

‘This Ugly Matter’: The Curious History of the Committee to Protect the Youth from Harmful Literature, Latvia 1926-1937

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[This is a preliminary draft for a full-length article. I am unabashedly using the conference, other panel contributors, chair, discussant, and audience members as an early review board for future drafts. As such, in places, this draft will be shorter on detail and more interested in presenting some of the larger issues. The article ready draft will include more quotations from meetings and appeals, more discussion of the process and format of the committee, and iron out some of the details]

The war to end all wars, World War One, rendered the political, economic and social fabric of European society. After the War, revolutions, armistices, and peace treaties, a patchwork quilt of new states replaced the old order. Roughly fifteen new states entered the international stage. Equally seismic shifts in culture reverberated across the continent: literature, music, and visual arts experimented with revolutionary new forms and radically different content. Massive population loss and war destruction complicated post-War economic recovery, but within economic circles new circles of wealth, new markets and opportunities redefined economic activity. In gender relations, women’s enfranchisement was but the pinnacle of a ‘brave new world.’ The Republic of Latvia was a part and parcel of all of these changes. The birth of the state was a part of the revolutionary collapse of empires (Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman), but also a check on Soviet revolutionary expansion. The War set off unimaginable population displacement and massive physical damage, which burdened the new state for more than a decade, yet did not halt the creation of a radically new economic system: where a landed nobility had their land expropriated and an industrial society as a part of a larger empire, was replaced with agrarian small holding. Similarly, Latvia’s authors, and artists mimicked larger European trends, occasionally with flashes of localizing brilliance and ingenuity. In gender relations, women could vote, were elected to the Constituent Assembly, pushed their way into universities and professions heretofore almost the exclusive domain of men. In Latvia, as across Europe, however, these radical changes were ushered in by war and disruption; with peace and a return to ‘normalcy’ a general backlash grew in the second half of the 1920s and defined much of a new order in the 1930s. This backlash was an amorphous phenomenon with a motley crew of supporters and fellow travelers across a host of issues and not the organized program of any circle of activists or political party (although the same players frequently recur across many issues). Rather, just as the defenders of a clear break from the past continued to press their cases for continued and sustained change throughout the 1920s, an equally and at times more vocal group decried the excesses of recent changes. If they did not question the value of the new state, they did long for much of what else had been the societal norms before the War and Revolution. This conference paper is an examination of this mood with a focus on youth, morality and censorship. The paper, however, is also a discussion of how powers given to the state for poorly defined purposes can come to be misused and abused. This theme extends the subject matter into

the 1930s, the ‘dark valley’ of twentieth century European history¹, and into contemporary relevance as well.

By the mid 1920s in the Republic of Latvia, newspapers churned out a daily allotment of the excesses of modern life: scandalous photographs of Josephine Baker, and/or Berlin cabarets, local suicides caused by unrequited love, bandit tales (domestic and international), technological innovations, and indecipherable modern art. Many of these items were presented with a curious mixture of bafflement, disdain and approval – Josephine Baker was exotic to Latvians, challenged stereotypes of racial beauty and appearance, but was also something completely foreign and different. As early as the late nineteenth century, when national identity ‘awakened,’ Latvian activists were divided between a tendency to embrace the modern and cosmopolitan world, and those that looked to a noble peasant past and anchored Latvian identity in a traditional, rural mould (Many of these activists particularly worried about the influence of the city on the purity of the Latvian nation).² Each of these viewpoints coexisted for decades with each enjoying times of greater popular acceptance. By the mid 1920s, the pendulum seemed to swing away from change and back to tradition, and key to this shift was newspaper accounts (and subsequent popular reaction) to teenage sexual excesses, in particular a story about a weekend orgy at the nearby seashore town of Jūrmala³ and a high school dance complete with a jazz club, a gothic element and public displays of explicit affection. A vocal, moral majority/minority complained loudly and teachers, school administrators, city council members and parliamentarians answered their call.

The events of these two salacious news stories were more muddled and unclear than initially presented (the school protested that the depictions of the dance were unfair and motivated by petty rivalries, while the teen orgy unraveled during subsequent investigations), but their press lives served to galvanize a spurt of public activity. Essentially, government officials convened public meetings to discuss the youth problem. At these meetings, debate was varied and far-reaching, but a consensus built around the idea of censorship, often from surprising sources and with extreme hyperbole. At a meeting of the Council of Riga Municipal Schools, for example, a lecturer from the University of Latvia declared that:

in the years of war our morality has been trampled. The temptation of pleasure and enjoyment has overtaken everyone from teenagers to seniors. The older generation, as damned as it is, can no longer be helped. Therefore society, and particularly teachers and parents, must work [on this matter with all energy].⁴

¹ Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Vintage, 2002).

² Katrina Schwartz, *Nature and National Identity After Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

³ Aldis Purs, “Youth Orgy in 1929 Jurmala and Future Paths for the Historiography of Latvia” conference paper at the Joint Conference of AABS and SASS, Seattle, WA April 23, 2010.

⁴ LVVA, 1632, 2, 1626, p. 1a.

More specifically, the idea that films and pulp fiction compromised adolescent morality gained common currency. The prominent librarian Jānis Misiņš regretted that:

we must again ask for censorship against which I have fought all of my life as if against the nation's greatest enemy, but without censorship we can not defeat pornographic literature. In 7 years of independence, the Latvian nation has been more ruined than in 700 years of slavery.⁵

This formulation appealed to politicians and state officials as a manageable legislative project: laws would be drawn up to keep harmful literature away from the youth of Latvia.

A second strand emerged opposite this proscriptive impulse; a small subset of activists pushed for a catalogue of officially approved, appropriate literature for children. Both of these projects continued after the initial public meetings, but the catalogue fell afoul of the economic realities of mass-produced publications. The committee appointed to create the catalogue (in some ways, almost self-appointed) imagined that Latvia's largest publishers and bookstores would submit books for consideration, as initially they did. With time, however, the bookstores and publishers wearied of these requests and distrusted the verdicts of the committee (many of Shakespeare's tragedies, for example, were deemed fit only for youth in their twenties). Furthermore, the explosion in published sources overwhelmed the committee. The catalogue was doomed to either be impossible to complete or to be immediately outdated and irrelevant. The distribution of the catalogue and those corresponding costs, to all of the bookstores, colporteurs, and kiosks across all of Latvia was never seriously entertained. Eventually a one-off catalogue was published to little fanfare as a measure of saving grace and some of the committee members migrated into the committee to censor literature.⁶

The move to censor literature took by state sanction as a law gradually moved through parliament while public meetings and meetings of activists continued apace. As the initial public wave of indignation subsided and it became more obvious that the final result would be a censorship law, some activists quietly excused themselves from further involvement (including Berta Pīpiņa who would later become the only female elected to parliament in the interwar era).⁷ By the summer of 1927, a law passed the *Saeima* that established a committee of governmental officials tasked with removing cheap and obscene literature from circulation in order to protect the youth. On July 20, 1927, the Committee to Protect the Youth from Harmful Literature published its first list of banned books (11) in the official newspaper of the government, *The Government Herald* (*Valdības vēstnesis*). Over the next ten years, the committee produced seventy-two more lists and banned hundreds of books.

⁵ LVVA, 1632, 2, 1626, p. 4.

⁶ See Latvijas valsts vēstures arhīvs, fond 1632, section 2, file 1626 (henceforth LVVA, 1632, 2, 1626); LVVA, 1632, 2, 1629 Kaitīgo kultūras apkarošanas Komisijas sēzu protokoli; LVVA 1632, 2, 1638.

⁷ LVVA, 1632, 2, 1626, p. 17.

Technically, books were not banned, but removed from the reach of young people; in practice the restrictions were so severe that books were taken out of circulation. How and why books were chosen for the lists was only vaguely defined in legislation or official guidelines. Instead, representatives from three different governmental ministries would meet on an occasional basis (there was no defined timing, meetings sometimes followed each other in rapid order, othertimes included lags and delays) and draw up the latest list. We have limited minutes from these meetings, and almost no archival records of the preliminary work before these meetings. Most frequently, each committee member suggested several books (at times mentioning that knowledge of the offending book was brought to them by a third party), the committee accepted all books, and soon after the list was published with the force of law in *The Government Herald*. Initially, the subject matter of books was varied: pulp fiction about pinkerton detectives, bandits, and criminals were targeted for violence. Some books were chosen for unrealistically raising the hopes and aspirations of young people, and some even for poor workmanship (poor paper, poor translations etc). Quickly, however, the committee settled on pornographic representation as the leading reason for inclusion on a list.

In all fairness, many of the chosen books were far more explicit than societal mores readily accepted and their publishers were well aware of the potential illegality of their offerings. Early on, many of the banned books were published by mercurial pulp fiction publishers with no real copyright rights over their published work. In more than one case, a publishing house ceased to exist and just as quickly reappeared under a slightly changed moniker. These publishers and their books exploited many of the tricks of seedy, pulp fiction: attributing works to well-known authors or slightly changing the spelling of a famous author's name to hoodwink readers, masking pornographic material in a historical guise, such as books about Catherine the Great, etc.

What remained unclear was what would happen when an author or a publisher believed a book should not be included on the list of banned books. The founding law of the committee did mention an appeals process, but without any further detail. The creation of an appeals process became a rather ad hoc measure and one dominated by the committee itself and the state ministries it represented. The first few appeals were easily dismissed, but with time determined publishers and authors asked for a detailed description of the appeals process. In short, they were told that a distinct committee reviewed the offending book's inclusion on the list. The initial committee submitted a detailed report on the reasons for the book's inclusion and the author or publisher could submit an explanation a counter-reply. The author and/or publisher, however, could not read the original committee's report, their appellate report, nor could they appear at the appeal process in person. Furthermore, no minutes of the meeting would be provided. With such heavy odds, appeals were at a decided disadvantage. In particular five books forcefully challenged their inclusion and in hindsight their defenses were with merit.

The first challenge to placement on the list came from the publishing house *Orients* in December of 1927 for its *Love Affairs of Catherine the Great*. This book, and its publisher, however, were easy to dismiss as almost caricatures of pulp and profane

fiction.⁸ A far more serious challenge came the following year when Otto Tenisons appealed the inclusion of *Sieviešu dzimumvēsums* (*Women's Sexual Frigidity*) as pornography harmful to young people. *Sieviešu dzimumvēsums* was a translation of the noted Dutch psychologist Theodor Hendrik van de Velde's *Ideal Marriage: Its Physiology and Technique*. The book caused a scandal across Europe, ultimately landing on the Vatican's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1931, but also running through forty-two printings in Germany alone before the rise of Hitler. Its Latvian publishers were aware of the potential for scandal and received a favorable ruling from a Liepāja Provincial Court in 1927. Nevertheless, the committee deemed the book "obscenity masked as science". In their appeal, the publishers marshalled a convincing defense of the book: it was priced well out of the reach of youth (more than 4 Ls), it was a scientific tome with a forward explicitly stating that it was meant for physicians and researchers, that the author was an esteemed, international scholar, and that in more than a year in circulation not a single copy had been sold to the youth.⁹ The committee on the other had submitted a more detailed report to the appellate committee quoting at length "pornographic" passages mocking its claims to scientific merit. They argued "is it science to show how unnaturally and perversely the act of sexual union can be done, for example from the woman's behind, squatting, from the side, seated or 'riding'." This report further highlighted the book's discussion of biting, of oral sex and masturbation as texts that "would damage the youth more morally than a crippling injury would hurt them physically." The appellate committee decided in favor of keeping the book prohibited solely on the basis of this report.¹⁰

The book, however, was predominantly scientific with an extensive review of existing scientific literature, discussion of anatomy and function, and progressive opinions (for its time) on sexuality (homosexuality was not damned, female pleasure was stressed and the clitoris existed).¹¹ Given general European trends, and the book's proscription elsewhere, it would not have been surprising for the book to remain banned for these morally driven reasons. More disturbingly, the appellate committee apparently never looked at the book itself and decided the case simply on the weight of reports from an aggrieved party (the publisher) and their colleagues (the initial committee). In other words they closed ranks around their colleagues and did not notice that the committee's report horribly misrepresented the text. All of the cited obscenities were from one case study of less than five pages out of a several hundred page scientific text.¹²

^{8 8} In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1627, Kaitigo kulturas paradību apkaršanas komisijas sezu protokoli, bernu un jaunatnes literatūras saraksti u.c. 1926.g.-1928.g, p. 2.

^{9 9} In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1627, Kaitigo kulturas paradību apkaršanas komisijas sezu protokoli, bernu un jaunatnes literatūras saraksti u.c. 1926.g.-1928.g, p. 43.

^{10 10} In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1627, Kaitigo kulturas paradību apkaršanas komisijas sezu protokoli, bernu un jaunatnes literatūras saraksti u.c. 1926.g.-1928.g, p. 49.

¹¹ Jakobsons, L. Dr.Med. *Sievietes dzimumvēsums: ārstiem, un stūdzējošiem* (Rīga: grāmatu apgāde 'Problēma', 1927.

¹² In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1627, Kaitigo kulturas paradību apkaršanas komisijas sezu protokoli, bernu un jaunatnes literatūras saraksti u.c. 1926.g.-1928.g, p. 49.

A more serious challenge to the list came in the spring of 1929 when the committee was asked to review its decision to include Andrejs Lanke's satirical *Career: A Satirical Story* on the list of harmful literature.¹³ The short novel had initially appeared in a serialized manner in a newspaper and was subsequently sold as a novel (the book would also be republished in 1991). The short book did have a risqué cover featuring a naked woman, but primarily the book was a relentless satirical attack on politics and parliament in Latvia. The book's hero is a country bumpkin who moves to the big city of Riga to embark on a political career (with no real credentials). He makes the rounds of established parties (pillorying existing parties by slightly modifying their names, such as the Big Farmers Party, Little Farmers Party and the Suffragettes), but decides to found his own, the One Horse Party with the slogan that "everyone who has one horse is our colleague." He gets elected and rises to power through a deft, unethical and corrupt use of coalition building. Throughout, the book has real literary value, is witty and biting and far removed from the obscenities the committee was tasked to proscribe. In the appeals process, the initial committee again extracted single sentences from the text and used them out of context as symptomatic of the whole book (particularly a short episode in which the protagonist wakes up in a bed with a naked woman sleeping next to him). In Lanke's case, unlike with *Sieviešu dzimumvēsums*, the appeals committee read the accused text. The appeals committee concluded that:

without a doubt there are a few obscene scenes in the book, but they are not positioned in a place of importance instead rather they are presented as the unattractive colors of characters in a happenstance manner; their uncivil behavior is not particularly stressed. Further, placing this book on the list of Obscene and Pulp Fiction we would have to also examine the works of many prominent Latvian authors who depict no less obscene material. Furthermore, the book is satire because it describes some of the dark sides of our life, but nonetheless finishes positively.¹⁴

All three members of the Appeals Committee agreed that the Minister of Education should remove the book from the list of literature harmful to the youth. The Minister of Education, however, simply refused to do so, and the affair was left hanging.¹⁵

The next substantive challenge, in many ways similar to the Lanke challenge, came in January of 1931 when Jānis Tormanis requested that his book, *Lāsti (Curses)* be removed from the list. The peculiarities of the Tormanis case primarily revolved around the author himself. Lanke's book was exceptional in many ways; first, it was essentially self-published in a provincial town, Cēsis, not in Rīga. This was a rare case, the great majority of books on the list (and the great majority of books) were published in Rīga and the capital seldom recognized what was done in the provinces; committee members would not, for example, have found the small-run, local *Lāsti* in a Rīga book store. The inclusion of *Lāsti* on the list seemed an unexplained anomaly until Tormanis wrote an impassioned letter to the Ministry of Education about his book. In a letter of 14 January 1931, Tormanis asked how to appeal and if he was legally entitled to as a minor. He

¹³ Andrejs Lanke, *Karjera: satīriska stāsts* (Rīga: A. Viestura izdevums, 1929).

¹⁴ LVVA 1632, 2, 1631, Jaunatnei kaitīgas literatūras saraksti, p. 46.

¹⁵ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1631, Jaunatnei kaitīgas literatūras saraksti, p. 34

received a reply that the Ministry had no objections to a minor's appeal request and explained to him the proper process. The appeal that followed and the back story to the book and its banning were more than extraordinary. Tormanis had graduated from high school in Cēsis and wrote his *Curses: An artistic novel (the first four parts)* soon after.¹⁶ The book was a long (187 pages of small print) meandering semi-autobiographical account of a tortured young genius trapped in a narrow-minded provincial town. The book vaguely resembled a film noir-ish coming of age novel. Tormanis' former teachers offended by the book's release sent copies to the committee and asked it to be banned. The committee complied and in their further report to the appellate committee quoted almost verbatim from the Cēsis teachers' letter that the book "can offend a person's moral sensibilities and is particularly harmful to school aged youth."¹⁷ The most egregious example was a single sentence from the protagonist that "true love, the ideal of love, is not compatible with marriage." This hardly seemed the pornography of *The Love Affairs of Catherine the Great*. Tormanis' downfall in his appeal was his own inflated sense of self-worth, genius, and unjust persecution. He assumed the Committee was a part of the same cabal as the Cēsis schoolteachers, and in a long, meandering 17 page letter outlined his suffering, referring to the entire episode as "this ugly affair." He was well read, and on point, but the spectacle of a provincial high school student comparing his work's censorship to that of Joyce's *Ulysses* or of Strindberg's misunderstood genius was too much for governmental officials to bear.¹⁸ They joked among themselves that if he attacked the Committee, teachers, and Latvian intellectuals but christened himself a great spirit, his appeal could not be taken seriously.¹⁹ On 2 March 1931, after Tormanis sent several additional letters asking for his appeal to be expedited, the committee informed Tormanis that his appeal failed.²⁰ The Committee could safely not take Tormanis seriously even though his complaints seem merited and his book hardly obscene.

The final two books, however, were a different matter: one was authored by a government official, and the other by someone willing to continue his fight through all legal channels. On 22 April 1931 the appellate committee received an appeal from Arsenijs Formakovs about the inclusion of his book *Naša Junosti (Our Youth)* on the list of obscene literature. Formakovs a school inspector of Russian language primary schools had been away on inspections across the province of Latgale and returned to find that his novel had been censored. He was shocked, not only because he claimed there was nothing even vaguely impolite within it, but because its content was so patriotic. Formakovs claimed his novel was the first Russian language book to describe the Latvian state's liberation of Latgale from the Bolsheviks in 1919 and 1920.²¹ Because of his work assignment, however, Formakovs missed the strict deadline for appeal stated in the

¹⁶ Janis Tormanis. *Lāsti: mākslinieku romāns (pirmās četras daļas)*. Cēsis: Bohemiešu dziesma, 1930-1931).

¹⁷ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 32.

¹⁸ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., pp. 7-23.

¹⁹ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 33.

²⁰ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 40.

²¹ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 55.

original law (by a week or two). The appellate committee seized upon this technicality and refused to consider Formakovs' appeal.²² This same tactic, using the letter of the law to avoid a difficult appeal was repeated with at least two other books. With the case of the book *Modern Paradise* (*Modernā paradīze*), edited by two Baptist preachers, the timeline again came to the aid of the appellate committee even though the appeal was only received two days past due.²³

Of all the hundreds of books banned and dozens of books appealed, only Janis Luke's *Our Language's Buffoon* (*Mūsu valodas ērmi*) succeeded in being removed from the list after inclusion, although the long journey to that result was truly monumental.²⁴ Luke's book was published in 1930 and quickly found itself on the list of obscene books harmful to the youth, but it was hardly pornographic. Latvia was in the midst of linguistic reform and standardization; new orthographic conventions were only the most obvious sign of a new and improved Latvian language. Jānis Endzelīns was the premier linguist at the University of Latvia, the self-appointed arbiter of proper Latvian grammar, and the motor behind much of this change in language. The central state eagerly followed his lead, even if individual ministers and directors struggled with changes in how to properly spell their names according to his conventions. Luke's book was a polemical attack on Endzelīns' reforms and even erudition. Much of this book is an argument that only a linguist would get impassioned about (whether some language mistakes 'should properly be *dažādas valodas kļūdas* or *dažas valodas kļūdas*) and its aggressive and personal tone is that of a specialist who senses that he is losing the battle and lashes out viciously, but obscene or pornographic it was not.

Luke (poignantly using the old orthographic rules and referring to himself as Jahnis Luhke) appealed his book's inclusion stating that its target was "those that ruin and cripple the Latvian language, and is not obscene or pulp fiction."²⁵ The committee internally replied that the book frequently used bawdiness to make its points, often with the use of double entendres in folk sayings, proverbs and jokes centered on 'the rear.'²⁶ On May 5, 1931, the appellate committee decided by a 2-1 vote that although the book had some "crude and indecent sayings" that its contents cannot be considered obscene literature and should be stricken from the list.²⁷ A month and a half later however, Luke wrote again to the Ministry asking why despite stories in the press that his book had been "legalized," he had yet to receive any official pronouncement.²⁸ A Deputy Minister of Education replied to Luke in a letter of 7 August 1931, that the Minister did not agree with the appellate committee's decision and decided to keep the book on the list.²⁹ This was also the ultimate fate of Andrejs Lanke's *Karjeri*, the only other book to receive a

²² In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 85.

²³ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 99.

²⁴ Janis Luke, *Mūsu valodas ērmi* (Rīga: 1930).

²⁵ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 43.

²⁶ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 49.

²⁷ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 61.

²⁸ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 65.

²⁹ In LVVA 1632, 2, 1633, Jaunatnei kaitīgās literatūras saraksti 1931.g., p. 67, 70.

successful appeal from the appellate committee. Unlike Lanke, however, Luke pressed the case further. On 20 August 1931, Luke wrote to the Administrative Department of the Senate of the Republic of Latvia (the equivalent of a Supreme Court) to rule on the idea that the Minister can refuse to sign a decision and thus overstep the appellate committee's authority.³⁰ Still not content, and while waiting for a decision, Luke petitioned the Parliamentary Petition Commission on 2 February 1932 for appropriate action.³¹ Parliament, however, refused to take up the matter while it was before the Senate for consideration. The Ministry, however, dragged its feet with the Senate. The Senate requested all files from the Ministry on 26 August 1931 in order to make a decision. The Senate again requested the same files on 6 April 1932, and yet again on 2 May 1932.³² Apparently the Ministry of Education was pushing the legal boundaries and claiming they had no obligation to either follow the appellate committee's decision or the Senate's.

By 4 May 1932, a new Minister of Education, Atis Kēniņš, wrote to the Senate asking for the Senate to simply drop the case from consideration.³³ Three weeks later, the same ministry (upon request) issued a certificate to Jānis Endzelīns that the book was still banned.³⁴ Finally on 16 July 1932, the Senate issued its verdict that the Ministry of Education had no right to ignore the decision of the appellate committee, that they had "overstepped the limits of their competence."³⁵ The victory for Luke, however, was not complete: the Senate suggested that the Ministry could return the matter to the committee for further review.³⁶ On 23 November 1932, the Committee to Protect Youth forwarded Luke's book again to the appellate committee. Luke, nearly at wit's end, penned a new letter to the Minister of Education on 6 December 1932. He wrote:

With regret I have to conclude that this unjustifiable delay inexcusably diminished the sense of justice in the consciousness of the citizenry, because there is a sense that one can behave inattentively to our laws and to the laws of the highest judicial offices. The duty of the Ministry of Education, I assume, should be to foster in citizens an awareness of justice and law.³⁷

The same day, Luke wrote to the Minister President outlining the long history of his book's legal worries and asking him to follow the matter to a conclusion.³⁸ Finally, on 18 January 1933 the government newspaper published a short line that relative to the Minister of Education's decision of 14 December 1932, J. Luke's brochure (a final insult), *Mūsu valdoas ērmi* was stricken from the list of literature harmful to the youth.³⁹

³⁰ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, p. 71.

³¹ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, pp. 6, 7.

³² In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, pp. 13, 14

³³ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, p. 15.

³⁴ The fact that Endzelīns requests this certificate shows how personal and contentious this battle was between them. In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, p. 17.

³⁵ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, p. 26.

³⁶ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, p. 60.

³⁷ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, p. 64.

³⁸ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti, 1932-1933, p. 65.

³⁹ In LVVA, 1632, 2, 1634, Saraksti 1932-1933, p. 79.

After almost two years of constant and willful refusal to follow the law, a book was removed from the list; the only one out of hundreds.

The Committee continued its work after the authoritarian coup of 1934 adding new books to the list in official pronouncements in the *Government Herald* until 1937. By that late date, the state's general control of publications limited the creation of potentially offending books. After the coup, appeals also ceased; authors and publishers likely understood that the decisions of the state could not be challenged. Herein lies the crux of the entire curious history of the Committee to Protect Youth from Harmful Literature. The initial impulse was unfocussed public anger at a seeming loss of morality among the youth and the agreed upon culprit was obscene literature. A poorly framed vague law followed that created a committee to ban literature with almost no control over its activities, over the appeals process, and with no transparency. The public would have agreed that hundreds of the banned books deserved censorship. In the cases, however, when a less clearly pornographic book for whatever reason landed in front of the committee, there was no mechanism to keep a Committee of three from making an arbitrary (sometimes uninformed), secret, and binding decision. The appeals process was equally weak, and even in the few cases where the insiders themselves felt an appeal was warranted was difficult to enforce. Once a power was given to the state, the only arbiter in the state's appropriate and legitimate use of that power was that same state. Although this was not a groundbreaking precedent (in Latvia or in the world), it did reinforce a pattern of supreme state power encroaching on the rights of its subjects in times of democratic rule or authoritarianism.