radicalised the public mood in Latvia and the fact that, in the spring of 1905, Latvian socialists started to set off bombs.³⁸ Comparison of the revolutionary violence in Estonia and Latvia has led to the conclusion that the fact that the shooting in Riga took place before that in Tallinn probably is a major reason why the uprising in Latvia was much more violent than that in Estonia.³⁹ In Lithuania no tragedy of such magnitude took place at all during 1905 and the resistance remained more peaceful than in Poland or Latvia.⁴⁰ There are many reasons for violent uprisings and it would be an overstatement to claim that they only happened due to the radicalising effect of state violence, but it may also have contributed to such a development of events.

The shooting in Tallinn on 16 October had a radicalising effect on the local socialists and on society in general. Some influential socialists such as Aleksander Kesküla spoke of the need to take up arms as a reaction to the tragic event.⁴¹ Only a day after the shooting in Tallinn an altercation between soldiers and a crowd of people happened near the postal office in Tartu, resulting in the death of one person. A local newspaper stated that the situation in Tartu had become more tense after a telegram had been spread in the city informing of the killing of 80 people in Tallinn by soldiers.⁴² It is important to keep in mind that, although in Estonia strikes, protests and some minor looting incidents did take place, there had not been any substantial violent resistance before that. This changed after the shooting in Tallinn. Among other circumstances, there is a probable link between the radicalising effect of the shooting on 16 October in Tallinn and the setting out of workers from Tallinn to the

³⁸ Stranga 2006, 573–574, 583.

³⁹ Kann 2020a, 23.

⁴⁰ Baikelis 2011, 105.

⁴¹ Karjahärm 2015a, 91.

⁴² *Postimees*, 21.10.1905.

countryside in December 1905 and the beginning of the burning of the Baltic German landlords' manors. Within a week, over a hundred manors were damaged.⁴³

Minsk prosecutor Bibikov wrote to the capital that, because of the shooting of 18 October, the local governor's life was put in severe danger.⁴⁴ In Belarusian historiography the ensuing rise of violence has also been linked to the shooting. The Socialist-Revolutionary party organisation committed many acts of terror in response to the shooting. Among other actions, they also tried to assassinate the governor, but the bomb that was meant to kill him did not explode.⁴⁵

If one looks into the details of these shootings, it becomes obvious that the reasons for opening fire on people were vague. Although it may have been self-defence if someone from the crowd opened fire on the soldiers, that was often not the case. On many occasions, the army shot at crowds of people when there was no imminent threat to the soldiers' lives. Although one can dispute eye-witness accounts, it is a solid fact that, while a soldier got hit with a bullet in Riga,⁴⁶ in Tallinn and Minsk no soldier sustained any injury. There were voices in society already in 1905, which warned that the army would not hesitate to use deadly force. In January 1905, the Estonian liberal newspaper *Postimees* warned people that when soldiers arrive at a protest, "a possibility of a bloodshed is not far away anymore".⁴⁷

⁴³ Karjahärm, Pullat 1975, 140.

⁴⁴ Telegram from Minsk District Prosecutor Bibikov to the Minister of Justice. 20 October 1905, p. 292.

⁴⁵ Chigrinov 2010, 556; Sergeenkova 2015, 50.

⁴⁶ Lapa 2007b, 119.

⁴⁷ *Postimees*, 14.01.1905, 3.

SHOOTINGS AS A PRETEXT FOR UPRISING: RIGA

The shooting at a protest in Riga happened during the January strike of 1905. After Bloody Sunday, hundreds of thousands of workers all over the empire went on strike in solidarity with St. Petersburg workers. Most often, striking workers demanded the improvement of their conditions, but sometimes the demands were political. The protesters in Riga marched through the city. When the protest consisting of workers and students was trying to cross the bridge over the river Daugava to reach another part of the city, soldiers blocked their way.⁴⁸ Līga Lapa has indicated that one of the reasons why the tragedy in Riga happened is that the workers had been encouraged by the fact that, although they had already had confrontations with soldiers, their movement through the city had not been effectively stopped and interactions had ended peacefully. This may have created a false sense of security in a situation where workers, once again, were eye-to-eye with the soldiers. It is possible that they did not really know enough to fear what was about to happen. Lapa also writes that, although some sources claim otherwise, the revolutionaries among the protest did open fire on the soldiers. There were also soldiers that got hit with bullets.⁴⁹

Latvian pro-socialist newspaper *Cīņa* wrote in January 1905 that the shooting had about 70 victims, including those who died from injuries a few days later. In addition, more than a 100 people were injured.⁵⁰ The figure of 70 victims has also been mentioned in Latvian historiography. The number of people who suffered injuries has been estimated to be over 200.⁵¹ Later studies have revealed that the number of victims

⁴⁸ Bērziņš 2000, 338–339.

⁴⁹ Lapa 2007b, 117.

⁵⁰ Krastinsh 1956, 14.

⁵¹ Bleiere 2008, 59.

clearly exceeded 50, but there could still be more victims we know nothing about.⁵²

When it comes to the radicalising effect of the shootings, it is important to stress that the revolutionary parties actively used massacres and their horrific details in their publications to incite anger in society and to call upon them to use violence. After the Riga shooting, the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (*Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku partija*) leaflet claimed that soldiers had attacked an unarmed peaceful protest, adding that the tsar and his “henchmen” would not escape swift punishment. The leaflet calls on people to take up arms, saying that “the tsar is sending armed soldiers and Cossacks against us. The tsar is ordering his servants to shoot and stab workers. Well, we are not going against those murderers with bare hands any more, we will arm ourselves, stock up on weapons, we will give a proper response to the attacks of these savages, revenge for our fallen comrades! Comrades! To arms! Death to tyrants!”⁵³ After the shooting in Riga, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party Riga committee also issued a leaflet entitled “Arm yourselves!” It also states that a peaceful rally that did no harm to anyone was shot at following the orders of the tsarist government. The leaflet asks a rhetorical question: “What should we do now, comrades?” And it answers itself: “We only have two options: freedom and happiness or the grave. Fight! Fight to the last drop of blood, to the last person!”⁵⁴

This kind of appeal was not uncommon in revolutionary publications regarding the shootings, but rather typical. After the shooting of 18 October, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party Minsk group issued a leaflet which stated that

⁵² Lapa 2007b, 119.

⁵³ Latvian Socialdemocratic Labour Party leaflet from January of 1905. Krastinsh 1956, 27.

⁵⁴ Russian Socialdemocratic Labour Party Riga Committee leaflet from January of 1905. Krastinsh 1956, 17.

“Autocracy cannot live without the blood of the people and, as long as autocracy exists, blood will not stop pouring in a wide stream ... We will take revenge. We will drench this autocratic ‘constitution’ with the blood of autocrats and the tsar’s henchmen— only in this way will we achieve freedom. Rise up, take up arms!”⁵⁵

After the shooting of 16 October, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party Tallinn committee produced a leaflet addressed at the soldiers stationed in the city which stated that the tsarist government was forcing them to shoot at their brothers and called upon them to give their arms to the workers to fight against the government.⁵⁶ It is also worth noting that the first time a call for armed resistance appeared in an Estonian socialist leaflet was in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party Tartu group leaflet of 10 January, published as a response to Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg.⁵⁷

AUTHORITIES

The idea that shootings were part of a pre-planned battle with the intention of killing workers just for killing’s sake is an exaggeration that fits the revolutionary socialist parties’ narrative, but the question of the central government’s role and responsibility in such events is very pertinent. Although many such events with numerous casualties had occurred throughout the year, in October, the governors both in Tallinn and Minsk were still giving orders to the army to use firearms in case of any unrest, without specifying that this should be done only in

⁵⁵ RSDLP proclamation 19 October 1905. *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Belorussii 1905–1907. Dokumenty i materialy*. Minsk: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk BCCP, 1955, 284–285.

⁵⁶ Saat 1963, 381.

⁵⁷ Karjahärm 2015b, 45.

case of an imminent threat to soldiers' life.⁵⁸ It seems that no effective policy was implemented to try to avoid killings during protests. Reactions from the central authorities regarding the responsibility for the shootings both in Tallinn and Minsk were in favour of the governors and the army.

As the Russian Empire was an autocratic state, it is important to ask what was the tsar's opinion on the use of violence against people. First of all, tsar's decisions could have created conditions for such shootings to take place (urging the use of violence and appointing persons who shared this view to high positions). Secondly, the tsar himself gave direct orders to use violence (sending out a punitive expedition with the mission to suppress resistance). Thirdly, one can also assume that the fact that the tsar and his government was in favour of using violence could have also given the governors, the army and other authorities an impression that using violence was an approved option.

On many occasions, Nicholas II was in favour of using harsh violence to put down resistance.⁵⁹ Even during one of the most crucial moments of the Revolution – the October strike – he was at first of a mind to name a dictator who would violently crush the Revolution, and delayed signing the manifesto which promised a constitution.⁶⁰ When Nicholas II received a report that at the beginning of December of 1905 the army had negotiated with the insurgents in Tukums in the Courland Governorate to end the confrontation, he was dissatisfied with such approach and expressed the view that the city should have been destroyed.⁶¹ When punitive expeditions were sent to present-day Estonia and Latvia, he gave them direct orders to show no

⁵⁸ Report from the Head of the Minsk gendarmie. 20 October 1905. Arshanski, Barashka 1926, 20; Governor Lopuhhin's report to Ministry of the Interior 20 October 1905. *Estonian National Archive* – EAA.27.1.123.

⁵⁹ Wortman 2008, 41.

⁶⁰ Ascher 1988, 227–228.

⁶¹ Tyutyukin 2005, 380.

mercy to anyone suspected of collaborating with the revolutionaries. He promised that the leaders of the punitive expedition would not be punished if they were too harsh, but warned that they would be punished if they were not harsh enough.⁶²

An influential role in choosing the methods to counter the revolution was also in the hands of the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. In 1905, the Prime Minister was count Sergey Witte who, in his memoirs, claimed to be quite liberal and not in favour of brutality. Historian Toomas Karjahärm has however written that, at least when it comes to sending punitive expeditions to present-day Estonia and Latvia, the version in Witte's memoirs and the information from archive documents does not fit together.⁶³ In 1905, the ministers of the interior were Piotr Sviatopolk-Mirsky (until January 1905), Alexander Bulygin (until October 1905), and Pyotr Durnovo (until April 1906). While Sviatopolk-Mirsky was known more as a liberal in favour of reforms,⁶⁴ Durnovo leaned in favour of measures to suppress resistance.⁶⁵ Assistant Minister of the Interior was Dmitri Trepov who had won the trust of the tsar and become politically even more influential than the ministers. Trepov was widely known to support harsh measures in putting down resistance.⁶⁶

At the local level, a major role in keeping order was in the hands of the governors. Governors decided if it was necessary to send out military units to protect public order. Governors Kurlov and Lopuhhin were seen by the public as being responsible for the shootings. They were the ones who gave instructions to the army before the shootings.⁶⁷ One example of how

⁶² Kann 2020a, 11.

⁶³ Karjahärm 1998, 113.

⁶⁴ Harcave 1970, 48–50.

⁶⁵ Rawson 2006, 143–144.

⁶⁶ Ascher 1988, 148, 246; Pavlov 2008, 263.

⁶⁷ Kann 2015, 93; Telegram from governor Kurlov to Department of Police. 19 October. Arshanski, Barashka 1926.

much the governors were seen to be responsible for everything that took place in their governorates is that, even in historiography, the opinion has been spread that it had been the governor of Livland Michail Paschkow who gave the order for the shooting in Riga, when in fact he had been in St Petersburg on vacation at the time.⁶⁸

TRAGEDY BEFORE THE TSAR'S MANIFESTO: TALLINN

The shootings in Tallinn and Minsk took place during the October strike. The October strike was the biggest strike movement ever seen in the history of the Russian Empire. It began as a railroad workers' strike and evolved into a general strike in which industrial workers, postal and telegraph workers, as well as employees from many other fields of life participated.⁶⁹ Although strikers made different kinds of economic demands, all kinds of organisations, institutions and protests, both those of workers' and other movements, demanded that the Russian Empire should have a constitution and an elected parliament.⁷⁰ Although, on 17 October, Tsar Nicholas II granted a manifesto promising a constitution, this happened only under the enormous pressure of an unprecedented general strike and violent clashes.⁷¹ Both in Tallinn and Minsk a few days before the shooting in their respective city, the governors gave instructions that, in case of unrest, firearms should be used. These orders are likely the crucial detail that led to tragic shootings a few days later, although the conditions that led to the shooting were somewhat different in each city.

⁶⁸ Lapa 2007b, 118.

⁶⁹ Pushkareva 2005, 293, 296–299; Schenk 2007, 62.

⁷⁰ Figs 1996, 189–190.

⁷¹ Pavlov 2008, 357.

There had been some looting in the heart of Tallinn on 14 October. No one was killed, but buildings were damaged, and a fire broke out. The governor admitted that the army had also behaved in an unprofessional manner; some soldiers had even taken vodka from the buffet of the burning wooden theatre building instead of putting the fire out. On the next day, the workers' representatives and the city council held talks in which they decided that, with the governor's permission, the workers would take responsibility for keeping order in the city. The next night there were no major disturbances in the city. Despite that, some soldiers had beaten a few workers who were keeping order. On 16 October, workers made new demands. Among other things, they demanded firearms for self-defense. The protest in Tallinn gathered near the building of the city council in order to hear the answer to their demands that were being discussed by the members of the city council and the governor. During this time, someone, whose identity has remained unknown, called the governor and informed him that the protest was destroying property. The governor ordered soldiers to be sent to deal with the protest. Thereafter, he received a call that stated that the information about the protest behaving in a disorderly fashion had been false. The governor claims in his report to the Minister of the Interior that he tried to call off the soldiers, but it was already too late. Soldiers arrived in the market square where the protest was taking place. Without giving people enough time to disperse, soldiers started shooting into the crowd. At first the shooting took place in an organised manner; thereafter just random shots were fired. Among the victims there were not only workers participating in the protest but also people who were just walking by or coming from the nearby Jaani Church. Although the governor wrote that someone from the protest had used a revolver, it seems unlikely or at least doubtful as none of the soldiers sustained any injuries and no arms were ever found among the

killed protesters. A policeman who was present at the shooting later said in an interview that he had not heard any shots before the army opened fire.⁷²

The day after the shooting, governor Lopuhhin ordered posters to be pasted up throughout the city where he claimed that the speakers who had addressed the protest had been calling for a revolt. The governor threatened that the army also had machine guns which could be used against people if they did not obey the orders.⁷³

In 1955, historian Hillar Saha published an article about the casualties in which he identified 86 victims by name and pointed out that there were at least four victims whose identity remained unknown.⁷⁴ In 2015, Tallinn City Archive published a research that identified 95 victims of the shooting.⁷⁵ As a reminder of how much the tragic event meant to the inhabitants of the city, a funeral procession was organised in Tallinn on 20 October 1905 with tens of thousands of people participating.⁷⁶ In 1905, it became a common practice to hold enormous protests at the funeral processions of victims of such events. Just like in Tallinn, there were huge crowds of people attending the funerals of the victims of other shootings. Although the shooting in Vilnius on the same day, 16 October, as the shooting in Tallinn had much fewer casualties, tens of thousands of people also attended the funeral procession there.⁷⁷

⁷² Kann 2015, 93–95.

⁷³ *Uus Aeg*, 21.10.1905.

⁷⁴ Saha 1955, 321–325.

⁷⁵ Tallinna Uuel turul tapetud ja haavata saanud inimeste nimekiri. 2015, 321–325.

⁷⁶ Kann 2015, 97.

⁷⁷ Kiaupa 2005, 213.

SHAPING THE PERCEPTION OF THE SHOOTING: MINSK

On 12 October, Minsk governor Pavel Kurlov received a telegram from Dmitri Trepov, Assistant Minister of the Interior, which stated that, due to increasing unrest on streets, strong measures of repression should be taken and the use of armed force should not be avoided. Trepov wrote that special attention should be given to the protection of state institutions.⁷⁸ This kind of call to use arms may have had a crucial influence on what happened in Minsk a few days later. It is also likely that other governors, including the governor of Estonia, received telegrams of a similar nature from the Ministry.

Although governor Kurlov had received information about the tsar's manifesto of 17 October promising political freedom to citizens, he was in no hurry to publish information about it. People had heard from other sources about the manifesto that also promised freedom of gathering and gathered near the Minsk railroad station on 18 October. People were celebrating and listening to speeches that were critical of the authorities. At one point the army opened fire on this protest.

In his telegram of 19 October to the Police Department, governor Kurlov accused the protest of behaving in a disorderly manner and shifted responsibility for the shooting away from himself. His general assessment was that the behaviour of the protesters themselves had led to the shooting. Kurlov wrote that a crowd of ten thousand people had approached the railroad station, shooting from revolvers and carrying red flags. The governor claimed that when the Head of the local Railroads Police Department had called him and asked for further

⁷⁸ Telegram from Assistant Minister of the Interior Trepov to Minsk governor. *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Belorussii 1905–1907. Dokumenty i materialy.* Minsk: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk BCCP, 1955, 270.

instructions, he had ordered the use of firearms only as a last resort in case of violence. He described how people had continued to behave in a provocative manner not only on their way to the station, but also in the square in front of it. He claimed that they had insulted soldiers, tried to take away their arms, shot from revolvers and vandalised the station. The governor also wrote that the army had opened fire after the third warning had been given to the crowd.⁷⁹

As already mentioned above, news of the shooting in Minsk reached newspapers far afield. It is remarkable to observe how the authorities tried to influence the perception of such events. The story about the event in Tallinn newspaper *Teataja*, that has the word “official” added to the text, is basically the same version of events that governor Kurlov sent to the Police Department. It says that a crowd of “ten thousand” “carrying red flags” and “shooting from revolvers” had walked to the railroad station where they had acted in a “provocative” manner with the soldiers and vandalised the building. The article states that the army had opened fire only after the “third warning”.⁸⁰ It is important to keep in mind that local newspapers relied on the central newspapers for information about events happening in far-away cities. Some local newspapers also had correspondents in remote cities who would send them telegrams about what had happened, but most newspapers did not. Therefore, one should consider that the influence of the articles in the major Russian newspapers on shaping the perception of revolutionary events was much wider than only their own readership.

Minsk City Council wrote to the Council of Ministers on 21 October that the official description of the Minsk shooting

⁷⁹ Telegram from governor Kurlov to Department of Police. 19 October. Arshanski, Barashka 1926, 18.

⁸⁰ *Teataja*, 22.10.1905, 3.

that had been published in Russian newspapers (referred particularly to *Russkoye Slovo*) was distorting the truth. The council wrote that there indeed had been some windows broken in the railroad station, but there had been no other acts of vandalism. They also stressed that the troops had not limited themselves to a single shot against the crowd of people, but many shots had been fired for several minutes. Soldiers had continued shooting as people had been leaving. After the collective shots, some soldiers had fired separate shots towards people, and even the police had shot at people who had been trying to escape the tragedy. The council added that all of this had also been confirmed by the prosecutor's inquiry and that the prosecutor had sent a report about it to the Minister of Justice.⁸¹ Minsk District Prosecutor Bibikov did indeed send reports of that nature to the capital. On 19 October, he described that, after the Head of the local Railroad Police had passed authority in the railroad station area over to the military, soldiers had surrounded the station building and the square that had been full of people. The prosecutor wrote that, according to the police, the crowd had entered the building shouting anti-government slogans, but without any violence. According to one of the commanders, people had yelled "Hurray" as they had hit four officers on the square. The soldiers had had an impression that their officers were being beaten and they opened fire without receiving any direct order to do so. Soldiers standing on the other side of the square had thought that the shots had come from the crowd and so they also had opened fire. He also stated that soldiers had shot and killed even those individuals who had been running away from the crowd. It is important to note that the prosecutor confirms that

⁸¹ Telegram from Minsk city council to the chairman of Council of Ministers. 21 October 1905. *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Belorussii 1905–1907. Dokumenty i materialy*. Minsk: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk BCCP, 1955, 293.

no one among the soldiers or policemen had sustained any injuries.⁸²

Governor Kurlov's claim that he had ordered the use of fire-arms only as a very last resort is in many ways controversial. The Head of the Minsk gendarmerie wrote that during a meeting of the governor, local officials and military commanders on 12 October, Kurlov had given clear instructions that arms should be used in case of unrest.⁸³ Prosecutor Bibikov wrote, on 20 October, to the Minister of Justice that "even today, the governor warned me again that in case of any crowd movement he will give all of the soldiers an order to shoot ruthlessly". The prosecutor added that the mood among the residents of Minsk had been such at that moment that the governor's life had been in danger. The prosecutor also remarked that the governor had been in such a mental state that it had been impossible to predict what kind of orders he was going to give.⁸⁴ Kurlov himself claimed in his memoirs (first published in emigration in the 1920s) that the night after the Minsk shooting the prosecutor's aide had delivered to his residence a letter from the prosecutor strongly recommending his resignation. Kurlov claimed that he had been called to St. Petersburg the next day as his position as a governor had been in jeopardy due to reports sent by the council and the prosecutor, but that he had been able to get the Minister of Justice on his side after showing him the outrageous letter he had received from the prosecutor the night after the shooting.⁸⁵

⁸² Telegram from Minsk District Prosecutor Bibikov to the Minister of Justice. 19 October 1905. *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Belorussii 1905–1907. Dokumenty i materialy*. Minsk: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk BCCP, 1955, 289.

⁸³ Report from the Head of the Minsk gendarmie. 20 October 1905. Arshanski, Barashka 1926, 20.

⁸⁴ Telegram from Minsk District Prosecutor Bibikov to the Minister of Justice. 20 October 1905. *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Belorussii 1905–1907. Dokumenty i materialy*. Minsk: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk BCCP, 1955, 292.

⁸⁵ Sergeenkova 2015, 56.

Whatever the circumstances, the fact is that governor Kurlov remained in office, which shows that the government did not see any reason for Kurlov to resign over what had happened on 18 October in Minsk. He remained in position despite the reports sent by the city council and the prosecutor.

CONCLUSIONS

Revolutionary time, when there were many altercations between protesters and the authorities created dangerous conditions that led to shootings at protesters. Although all of the shootings examined in this article had local unfortunate conditions leading to such events, there is also the wider responsibility of state policy that contributed to these tragedies happening. Some of those shootings took place after someone from the crowd opened fire on the soldiers, but often they occurred in situations where the crowd did not present any direct threat to soldiers' lives. Among the casualties were also people who had nothing to do with the protest. These events indicate that the tsarist state did not implement a sufficient policy that might have tried to prevent such tragedies from happening.

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KAD KARASPĒKS ATKLĀJ UGUNI PRET PROTESTĒTĀJIEM. 1905. GADA SLAKTIŅI RĪGĀ, TALLINĀ UN MINSKĀ

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Zinātniskās intereses: 1905. gada revolūcija, Baltijas reģiona vēsture 20. gadsimta pirmajās desmitgadēs.

Rakstā tiek salīdzinātas trīs visaiņainākās protestētāju apšaušanas Rīgā, Tallinā un Minskā 1905. gada revolūcijas laikā. Salīdzinājuma mērķis ir atrast šajās norisēs līdzības, kas atspoguļotu carisko varas iestāžu vispārējos principus attiecībā uz nāvējoša spēka lietošanu pret protestētājiem. Rakstā tiek secināts, ka uguns atklāšana pret protestētājiem Krievijas impērijas rietumu pierobežas teritorijā kopumā ir atstājusi lielāku ietekmi uz situācijas radikālizāciju, nekā ir ticis atzīts apkopojošos pētījumos par 1905. gada revolūciju.

Atslēgas vārdi: 1905. gada revolūcija, vardarbība revolūcijas laikā, protestētāju apšaušana, 13. janvāra slaktiņš Rīgā, 16. oktobra slaktiņš Tallinā, 18. oktobra slaktiņš Minskā.

Kopsavilkums

1905. gada revolūcija nebija tik vardarbīga kā norises pēc boļševiku veiktā 1917. gada valsts apvērsuma, tomēr pirmajai Krievijas revolūcijai bija augsts vardarbības līmenis. Viena īpaši traģiska vardarbības forma bija karavīru šaušana uz protestētājiem, vienlaikus nogalinot lielu cilvēku skaitu. Šādi notikumi tika pieredzēti vairākkārt daudzās Krievijas impērijas daļās. Raksta uzmanības centrā ir trīs protestētāju apšaušanas epizodes Baltijas provincēs un Baltkrievijā. Rakstā salīdzinātās šaušanas epizodes – Rīgā (13. janvārī), Tallinā (16. oktobrī) un Minskā (18. oktobrī) – bija ar vislielāko upuru skaitu attiecīgi Latvijā, Igaunijā un Baltkrievijā. Viens no raksta mērķiem ir atklāt šajās norisēs līdzības, kas atspoguļotu carisko varas iestāžu vispārējos principus attiecībā uz nāvējoša spēka lietošanu pret protestētājiem.

Aplūkotās šaušanas epizodes notika samērā atšķirīgos apstākļos. Rīgā uguns tika atklāta revolūcijas sākumā notikušā janvāra streika laikā. Tallinā un Minskā šaušana notika oktobra streika laikā. Rīgā konflikts starp protestētājiem un karavīriem izvērās slaktiņā brīdī, kad karavīri mēģināja apturēt protestētāju došanos uz citu pilsētas daļu. Tallinā karavīri atklāja uguni pret protestētājiem, kuri bija sapulcējušies pilsētas centrā, gaidot atbildi uz strādnieku izvirzītajām prasībām. Minskā karavīri šāva uz pūli, kas bija sanācis, lai svinētu 17. oktobrī izdoto cara manifestu. Jāņem vērā plašākais šo šaušanas epizožu konteksts – revolūcijas laikā uguns pret protestētājiem tika atklāta arī daudzās citās pilsētās (piemēram, Sanktpēterburgā, Lodzā, Varšavā utt.). Tāpēc ir vietā jautājums, ko varas iestādes darīja, lai novērstu šādu traģēdiju atkārtošanos. Lai gan visos trijos gadījumos līdz šaušanai noveda vietējie apstākļi, šādu traģisku iznākumu veicināja arī valsts politika, uz kuru gulstas vispārējā atbildība par notikušo. Rakstā atklāts, ka varas iestādes deva norādījumus militārpersonām, ka ugunsieroču pielietošana pret protestētājiem nemieru gadījumā ir pieņemams risinājums. Tiesa, dažas šaušanas epizodes notika pēc tam, kad kāds no pūļa bija raidījis šāvienus pret karavīriem, taču šaušanas bieži notika situācijā, kad pūlis neradīja nekādu tiešu draudu kāda dzīvībai. Upuru vidū bija arī cilvēki, kuriem ar protestu nebija nekāda sakara. Šie notikumi rāda, ka cariskā valsts pietiekamā mērā neīstenoja tādu politiku, kas varētu mēģināt novērst šādas traģēdijas.

Rakstā tiek arī analizēta šo traģēdiju ietekme uz sabiedrību un parādīts, kā šādus notikumus saviem propagandas nolūkiem izmantoja revolūcijas pretējie spēki. Šaušana uz protestētājiem radikalizēja situāciju

sabiedrībā. Revolucionāri noskaņotās partijas izmantoja šādas norises savos izdevumos, lai kurinātu dusmas pret varas iestādēm. Savukārt varas iestādes šajās traģēdijās vainoja pašus protestētājus.

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