

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 182

“1919 – The Baltic States”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

For most of the past millennium, the peoples of the Baltic coast have lived within the borders of larger kingdoms and empires not their own. But at the end of the Great War, the collapse of their two powerful neighbors, Russia and Germany, opened a window of opportunity.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 182. 1919 – The Baltic States.

Last week, we talked about Finland. This week I want to talk about what we call the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It was at this time in history, 1919-1920, when these nations won their independence from Russia, that you first began to hear them referred to collectively with the phrase “the Baltic States.”

The presence of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian peoples along the east coast of the Baltic Sea is attested to in sources from ancient Rome, meaning we can be certain these peoples have lived in the region for at least the past two millennia, and possibly much longer. Over this time, they have coexisted peacefully; there is remarkably little record of conflicts between them.

The Estonians, like the Finns, speak a Uralic language; hence the two languages are related to each other but not to the Indo-European language group that encompasses most European languages, including English. As is the case with Finland, it is a matter of debate among archeologists and historians as to whether the first inhabitants of what is today Estonia were an Indo-European people who were later displaced by or assimilated into a Uralic people, or whether Uralic-speaking people have lived in Estonia ever since that land became habitable following the last Ice Age.

The Latvians and the Lithuanians, on the other hand, two peoples among those collectively known as the Balts, speak languages related to each other that are part of the Balto-Slavic language group, a branch of the larger Indo-European family of languages.

Little is known of the history of these peoples before the 13th century. This is because the Balts were the last people in Europe to convert to Christianity, so there is no earlier written history and they had few contacts with other European peoples before this time. There are only occasional references to them in Scandinavian, German, and Roman sources. It is believed that the Balts once controlled a larger swath of territory in Eastern Europe, extending as far inland as Moscow, but were gradually pushed back or assimilated by their Germanic and Slavic neighbors.

By the 12th century, the neighboring Catholic kingdoms of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, and the Holy Roman Empire began to take an interest in Christianizing their pagan neighbors and there are some records of both peaceful and military missions to bring Christianity to the Balts, although the historicity of many of these accounts is in question.

What is not in question is that in 1195, Pope Celestine III explicitly called for the forced conversion of these lands, beginning a series of conflicts that modern historians call the Northern Crusades. These campaigns were fought by the Catholic kingdoms and by the Teutonic Order, a Catholic military order founded in the crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. The Teutonic Knights would rule over their own crusader state in the Baltic for a time, and from the 13th to the 15th centuries, Estonia and Latvia would be variously ruled by German crusaders, Denmark, and Sweden, and the local aristocracy would be predominantly German. The common people only gradually became Christian over the centuries. The cities of Reval (now known as Tallinn) and Riga became part of the Hanseatic League. Today they are the capitals of Estonia and Latvia, respectively.

Lithuania, by contrast, managed to maintain a precarious independence during this dangerous time, despite being wedged between aggressive Catholic states, making the Grand Duchy of Lithuania the last surviving pagan nation in Europe. In the year 1251, Grand Duke Mindaugas cut a deal with the Pope, Innocent IV, under which Mindaugas would be baptized and the Pope would recognize him as King of Lithuania, which thus eliminated the risk of further religious conflict with Lithuania's Catholic neighbors, though it appears his conversion was mostly strategic and ordinary Lithuanians, like their ordinary Baltic neighbors, remained pagan for many years to come. Still, modern Lithuania celebrates this moment as marking the birth of the Lithuanian nation.

Over the next two centuries, Lithuania rose in power until it controlled a large stretch of territory all the way to the Black Sea, including much of what we today call Belarus and Ukraine. The peoples of these lands were Orthodox Slavs, while the ruling elites of Vilnius found it convenient to shift between Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and paganism, depending on what was politically and strategically useful at the moment. This went on for more than a century, until 1385, when the

pagan Grand Duke Jogaila weighed competing offers from the Grand Duchy of Moscow to convert to Orthodoxy and become a vassal and from the Kingdom of Poland to convert to Catholicism and marry the Polish Queen. Jogaila found the latter proposal more attractive, which also put Poland and Lithuania on the path that would lead to the creation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1518.

In 1700, Peter the Great began the Great Northern War between Russia and Sweden, in order to secure Russian access to the Baltic Sea. Sweden was defeated and in 1721, Estonia and most of what is today Latvia—the portion known as Livonia—were transferred from Swedish to Russian rule. The remainder of Latvia—the portion known as Courland—and Lithuania came under Russian rule later in the 18th century, after the partitions of Poland.

As was the case with Poland and Finland, the 19th century saw successive Russian Emperors attempt to Russify the Baltic States, imposing the Russian language and the Orthodox faith on peoples who were at this time mostly Catholic in the old Lithuanian territories and mostly Lutheran in the formerly Swedish lands. But as we've seen elsewhere, this process of Russification ran head-on into the rising nationalism that was all the rage at the time.

As you know from episode 34, Sunday January 22, 1905 saw unarmed protestors in the Russian capital of St. Petersburg shot and killed by Russian soldiers as they attempted to present a petition to the Russian Emperor. This event, Bloody Sunday, sparked the Revolution of 1905 and also boosted nationalist sentiment in the Baltic States, particularly in Latvia, where a few days later workers in Riga called a general strike in protest of the killings in St. Petersburg, and the policy of Russification, and, it should be said, against the German-speaking elites who still mostly controlled local affairs in Latvia. Strikers in Riga were also met with violence from Russian soldiers. Seventy-three people were killed and hundreds wounded. Martial law was declared.

So by 1914, the peoples of the Baltic States could fairly be described as restless under Russian rule. Then the Great War began. The war brought tremendous suffering everywhere, but nowhere more so than on the Eastern Front. You'll recall from our war narrative that after Russian incursions into East Prussia in 1914, the German Army went on the offensive in spring of 1915, by summer forcing the Russian Army into a large-scale withdrawal known as the Great Retreat. Warsaw fell to the Germans on August 5 and Brest-Litovsk on August 25. Vilnius, the past and future capital of Lithuania, was taken by the Germans on September 19.

This Great Retreat ended only after the German Army was exhausted and had outrun its supply lines. In the Baltic region, the new front line now ran roughly along the River Daugava. The Daugava, which the Russians call the Dvinsk, runs through what we know today as Latvia, emptying into the Baltic at the city of Riga. The years 1916 and 1917 would see the Brusilov Offensive and the Kerensky Offensive, but both of those were farther south. Here in the Baltic, the front would remain static over those two years.

This meant that the Eastern Front would lie roughly along the divide between Courland and Livonia, the place where the border between Lithuania and Swedish Livonia lay 200 years earlier. It also meant that the front line would bisect what we now call Latvia, and place Riga, Latvia's most important city, right on the front line, still under Russian control at this point, but with the Germans almost literally at the gates.

As a result, Latvia in particular suffered during the war. The city of Riga was a major Russian industrial center at the time, and as the Germans approached, the Russians cleared the city's factories of their valuable machinery and equipment. Whatever could be moved was shipped east, to the detriment of the future Latvia's economy. Worse, close to a million Latvians were killed or forced to flee their homeland during the war. It's a striking fact that even in our time, a century later, the number of ethnic Latvians in Latvia has still not recovered to where it stood before the Great War.

During this period, the Russian government began recruiting, and later conscripting, an ethnic Latvian military force to help defend the line along the Daugava. This force would come to be known as the Latvian Riflemen. By 1917, the Latvian Riflemen will have become among the most ardent Bolsheviks in the Russian Army and they would be among Lenin's key supporters in the military.

Meanwhile, in August 1917, the German occupation force in Lithuania began approaching prominent Lithuanians about organizing a Council of Lithuania as the first step toward the creation of a Lithuanian state. This was in accord with the Reichstag's recent peace resolution, which had called for a peace based on the principle of no annexations and no indemnities. The German civilian administration envisioned a postwar East of newly created independent states that would serve as buffers between Germany and Russia. The German military had its own vision, one of nominally independent buffer states that would in fact become German satellites. Once this new council was in place, the German military demanded that it declare Lithuanian independence and then immediately request to federate the new Lithuanian nation with Imperial Germany.

The council members resisted the German demand. They wanted a fully independent Lithuania, with its new government to be determined by an elected Constituent Assembly, since they themselves were unelected, and they would only go so far as to declare that independent Lithuania anticipated good relations with its neighbor to the west following the war. This was too wishy-washy to satisfy the German military commanders, leaving them and the Lithuanians at an impasse.

On the other side of the front line, Russian-controlled Latvia and Estonia had formed local soviets following the February Revolution, and the Provisional Government in Petrograd granted these soviets considerable autonomy. These Latvian and Estonian soviets weren't really thinking

about independence in the spring of 1917, but had reason to hope they could maintain their new autonomy within a free and democratic Russia.

But as you know, by July things were rapidly going to hell for the Provisional Government. The failure of the Kerensky Offensive. The July Days. The Kornilov Affair. In September, the Germans were able to seize the city of Riga. When the Germans took Riga, the Latvian soviet, known as the Iskolat, retreated north, where it continued to function as the regional government for unoccupied Latvia. A few weeks later, in October, the German Navy executed Operation Albion, which took control of the West Estonian Archipelago, part of Estonia.

Then came the October Revolution, and just a week later, the new Bolshevik government's decree permitting minorities in Russia to declare independence. I've said this a few times before, but perhaps it bears repeating that the Bolsheviks didn't anticipate that this would lead to new independent states along Russia's borders; they believed that socialist revolution was about to sweep the world and make nation-states obsolete. Dismantling the Russian Empire was meant to help bring about this glorious post-national future.

In Estonia, this was working out pretty much according to the Bolshevik plan, by which I mean the Bolsheviks seized power in Tallinn, the Estonian capital, in much the same way as Lenin and his followers had in Petrograd. In fact, the Estonian Bolsheviks seized power two days before the October Revolution came to the Russian capital. But the former government, the Estonian Provincial Assembly, continued to operate. It went underground. Each of these groups, the Provincial Assembly and the Estonian Bolsheviks' Revolutionary Council, declared themselves to be the supreme authority in Estonia, with the Bolsheviks mostly in control of the cities and the Assembly of the countryside.

In neighboring Latvia, at least the part of Latvia not occupied by the German Army, the Iskolat maintained control. In response to the nationalities declaration in Petrograd on November 14, Iskolat would declare Latvian independence.

The Russian and the Germans agreed to a truce in early December. By this time in Estonia, the Estonian Bolsheviks seemed to be gaining the upper hand. Conservative groups in Estonia, especially the Baltic German aristocracy, the people who were accustomed to running things in Estonia and didn't see much of a future for themselves with the Bolsheviks, began calling for German military intervention. Some of them were calling for outright German annexation.

On the other side of the front, in German-occupied Lithuania, the armistice dashed the hopes of the Council of Lithuania that they might be able to defy the Germans and hold out for full independence. The German proposal, for a Lithuania federated with Germany in a military alliance, a customs union, and a common currency, sounded like the best deal they could get, and so a divided council reluctantly approved the German proposal on December 11.

This agreement between Lithuania and Germany was quickly denounced by the Allied governments as well as by ethnic Lithuanians living abroad. After two months of further discussions with the Germans, which went nowhere, the Council of Lithuania abrogated the agreement and declared independence on February 16, 1918. In our time, Lithuania regards this date as its independence day. But at the time the Germans refused to recognize the Lithuanian declaration and demanded the Council follow through on the terms of the December agreement.

Meanwhile, peace negotiations were underway between the Russians and the Germans at Brest-Litovsk. You'll recall that Leon Trotsky rejected the German territorial demands, which included Lithuania and Courland, and walked out of the talks, declaring his policy of "neither war nor peace." The Central Powers responded with Operation *Faustschlag*, resuming the war and advancing rapidly into Russia, and in particular with an eye toward taking Petrograd. This matters for today's narrative because, over the eleven days of *Faustschlag*, the German Army advanced right through the rest of Latvia and Estonia, putting the territory of all three nations under German occupation.

In Estonia, the Provincial Assembly declared Estonian independence the same day the Russians withdrew, but soon Russian soldiers were replaced by German ones, and the Germans did not recognize the declaration. In Latvia, the leftist Iskolat fled the country ahead of the advancing Germans and they disappear from our narrative. A different *ad hoc* group, the nationalist Latvian Provisional National Council declared Latvian independence, but the Germans paid them no attention either.

The previous German peace offer to the Russians, the one Trotsky rejected, had called for Russia to cede Lithuania and Courland. Now the Germans were demanding Russia cede all three of the Baltic States, which Russia agreed to under the harsher terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Now that peace had come to the Eastern Front, Germany spent the rest of 1918 trying to realize its vision of nominally-independent-but-German-aligned buffer states in the east. In the case of Lithuania, the Germans continued to push for a Lithuania federated with Germany, a monarchy in a personal union with Prussia, or in other words, with Kaiser Wilhelm crowned King of Lithuania. The Lithuanians tried to dodge this bullet by inviting a different German noble, Prince Wilhelm of Württemberg, to accept the Lithuanian throne. The Prince agreed, but as was the case with Finland, he never made it to Lithuania or had an official coronation before the Armistice came and the plan was off again.

As for the lands up the coast, Latvia and Estonia, there the Germans proposed creation of what they called the United Baltic Duchy. Under this arrangement, the German landed aristocracy in those countries formed their own Provincial Assembly and asked Germany to recognize this United Baltic Duchy as a sovereign state and a German protectorate. In October 1918, the German government made it official.

Of course, the Armistice came just a few weeks later. In Lithuania, that meant the Council of Lithuania was now free to disinvite their almost-king and begin acting like a truly independent provisional government, which they did. Similarly, in Estonia, the Estonian Provincial Assembly, the group that had declared independence back in February, then gone underground when the Germans arrived, reappeared and set itself up as the Estonian provisional government. In Latvia, the National Council that had declared independence back in January, also reappeared and joined a larger patriotic front called the People's Council, which declared independence on November 18. Because this People's Council was broader based, in our time the nation of Latvia looks upon this declaration, not the earlier one, as its official birthday.

So now we have it all lined up: three Baltic states, three declarations of independence, and three provisional governments ready to take charge until elections can be held. If you are a supporter of liberal democratic self-determination of peoples, then it's time to stand up and cheer. Everything's going just great. This is one of those historical moments when I wish I could just stop the narrative right here. But alas, this is not the end of the story.

[music: Grieg, *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1*]

In all three Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, nationalist provisional governments have been set up and have declared independence, with at least the implicit blessings of the Western Allies. Unfortunately for these new governments, this moment may not last. For these three countries are still wedged between Germany and Russia, and though the Great War is over, the little wars to be fought in this region have just begun.

For example, the United Baltic Duchy still existed, at least notionally, and its German landed aristocracy still dreamed of making their rule permanent. They had sympathizers in Germany itself, right-wing Germans who, just as soon as the Armistice was declared, began to question why Germany had had to give up so much. Germany had already won the war in the East, and the Russians had already ceded the Baltic States to German rule. Why should an armistice in the West change that fact, when there was not a single Allied soldier within 500 miles of the Baltic States? Remember, too, that the Allies had charged Germany with maintaining its occupation in the east for now, in order to keep the peace and protect the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe from Russia.

Ah, yes. Russia. Russia renounced the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk almost as soon as the ink was dry on the Armistice agreement. Now, in the bad old days of Imperial Russia, the czars of old might have simply ordered their armies to occupy the Baltic States and forcibly annexed them. But the new, enlightened communist Russia was content to wait until the revolution that would engulf the world any day now swept away the bourgeois nationalist governments of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia and replaced them with socialist governments that would allow the Baltic proletariat to join hands with their Russian brothers and sisters and work together to build the glorious socialist future.

Only...you can't expect the Russian proletariat to stand idly by while their brothers and sisters in the Baltic States suffer imperialist repression, can you? Naturally, Moscow stood ready to funnel money and resources into the Baltic States to subsidize the creation of revolutionary communist governments, which then proceeded to declare the Commune of the Working People of Estonia on November 29, the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic on December 16, and the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic on December 17. These three governments were quickly granted recognition by the Russian government, and soon the Red Army began advancing westward in support of these revolutionary movements, which is a totally different thing from an imperialist annexation.

By December 1918, the Red Army was on the move west to reoccupy the lands the German Army abandoned as it disintegrated and its soldiers headed home. That meant Ukraine, in the south, and Belarus, farther north, where the Red Army marched into Minsk on December 10, putting an end to the short-lived independent Belarusian state and replacing it with the Socialist Soviet Republic of Byelorussia. It also meant advancing on into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. And for the ardent Bolshevik, that was just the beginning. From there, westward to bring the revolution next to Germany, Hungary, Austria, and farther. Perhaps all the way to Paris and London. Who could say?

We covered part of the story of this Russian westward offensive of 1919 two episodes ago, when we were discussing Poland. Other parts of the story I am going to defer to next week, when we'll focus on Russia and the Russian Civil War. For today, though, I'll want to keep the spotlight on the Baltic States. The Red Army entered Lithuania in December 1918 and took the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, on January 5. The Lithuanian nationalist government fled to Kaunas, the second city of Lithuania. But although the Red Army managed to take control of much of the land area of Lithuania, they were not able to take Kaunas and the Lithuanians living in the occupied lands did not take kindly to their would-be liberators.

This would be the high-water mark of the Russian advance into Lithuania, because the Lithuanians are still resisting, they are recruiting volunteers from Germany, and most important, as you already know, the newly independent state of Poland sent its own army eastward in March to push back against the Russian advance and offer the embattled Lithuanians much-needed support. On April 19, the Polish Army would take Vilnius. Unfortunately for the Lithuanians, as you also know, when the fighting between the Poles and the Russians ends, Vilnius will still be in Polish hands and will ultimately be incorporated into Poland.

The Lithuanian communist government and the Belarusian communist government would be merged together into a short-lived joint government called the Lithuanian-Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, known as Litbel for short. By August, the Polish Army would be in Minsk and Litbel would be no more.

When the Red Army moved west in December 1918, it also moved into Latvia and Estonia. In the case of Estonia, the Russians had advanced most of the way to Tallinn, the Estonian capital, by January, but the Estonian government had managed to recruit enough of an army to surprise the Russians, not only halting their advance but throwing them back.

The situation was far direr for Latvia, the middle one of the three states, where the Red Army, ably assisted by its Latvian Riflemen, all but overran the country. The Latvian capital, Riga, fell on January 3, two days before the fall of Vilnius to the south. By March, the Russians occupied all of Latvia, apart from a small enclave around the Latvian port city of Liepāja, which lies on the Baltic on the far western edge of Latvia.

But by this time, Rüdiger von der Goltz had arrived. You'll remember him from last week's episode, the German commander who had seized Helsinki from the Red Finns, helping the White Finns to win the civil war in that country and functioning for a time as the effective regent or dictator, take your pick, of Finland.

He left Finland in December 1918 after the Finns quashed the plan to import a German noble and make him their king and crossed the Baltic to Latvia in the hope of defending the United Baltic Duchy. Remember that as far as the German nobility in Latvia are concerned, that is still the legitimate government in Latvia and Estonia, especially so long as the invading Red Army were executing any Baltic German nobles they could get their hands on, which they were.

Recall that the Allies had asked Germany to hold its army in place in Eastern Europe until the Paris Peace Conference could sort everything out. The disintegrating German Army had not been able to fulfill the request. But now, the news of the Red Army advancing into the Baltic region and killing Baltic German aristocrats was alarming to many Germans, especially right-wing Germans of the sort who didn't understand why Germany had to give up its gains from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk anyway. There was by this time in Germany a paramilitary movement called the *Freikorps*, or "Free Corps," made up of exactly this kind of disgruntled right-wing German, many of them also veterans of the Great War.

Not only did right-wing Germans want to preserve the United Baltic Duchy, they also wanted to preserve Germany, as the Bolsheviks were making threats about how after Riga and Vilnius and Warsaw, Berlin was next on the list. What remained of the government of the United Baltic Duchy and the Latvian provisional government were begging for help, from Lithuania and Estonia, from Poland, from Germany, from France and Britain.

The *Freikorps* answered the call, and under the command of von der Goltz and with some assistance from Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Poles, began pushing the Red Army back again. By May, they had retaken Riga. But by this time, the Baltic German leadership, aided by the *Freikorps*, had also seized control of Latvia, driving the Latvian provisional government to the safety of a British ship. After the *Freikorps* turned north, away from the Red Army and

toward Estonia, it became clear that they would not settle for anything less than the restoration of the United Baltic Duchy.

The remainder of 1919 would see a three-way battle in Latvia, between the nationalist Latvians, the *Freikorps*, and the Red Army. The Allies would demand a German withdrawal in July, but instead of withdrawing, the Germans in Latvia reorganized themselves as the West Russian Volunteer Army, ostensibly a force created to assist the White side in the ongoing Russian Civil War (whom the Allies were also supporting), although in practice they seemed far more interested in holding onto Latvia than in advancing on Petrograd.

The picture is further muddled by the arrival in Estonia of Nikolai Nikolayevich Yudenich. Yudenich was a former general in the Imperial Russian Army. We met him once before, in episode 120, back when he was Grand Duke Nikolai's chief of staff in the Russian Army of the Caucasus. Yudenich had now arrived in Estonia, with the backing from the Allies, to recruit a new White Russian military force with the aim of opening another front in the Russian Civil War. Again, I'll defer some of this story until we get to the Russian Civil War proper, but it was a distinctly awkward situation for Estonia, since the Allies were pressing Estonia to allow this army to assemble on Estonian territory even though it made Estonia a target for Red reprisals. Also, the White side in the Russian Civil War officially did not recognize the independence of Estonia and its stated position was that the Baltic States were Russian territory. Yudenich's force also complicated the picture regarding the *Freikorps* units (now renamed the West Russian Volunteer Army) since it made it that much easier for General von der Goltz to claim his force was there to assist Yudenich.

Anyway, Yudenich made his move on Petrograd in October 1919, beginning from Estonian territory. When that failed, the Estonians would not permit the White force to reenter Estonian territory out of fear that would provoke a Red Army pursuit. Estonia and Russia would agree to a ceasefire in January 1920, followed by a permanent peace treaty, in which Russia acknowledged Estonian independence.

In July and August 1920, Lithuania and Latvia, respectively, signed similar peace agreements with Russia. Although the treaty between Russia and Lithuania recognized the Lithuanian claim to the Vilnius region, as you already know from episode 180, Poland did not recognize that claim and eastern Lithuania would be incorporated into Poland.

The Allied governments did not permit delegations from the Baltic States to participate in the Paris Peace Conference and they were reluctant to recognize their independence even after Moscow did in 1920 because the Allies still favored the White side in the Russian Civil War and the Whites continued to oppose independence for the Baltic States. After it became clear the White side was not going to win the civil war—is that a spoiler? Sorry. Anyway, after that became clear, the Allied governments finally granted diplomatic recognition to the Baltic States and they were admitted to the League of Nations in 1921.

But even in 1919, before the Allies recognized Lithuania, they recognized that Lithuania held only a small and not very useful bit of Baltic coastline. This in contrast to Latvia and Estonia, the capitals of which are two old and well-established seaports, Riga and Tallinn, respectively. Just as the Treaty of Versailles required Germany to give up control over Danzig, the Baltic port city on the western side of the German enclave of East Prussia, the treaty similarly required Germany to cede control of Memel, the port town on the northeastern tip of East Prussia. French troops were sent to occupy what came to be called Memelland, until the Allies or the League of Nations could work out a final disposition, possibly as another free city, like Danzig.

But in 1923, with the question still unresolved, the Lithuanians occupied Memelland and annexed it, with no resistance from the French or the Germans. The League of Nations finally agreed to Lithuanian sovereignty over the region in 1924, and it remains part of Lithuania in our time.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you all for listening. I'd especially like to offer thanks to Daniel, for his donation, and thank you Martin for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep the podcast going, for themselves and for everyone, and I am always grateful to all of you for your support. If you'd like to become a donor or patron, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we shift our attention east, toward Russia. We haven't had a good look at Russia since episode 166, when the Imperial family was killed and an attempt made on the life of Lenin. Things have only gotten more chaotic since then, and with the other Allies meeting in Paris to negotiate the post-war world, the absence of Russia from the deliberations looms large. What is to become of Russia, and where is its place in the post-war world? We'll begin to examine those questions next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I should add that the three new Baltic States all set up democratic governments and had pretty good relations among themselves. Internally, they all had substantial minority groups—notably Russian, Jewish, German, Polish, and Belarusian minorities—and the rights of these minorities were generally respected. Independence meant education in the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian languages, and a flourishing of the cultures of the Baltic peoples.

Economically, things were tougher. Latvian industry was all but dismantled during the war, as I mentioned. Agriculture was still the largest economic sector in all three countries, but before the war, Baltic agricultural surpluses were sold in Russia. After the war, the Russian market all but disappeared. Over time, industry was rebuilt, and Baltic agricultural products were shipped westward, principally to Germany and Britain. Land reform helped improve productivity. It also broke the political power of the Baltic German elites.

All three Baltic States set up democratic governments, but an authoritarian government would seize control of Lithuania in 1926. In 1934, by which time dictators were all the rage, Latvia and Estonia would follow suit. And so the situation would remain until 1939, when—

Well, I'd better stop right there, because that, too, is a story for another episode.

[music: Closing Theme]