

POLITICAL PUBLICATIONS IN ESTONIA DURING THE REVOLUTION OF 1905-1907

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The year 1905 notes the political awakening of the Estonian people, when different political movements and the first Estonian national parties were established. The revolution drew the attention of all the social strata to the political and economical issues that lead to a rapid increase in publishing of political literature.

The number of publications dedicated to political and economical issues had been very small during the pre-Revolutionary years. According to chart 1 only two titles on these topics were issued in 1904. The chart is composed on the basis of the retrospective Estonian national bibliography (Eestikeelne 1993).

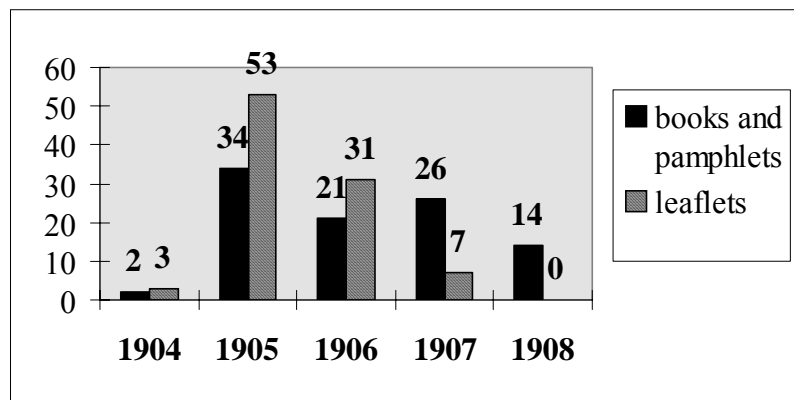


Chart 1. Annual title production of political and economical publications in the Estonian language in 1904-1908.

The limits to publishing were set by censorship, which up to 1905 acted on the basis of the press law from 1865. The law was completed by dozens of circulars and instructions during the following decades. It provided pre-publication censorship and also post-publication censorship of some types of publications. Periodical publications issued in capital cities, original works with the volume not less than 10 printed sheets and translations with the volume not less than 20 printed sheets, the publications of academies, universities and learned societies as well as publications in classical languages and translations from these languages were exempt of pre-publication censorship (Жирков 2001: 145). Hence the censorship made a difference between

academic books and publications, which were addressed to the mass reader – it was especially important to control the reading matter available to wider audience.

According to the censorship regulations, issued in 1890, the list of prohibited topics included critique on the political order and laws of Russia, on the absolutist regime, the tsar and his family. It was forbidden to offend the Russian government and to depict the differences between the social classes as well as to express the harmful teachings such as socialism and communism, which call on overthrowing the existing order and anarchy. The Orthodox Church was also beyond criticism (Усрав 1912: 74). The so-called particular censors in Tallinn and Tartu (since 1878) censored literature in the Estonian language.

Thus it was almost impossible to write about the social conflicts, political struggle and opposition, discuss the real situation in the political conditions of the country. The workers' movement could be treated only cautiously. Although some books on the conditions of the working class and the theory of socialism were published in Russia in the Russian language, they were often prohibited by post-publication censorship. For example, N. Polyakov published the works by F. Lassalle in St. Petersburg in 1870. The first volume of the two-volume edition was granted permission to be put on sale by the censor. The second volume was sent to him on November 13 of the same year, but a couple of days later, on November 16 both volumes of the publication were seized with the argument that they approved of the activities, forbidden by the laws of Russia – the strikes, inciting hatred between the social classes etc. Eventually the Committee of Ministers prohibited the works of F. Lassalle in 1872 and ordered the remaining copies of both volumes to be destroyed. Another example is the book "Misery of Philosophy" by K. Marx, published in St. Petersburg in 1901, which was prohibited in 1902 for propagating socialism and communism (Добровольский 1962: 72, 230).

There were no noteworthy political publications in the Estonian language before 1905, but the revolutionary events brought a change into this situation. 34 titles of books and pamphlets treated political and economical issues in the book production of 1905, which formed about nine per cent of the annual title production. They included publications reflecting the events in the whole empire as well as in Estonia – official announcements, regulations about organising the elections and the work of local authorities, overviews about the political situation in Estonia, programs of the new parties etc.

But the current events were reflected, in the first place, in dozens of leaflets, including the proclamations, the decisions of political meetings etc. Their number exceeded to 53 titles in 1905. The most active organisations in issuing leaflets were the local branches of the all-Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP). The hectograph publications signed by the Tallinn Committee of the RSDWP were first issued after the events of January 9 in St. Petersburg (Jaanson 2005: 46). The number of the proclamations by the Tallinn Committee increased in spring 1905 when they were issued periodically. An illegal RSDWP group was active also in Tartu. In 1905 social-democratic organisations were established in all the major towns and villages of Estonia

and even in some rural places. Such organisations could be found in many schools and in the Tartu University. Marxist ideas had reached Tartu in the 1880s, when they were distributed among the students of the university, especially by Latvian and Russian students. The students distributed illegal leaflets and books. But legal books on the theoretical foundations of socialism were published in the Estonian language only since 1905.

In autumn 1905 the Tallinn Committee of the RSDWP took a course on an armed insurrection and made the shop stewards a proposition to print books in order to collect donations, which could be used for buying arms. Printing of revolutionary literature in local printing offices took place under control of the members of the Tallinn Committee, who pressed their way in the offices together with workers. Most of the members of the Tallinn Committee were arrested on December 10; the authorities also expropriated the printing office of M. Antje, one of the leading printing offices for printing revolutionary leaflets and pamphlets. It caused a temporary pause in publishing of this kind of publications (Jaanson 2005: 57-58). The arrest also hindered the publishing of political books on a larger scale. The Tallinn Committee published two more voluminous publications in 1905: the brochure “Collectivism” by Jules Guesde and “Spiders and flies” by W. Liebknecht – thus the Committee issued the translations of writings by the leaders of international workers’ movement, the original first editions of which had been published decades ago.

Such works were published not only by the Tallinn Committee of the RSDWP, but also by the Tartu group of the RSDWP, the publishing house of A. J. Ratas in St. Petersburg etc. Georg Zirk, publisher and printer who was active in Tartu issued the pamphlet “The situation of women today and in the future” by August Bebel, which was translated from Russian. The censor of foreign books had prohibited the import of this book in 1884. The publishing house of M. Orechov in St. Petersburg had issued it in 1900, but the publication was forbidden in the course of post-publication censorship in the same year. The causes for prohibition lied in the denial of the institution of marriage and the dissemination of socialist ideas (Добровольский 1962: 224).

The political pamphlets did not reflect only rebel ideas, there were also the publications with a contradictory message. For example, three brochures with conservative, anti-revolutionary ideas by the Latvian author Andrievs Niedra were issued in the Estonian language in 1905. According to the article by A. Ostra-Oinas, a participant of the revolutionary movement, published in 1930, the Baltic German nobility, interested in warding off the riots in the countryside, was interested in the dissemination of A. Niedra’s works in the Estonian language. In September 1905 the Committee of the Estonian Nobility even decided to open a credit for the distribution of Niedra’s writings. A. Niedra sent to Tallinn three pamphlets, asking help in their dissemination (Ostra-Oinas 1930). His “Where are we going : a letter on the disturbances in the countryside” was published in Tartu in 15 000 copies, the other two pamphlets, aimed against riots in the churches and in the factories were published in the Estonian language by the author himself in his publishing house *Austrums* in Cesis. De-escalation of revolt was also the in the publications of the Baltic Constitutional Party and the

Estonian Constitutional Party, uniting the Baltic German landowners and the urban bourgeoisie. Baron N. W. von Hoyningen-Huene issued his “Open letter to the people of Estonia”, which led to his arrest and imprisonment for two months. The reason was that the text incited hatred of Estonians towards Russians.

By the end of 1905 the peak of the revolution had passed, martial law had been imposed in Estonia by December 26, 1905 (Raun 2005: 38). The situation was still quite restless and the martial law was suspended only in 1908 when it was replaced by a milder “reinforced surveillance” (Laur et al 2000: 192). The decline in the revolutionary activities is demonstrated by the decrease in the number of leaflets in 1906-1908 (chart 1). The publication of books and pamphlets also decreases, but remains on a relatively high level. It entails mostly publications on the theoretical and practical questions of politics and economy, treated mainly from the social-democratic aspect. Translations of the works by A. Bebel, P. Lafargue and F. Lassalle were first published in the Estonian language in 1906-1907. The first book by K. Marx published in Estonian was “The wage labour and capital” issued in St. Petersburg in 1906. Karl Kautsky was another classical author of texts on socialism, issued in the Estonian language – altogether six works by him were published in the Estonian language in 1906-1908.

The Estonian authors treated the agrarian politics in two pamphlets issued in 1907: collection of articles by K. Päts was published by the publishing house *Koit* in Tallinn and the comments on preparing the law on land-ownership by P. Schneider were issued in Finland, in Kuopio.

The number of pamphlets on current events and political proclamations decreases with the decline of revolutionary activity. At the same time the first books which analysed the revolution were published in 1907. One of the actors in the social-democratic movement Mihkel Martna published his pamphlet reflecting the recent events in the publishing house *Tulevik* in St. Petersburg in 1907. The publication was called “The red years in Estonia in 1905-1906: the historic and economical reasons of the revolutionary movement”. Another treatment of the revolution, published in Estonian was written by K. Kautsky. A. J. Ratas in St. Petersburg published his pamphlet “The driving forces and prospects of the Russian revolution”.

Table 1 demonstrates that the political publications in the Estonian language were issued in numerous towns, reflecting also the formation of the political centers in Estonia as well as the contacts of the Estonian organisations abroad. The main centers of political movement were Tallinn and Tartu. In 1905 the political activities were concentrated in Tartu, where many political organisations were situated and important political events took place – a meeting of people’s representatives from all over Estonia was organised here at the end of November. Counties, towns and different societies sent about 800 representatives to Tartu. The event led to a split between the radical and conservative wing and ended in two meetings. During 1906 and 1907 Tallinn became the leading centre of publishing the political pamphlets and leaflets.

Table 1. Towns where political publications in the Estonian language were issued

	1905		1906		1907	
	books	leaflets	books	leaflets	books	leaflets
Tallinn	9	16	6	14	9	6
Riia	2	4	1	2	-	-
Tartu	16	27	4	7	2	2
Pärnu	3	2	1	-	1	-
Cesis	2	-	-	-	-	-
St.Petersburg	1	-	4	2	6	-
Helsinki	-	-	1	-	-	-
Narva	-	-	3	5	2	-
Rakvere	-	-	-	1	-	-
Viljandi	-	-	-	-	2	-
Lahti	-	-	-	-	1	-
Kuopio	-	-	-	-	1	-

As it was mentioned above, the larger part of the theoretical publications and leaflets represent the social-democratic ideas. They were mainly issued by the Tallinn Committee and Tartu Group of the RSDWP, which were the leading social-democratic groups in 1905. The Estonian Social Democratic Workers Community, which was based on national principles, was more modest in publishing activities, issuing three pamphlets and three leaflets. Among them were “Flies and spiders or workers and capitalists” by W. Liebknecht and “Christianity and socialism” by A. Bebel. The latter was printed in Helsinki in 1906. By then the party had been almost completely disbanded by the military and police terror (Karjahärm 1990: 134). The non-socialist political spectre in Estonia was narrow, consisting mainly from the Estonian National Progressive Party, ideologically close to the Russian constitutional democrats (Raun 2005: 41).

The political book production of the year 1907 was largely issued by publishing houses, which were established during the years of the revolution. The establishment of the new publishing houses was intensive in the whole empire, over 350 publishers started to work in 1905-1907, many of them issuing political literature (История 2001: 240). Among such firms were the publishing house *Töö* (Work) in Tallinn as well as *Edasi* (Foreward) and *Edu* (Success) in St. Petersburg. The publishing house *Edasi* was connected with the newspaper with the same name issued by the Estonian Group of the RSDWP. Many publications were issued by Juhan Liliénbach – a man, who occupies a special place in Estonian publishing as a consistent publisher of marxist literature. His publishing activities started in 1905 with the help of the Tallinn Committee of the RSDWP. Liliénbach issued political and popular-scientific publications supporting the revolution. A large share of his publications were satiric papers and magazines, which

were widespread at that time. In 1906-1907 he published a series called “Leaflets”, including pamphlets by K. Zetkin, A. Bebel, K. Kautsky and writings by Russian authors on actual topics.

The range and content of political literature, which was issued during these years demonstrates that it had become possible to issue publications on the topics forbidden before the revolution. Officially the civil rights, including freedom of the press and freedom of speech were guaranteed to the people only with the manifesto of October 17, 1905. Until the new provisional regulations of the press had been elaborated the censors continued to act according to the existing law, which meant the preservation of the pre-publication censorship. The circular of the Central Board of Censorship from October 19, 1905 recommended to the censors to change the attitude towards the works they controlled (Жирков 2001: 188). Pre-publication censorship of non-periodical publications was abolished on April 26, 1906 (Жирков 2001: 192). However, the post-publication censorship was preserved, for example the printers had to present the publications with the volume of over five printed sheets to the inspector of printed matter (censor) simultaneously with their publication (EAA, f 52, n 1, s 474, l 23). The censorship of imported books and clerical censorship, controlling orthodox writings were also preserved. All the violations of the press law had to be treated in court.

The revolutionary events of 1905 were followed by the reactionist offence which included the strengthening of censorship. The prohibition of publications, including condemned ideas on politics, religion or morality, published during these years started since 1906 and continued till the beginning of the World War I. For example, “Collectivism” by Jules Guesde, issued in 1905 was banned in 1913. The prohibition of this publication was initiated in 1912. The censor of foreign publications asked the police to confiscate the pamphlet on February 9, 1912 because, in his opinion, it included the features of felony. According to article 129 of the criminal code it was forbidden to publish publications, inciting hatred between social classes and instigating revolt. To prove it the censor explained, that according to the text private property caused hatred between the classes and the class of capitalists was meant to become extinct as it had no function in the production of goods. The Court of Appeal of St. Petersburg confirmed the seizure of the pamphlet. A year later, on March 29, 1913 the Court of Appeal decided that the publication had to be destroyed. But after eight years from the date of publication the chief of Tallinn police noted, that no copies of the publications could be found in Tallinn (EAA f 52, n 1, s 621, l 1- 13).

From the book production of 1906 five publications had problems with post-publication censorship. Two of them were prohibited the same year they were published – “Who Lives on What” by S. Dickstein and “Down with the social democrats” by W. Bracke. Other banned books were written by L. Tolstoi, A. Bebel and K. Marx. His “Wage labour and capital” was seized in 1914 and the copies found by police were destroyed (Eestikeelne 1993: 499).

Among the publications issued in 1907 eight titles were seized in the same year or later. For example, both books, analysing the revolution, written by M. Martna and K.

Kautsky were banned immediately after publication – the treatment of revolt, reminding the public about the resistance to the power, was considered unacceptable.

Some of the titles, which were seized by request of the censors, were able to escape banning. This demonstrates, that the earlier rigor of the system had softened. For example, the translation of "Volkspolitik" of A. Menger was issued in Tallinn in 1907. At the beginning of 1908 the censor requested its seizure, which was confirmed by the Court of Appeal in St. Petersburg. A year later the court decided to lift the seizure. At the same time the censorship of imported books had banned the work and the translation into Russian, issued in Moscow was banned by the Court of Appeal of Moscow. On the basis of this decision the censor of Tallinn requested that the translation into the Estonian language had to be seized again, but the prosecutor rebuffed this motion in 1910 (EAA f 52, n 1, s 576).

The events of 1905 played an outstanding role in creating the political and social self-awareness of the Estonian people. The political publications, which were issued during these years had a great value in providing the necessary political education for the continuation of the struggle for democracy and autonomy.

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Punitive troops during the 1905 revolutionary events in Tallinn. The first Russian revolutionary uprising in January 1905, became a turning point in Estonian history. In Estonia, the revolution was directed against both the absolutist power and the Baltic German upper classes' demands for democratic reorganisation were provoked by the lack of political freedom, remnants of feudal order and the class-related Baltic German privileges, insufficient land and national oppression. Estonians who had become politically conscious by the start of the century, for the first time stepped forward as an active power in 1905. In the ever more tense atmosphere, the revolutionary movement in Estonia reached its height in the autumn of 1905.