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# ***CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REVIEW***

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**JOURNALISM AS A MEANS TO RECONCILIATION.  
PAUL SCHIEMANN'S ESSAYS 1919–20**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Paul Schiemann was one of the most significant ethnic Germans left outside the German state by the post-First World War peace settlement. As editor of *Rigasche Rundschau* and an active politician in the new Latvian state, he was well placed both to comment on developments in the political life of the Baltic region and to attempt to work towards responses to them. This article focuses specifically on his journalism during the critical years 1919–20. As the Latvian state was forming against a background of considerable on-going violence and instability, Schiemann disseminated consistently a call for reconciliation between Latvia's mutually suspicious national groups. The paper examines the compelling arguments he used.

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**Journalism as a Means to Reconciliation. Paul Schiemann's Essays 1919–20.**

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**Introduction**

Reconciliation has been called ‘the heart of deep peacemaking and cultural peacebuilding’.<sup>1</sup> Without it, antagonistic communities cannot be proofed against future conflict. It is, however, a complicated matter. As a process, the reconciliation of former enemies has been said to entail the re-spinning of a ‘web’ of ‘social, psychological, spiritual, legal and political’ relationships in ways involving ‘truthfulness, acknowledgement, justice, protection, compassion, repentance, and restoration’.<sup>2</sup> All of this cannot happen over-night; it has to be achieved gradually.<sup>3</sup> To complicate things further, ‘reconciliation’ has a number of meanings in addition to the one most clearly associated with peace. For instance, it can indicate acceptance of prevailing reality (‘I am reconciled to my fate’) or the correlation of formerly conflicting narratives about the past (so they are no longer ‘irreconcilable’).<sup>4</sup> These meanings, in fact, can stand alone or, indeed, be components of a larger process of reconciliation since coming to terms with an unmovable reality or agreeing a narrative may well be integral to the achievement of social harmony.

In recent years, the richness of the life and work of the Baltic German liberal politician Paul Schiemann (1876–1944) has led to it starting to interest an international audience beyond a relatively narrow circle of Baltic scholars.<sup>5</sup> Even so, his political thought remains significantly under-analysed.<sup>6</sup> Specifically here it is important to notice that his

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<sup>1</sup> O. Ramsbotham, T. Woodhouse and H. Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution. The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity, 2011, p.246.

<sup>2</sup> P. Green, ‘Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Divided Societies: a Path of Courage, Compassion, and Commitment’ in A. Kalayjian and R.F. Paloutzian (eds.), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Psychological Pathways to Conflict Transformation and Peace Building*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2010, p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> In *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Ramsbotham *et al.* suggest that reconciliation passes through the following stages: closure and acceptance, overcoming polarisation, managing contradiction and finally celebrating difference. (pp. 259–60.)

<sup>4</sup> Ramsbotham *et al.*, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 247.

<sup>5</sup> M. Garleff, ‘Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte Paul Schiemanns’, *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums*, 62 (2014) p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> For the point about Schiemann being under-discussed, and also for details about much of the existing literature on Schiemann, see I. Ijabs, ‘Strange Baltic Liberalism: Paul Schiemann’s Political Thought Revisited’, *Journal*

journalism from the years 1919 and 1920 evidences a mind engaged profoundly in work towards reconciliation. Although the social divisions he discussed most frequently did not really concern relations between formerly warring parties, they certainly did involve deep mutual suspicions held by antagonistic ethnic groups. The social fractures were rooted in former imperial times (during which a small numerical minority of ethnic Germans managed the Baltic provinces on behalf of the Tsar)<sup>7</sup> and the radicalisation of ethnic identity as a result of war (which, not least, had involved the collaboration of some Baltic Germans with German occupiers and, by 1919, involved military threats from Bolshevik, White Russian and *Freikorps* units).<sup>8</sup> In this context, there emerged a new democratic Latvian state which promised government by parties representing the numerically dominant ethnic Latvians. Schiemann's journalism, therefore, was pursued in a society undergoing a rapid process of decolonisation in which divisions reflected memories of subjugation (on the part of Latvians) and experiences of profound loss (as ethnic Germans fell from their social heights), with social tensions heightened by the proximity of military conflict. A Baltic German with a markedly progressive cast of mind and a long-standing commentator on public life who became a respected politician in the Latvian state, in his essays written in 1919 and 1920 Paul Schiemann displayed an intellect ready to analyse Latvia's deep social cleavages, to confront those who would entrench them and to propose paths leading towards greater social unity.<sup>9</sup>

### **Joys of Christmas**

In impotent anger we raise our fist against Heaven. Give us our Christmas! The meaning of our life: joy.

Where is our right to Christmas?<sup>10</sup>

Many Baltic Germans certainly experienced Christmas 1919 as a time of loss and hardship, but Schiemann's lines were ironic. Although the Russian Empire had collapsed, although a co-national state (Germany) was losing its war-time position in the eastern Baltic, and as a

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*of Baltic Studies* 40 (2009) pp. 495–515. Ijabs's article is more critical of Schiemann than the argument deployed here.

<sup>7</sup> For a short history of the Baltic Germans, see W. Schlaw (ed), *Die Deutschbalten*. Munich: Langen Müller, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*. CUP, 2011, p. 301.

<sup>9</sup> For a study of Schiemann's political career, see J. Hiden, *Defender of Minorities. Paul Schiemann, 1876–1944*. London: Hurst, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> P. Schiemann, 'Weihnachten 1919', *Rigasche Rundschau* 24 December 1919, nr. 129. This essay, like all of the other essays by Schiemann cited in this article can be found in H. Donath (ed.), *Paul Schiemann. Leitartikel, Reden und Aufsätze*. Frankfurt a.M., 1986.

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new Latvian state consolidated itself, the author encouraged his fellow ethnic Germans to look to the future:

Joy has expired in us. We live in the darkness of night. But we can awaken it. In a quiet and holy night in which we begin to remember ourselves. In which we ignite the love within ourselves which is stronger than national hatred and social selfishness. As we try to give meaning to that which for almost 2000 years was called the religion of our fathers. As we celebrate Christmases completely within ourselves. Without joy, but in the hope of joy.

In part at least, Schiemann could appreciate the possibility of future joy because he refused to romanticise the past. Looking back at the imperial world before 1914, he saw a place riven with hatreds based on both class and nationality. It had been inevitable that such a thing would fall apart and yield to something else.

Not that a brighter future was in any way guaranteed. Schiemann understood his community would have to work extremely hard in order to survive in the post-war world; hence he continued:

Until the idea of responsible democratic statehood has found its place in the political life of our homeland, we will have to fight. [We will have to represent] [t[he idea that democracy is not an accommodation of national opinion, but rather its influencing in the correctly understood sense.

But isn't it an advantage of our time, that we can wage such a battle at all? Don't we have the inalienable right to express our opinion in the National Assembly, in the press and in public meetings? Can't we strengthen our position through uninterrupted political work and gain a firmer foundation for our interests through united electoral work? In this respect the new democratic period, which in many respects has made us poorer, delivers us a benefit which it would be outrageous to undervalue, a benefit which we must nourish and preserve, not only against the spectre of reaction, but above all against the threatening anti-democratic wave from the East [i.e. Bolshevism] which recognises no personal freedom. And in defence of these idealistic aspects of life, on which our existence depends, we must and will find allies among the circles of the [ethnic Latvian] majority whose steadfastness is guaranteed by the perfect harmony of interests. The Latvian who holds the political order of the homeland close to his heart needs us just as we need him. The new political front of the future in which we must compete will be built on such a community.

Here was a powerful message: the old life was flawed and had to change; the new life offers much so long as we work hard and reach out to Latvians. This was a call for reconciliation

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both as coming to terms with prevailing realities and as bridge-building between alienated communities.

### **What a reconciled society is not: the problems of the day**

#### *Chauvinism and popular opinion*

Reconciliation was never just a theme for Schieman: it was a thread running throughout Schieman's thinking. Not least, he spoke out against those social forces militating against the creation of social harmony. For instance he explained how the antagonisms of imperial times had been exacerbated by war only then to be exploited by dangerous politicians.

You will agree with me that the long war, with its violent enflaming of all Mankind's passions and animal instincts, has precipitated a serious disease of national spirits in all the countries of Europe. No matter whether this sickness is expressed, here, in Bolshevist outrages or, there, in chauvinistic ones, the germ of the illness is the same. If at such a time the party which has the closest relationship to the broad masses of the people gives up the ambition to participate in healing this psychological disease and turns itself into the tool of the passions, then the state is brought to the verge of collapse.<sup>11</sup>

Schieman insisted that Latvian public figures were particularly culpable:

So long as the Latvian majority seeks power-political way of thinking in the Baltic, we will always stand towards each other in the position of vanquished to victor and Latvian democracy, for its part, will not be able to free itself from the confrontational chauvinism which without doubt is strong even in Latvian social democratic circles.

The position would be grim and would establish the prospect of a fight without end or a fight to the point of collapse if the spirit of a national politics of dominion really defined the spirit of the Baltic as such.<sup>12</sup>

When the Latvian Education Association denounced proposals made by Baltic Germans to allow minority nationalities to administer their own education systems, Schieman thought he traced something unpleasant behind apparently reasonable words. Contradicting all the points made, he proposed the group had been driven by 'unfruitful and aggressive chauvinism' aiming to kill off cultural life among national minorities.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Schieman, 'Sozialdemokratie und Gewissensfreiheit. Ein offener Brief an den Stadtverordneten Zelmes', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 5 September 1919.

<sup>12</sup> Schieman, 'Baltische Demokratie', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 21 July 1919.

<sup>13</sup> Schieman, 'Eine Manifestation des Chauvinismus', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 23 August 1919.

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As an ideal, democracy was supposed to empower all of a state's citizens, but Schiemann warned Latvian democracy was not attaining the ideal:

An infringement of your own law vis-a-vis the law of the other person in the form of a security regulation. A caricature of liberalism, which started as the unchaining of the personality and became the violation of the personality. A caricature of democracy which changed from an accommodation of the masses into the dictatorship of the masses. In a land where a national minority inherited rights against autocratic government and had to defend itself against the democratic impulsivity of a young nation, naturally this spirit had to take on an especially unyielding form.

He accused Latvian politicians especially of only giving vent to popular opinion rather than attempting to educate the electorate. This was a strategy which, thanks to the character of public opinion itself, offered no benefit for the future.

You have to be clear that so-called popular opinion can never be and never was anything other than the result of all the political actions of the past. Every concession to it means the continuation of old sins, means a strengthening of all those forces which stand against the consolidation of our state.

As a member of a now marginalised former imperial élite which, in popular Latvian minds, had been involved in the brutal suppression of an uprising in 1905 and complicit with war-time German occupation, perhaps Schiemann had practical reasons to try to keep the past at arm's length; but his position was more than just pragmatic. Recent commentators on conflict resolution recognise fully the importance of dealing with burdens of the past as a means to preparing the way to a shared future.<sup>14</sup>

Schiemann was depressed at low grade Latvian politics and what he regarded as its overwhelming readiness to pander to popular dissatisfactions.

The first party wants to make the landless happy; the second promises women paradise on earth; the third reifies the landless and the property owners at the same time; the fourth turns the army into Eldorado etc etc.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ramsbotham *et al.*, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 249.

<sup>15</sup> Schiemann, 'Staatliches Denken', *Rigasche Rundschau*, nr. 84 / 1920.

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The result was an incoherent politics prioritising the interests of sections of the population over those of the whole.<sup>16</sup> He warned that sooner or later the practice would lead to the scapegoating, of minorities:

The more an institution is dependent on the favour of the masses, the more it is necessary for it to characterise the national minorities, especially the Balts, as enemies.<sup>17</sup>

Schiemann advocated something different:

The democrat does not only have the duty to protect the interests of the broad masses of the nation, but also to protect the individual against victimisation. Even the most minor thing that a democratic leader does in contradiction to better knowledge damages the polity as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

He recommended that the state's politicians forgo strategies tailored towards cheap but partial popularity and cultivate something more worthwhile: a 'feeling of responsibility'.<sup>19</sup>

### *The position of minorities: ethnic Germans*

Despite being a member of an increasingly marginalised national minority, Schiemann was determined to fight his community's corner. He campaigned forcefully for the right of the German community to run its own educational and other social institutions. For example:

We cannot tolerate the violent de-nationing of the children of our economically weak national comrades.... During volatile times such as the present, such disputes [about social institutions] cannot be decided by orders based solely on power, but only by an amicable divorce, by avoiding collisions of interests. Just as we have created national autonomy in the area of school and educational questions, so we will have to find a corresponding solution for the social institutions associated with this area.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Schiemann, 'Chauvinismus', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920.

<sup>18</sup> Schiemann, 'Demokratie und Volksstimmung', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 22 August 1919.

<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, Schiemann favoured a nationwide system of proportional representation for Latvia. In a state with a population roughly the size of Berlin, he thought it silly to divide the territory into 5 separate electoral districts. In particular, such a strategy made it virtually impossible for minorities which could be widely dispersed to express their political requirements properly. See his essay, 'Das Proportionale Wahlrecht und die Minderheiten', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 2 August 1919.

<sup>20</sup> Schiemann, 'Stadt und Parteien', *Rigasche Rundschau* January 1920,

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When the implementation of autonomous education proceeded too slowly, he spoke out.<sup>21</sup> When the German minority lost the Alexander and Nikolai Gymnasiums, he did so again.<sup>22</sup> When Riga municipal council began replacing old German street signs with new ones, he complained of parochial behaviour at a time of increasing globalisation.<sup>23</sup> He also stood up for a sub-group of ethnic Germans—referred to as ‘colonists’—who had settled relatively recently in rural areas of Latvia. These were being expropriated and denied Latvian citizenship whilst being expected to pay taxes and perform military service. Schiemann compared their treatment to that of the Huguenots.<sup>24</sup>

From the perspective of history, Schiemann found reluctance to treat Baltic Germans equally to be unacceptable:

We are not just tolerated foreigners in the land who are requesting protection, but long-established state citizens who have to turn into reality those rights which can exhibit the intellectual values which a yet-to-be-built state cannot do without.<sup>25</sup>

He understood only too well that a close tie between citizenship, equality and justice was fundamental to the Latvian state and maintained the point had not been ‘absorbed with enough clarity by Baltic consciousness.’<sup>26</sup> It was a shortcoming he became determined to rectify:

Equality of rights for all must be the foundation of our state. We will stand up for that so long as there is a German in the land.<sup>27</sup>

And again:

... Baltic Germans stand united on the platform of constitutional thinking.... We want to help justice to victory.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Schiemann, ‘Unsere Mittelschulen’, *Rigasche Rundschau* 9 September 1919.

<sup>22</sup> Schiemann, ‘Schulsorgen’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, November 1919, nr. 107.

<sup>23</sup> Schiemann, ‘Staatsprache und Landessprache’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 143.

<sup>24</sup> Schiemann, ‘Das Recht auf die Staatszugehoerigkeit’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 153.

<sup>25</sup> Schiemann, ‘Baltische Demokratie’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 21 July 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Schiemann, ‘Staatlichkeit’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 7 August 1919.

<sup>27</sup> Schiemann, ‘Staatliches Denken’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 84.

<sup>28</sup> Schiemann, ‘Der Kampf für das Recht’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 79.

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### *The position of minorities and the interests of the state*

Schiemann was always clear that he was not seeking special privileges for his national group.<sup>29</sup> His discussion of language rights recognised both that ethnic Germans should acquire a working knowledge of Latvian and that Russian should be recognised officially too, as should Polish and Lithuanian on a local basis at least. If he felt there was no need to extend official recognition to Yiddish, this was because most Latvian Jews were said to have a good knowledge of either German or Russian.<sup>30</sup>

Schiemann's attitude to Yiddish was surprising given his respect for Jewish culture. Whilst he recognised the influence of, say, Karl Renner on ideas of cultural autonomy which stood behind Latvia's Schooling Law of 1919, he appreciated fully the importance of local Bundist politicians too.<sup>31</sup> When necessary, Schiemann was prepared to defend the Jewish community—for instance, when Sunday was identified as an official day of rest for Latvian workers.<sup>32</sup> He pointed out how this put the country's Jews in a difficult position by presenting them with a conflict between their economic and religious interests. Why couldn't they close their shops on Saturday, he asked? What about the principle of freedom of religion? Why were Jews not exempt from the legislation if railway and hotel workers were—particularly at a time when Western European Socialism was moving away from demanding a fixed day of rest? In this light, Schiemann feared that in making this law, Latvia's politicians were bowing to 'anti-Semitic currents' existing among some of the masses.

Schiemann was clear that, while minorities felt tied closely to their homeland, they remained sensitive to the signals sent to them by the state. He explained:

This point involves no kind of threat at all being addressed to the Latvian. It only expresses a psychological fact that we can only feel we are in a homeland, that we have an enduring existential tie [here], if the state is ready to document our belonging in public by recognising our culture.<sup>33</sup>

If the state refused to recognise their needs properly, how could minorities feel at one with it? Or as Schiemann also put it:

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<sup>29</sup> Schiemann, 'Unser Weg', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 6 October 1919.

<sup>30</sup> Schiemann, 'Zur Sprachenfrage in Lettland', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 29 July 1919.

<sup>31</sup> Schiemann, 'Die Überwindung des nationalen Hasses', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 26 July 1919.

<sup>32</sup> Schiemann, 'Sozialdemokratie und Gewissensfreiheit. Ein offener Brief an den Stadtverordneten Zelmes', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 5 September 1919.

<sup>33</sup> Schiemann, 'Zur Sprachenfrage in Lettland', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 29 July 1919.

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Already on several occasions we have represented the standpoint that the long-established (*alteingesessene*) population which is not ethnically Latvian must have a right to the use of its mother tongue in public affairs. Only this will permit German, Russian and Jewish Latvian state citizens not to feel like foreigners in the state, but rather fully-recognised citizens rooted in the homeland (*Heimat*).<sup>34</sup>

Arguing more strongly still, he went on to contend that when minorities were treated badly, they were not the only losers:

In truth, it is not just we Germans and our interests that is sacrificed, but the idea of the state as such. It is the concept of right and order in its most elementary form without which no state system can exist.<sup>35</sup>

Failure to take account of minorities adequately was, therefore, against the interests of the Latvian state and democracy itself.<sup>36</sup>

### *The mote in your own eye*

Although Schiemann spent a lot of time fighting what he identified as Latvian chauvinism, he did not only see faults in others. He accepted that in the past his own community had been less than perfect.<sup>37</sup> In particular, he recognised and criticised its social élitism:

Always up to now we have felt instinctively a social upper class. The estate owner, the head teacher the big businessman, perhaps even a craftsman were the natural representatives of the Baltic Germans; and it was not a narrow-minded policy of interests but naive class consciousness if these representatives understood the key question for the preservation of the national group to be the preservation of their social position. We have worked so that our sons could also become estate owners, head teachers and big businessmen and have believed that the conservation of a social *status quo* offered the best way to guarantee the interests of the so-called 'little German man'.<sup>38</sup>

Such ways of thinking had to be surpassed if the Baltic Germans were to survive.<sup>39</sup> In the spirit of achieving such an end, Schiemann recognised that the successful practice of language rights called for good will on the part not just of the majority, but of the minority too. He warned, for instance, that non-Latvians should never use their rights for any kind of

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<sup>34</sup> Schiemann, 'Staatsprache und Landessprache', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Schiemann, 'Ich warne!', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Schiemann, 'Sozialdemokratie und Gewissensfreiheit'. Op cit.

<sup>37</sup> Schiemann, 'Zur Sprachenfrage in Lettland'. Op cit.

<sup>38</sup> Schiemann, 'Baltische Demokratie', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 21 July 1919.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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chicanery<sup>40</sup> and appreciated that ethnic German children would have to be taught Latvian at their German mother-tongue schools.<sup>41</sup>

He was clear that days of empire were past, and hence that the opportunity for a small group like the Baltic Germans to play a terrifically important social role was gone for good.<sup>42</sup> But nor should they just stand back and watch how the Latvian state developed. They had to engage with the process of change, a role which required them to accept those demands of the majority population which were unpopular but ‘justified objectively’.<sup>43</sup> In his own words:

Woe to the generation which cannot adapt to such a transformation with reason and feeling.<sup>44</sup>

There was only one way forward:

The time for work has come.

The terrain for the work is given. It is the Latvian state which signifies our homeland (*Heimat*).<sup>45</sup>

In particular, Schiemann had no time for those who had emigrated and who were either waiting for a restoration of pre-1914 conditions or somehow trying to influence events from a distance. He called Ernst Seraphim, a former editor in chief of *Rigasche Rundschau*, ‘irresponsible’ and one of his ‘dangerous enemies’.<sup>46</sup> In 1918–19, Schiemann said, Seraphim had encouraged ethnic Germans to stay in place to secure their future in the Baltic, but had left the region himself. By 1920 he was in the process of returning and spreading a message that the community should remain aloof from politics since current conditions were only ‘provisional’. Schiemann lambasted Seraphim for failing to understand that Latvia’s territory needed a functioning state and ridiculed the idea that Baltic Germans could disengage from political reconstruction only to re-engage at a later date in order to enjoy citizenship and property rights. He believed that a Baltic German who remained in his homeland doing manual labour contributed more to the national community than any emigrant, while:

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<sup>40</sup> Schiemann, ‘Staatsprache und Landessprache’. Op cit.

<sup>41</sup> Schiemann, ‘Zur Sprachenfrage in Lettland’. Op cit.

<sup>42</sup> Schiemann, ‘Wir und der Krieg’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, October 1919.

<sup>43</sup> Schiemann, ‘Die Zukunft des Baltentums’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, December 1919, nr. 126.

<sup>44</sup> Schiemann, ‘Die abseits stehen’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 23 August 1919.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Schiemann, ‘Blickt der Gefahr ins Auge!’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 12.

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Anyone who is outside [the Baltic] prancing around with Pan-German phrases and wearing the martyr's crown of the patriot and who opposes the policy hammered out by us is vermin and our enemy.<sup>47</sup>

This language was more severe than any Schiemann applied against Latvian chauvinists. Given Schiemann's view, it was logical that the Committee of Baltic German Parties of Latvia, to which he belonged, issued a call for Balts to return home and participate in the construction of the Latvian state.<sup>48</sup>

In one of his most clearly reconciliatory essays, Schiemann argued passionately that minorities had to stop seeing chauvinism in others while believing their own politics fault-free.<sup>49</sup> He recommended that a genuine process of 'reconciliation' (*Versöhnung*) was needed in the Baltic German community and proposed that a proper capacity for 'understanding' was impossible until you had learned to appreciate a problem from someone else's point of view. Schiemann even indicated that some Latvian politicians appreciated that the Baltic Germans were undergoing a crisis and were attempting to help them. On another occasion he emphasised the need for Latvian society's different elements to find the right kind of 'mutual psychological understanding'.<sup>50</sup>

In Schiemann, then, we find a progressive cast of mind advocating the need to put social divisions to one side and for society to move forward in some kind of harmony. In the process, he rejected completely past and present (i.e. imperial and Bolshevik) non-democratic systems of government as nurturing the fragmentation of society (based on the exploitation of either national or class differences).<sup>51</sup> With an eye on Germany in 1920, he also rejected conservative revolution. Too much water had flowed under the bridge since 1914 for that to be an option.<sup>52</sup> Talk of monarchism could only prevent German culture adapting to Europe's new conditions.<sup>53</sup> The future lay with self-determination and democracy.

### **What a reconciled society is: towards solutions**

Which, then, were the forces and developments which Schiemann believed most likely to promote reconciliation within Latvia? Immediately following world war, at a time of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> 'Aufruf an unsere Landsleute im Auslande', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Schiemann, 'Chauvinismus'. Op cit.

<sup>50</sup> Schiemann, 'Politik und Volkstum', *Rigasche Rundschau*, November 1919, nr. 96.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Schiemann, 'Die abseits stehen'. Op cit.

<sup>53</sup> Schiemann, 'Wohin steuert die Gegenrevolution in Berlin?', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 61.

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manifold instabilities, peace could not be taken for granted; yet it was fundamental. Hence Schiemann went to considerable lengths to establish the idea of peace as part of the new state's most basic fabric:

Latvia emerged from the war, but not as its structure and not as its spirit; rather in opposition to it, as a concentration of all yearnings after peace and peaceful labour which were manifest in the midst of the hell of hatred and selfishness.<sup>54</sup>

But Schiemann knew peace came with no guarantee. It would require constant work. In a modern parliamentary democracy, that meant involvement in party politics. On this point, Schiemann displayed fundamental differences to other significant Baltic Germans. For Baron Manteuffel, for instance, being without a political party signified superior knowledge and deeper political interest.<sup>55</sup> Schiemann saw this as a risible failure of duty:

'I don't have a party.'

Never can anyone have heard this statement so frequently from citizens as in our society. A certain self-assurance shines from such words: the Baltic German 'stands for values superior to the summit of the party...'

[But] We live in a democratic state whose sovereignty is built on party membership.<sup>56</sup>

Schiemann pointed out that you simply had to work within the confines of party politics in order to express your concerns and dissatisfactions. Until the group did this, its voice would not be heard. Consistently, then, Schiemann encouraged members of his community to participate in elections and, in the process, to seek out a new social position.<sup>57</sup>

*Rigasche Rundschau* and the Democratic Party take the view that only unfettered co-operation in the work of the state, finding yourself in the great common interests, can create quiet and order, can create the place due to our national group.<sup>58</sup>

Schiemann wanted his social group to achieve unity within itself, but with the wider communities of Latvia too. So, when Riga faced military crisis in October 1919, Schiemann advocated ethnic German involvement in the security committee established to maintain the

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<sup>54</sup> Schiemann, 'Wir und der Krieg'. Op cit.

<sup>55</sup> Schiemann, 'Parteien', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Schiemann, 'Partei-gruppierung des Baltischen Deutschtums in Lettland', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 102-, nr. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Schiemann, 'Der Kampf für das Recht', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Schiemann, 'Eine Reifeprüfung', *Rigasche Rundschau*, December 1919, nr. 122.

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city's independence. In fact, he wanted all ethnic groups to participate to preserve the city during a 'nervous hour' when gunpowder hung in the air.<sup>59</sup> Unity of all groups—and not just at times of extreme crisis—was fundamental because:

Everything that contradicts the solidarity of political feeling, everything that somehow exacerbates the contradictions among Latvia's citizens, eats away at the foundations on which our state is built.<sup>60</sup>

And if Baltic Germans could unite among themselves and with other groups, then he insisted that democracy offered all they needed to build a successful future. He did this knowing full well that many Baltic Germans considered democracy '...a violation of the personality and the freedom of the individual'.<sup>61</sup> But the same political system that promised domination according to voting numbers alone also was offering the possibility of self-determination for national cultures.<sup>62</sup> So, once again, the most important thing was for people to participate enthusiastically in the state in order to capitalise on what it offered. Schiemann tried to change attitudes accordingly:

Democracy doesn't mean that every ignoramus and know-nothing should get a platform in the state, rather that every citizens of the state must feel within him- or herself the duty to acquire the knowledge necessary in order to be able to participate within the framework of what is possible.

And here our Baltic society still has a lot to do. The times when birth and property alone provided a right to political activity are past, although often our public life still finds itself in the hands of the few, [while] often thousands still sit to the side because they do not feel a calling to participate. Today, only a party can and must solve the task of drawing these circles into political activity by broadcasting the necessary information, by awakening interest and a citizenly feeling of responsibility. By its very nature, such a task is democratic.<sup>63</sup>

The purpose of Schiemann's political party was coined appropriately. The Baltic German Democratic Party of Latvia committed itself to working within the framework of the Latvian

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<sup>59</sup> Schiemann, 'In schwerer Stunde', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 9 October 1919.

<sup>60</sup> Schiemann, 'Der Popanz der Volksstimmung', *Rigasche Rundschau* 1920, nr. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Schiemann, 'Demokratisches Parteiversammlung', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 7.

<sup>62</sup> i.e. based on the Schooling Law of 1919.

<sup>63</sup> Schiemann, 'Demokratisches Parteiversammlung'. Op cit.

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republic, to promoting justice and equality, to educating the population through democratic engagement and to supporting private economic enterprise.<sup>64</sup>

Schiemann considered the new political conditions empowering:

The joyous and encouraging thing about our time [is] that such a huge amount is put into our own hands so that never more than today it's possible to say: we are the agents of our own fortune.<sup>65</sup>

Accepting that the path before the Baltic Germans would be difficult, Schiemann thought the results would be good, especially if 'we take all the hardship which we experience not as grounds for tired despair but as a spur to act, to engage with especially intensive work.'<sup>66</sup> He knew well that many Baltic Germans were suffering hardships (for instance families were going short of necessities and children were having their upbringing disrupted),<sup>67</sup> but he counselled against bitterness and preached optimism and unity:

It has always been my conviction that there is space enough for all members of the *Heimat* [*Heimatgenossen*] on the soil of the Latvian state. It has always been my conviction that co-operative work must bring us closer together, that all our interests ultimately flow together on all decisive points.<sup>68</sup>

A cynic might say that Schiemann was attempting to re-cast the well established idea of a Baltic German mission. Traditionally the community had seen itself as civilising the rowdy, lawless peoples of the East. By 1919–20, however, those rowdies had overthrown them and so the terms of the mission had to have changed. But by how much? Maybe modernisation and civilisation now implied the creation of the right kind of parliamentary democracy, one that would be reasonable, tolerant, inclusive, united and just, as opposed to one that was emotional, persecutory, exclusive, divided and arbitrary. In the end, Paul Schiemann was indeed presenting his community with a fresh challenge: engagement in the new developments in the land of your birth in order to underpin an enlightened democracy.

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<sup>64</sup> For the party's programme, see 'Richtlinien für die Tätigkeit der Deutsch-Baltischen demokratischen Partei Lettlands', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 12 January 1920, nr. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Schiemann, 'Beruf und Bildung', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1920, nr. 48.

<sup>66</sup> Schiemann, 'Die Zukunft des Baltentums', *Rigasche Rundschau*, December 1919, nr. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Schiemann, 'Beruf und Bildung'. Op cit.

<sup>68</sup> Schiemann, 'Ich warne!' Op cit.

### **Reconciliation, unity and virtuous circles**

Repeatedly Schiemann emphasised that, for Latvia to achieve its potential, its population had to unite. As a step on the way, he recommended offering amnesties to those threatened with prosecution for possible offences against the state while Latvia underwent its difficult process of emergence. He wanted parliament to offer the amnesties quickly since, in his opinion, failure to do so undermined Latvia's credentials as a *Rechtsstaat* (a state built on the rule of law).<sup>69</sup> Since it was unclear just how many people might be accused of crimes against the state, failing to grant amnesties left whole sections of society feeling threatened and alienated. Since there could end up being very many trials indeed, there was also a risk that many people would have to be kept on remand awaiting their time in court. The result could only be more social tension and damage to the standing of law in Latvia. Instead, an amnesty would draw a line under past events and, based on reciprocal respect, commence a virtuous cycle of events likely to draw Baltic Germans and the state into ever closer harmony.

Schiemann was interested in cultivating a psychology of reconciliation, and this required things to move forwards.<sup>70</sup> As he put it, 'Grubbing around in the sins of the past is always unfruitful.'<sup>71</sup> He wanted to cultivate qualities such as trust and certainty. At the time, however, Latvians appeared not to trust Germans, which only meant that Germans didn't trust Latvians. Hence there was a 'vicious circle' of mistrust in which Latvians constantly were looking for proof of German good faith while Germans constantly wanted proof that their loyalty was not being pre-judged.<sup>72</sup> Schiemann explained that Latvians did not appreciate how badly affected Baltic Germans had been by the expropriation of their assets and the state's ignoring of the achievements of the *Landeswehr*.<sup>73</sup>

The author believed trust and unity would flourish best if backed up by affluence and hence that the question of the economy was critical for Latvia.<sup>74</sup> They were not living in heroic times when greatness could be measured by a state's military victories. Rather, the state was essentially an economic organism which could only function properly if all of its sub-divisions could be forged together as a community of common interest. Here, reciprocity between communities was fundamental. In other words, affluence was a condition likely to

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<sup>69</sup> Schiemann, 'Die Amnestie und der politische Moment', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 2 September 1919.

<sup>70</sup> Schiemann, 'Politik und Volkstum', *Rigasche Rundschau*, November 1919, nr. 96.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Schiemann, 'Staatlichkeit', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 7 August 1919.

<sup>73</sup> The *Landeswehr* was a volunteer army of ethnic Germans which, among other things, fought Bolshevik forces in Latvia.

<sup>74</sup> Schiemann, 'Lettlands Staatsproblem', *Rigasche Rundschau*, November 1919, nr. 89.

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promote unity, but unity was also a condition likely to promote affluence. Here, again, was the possibility of a virtuous circle.

There was, however, rather an irony. In order for the state to achieve unity among its population, it was imperative to recognise fully the differences existing within Latvia's borders. In this light, Schiemann advocated that the same principle of self-determination that had been applied to create small states in Central and Eastern Europe be applied in order for different national groups to enjoy their own cultural spaces within the state.<sup>75</sup> This didn't imply creating potentially disruptive 'states within states', rather Schiemann was seeking structures and systems embodying principles of rights for culturally autonomous organisation which would, nonetheless, be in harmony fully with awareness of duty and loyalty to the state. Once again, Schiemann thought a virtuous circle could be created here. The provision of autonomy rights would satisfy minorities and this satisfaction would encourage them increasingly to fulfil their duties. In turn, this greater fulfilment of duties would give the state confidence to provide still more autonomous rights, to which minorities would respond with even greater commitment to the state.

And Schiemann thought that this virtuous circle could be supported in simple, understated ways:

Only quiet work allows attachment to the state to flourish in a natural way and binds the individual with the community firmly.<sup>76</sup>

He was looking to create un-dramatic means to bring about a reconciled society in which everyone felt that they could be themselves and also that they were secure.

### **Schiemann's style**

Given the difficult and highly changeable conditions under which Schiemann was writing,<sup>77</sup> the relative consistency of his balance, humanism and rationality marks out his work as distinctive. Very many of his essays convey a vibrant mind attempting to drag his formerly élite (and now often disgruntled) national group into an accommodation with the post-war world. As he did this, he tried to create a sense of community where it had not really existed before, that's to say between the different classes of the Baltic Germans and between that

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<sup>75</sup> Schiemann, 'Die Überwindung des nationalen Hasses', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 26 July 1919.

<sup>76</sup> Schiemann, 'Staatlichkeit'. Op cit.

<sup>77</sup> For an outline of the chaos within Latvia from 1918 to 1920, see Hiden, *Defender of Minorities* also Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, pp. 300–7.

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group and Latvians in particular. So even if Schiemann did not always tell people what they wanted to hear, his courage to convey messages, usually in a way that was skilful and perceptive, at least provided a challenge likely to provoke further interaction and communication between the interested parties. Time and again he invited people to examine themselves, their reactions and their ‘instincts’ all the more closely, for instance by applying his intellect to locate current events in historical context.<sup>78</sup> The knowledge likely to emerge from this process of enhancing understanding could only have assisted reconciliation.

Schiemann had the ability to insert a sense of perspective into discussion which was humbling. In November 1919 he wrote as follows:

Canons thunder and out in the field our soldiers are dying for the future of the homeland, for the Latvian state. And we politicians and peaceful citizens sit at home and sacrifice lovely words....<sup>79</sup>

The language was provocative in a number of ways. Here was an ethnic German claiming ‘our soldiers’ were dying for Latvia—in effect, for their homeland too. He was also putting politicians in their place: they were doing nothing compared to those on the battlefield.<sup>80</sup> Even these few lines amounted to a powerful call for people to sort out what was important from what was not, to set aside minor difference in favour of what really mattered in life.

This was typical of Schiemann. Time and again he tackled issues affecting people most deeply by striking towards the moral high ground. He did this with a pugnacity and resilience which displayed an understanding that a better society could not be attained by lovely words alone.<sup>81</sup> As he made his case, Schiemann applied all the tools at his disposal, not least a considerable intellect. This led him, for instance, not simply to frame arguments defensively (i.e. in terms of preventing others doing things to ‘us’), but proactively (e.g. in terms of duty and responsibility). So, for instance, he didn’t simply demand that Germans be given jobs in local administrations, rather he said that where ethnic Germans made up more than 50% of the population, they had a duty to participate in local administration.<sup>82</sup> It was a positive way of looking at things.

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<sup>78</sup> Schiemann, ‘Baltische Demokratie’. Op cit.

<sup>79</sup> Schiemann, ‘Lettlands Staatsproblem’. Op cit.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Schiemann, ‘Baltische Demokratie’. Op cit.

<sup>82</sup> Schiemann, ‘Eine Reifepuefung’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, December 1919, nr. 122.

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The ability to be positive even accompanied some of Schiemann's harshest messages. So, for example, he thought that improved communication between Latvian and German communities required the latter to transform itself in more egalitarian ways. As he put it:

The pre-requisite for an unhindered and successful co-operation in the Latvian state is the shift of our average social balance downwards.<sup>83</sup>

In other words, if Baltic Germans became more inclusive and progressive, then perhaps the rest of the world would have more confidence in them, stop considering them reactionaries and be more ready to accommodate them. And as Schiemann forged arguments such as these, he conveyed hope. Although the Baltic could seem mired in 'boundless hopelessness', he insisted his community should not take all the hardships they faced as grounds for depression, but use them as motivators for intensive action to work towards a better future.<sup>84</sup>

### **The limits of Schiemann's reconciliation**

For all his worthy credentials, we have to recognise that Paul Schiemann's work for reconciliation had some limits. Regarding Russia, for instance, he understood that it had lost its place in the Baltic and believed it should be assisted to ameliorate the difficulties this implied.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, Schiemann held Bolshevism a clear, present and enduring threat. He thought Latvia to be 'endangered by the onrush of the Red hordes.'<sup>86</sup> Discussing peace negotiations in 1920, Schiemann described Bolshevism as intent on 'the annihilation of western European culture'.<sup>87</sup> Everything about it was wrong. Its doctrine forced a false dichotomy onto society, since class conflict was unnecessary.<sup>88</sup> Its idea of economics was wrong and led only to a system based on fantasy and paper money.<sup>89</sup> Even its model of the worker was wrong, since it failed to allow space for individual initiative and self-improvement.<sup>90</sup> Under these circumstances, it is hard to see how Schiemann could have reached a position of reconciliation with left-wing politics.

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<sup>83</sup> Schiemann, 'Baltische Demokratie'. Op cit.

<sup>84</sup> Schiemann, 'Die Zukunft des Baltentums', *Rigasche Rundschau*, December 1919, nr. 126.

<sup>85</sup> Schiemann, 'Zur Sprachenfrage in Lettland', *Rigasche Rundschau* 29 July 1919.

<sup>86</sup> Schiemann, 'Chauvinismus'. Op cit.

<sup>87</sup> Schiemann, untitled, *Rigasche Rundschau*, start of 1920.

<sup>88</sup> Schiemann, 'Der soziale Gedanke', *Rigasche Rundschau* 11 September 1919.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

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To be absolutely fair, at times a certain sense of superiority also could be traced in Schiemann's essays. This is true even though in later years he was ready to recognise that important cultural bonds existed between Latvians and ethnic Germans by virtue of their co-existence over so many years.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, his idea that Baltic Germans could act as tutors for Latvian politicians and that they could represent loftier ideals than a politics shot through with self-interest and sectional thinking no doubt could have been taken amiss by some. To would-be detractors, this characteristic would have provided evidence of an outdated paternalism living on in Schiemann's mind.<sup>92</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Recent peace-building projects have discovered that situations 'on the ground' can be so complicated that interventions by 'outsider-neutrals' have neither the power nor the relevance to guarantee effective outcomes.<sup>93</sup> In the figure of Paul Schiemann, we encounter someone who offered more power and relevance than could be available to any outsider. Despite the limitations just noted, here was a local actor deeply engaged with ideas leading to a reconciliation which his society needed badly.

He recommended that Baltic Germans reconcile themselves to new conditions of life. He called on the community both to re-define its relationship with those who now held power and to re-define its identity in a constructive way appropriate to democracy. Old ideas of mission had to change, old inequalities and superiorities had to vanish; people had to look for the best that was available in democracy and to be active in seeking out strategies leading to sustainable new forms of life. If at times there was a hint of an old paternalism in Schiemann's prose, then it was not so marked as to undermine the thrust of his arguments.

Schiemann's attempts to promote reconciliation highlight it as not so much a single political act as a tortuous process involving the development of new understandings about life and its possibilities. It was about creating a sense of a single community where previously different ones had coexisted with too little humane interaction.<sup>94</sup> He made reconciliation seem like a series of conversations in which those involved could explore mutual concerns

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<sup>91</sup> See M. Garleff, 'Deutschbalten als Mittler zwischen Staaten, Völkern und Kulturen', *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums*, 61 (2013), p. 48.

<sup>92</sup> For a stronger view of possible inequalities in Schiemann's view of the world, see Ijabs, 'Strange Baltic Liberalism'.

<sup>93</sup> Ramsbotham *et al.*, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 235.

<sup>94</sup> For discussion of this point, see Kalayjian and Paloutzian (eds.), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, for example the essay by B.S. Tint, 'Dialogue, Forgiveness and Reconciliation'.

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and misapprehensions. It created an opportunity for both oneself and others to reflect and to take account. The process required the ability to identify and present criticism of others in ways that would be effective and the capacity to respond to well-founded criticism constructively yourself. It was, then, no easy journey.

To bring things back to the start, Schiemann's Christmas message was a clear attempt to provoke the Baltic German community into a more helpful self-image. And the purpose was unambiguous:

With a will made firm by our own strength, in clear understanding of what is attainable for our nation, to travel the path to a new existence. With a firm will expressed in the short words: WE ARE STAYING!<sup>95</sup>

### **The author**

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<sup>95</sup> Schiemann, 'Weihnachten 1919'. Op cit.