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Lithuanian Collaboration during the Second World War: Past Realities, Present Perceptions¹

In a study of the German occupation of Poland published in 1979, Jan Tomasz Gross defined a collaborator as someone willing, within a context of an “uneven distribution of power ... to grant the occupier authority, rather than merely... provide expertise and information.”² For most people, betrayal is, perhaps, the characteristic stigma tarnishing the collaborator. Resistance, on the other hand, presents the antithesis. Collaboration and resistance are responses to foreign occupation. Very few persons accused of collaboration have ever defined their relationship with foreign conquerors as treason. The title of one study, the “Patriotic Traitors”, reflects the conflicting, even counterintuitive, reality of the collaborators’ self-perception.³ Clearly, any study of collaboration, whatever its academic definition, must take into account the phenomenon’s various manifestations, its *Erscheinungsformen*. A broad spectrum of possible behaviors, ranging from politically motivated conditional cooperation to complete identification with the ideological goals of the occupier should be recognized. Perhaps, a similar “spectrum of resistance” could also be useful.

Lithuania endured a half-century of foreign rule during the twentieth century. Whether the entire period between 1940 and 1990 can be characterized as an “occupation” in any other than a strictly juridical sense is questionable. Certainly, at least from the late 1950s, the world at large, as well as many inhabitants of Soviet Lithuania, ceased to think of the country’s condition as an “occupation.” As a consequence, the accusation of “collaborator” hurled at those who joined the CPSU lost much of its sting, but this situation changed

1 This presentation is in part a modified summary and collation of my studies presented in earlier venues: my reports “Foreign Saviors, Native Disciples: Perspectives on Collaboration in Lithuania, 1940–1945”, presented at the conference “Reichskommissariat Ostland” at Uppsala University and Södertörn University College, in April 2002, now published in: *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust. Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania*, ed. by David Gaunt (et al.). Bern 2004, pp. 313-359, and “The Mass Persecution and Murder of Jews: The Summer and Fall of 1941” in Vilnius at the conference “Holocaust in Lithuania” September 2002; my articles: “The Burden of 1941”, in: *Lituanus* 47:4 (2001), pp. 47-60; “Thoughts on Lithuania’s Shadows of the Past: A Historical Essay on the Legacy of War, Part I”, in: *Vilnius* (Summer 1998), pp. 129-146; “Thoughts on Lithuania’s Shadows of the Past: A Historical Essay on the Legacy of War, Part II”, in: *Vilnius* (Summer 1999), pp. 177-208; and my introduction to Avraham Tory’s well-known diary, *Avrahamo Torio Kauno getas: diena po dienos*. [The Kaunas Ghetto of Avraham Tory: Day after Day]. Vilnius 2000, S. V-LX.

2 See Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement 1939–1944*. Princeton, N.J. 1979, pp. 117 and 119.

3 David Littlejohn, *The Patriotic Traitors: A History of Collaboration in German-occupied Europe, 1940–1945*. New York 1972.

when, during the late 1980s, the rapid disintegration of the Soviet regime and the subsequent loosening of censorship inaugurated a transformed political climate in which “collaboration” and “occupation” once again took center stage in public and academic discussion.⁴ Given the turmoil unleashed during the post-Soviet transformation, it is not surprising that public discourse ranged from thoughtful academic analysis to political character assassination.

The study of collaboration in Lithuania has suffered from tendencies to either narrow or broaden the concepts of collaboration for partisan purposes, often in order to attack or defend the historic reputations of “nationalist” movements. Sometimes the advocates utilize the same data to provide diametrically opposed conclusions. One example will suffice. The supporters of the Lithuanian Activist Front (Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas, or the LAF) claim that the anti-Soviet uprising which erupted during the Nazi invasion counted some 100 000 rebels – proof, in their view, of the patriotic sentiments of the populace. Israeli author Sarah Shner-Neshamit accepts the same absurdly inflated figure as evidence of something quite different, namely, massive collaboration with the Nazis.⁵ The actual number was at least five-fold less. The polemics have also given rise to the “theory of two genocides” according to which Lithuanian collaboration in the Holocaust was but revenge against the atrocities of Jewish supporters of the Soviets.⁶ Then there are the unsubtle assertions that “the Baltic and Ukrainian *populations* (my emphasis) collaborated voluntarily with the Germans in murdering the Jews”,⁷ or that “most Lithuanian people” collaborated with the Nazis.⁸ Aside from the problematic nature of such pronouncements, both denial and a broad brush approach to the problem of collaboration result in historically as well as methodologically meaningless constructs.

In addition to an approach which would avoid politicized formulations, a useful model of collaboration in Lithuania requires a grasp of history based on the mass of indigenous documents made available in Lithuanian archives since the late 1980s. A better understanding of the phenomenon, especially during the Second World War and the immediate

4 For example, see the discussion, in: Algis Kasperavičius, *Kolaboravimas: chronologinės ribos* [The Chronological Limits of Collaboration], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* (2002), No. 1(9), pp. 85-90.

5 Sara Shner-Neshamit, *Lithuanian-Jewish Relations During World War II: History and Rhetoric*, in: *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. by Zvi Gitelman. Bloomington 1997, p. 170.

6 Versions of the “revenge” theory in the popular and pseudo-academic press are too numerous to mention here. One of the more egregious examples is Jonas Mikelinškas, *Teisė likti nesuprastam, arba mes ir jie, jie ir mes. (Pamastymas apie ne tiek škyrėjusia, kiek amžina tema)* [The Right to Remain Misunderstood, or We and They, They and Us (Reflections on a Theme More Eternal than Annoying)], in *Metai* (1996), vol. 8-9, pp. 126-164.

7 Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945*. New York 1975, p. 541.

8 Amos Perlmutter in the *Washington Times*, 28 December 1996. Also, there is the assertion that the killers shared the same ideological values as the general populace: („teilten sie Nähe zu Werten und Konzepten der NS-Ideologie mit der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung”) or that as late as 1943 Lithuania was the most supportive of Nazi ideology in Europe („insgesamt die Bejahung der NS-Herrschaft auch noch zu diesem Zeitpunkt wohl in keinem der von Deutschland besetzten Länder so groß war wie in Litauen”), as in Knut Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord: Die litauische Hilfspolizei, das Rollkommando Hamann und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden*. Frankfurt a.M. 1996, pp. 70, 178.

postwar period, requires a closer look at several important factors unique to Lithuania as well as some of the other states of the region. A study of a number of as yet insufficiently examined questions would result in more fruitful analysis of collaboration than has been the case heretofore. For example: What preconditions, if any, encouraged collaboration during the 1940–1945 period of foreign occupation and to what extent did this “prehistory” structure its nature? Is there a causal relationship between the Nazi and Soviet periods, or to what extent did events themselves feed the phenomenon of collaboration (and, perhaps, resistance)?⁹ Is it possible, or even desirable, to construct a typology of collaboration, that is, its various forms? Posing such questions would also help us understand the extent to which differing perceptions of collaboration have influenced the search for a meaningful study and public discourse on the collaboration phenomenon.

The Prehistory of Collaboration: Defeatism and the Geopolitics of Ethnic Conflict

The passivity of the Lithuanian political leadership and populace in the face of the invasion of June 1940 greatly assisted the occupation authorities and their local collaborators in their task of Sovietization. The roots of this apathy can be traced to the so-called period of “three ultimatums” (Poland, 1938; Germany, 1939; USSR, 1940). Despite the official rhetoric of no further retreats, many ordinary Lithuanians met the crises with a fatalistic, even morbid resignation. According to security police reports, farmers debated whether Lithuania would be better off “under the Russians” or “with the Germans.” In Vilkaviškis District, villagers spoke approvingly of the German option, especially since, after Munich, the “Great Powers could not be trusted.”¹⁰ Fatalism infected the political elite as well. Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys recalls that in late autumn 1939, neither the people nor the government “had any firm conviction that the other [i.e. Soviet] side would really observe... [the treaty] concerning sovereign rights and noninterference in internal affairs...”¹¹ Antanas Smetona, Urbšys and others are reported to have stated a preference for Soviet dominance as the lesser of two evils.¹² When war came, the Leader of the Nation had little faith in a German victory given what he believed was the might of combined Anglo-American power. Smetona’s attitude was in sharp contrast to the pro-Axis and anti-Semitic tilt of the Lithuanian Activist Movement (Lietuvių aktyvistų sąjūdis – LAS), which can be regarded as a precursor of the LAF. In any case, the spirit of defeatism provided a breeding ground conducive to collaboration, not unlike the atmosphere which produced Vichy France.

In retrospect, the period of Lithuania’s “neutrality” during the first months of war in Europe (September 1939 – June 1940) provided not only the requisite defeatist atmosphere, but also enhanced divisions within the society between those oriented towards the German

9 One should emphasize that to recognize a relationship is not necessarily to *equate* differing phenomena.

10 State Security Department Bulletin No. 1 of 2 January 1939, Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas [The Lithuanian Central State Archive, henceforth LCVA], F. 378, Ap. 10, b. 186, I d., l. 4; cf. Lembergas’ report of 30 June 1939, LCVA, F. 378, Ap. 11, b. 206, l. 104 ff.

11 Juozas Urbšys, *Lietuva lemtingaisiais 1939–1940 metais* [Lithuania during the Fateful Years, 1939–1940]. Vilnius 1988, p. 40.

12 Liudas Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai* [Antanas Smetona and His Age]. Vilnius 1996, pp. 368 f.

option, others favoring a tilt towards the Soviet Union, and elements sympathetic to Britain and America, the “Anglo-Saxon alternative.” The important factor here is the *expectation* of foreign domination and the sense that events were beyond Lithuanian control. After the First Republic became a de facto Soviet protectorate following the mutual assistance pact of 10 October 1939, the divisive nature of this defeatism became ever more pronounced.

The conflict over the country’s geopolitical orientation acquired an ethnic dimension, clearly visible in the unruly pro-Soviet demonstration in Kaunas of 11 October 1939 in which a heavy Jewish presence was noted.¹³ Annoyed anti-Semites noted the friendly attitude of some Jews to the Soviet garrisons now stationed in the country. The differing response to the foreign threat thus widened the already significant divide among the nationalities. These divisions influenced the forms of collaboration during 1940–1945.

The First Soviet Occupation, 1940–1941: Nationalism and the Geopolitics of Hatred

The occupation of 15 June 1940 and the subsequent Stalinization of Lithuania intensified the aggravations of the previous decade which now escalated into a chasm of fear and contempt. The mutual stereotypes solidified into dogmas about the collective guilt of the Other. The vision of invading Soviet hordes fashioned the archetypes which shaped attitudes towards Bolshevism, Russians and Jews. The images burned into the minds of contemporaries encompassed the crowds of leftists, Communists and Jews welcoming the troops with flowers, a contrast to the sullen, sometimes hostile, but also curious Lithuanians – the resentful silent majority. But it is also noteworthy that the first hours of the invasion are described as a divisive shock to the society, albeit in a different context, by Jewish memoirs as well.

Sometimes, the clichés of flower-throwing Jews who welcomed the Bolsheviks (1940), or the flower-tossing Lithuanians who greeted the fascists (1941), are noted with sadness more than rancor. A Lithuanian officer remembers the day he escorted Soviet tanks into the town of Plungė:

When we reached the outskirts... I observed that quite a few people had gathered, mostly the town’s Jews. Since I was first in line, they assumed that I was the commander of the Soviet tank force and showered flowers both on my car and the tanks which followed. The blossoms were fresh, the shouts and greetings in Russian. True, not everyone did this, but such exalted enthusiasm was shown especially by young Jewish boys and girls. I watched as the excited young Jews leaped into the Lithuanian gardens, tore up the flowers and threw them on my car and the Soviet tanks which crept along behind me. A trifle? Perhaps, but the impression then was horrendous, it burned in the mind. One part of Plungė’s population exulted, the other wept. I saw how a young Lithuanian farm girl sobbed as the Jews uprooted her flowers. It seemed as if two peoples had split up, separated, never to live in peace again. And these momentary images are so ingrained in my memory that I can still see them today, forty-four years later.¹⁴

¹³ Details are in LCVA, F. 378, Ap. 10, b. 187, l. 232-246, State Security Department Bulletins of 12-15 October 1939; cf. the government’s response in: Apžvalga, 22 October 1939.

¹⁴ Jonas Andrašiūnas, Kaip mane apmėtė gėlėmis [How They Covered Me with Flower], in: Aki-račiai, 10 (October 1984), pp. 13, 15.

Naturally, there were non-Jews among the flower-throwers in the accounts of those first hours, but the Jews stand out in the collective memory, and not only among anti-Semites or “nationalists.”¹⁵ Frieda Frome’s childhood memories of Lithuania include the rosy conviction that under Smetona’s regime “Germans, Russians, Jews, and many others, in addition to the native Lithuanians, lived together in tolerance and peace.” As the Communists became more active after the establishment of Soviet bases in October 1939, she recalls, “little by little my thoughts were channeled into the Russian stream of ideology... so strongly that my parents were horrified at the opinions I expressed.” And she remembers the day that pained many patriotic Lithuanians:

I was at home the afternoon of June 15, 1940, when I heard singing outside in the street – not one voice but many. People were hurrying along the street, shouting, singing and clapping their hands. They were joined every few yards along their march by other excited men, women, and children. I rushed out of the house and into the street to learn the reason for their behavior. ‘Our liberators are coming,’ they shouted joyously. ‘The Russians will make us free. Down with Smetona and the Fascists!’ Those people on the street were the communists of Lithuania, led by the Russian underground. Looking in the direction they were headed, I saw great hordes of Russian soldiers in olive drab uniforms coming down from the hills.¹⁶

The interethnic conflicts are recounted in virtually all sources, including Jewish memoirs.¹⁷ Bitter fault lines separate most Lithuanian and Jewish wartime memories, but, with few exceptions, the contrasting reaction of the communities to the Soviet invasion does not seem to be one of them.

Police reports indicate that, just as some Jewish citizens took the opportunity to repay past slights utilizing the Soviet umbrella, so “there is talk among Lithuanians and Poles that, if the Germans would come, the Jews would suffer greatly.”¹⁸ In the new geopolitics of hatred each side had a foreign threat with which to bash the other. The political middle ground, where moderate leaders of both communities could meet, narrow during the best of times, had now vanished.¹⁹ Fierce ethnic antagonisms, expressed in accusations of “Jewish power” and betrayal by ethnic Lithuanians, who, in turn, suffered charges of fascist leanings by some Jews, intensified after the farcical elections to the People’s Diet (Liaudies Seimas) in July 1941. Even anti-Communist Jews initially succumbed to the prospect of improved

15 See National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD, M1178, Roll 19, Norem to State, 17 July 1940, 860.00/464.

16 Frieda Frome, *Some Dare to Dream: Frieda Frome’s Escape from Lithuania*. Ames, IA 1988, pp. 7, 10.

17 Harry Gordon, *The Shadow of Death: Holocaust in Lithuania*. Lexington, KY 1992, pp 11 f.

18 LVA, F. 378, Ap. 12, b. 296, l. 5, Šilas, Šiauliai Security and Criminal Police Report of 24 June 1940; *ibidem*, Ap. 10, b. 699, l. 619, Vilnius Security Police District Bulletin No. 138, 9 July 1940.

19 See acting prime minister Vincas Krėvė’s complaint concerning the Jews in Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas [Lithuanian Special Archive, henceforth LYA], Vilnius, Telephone report (Telefogramas) No. 2, 27 June 1940, Makarov to USSR Commissariat of Foreign Affairs F. K-1, Ap. 49, b. 828, l. 45-46.

status in the new geopolitics: "...we as Jews had no choice: under Germany we were doomed, under Russia we were free."²⁰

Describing the Stalinist occupation as both destructive of a community's religious, economic and cultural life *and* as a carrier of freedom and civil rights in the same breath, as we see in some Jewish memoirs, seems, at the very least, a bizarre incongruity. On closer inspection, however, the fact that the geopolitics of Lithuania's occupation gave rise to eerie frames of reference is not so strange if one considers the surreal context of the experience. This was a war of aberrant ideological alliances in which criminal regimes could be, and were, perceived as liberators.

An interesting document on the roots of Lithuanian pro-German attitudes is the NKVD's January 1941 report on the 29th Territorial Riflemen's Corps, the Red Army formation which had incorporated most of the Lithuanian military. One Lithuanian soldier consoled himself with the hope that "we'll survive somehow – soon the Germans will come and we'll get back what's ours and *be free* (my emphasis)." A junior officer opined: "Hitler has proposed to clean out the Baltics, the Soviet Army will be gone and our Lithuania will be free." One lieutenant had a more sophisticated outlook: "Germany is much more cultured than the USSR, and Lithuanians are more cultured than Russians. If Germany seizes Lithuania, we will save culture." The NKVD acknowledged the growing ideological radicalization as a reaction to foreign occupation: "If earlier the Nazi territorial-racial theory did not attract [the men], so now very often there is talk among the officers that only German culture can save Lithuania." Many soldiers spoke with longing of the pre-Soviet days when "our life was better and our culture on a higher level." The contempt for the new order was palpable: "(...) barely literate Asians [*aziyaty*] have come here and have destroyed our national culture. Only Hitler can save us." As an alternative, the men pointed to Slovakia, where "life is splendid." The Soviet secret police predicted, accurately as it turned out, that the majority of the 29th Corps were "completely unreliable" and could defect en masse in case of war.²¹

In general, during 1940–1941 the country's national communities, Lithuanians, Jews, Germans and Poles, turned inward as their geopolitical orientations became ever more incompatible. Since most Lithuanians had underestimated, and many even approved, the growing anti-Semitic atmosphere of the 1930s, they tended to downplay the Jews' very real fears. Even as some angrily threatened their Jewish neighbors with Hitler, few could have fully grasped the Nazis' capacity for devastation. In a parallel development, except for the initial sympathetic response to suffering Poles at the war's outset,²² anti-Polonism inoculated a large segment of Lithuanian society against an appreciation of the Nazis' murderous attack on their Polish neighbors. Then again, Soviet behavior in occupied Poland during 1939–1941 was no better, and, at least for a time, arguably worse.

20 See William W. Mishell, *Kaddish for Kovno: Life and Death in a Lithuanian Ghetto 1941–1945*. Chicago 1988, pp. 8 f; also cf. interesting passages in Gordon, *Shadow of Death* (see note 17), p. 16.

21 LYA, F. 1771, Ap. 2, b. 531, *Dokladnye zapiski NKVD LSSR o politicheskom sostoyanii 29-go Territorial' nogo korpusa* [Reporting Notes of the NKVD of the Lithuanian SSR on the Political Situation of the 29th Territorial Corps], January 1941, ll. 3-4, 21, 61.

22 See Piotr Łossowski, *Litwa a sprawy polskie 1939–1940* [Lithuania and the Polish Question 1939–1940]. Warsaw 1982, pp. 47 f.

While an ample variety of sources documents the numerous political and social conflicts which exacerbated mutual ethnic animosities, one should resist the temptation to read history backwards. Jewish society of the Soviet period was not a hapless body buffeted by a storm of racial hatred, as it was under the Nazi occupation. Anti-Semitism as an ideological construct is founded on religious and/or racial mythologies, but it would be an oversimplification and, indeed, a distortion, to characterize Lithuanian hostility to the Jews as simply a result of a fantasy, “de-contextualized” and unconnected to the actual situation as it evolved in 1940–1941. In fact, there was no single strand of pure anti-Semitism or, for that matter, pure anti-Polonism. The hostility, and it must be stressed that it was mutual, incorporated a conglomerate of old aversions, traditional stereotypes, current observations and distorted perceptions of the Other’s behavior, intensified by the clash of competing collective interests and geopolitical orientations.

We can leave aside here the question to what extent the perception of “Jewish power” under the Soviets reflected reality. Suffice it to say that the archival evidence has today been thoroughly mined and discredits two politicized stereotypes: first, that the proportion of Jews in important Soviet power structures was not substantially greater than their percentage in the population (it was); or second, that Jews constituted the overwhelming majority of NKVD torturers (they did not).²³ The real power in Lithuania were the handful of doctrinaire Stalinists of the Sniečkus type, and the rapidly growing army of predominantly Russian and Russified military, security and other cadres offering “fraternal assistance” to the fledging Soviet republic.

In sum, the history of the 1930s, as well as the realities of the first year of Soviet power configured the manner in which the various communities would respond. Most of the Germans, who viewed the Russians with loathing, simply repatriated to the Reich during the spring of 1941. As potential enemies of the Russian oppressors, they were the best of the lot in a negative process of elimination as far as Lithuanians were concerned, the conflict over Klaipėda fast receding into the background. The Polish population was in an impossible situation, demoralized not only by the Nazi-Soviet destruction of their state, but also by the Lithuanian determination to hold on to Vilnius. Most Poles may have detested Soviet rule, but they also viewed Lithuanians as the “occupiers” of Vilnius, while the Nazis hardly figured as potential “liberators.” It was also obvious that Jews, many of whom understandably preferred Stalin to Hitler, did not share the depth of the Lithuanians’ grief and shame at the loss of independence.²⁴

23 See Liudas Truska, Lietuvos valdžios įstaigų rusifikavimas 1940–1941 m. [The Russification of Lithuanian Government Institutions 1940–1941], in: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo institutas. Darbai 1 (1996), pp. 3-28; cf. Nijolė Maslauskienė, Lietuvos komunistų tautinė ir socialinė sudėtis 1939 m. pabaigoje – 1940 m. rugsejo mėn. [The National and Social Composition of Lithuania’s Communists from the End of 1939 to September 1940], in: Genocidas ir rezistencija (1999), No. 1/5, pp. 77-104, as well as her sequel, Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis 1940 spalio – 1941 birželio mėn. [The Make-up of Lithuania’s Communists from October 1940 to June 1941], in: Ibidem (1999), No. 2/6, pp. 20-46. The data published here confirm what I found in my own search of the same archives in 1992.

24 See Azriel Shochat, Jews, Lithuanians and Russians, 1939–1941, in: Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe, ed. by George L. Mosse and Bela Vago. New York 1974, pp. 301-314.

In 1918–1920 thousands of Lithuanians, Jews and other minorities had fought together for the reestablishment of an independent state even as they entertained conflicting visions and hopes for the First Republic. While it is true that other factors at work during the interwar period undermined the chances for cooperation among the nationalities, the Soviet occupation was a powerful catalyst relegating this common experience to a fleeting memory. Whatever the minorities' anti-Soviet moods, the politics and geopolitics of the war and occupation precluded an alliance with anti-Soviet ethnic Lithuanians who increasingly perceived the struggle for independence as their exclusive affair. International realities amplified national animosities, ensuring that, in the end, the struggle for Lithuania, whatever the various ideological trappings, would acquire many of the characteristics of a communal ethnic war.

The Nazi Occupation, 1941–1944

The historic interplay between the growth of anti-Soviet resistance in 1940–1941 and the behavior of many pro-Nazi Lithuanian collaborators during 1941–1944 is a complex story of nationalist idealism, political naivete, ideological contamination, obsequious opportunism and criminal intent. In contrast to pro-Soviet collaborators and Nazi collaborators in the West, Lithuania's pro-Nazi collaborators of 1941, almost without exception, originated in the anti-Soviet resistance, that is, in the struggle against the "first" foreign occupation.²⁵ This anti-Soviet opposition increasingly adopted attitudes which had percolated on the fringes, but had never dominated Lithuanian nationalism and which flourished in the nurturing soil of 1940–1941: the fascination with corporatism and a disciplined society, economic and racial anti-Semitism, as well as the geopolitical orientation towards Axis Europe, expressed as a distinct geopolitical tilt towards Germany.

Moreover, life itself served as the mid-wife of radicalism. The older generation's relatively moderate political discourse appeared hopelessly outmoded if not embarrassingly irrelevant. It was obvious that the only avenue of liberation, unless one were incurably naive, lay in a violent breakdown of the 1939 partnership established between the Soviet conquerors and the Nazis. For a time, these trends coexisted with genuinely democratic opposition to Stalinism, especially on the popular level,²⁶ but the Soviets, of course, lumped all protesters against Communist dominance with "fascists" and "reactionary elements." Overall, anti-Soviet activity was a complex and contradictory mosaic of attitudes and movements, which actually included both Jews and Lithuanians.²⁷ The other nationalities had reason to

25 Of course, many Communist collaborators who joined the Soviet regime in the summer of 1940 could claim their origins in the anti-Smetona movement, but that is a different context.

26 A good example is a case in Kapčiamiestis where local villagers protested undemocratic electoral practices, LYA, F. 1771, Ap. 1, b. 123, l. 29-30.

27 The various groups are discussed in Valentinas Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą (1940 06-1941 09)* [The Efforts to Restore Lithuanian Statehood, June 1940 – September 1941]. Vilnius 1996. An interesting account of the NKVD's struggle against "Jewish counter-revolution" is Gladkov's report: *O kontrrevoliutsionnoi deyatelnosti evreiskikh natsionalisticheskikh organizatsii* [On the Counter-Revolutionary Activities of the Jewish Nationalist Organizations], 29 March 1941, in: LYA, F. K1, Ap. 10, b.4, l. 179-198. I am grateful to Dr. Solomonas Atamukas for providing me with a copy of this document.

chafe at Soviet rule, but none, as noted above, saw their situation in quite the same way as the Lithuanians.

On 17 November 1940 a group of émigrés inaugurated the aforementioned LAF in Berlin. Formally, the organization was an alliance of all non-Communist parties, but the LAF gravitated to the more militant nationalist political spectrum. The former Lithuanian envoy to Berlin, Col. Kazys Škirpa, although stripped of his credentials by the Nazis, was chosen as leader. Correctly convinced that Nazi-Soviet friendship was short-lived, the ambitious Škirpa pressed Lithuania's case, bombarded German officials with copious memoranda, arguing that it was in the Nazis' interest to sponsor an anti-Bolshevik national liberation movement and a restored Lithuanian state which, in turn, would prove a useful ally in the "New Europe."²⁸ Škirpa's pro-German stance did not go unchallenged, especially by Lithuanian diplomats of the older generation still accredited in Western capitals, who, like Smetona, were hostile to Nazi ideology and doubted Germany's success against an eventual Anglo-American alliance. However, the moderating forces were unfocused, geographically scattered, and dispirited.²⁹ Those who favored "the German card" held the upper hand in Berlin, many of them impressed by the raw power of National Socialism. In their eyes, Smetona's failed neutrality policy, the collapse of national will in the face of Soviet invasion, and the growing perception of Lithuania's Jews as traitors to the nation, more than validated their strident political stance. Of course, they could also point out the geopolitical realities to the squeamish: with Britain on the verge of defeat, Germany was the only force capable of expelling Lithuania's tormentors.

The LAF traced some of its ideological discourse to the LAS of the late 1930s.³⁰ The philosopher Antanas Maceina, who had then propagated national exclusiveness and a "Promethean" view of the world, composed the Front's platform: economic corporatism, emphasis on the national will, solidarity reinforced by the *Führer-Prinzip* and a foreign policy guided by a "realistic" accommodation of Germany's interests. Maceina also underscored adherence to "Christian ethics" as a factor in the moral education of the nation and envisioned a "New Europe" in which the rights of small nations would be safeguarded.³¹ This vision departed significantly from that of the elites of the First Republic who had always been wary of, if not hostile to, Nazism, respected private property, and cherished the moderating influence of traditional Christian and bourgeois values.

28 The various contacts are detailed in Kazys Škirpa, Sukilimas [Uprising]. Washington 1973.

29 See Algirdas Budreckis, *The Lithuanian National Revolt of 1941*. Boston 1968; cf. Škirpa to Lozoraitis, 10 October 1940, in: Lietuvos Mokslų akademijos centrinė biblioteka, rankraščių skyrius [Manuscript Section of the Central Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences – henceforth MACB RS], F. 9-3105.

30 Bronys Raila, Už ką kovoja aktyvistai [For What the Activists Struggle], MACB RS, F. 9-3105, l. 15.

31 The LAF's program in: Lietuvos aktyvistų platformos metmenys: projektas [A Project: Outline of the Platform of the Lithuanian Activists], Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Turauskas Collection, CSUZ 75015-A, Box 5, also published in Škirpa, Sukilimas (see note 28), pp. 65-89. However, in Škirpa's version, the reference to the role of "Jewish Communists" in the destruction of independent Lithuania and the need for Lithuanians to take over "the Jewish position in commerce" are elided.

A more extreme example of ideological contamination is the draft of the LAF action program composed by the polemicist Bronys Raila who derided “democratism” as a system which preached “the equality of all inhabitants and races” but was essentially “anti-national.” A democratic nation-state was incapable of expressing the national which was more than simply “the sum of persons speaking the same language and united in a common historical consciousness.” The nation constituted rather “*an idea and indivisible organism (...) created by blood, land, historical fate and a struggle for a common future*” (emphasis in the original).³² Raila urged Lithuanians to unite with their racial brethren, the Latvians and create a “unified Aestian ideal.”³³ In contrast to the effete and “criminally negligent” Smetona regime, Raila proposed a pro-German stance based on Lithuania’s national self-interest, despite the nation’s difficult historic relations with its Teutonic neighbor. How this would square with the brutal Nazi racial empire envisioned by Hitler, a danger of which some of the older Nationalists had warned, Raila would not say.

The most egregious departure from the norms of the First Republic was the LAF’s racial anti-Semitism. Raila emphasized that, while Germans, Russians and Poles had all contributed to the historic weakening of the Lithuanian state and nation, the Jews had done the most damage. Contemporary Russian imperialism was simply concocted by a “pack composed of the Caucasian Dzhughashvili-Stalin and his innumerable Israelite leeches.” If Lithuania surrendered to Asiatic Judeo-Communism, the nation would cut itself off from “Western culture, and most important, from the orbit of National Socialist Germany’s politics and civilization.” The countless “Jewish breed,” coddled by Smetona, had made Lithuania one of the most “Jewish states in Europe.”³⁴ A future Lithuanian state, purified of “Jews, parasites and traitors,” could only develop fruitfully if it were welded into a single nation-body, “an ethnic (...) racial, political, economic and spiritual unit.” The Jew could never be assimilated into the host society, because “his peculiar Semitic race, the nature of this vagabond nation, seeks only a parasite’s life.” Raila had no scruples about spelling out the process of economic Lithuanianization:

*The LAF, acting in accordance with the Aryan spirit of Europe reborn, is determined to completely separate the Jews from the Lithuanian state and national body and to progressively accomplish the general expulsion of the Jews from Lithuanian land. All the movable property accumulated by Jewish exploitation and deceit will have to be returned to the Lithuanian nation through legal means and justly distributed for Lithuanian use and possession. (emphasis in original)*³⁵

In the end, Raila wrote, the Lithuanian nation, having rooted out the “remnants of Eastern nihilism,” would gather strength from “the depths of the Lithuanian soul and its Aestian land.” At that point, “the creative will of the Lithuanian nation would harmoniously join the healthy current of Western European culture.” Rhetorical excess reached a peak in

³² Raila, *Už ką* (see note 30), I. 26-27.

³³ The term “Aestian” (*aistiai*), given to inhabitants of the eastern Baltic region by Tacitus, was widely used to signify an anthropological, or racial, category, rather than the linguistic one denoted by the term “Balt.”

³⁴ Raila, *Už ką* (see note 30), I. 30-31.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, I. 43-44.

Raila's vision of Lithuanian supermen: commitment to struggle would "permeate their entire being, bursting with the desire to set out on new campaigns, ever more determined actions, and greater victories (...) The (LAF) activist is a new ethical Aestian type." Like most fanatics, impervious to paradox and irony, the long-winded Raila maintained that the activists' "actions were more eloquent than their words."³⁶

Such histrionics proved too much for the older moderates in Berlin who had not yet lost their senses. Even Škirpa was forced to admit that Raila's action program "having been written in a militant spirit..., perhaps, was a bit too sharp." Publication of Raila's call to arms was abandoned: the necessary "softening" of language could not be completed in time for the planned insurrection which was to coincide with the outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet war.³⁷ Nonetheless, Raila's program is revealing of the extent to which a gifted journalist could succumb to the influence of Nazi racist and geopolitical prattle.

By far the most extreme faction within the LAF were the radical followers of Augustinas Voldemaras, the charismatic Germanophile former prime minister and political enemy of Smetona. A week before the outbreak of the war, thirty-two self-described "remnants of the Voldemarists," mostly young officers, founded the Lithuanian National Socialist Iron Wolf Front which outlined a program for a "Third Lithuania." These "Wolves" proclaimed that the "young Lithuanian generation (...) has come to honor the new racial ideals of fascism and national socialism." Their brief ideological outline listed a number of principles for Lithuania's domestic politics, of which the second stated: "Jews are stricken from life." Other points included an educational system based on the "national socialist spirit," the installation of the leader of the Iron Wolf Front as head of state, and the establishment of the "closest cooperation with the Great Third Reich, and normal relations with other nations in the new European order..."³⁸ These self-styled Lithuanian Nazis had limited political impact, but they were to play their part as foot soldiers of the Holocaust.

The LAF claimed exclusive leadership in the struggle to restore Lithuania's independence, but its influence on events inside the country was limited. Only a handful of couriers were able to cross the border to maintain contacts with Berlin. The Front's instructions and documents were known to but a limited group of LAF people in Lithuania and most of the anti-Soviet leaflets circulated by the underground were home-grown. It is difficult to establish the political and ideological interaction between the Berlin center and the resisters in Lithuania, to determine which side radicalized the other. It is likely, but not certain, that LAF-Berlin's increasingly strident anti-Semitism was a reaction to the mood back home, which as we have seen, was a distorted response to a real tragedy and needed little prodding from "foreign influences."

An important document concerning the LAF's program for the Jews is the often-quoted "Directives for the Liberation of Lithuania" of 24 March 1941, which accurately predicted the development of the international situation through the spring and summer of 1941. The articulated goal was to seize control of Lithuania's administration at the outset of the Nazi-Soviet war with or without prior approval from Berlin. This would restore independent

36 *Ibidem*, I. 45-48.

37 In Škirpa's account, LMACB RS, F. 9-3105, I. 102-103.

38 Quoted in the diary of Zenonas Blynas, General Secretary of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party (LNP), LYA, F. 3377, Ap. 55, b. 235, I. 150-152.

Lithuania “on a new basis” of unity, nationalism and the “perfection of moral strength based on principles of Christian morality.” To achieve these goals it was necessary “to strengthen anti-Communist and anti-Jewish action.” As far as the latter was concerned:

It is very important on this occasion to shake off (Lith. *atsikratyti*) the Jews. For this reason it is necessary to create within the country such a stifling atmosphere against the Jews that not a single Jew would dare to even allow himself the thought that he would have even minimal rights or, in general, any possibility to earn a living in the new Lithuania. The goal is to force all the Jews to flee Lithuania together with the Red Russians. The more of them who leave Lithuania at this time, the easier it will be to finally get rid of the Jews later. The hospitality granted the Jews during the time of Vytautas the Great is hereby revoked for all time on account of their repeated betrayal of the Lithuanian nation to its oppressors.³⁹

LAF-Berlin had hoped that the Luftwaffe would consent to drop their leaflets during the Nazi invasion. The agreement never materialized and a chance was lost to proselytize anti-Semitism on a massive scale, but the texts have survived, including one aimed at the Jews, informing them of the aforementioned “revocation of hospitality” and presenting them with only two choices if they failed to flee with the Soviets: “arrest and trial before a military court” for those who had harmed Lithuanians and, for the rest, forcible expulsion and transfer of property “for the general needs of the Lithuanian nation and state.” The proclamation directed against Lithuanian Communists, on the other hand, offered redemption if they returned to the “ranks of their Lithuanian brothers and patriots.”⁴⁰ In March 1941 the Lithuanian Information Bureau in Berlin, the LAF’s propaganda arm, issued an appeal for the population to revolt at the onset of war and “to arrest all local Communists and other traitors of Lithuania, so that none of them would escape retribution for their deeds (...) traitors would be forgiven only when they truly prove that they had liquidated at least one Jew.”⁴¹ The evidence gleaned from the available documentation indicates that the LAF intended to expel and expropriate, rather than exterminate, the Jews. However, the burden of Škirpa and Co. in laying the groundwork for criminal collaboration is considerable. The LAF intellectualized the popular animus towards “Jewish power,” while its anti-Semitic diatribes served to legitimize anti-Jewish hatred.

The LAF’s militant rhetoric belied the reality of an organization driven by doubts and infighting. Škirpa felt hemmed in by intrigue, criticized as being too pro-German or not enough. Smetona’s public denunciations of Nazism from the former President’s comfortable exile in America annoyed him. In public dealings outside the LAF inner circle, Škirpa downplayed the ideological radicalism, not only to the Lithuanian-American diaspora, but also in his formal memoranda to the Germans and Japanese. To the latter, he made no mention of the Jews and described the LAF laconically as “people’s national and socialist, but strictly

39 Hoover Institution, Turauskas Collection, Box 5, “Lietuvai išlaisvinti nurodymai” [Instructions for the Liberation of Lithuania], 24 March 1941, 11.

40 The texts of the proclamations, including those directed at women, workers, activists and others, are in Hoover Institution, Turauskas Collection, Box 5.

41 LYA, F. 3377, Ap. 55, b. 50, l. 88 (129); cf. “Laisvoji Lietuva”, January 1941, in Hoover Institution, Turauskas Collection, Box 9.

anti-Communist (*völkisch national und sozialistisch, aber scharf anti-kommunistisch*),” and as a movement under (his) unified leadership.⁴²

In early 1941 Škirpa’s pro-German stance was briefly put to the test. Following the Soviet-German treaty of 10 January 1941, Lithuanians living in the Suwałki region came under Nazi pressure to leave their farms and cross into the USSR. The German Commissar for the region revealed that colonization and expulsion rather than assimilation would be Nazi policy toward the area’s Lithuanians who could now expect “the fate of the Poles.” On 20 February 1941 the worried LAF council met to consider whether to continue cooperation with the Germans; some called for abandoning plans for an insurrection. At the same time, the Vilnius LAF center, mostly officers in the 29th Corps, had, on their own, queried the Germans whether the Reich would grant Lithuania independence if the Lithuanian Red Army men mutinied during the Nazi attack as planned, an offer of a conditional alliance rather than collaboration as envisioned by Raila.

Eventually it was decided that there was no alternative to utilizing the German invasion as a platform for an armed rebellion which would probably erupt with or without the LAF. Škirpa was relieved by Ribbentrop’s March 1941 statement on the occasion of Bulgaria’s accession to the Tripartite Pact affirming the Reich’s interest in the “free development and independence of European states.” For their part, the SD began to press Škirpa to scrap plans for the immediate re-establishment of a Lithuanian government both directly and through the Gestapo’s Lithuanian agents in Berlin.⁴³ But it was too late to turn back.

The War and Holocaust

The Soviet deportations of 14-17 June 1941 pushed an already anxious and conflict-ridden Lithuanian society over the edge. Almost 20 000 men, women and children were rounded up and loaded onto cattle cars, most bound for Siberia and the Soviet Far North.⁴⁴ As the Germans invaded, much of the Lithuanian population exulted, while a significant minority were gripped by panic and dread: Communist officials, collaborators who had cast their lot with the Stalinists, above all, the Jews.⁴⁵ The much vaunted “Soviet power” unraveled overnight, leaving a vacuum quickly filled by the advancing Germans and angry young Lithuanians. On 23 June a hastily assembled LAF group proclaimed the restoration of the country’s independence under a Lithuanian Provisional Government (PG) (*Lietuvos laikinoji*

42 See LMACB RS, F. 9-3105, l. 49-66; also Hoover Institution, Turauskas Collection, Box 8, Memo to Reich Foreign Office, 12 June 1941; cf. Memo to the Japanese Ambassador Oshima, 21 May 1941.

43 See Škirpa’s memoir in: LMACB RS, F. 9-3105, l. 116-132.

44 Fewer than two thousand Lithuanian Jews were among the deportees. A disproportionate number were Poles, both Jews and non-Jews, but the majority were ethnic Lithuanians. Unfortunately, the old figures of 35 000 and more victims, including as many as 7 000 Jews are still being regurgitated by Western writers unaware of the latest findings. The figures for the deportees do not include the mostly Lithuanian political prisoners evacuated at the outbreak of the war. An excellent statistical analysis of the June 1941 deportations is Eugenijus Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940–1941, 1945–1953 metais* [The Deportations of Lithuania’s Inhabitants 1940–1941, 1945–1953]. Vilnius 1996, pp. 38-53.

45 See the interesting account in Laimonas Noreika, *Mano 1941–1942 metai* [My Year: 1941–1942], in: *Metai* (2001), No. 5-6, pp. 151-163.

vyriausybė) headed by Acting Prime Minister Juozas Ambrazevičius. Škirpa, the intended leader, had been detained in Berlin by the Germans.

The fact that the genocidal stage of the Holocaust began in Lithuania is the essential framework within which the events of 1941 must be viewed. Methodologically, the genocide falls into several more or less discernible stages:

- The pogroms and initial mass actions aimed primarily at Jewish men and alleged Communists, including ethnic Lithuanians, before about mid-July of 1941;⁴⁶
- The killing operations of early July through December 1941, especially between August and October, directed by Einsatzkommando 3 (EK 3) with logistical support from Lithuanian Police Department in Kaunas, local precincts and police battalion personnel;
- The periodic “selections” in the Vilnius (mainly the SD’s *Ypatingas Būrys*), Kaunas and Šiauliai Jewish ghettos during 1941–1944.⁴⁷

The environment of the first weeks of the war was one of political uncertainty and chaos.⁴⁸ Until the first days of July, the killings of the Jews were embedded in a broader canvass of death which included hundreds of Gentile unfortunates of various categories. Some were real and alleged Communists killed by the anti-Soviet partisans or simply by vengeful neighbors; there were the political prisoners and other “suspect” elements murdered by the Stalinists. Some victims were simply unlucky, randomly gunned down by the retreating Red Army, as well as civilians and even anti-Soviet partisans shot by nervous German troops. During the first days of the Nazi invasion, scattered groups of Communist activists resisted the invaders and rebels with arms, also hunting down real and imagined anti-Soviet elements. Nearly a thousand anti-Soviet rebels died fighting the Red Army and communist militias.⁴⁹ Thus, not all clashes and altercations of the first days were pogroms or crimes against humanity.

As SS General Walter Stahlecker, commander of Einsatzgruppe A (EG A), admitted in his oft-quoted report, the Nazi-inspired initial pogroms were possible “only during the first days after the occupation.”⁵⁰ The anti-Semitic discourse of the various irregular units, as well as the voiced perceptions of much of the populace, were expressed within the context of revenge, liberation and a struggle against Bolshevism, rather than the rhetoric of racially

46 Here we should differentiate between shootings carried out by predominantly German units, with or without local assistance, such as the Gargždai massacre of 23 June, other killings in the border areas, and a number of massacres in the area of Šiauliai (German Police Battalion 65), and killings carried out by predominantly Lithuanians under German control during the period *preceding* the mass extermination campaign of Hamann’s Rollkommando.

47 This scheme is based on Yitzhak Arad, “The Final Solution” in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation, in: *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976), pp. 234-272.

48 Much of the material below is adapted from Christoph Dieckmann’s and my unpublished draft report presented to the Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania.

49 A considerable number of relevant documents are published in: 1941 m. birželio sukilimas. Dokumentų rinkinys [The Uprising of June 1941. Selected Documents], ed. by Valentinas Brاندišauskas. Vilnius 2000.

50 Nuremberg Document 180-L (Einsatzgruppe A: Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941) in: *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal [IMT]*. Vol. XXXVII, Nuremberg 1949, p. 683.

motivated genocide. The very first mass murders carried out by the Tilsit Stapo and SD in the specially designated border areas occurred within hours of the invasion; elsewhere, there was a period of transition from pogrom-like attacks to a campaign of organized extermination. On 1 July 1941 Obersturmbannführer Erich Ehrlinger reported that he had created five Lithuanian companies of auxiliary police (*Hilfspolizeitruppe*), two of which had been put at the disposition of his Einsatzkommando 1b guarding prisoners and “carrying out executions” at Kaunas’ Seventh Fort.⁵¹ At this point, organized mass executions under a militarized command structure became the tool of destruction rather than pogroms. Still, in method and scope the massacres of the first six weeks differed significantly from the decisive assault on the Jews which fell with the greatest force between August and October 1941. In a sense, the initial wave of violence is the prehistory rather than history of the Final Solution in Lithuania.

There is no question that the Third Reich owns the decision-making responsibility for the Holocaust: Stahlecker’s EG A had already received sufficient instructions and official latitude to “solve the Jewish question.” After 2 July 1941, EK 3 commanded by Karl Jäger supervised operations in most of western and central Lithuania, while EK 9A of EG B, briefly operated in eastern Lithuania. A number of German agencies provided logistical support and personnel in the destruction process:

- the Wehrmacht, principally Feldkommandantur 821 as well as the so-called Security Divisions, responsible for securing the rear areas;
- German police battalions, particularly the 11th under Franz Lechthaler and the 65th, as well as other police agencies, both political and criminal;
- finally, elements of the Zivilverwaltung, especially agencies dealing with Jewish matters.

The Lithuanian irregular, military, administrative and political formations were important auxiliary factors during the period before and after the full-scale assault on Lithuanian Jewry. A general classification might include the following:

- The Lithuanian Provisional Government (PG) and its cohort, the Vilnius Citizens’ Committee;
- elements of the Lithuanian civilian administration, including district chiefs, mayors and rural officials; the local constabulary reestablished after the Soviet retreat and organized into police precincts under the administration of the Police Department in Kaunas;
- certain members of irregular forces, frequently termed partisans or “white armbands,” which arose spontaneously or were quickly organized upon news of the Nazi invasion, the most notorious of which was the Klimaitis band in Kaunas;
- units of the so-called Defense of National Work (lith. *Tautinio Darbo Apsauga* – TDA), later termed Self-Defense Battalions (lith. *Savisaugos, apsaugos batalionai*).

It is important to note that the categories outlined above are somewhat artificial and general in nature. The personnel of the irregular forces, police administration and police battalions often overlapped. The levels of participation and responsibility in collaboration with the

⁵¹ Ehrlinger Report to Berlin and Einsatzgruppe A, 1 July 1941, in: Bundesarchiv (Koblenz), copy provided to author.

Nazi genocide varied greatly according to place, time and circumstance. The degree of collaboration ranged from limited cooperation with Germans political goals to outright identification with the Nazi occupiers and participation in mass murder.

Whether native assistance was a *sine qua non* of the Baltic Holocaust is an open question. Christopher Browning has made clear that the destructive campaign of the German Police Battalion 101 achieved most of its genocidal goals without significant outside assistance. While none of the Lithuanian agencies and police formations were involved in the decision-making of the Final Solution, there is no doubt that their collaboration was a significant help in facilitating all phases of the genocidal program, including the definition („marking”), expropriation, concentration and, extermination of the victims.⁵²

The rebel leaders’ ambiguous position emanated from the paradoxical political morass in which it found itself: the regime, such as it was, claimed sovereignty but could not exercise effective control. Still, the LAF’s organ, “Į laisvė”, greeted the hour of liberation with the charge that “Jews and Bolshevism are one and the same.”⁵³ “Naujoji Lietuva”, published in Vilnius, and the provincial newspapers contained even more strident passages. The PG’s official anti-Semitism was reflected in the “Statutes on the Situation of the Jews” (Lith. *Žydų padėties nuostatai*) of 1 August 1941.⁵⁴ But the cabinet, even as it approved decrees segregating and expropriating the Jews, eschewed organized slaughter. The PG recorded, albeit not publicly, their disassociation from Klimaitis and other rogue partisan elements, and issued public reprimands against lawlessness and vigilante justice.⁵⁵ Only one member of the leadership, the PG’s liaison with the Germans, the historian Zenonas Ivinskis, is reported to have suggested a public disassociation from anti-Jewish violence.⁵⁶ The men of the PG were clearly discomforted, even shocked, by the excesses.⁵⁷ A similar attitude was evidenced by the country’s metropolitan, Archbishop Juozas Skvireckas, who confided to his diary that Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” made good points about the Jewish world conspiracy; at the same time, he registered his horror at the Lietūkis killings and sent his assistant,

52 According to the process outlined by Raul Hilberg.

53 Į laisvė, 24 June 1941.

54 Lietuvos Laikinoji vyriausybė: posėdžių protokolai [The Lithuanian Provisional Government: Meeting Protocols], comp. by Arvydas Anušauskas. Vilnius 2001, pp. 135 ff.

55 See ibidem, pp. 9-18; Į laisvė, 24 June 1941. There is also the claim that two Lithuanian generals had privately rebuked Klimaitis, in: Algirdas Martin Budreckis, *The Lithuanian National Revolt of 1941*. Boston 1968, p. 63.

56 Liudas Truska, *Ir atleisk mums mūsų tėvų bei senelių nuodėmes: apie holokaustą Lietuvoje 1941 m.* [And Forgive Us the Sins of Our Fathers and Grandfathers: On the Holocaust in Lithuania], in: Lietuvos Žydų žudynių byla: dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys [The Case of the Murder of Lithuania’s Jews: A Collection of Documents and Articles], comp. by Alfonsas Eidintas. Vilnius 2000, p. 671.

57 The following interesting formulation is found in the protocol of the 27 June 1941 cabinet meeting of the PG in response to the news about the Lietūkis killings: “Minister Žemkalnis reported on the extremely cruel torture of the Jews in the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas. Decided: Notwithstanding all the measures which must be taken against the Jews because of their Communist activity and harm to the German Army, partisans and individuals should avoid public executions of Jews. It has been learned that these actions have been committed by people who have no connection with the [Lithuanian] Activists’ Staff, the Partisans’ Staff, nor the Lithuanian Provisional Government”; published in: Lietuvos Laikinoji vyriausybė (see note 54), p. 18.

Msgr. Kazimieras Šaulys, to intercede with Kaunas authorities to halt such excesses.⁵⁸ Yet none of this amounted to the kind of public stance which alone could have persuaded at least some of those who had volunteered or been coopted into participating in the killings to rethink their behavior. The Šiauliai prosecutor, Matas Krygeris, did protest the extrajudicial lynching of alleged *Lithuanian* Soviet collaborators. A pastoral letter of July 1941 from Bishop Justinas Staugaitis of Telšiai strongly condemned violence against anyone, “whether one of our own or an outsider, whether friend or foe,” but did not specifically mention Jews.⁵⁹ But Krygeris and Staugaitis were the exceptions.

No action by the PG or, for that matter, any Lithuanian could have prevented the Holocaust as such. The PG had no real control over the Lithuanian companies engaged in their gruesome task, but it had approved their formation. In early July, the city’s Lithuanian military commandant, Col. Jurgis Bobelis, reported to the PG. At the same time, the Nazi Einsatzkommando was orchestrating mass shootings at the Kaunas forts over which Bobelis had only nominal jurisdiction. More damaging was the PG’s voluntary public alignment with the Reich, as well as its fawning rhetoric of gratitude to Hitler and “Greater Germany” which increased the prestige of the Nazis. The rebel leaders may have been unable to affect the military situation, but they certainly had complete control over their own rhetoric.

However, the troublesome record of the PG and the chaotic violence which accompanied the anti-Soviet rebellion of June 1941 should not, in principle, obscure the insurrection’s legitimacy. The picture of heroic anti-fascists being “shot in the back” by a treacherous fifth column is a propaganda fig-leaf. Stalinism was a criminal regime which deserved betrayal. While the anti-Soviet partisans inspired dread among Jews, not all were killers. But the sinister role of those “white arm bands” who did carry out atrocities against real and alleged Communists and, especially, the Jews, has understandably overshadowed the rebellion as an act of insurrection against foreign occupiers.

Natives in the Killing Fields: The Apex of Criminal Collaboration

Many bodies of the local administration contributed, at times with zeal, to the destruction of Lithuanian Jewry. In Alytus, at the end of June, the police chief’s offer to kill the Jews of his locale was turned down by the Germans.⁶⁰ On 16 September 1941, the Šakiai District Chief, Vincas Karalius, reported that his Jews had been “handled by the local partisans and auxiliary police.”⁶¹ Although such murderous initiative were not the norm, there is substantial evidence of the participation of local administrative bodies in the enactment of various restrictions, discriminatory measures, financial expropriation and compulsory

58 Relevant excerpts of the diary entries for 27-28 June 1941 are published in: 1941 m. birželio sukilimas (see note 49), pp. 271 f.

59 Lietuvos Žydų žudynių byla (see note 56), pp. 127 f.; Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas [Lithuanian State History Archive = LVIA], F. 1671, Ap. 5, b. 63, Pastoral Letter to the Faithful, 12 July 1941.

60 Christoph Dieckmann, *The War and the Killing of the Lithuanian Jews*, in: *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. by Ulrich Herbert, trans. from German 1998. New York 2000, p. 245.

61 LCVA, F. R-683, Ap. 2, b. 2, l. 86.

labor involving the Jews.⁶² In part these were attempts to follow the “Announcement to the Occupied Land” issuing by the German military within a week of the invasion, which, among other regulations, defined Jews according to the Nuremberg standards and forbade kosher slaughter, the very first such racist statutes promulgated in Lithuania. The local authorities’ discriminatory announcements also were well within the spirit of the anti-Semitic rhetoric emanating from the press and the Lithuanian authorities in Kaunas.⁶³

While the rationale behind the decision to initiate the genocide of the Jews during the summer of 1941 is still a subject of some controversy,⁶⁴ there is no doubt that the majority of the personnel involved in the actual destruction process were drawn from native sources, including former partisans and local police. The massive desertion of Lithuanian Red Army soldiers, who naturally saw no reason to die for Stalin, created an additional large reservoir of armed men, many of whom volunteered or were pressed into service as TDA troops. The Nazified Voldemarists who coalesced in the Lithuanian Nationalist Party (lith. *Lietuvių nacionalistų partija* – LNP), and whose moral degeneration is aptly captured in the diary of their General Secretary, Zenonas Blynas,⁶⁵ supplied many of the officers.

The most extensive collaboration in the genocide can be traced to August 1941 with the police collection of demographic data on Jewish communities, soon to be followed by the Secret Circular No. 3 which ordered precincts to gather their Jews for “transportation to camps.”⁶⁶ The records are fragmentary but, at least for Kaunas district, they provide a stark picture. The Lithuanian Police Department headquartered in Kaunas and supervised by Col. Vytautas Reivytiis played a fateful role in the destruction of Lithuanian Jewry even though the mastermind of detail, the daily manager of murder, was a rather low-ranking Nazi henchman from Kiel, 28-year old SS First Lieutenant Joachim Hamann. Forty-year old Vytautas Reivytiis could have considered himself superior to Hamann in both rank and social status. The son of a respected local patriot from Maneikiai, Reivytiis had entered police service in 1925, completing criminology studies in Kaunas and Berlin. An accomplished target shooter and ju-jitsu expert who competed internationally, an aviation enthusiast, the pro-German Reivytiis fit the self-image of the *voldemarininkai*, the hard right-wing “men of action.” Whenever problems arose, Reivytiis was quick to implore Hamann for instructions, even on the minutest details of the operation. There is no way to know whether the colonel was galled by his humble subordination to a lowly SS lieutenant, but there was no doubt about his subservience and loyalty to the Nazi cause throughout the occupation.⁶⁷

62 A well-documented example is the Joniškis LAF staff, some of whose documents have been published in: 1941 m. birželio sukilimas (see note 49), pp. 253-261.

63 LCVA, R-1436, Ap. 1, b. 7, l. 4.

64 See, for example, the interesting and well-documented argument in Dieckmann.

65 See note 38.

66 LCVA, F. R-683, Ap. 2, b. 2, l. 1. Responses to Reivytiis’ circular indicate that it was received by other police chiefs before 16 August 1941. Only a few of the documents in the file have been published, most notably in the series of Soviet propaganda publications of the 1960s and 1970s. Cf. Arūnas Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva* [German occupied Lithuania]. Vilnius 1998, pp. 190 ff.

67 For more on Reivytiis see Petras Stankeras, *Lietuvių policija 1941–1944 metais* [Lithuanian Police 1941–1944]. Vilnius 1998).

A relatively small proportion of those involved in the actual killing caused the most destruction. The Rollkommando, particularly its Lithuanian contingent under Lt. Bronius Norkus, accounted for at least half of the total number of persons murdered during the period encompassed by the well-known Jäger Report of 1 December 1941. The infamous Special Platoon (*Ypatingas Būrys*) was directly responsible for the majority of deaths in the immediate vicinity of Vilnius (Paneriai). At the same time, a considerably larger number of Lithuanian police battalion members and local auxiliaries, took part in “sporadic,” rather than “permanent” killing operations, as well as in secondary roles, especially the guarding of detainees, securing the perimeters of killing operations and the hunt for Jews in hiding. Lithuanian police battalions also participated in mass murders in Belarus and Ukraine.

At the core of the program of mass extermination of Lithuanian Jewry was an intensive “cleansing” (*Säuberung*) of the provincial population which reached a burst of murderous activity between mid-August and mid-September 1941. Of the more than 125 000 Jewish inhabitants of the Republic of Lithuania who are listed as having perished in the German accounts during the summer and fall of 1941, nearly half were murdered during this four-week period. The infamous *Großaktion* of 28 October 1941, when nearly 10 000 Lithuanian Jews were slaughtered at the Ninth Fort in Kaunas by the Nazis and their collaborators, stands out as a brutal record.⁶⁸ Never had so many been killed on Lithuanian soil in so short a time. At least 95% of Lithuania’s Jews who had not succeeded in escaping the country were still alive on 5 August 1941 when the Provisional Government formally announced its own dissolution. By the time Karl Jäger had completed his renowned report on 1 December 1941, about four-fifths of Lithuania’s Jewish community were dead.

Holocaust Time-Line:

German Reports on the Destruction of Lithuanian Jews, Summer and Fall 1941⁶⁹

REPORTED DATES OF ACTIONS	NUMBER OF REPORTED VICTIMS
Before Aug 1	8,237
1-14 August	4,756
15-31 August	32,909
1-15 September	28,707
16-30 September	11,671
1-15 October	10,752
16-31 October	18,027
1-15 November	2,991
16-30 November	252

⁶⁸ A factual account which preserves the horror of the atrocity is in Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*. Cambridge, MA 1990, pp. 43-60.

⁶⁹ This table is adapted from the Jäger Reports of 10 September 1941 and 1 December 1941 located in a number of venues. Victims in the border areas during the first days of the war, foreign Jews and Gentiles are not included in the calculation. One may find slightly different figures in other sources.

Germans and Lithuanians, 1942–1944

1942 dawned on a changed landscape of Lithuanian-German relations. The Nazis' disbanding of the PG and the banning of the LAF created disillusion among political and cultural elites. Revulsion at the massacre of the Jews had set in not only among many ordinary people, but had affected even some of the most fervent collaborators, although the latter were more bitter at the debasement of their soldierly honor than any real sympathy for the victims.⁷⁰ Popular dissatisfaction grew, exacerbated by rationing, intermittent food and fuel supplies, and the arrogant behavior of the German civilian administration, the detested *Zivilverwaltung*. However, the most important catalyst for the breakdown in German-Lithuanian relations was political: the issue of independence. Ambrazevičius' ingratiating letter to Generalkommissar Adrian von Renteln of August 1941 rejecting the German offer to join the advisory council noted that only the prospect of an independent state would guarantee Lithuanian support in the war against Bolshevism.⁷¹ As early as February 1942 Josef Wutz of Rosenberg's *Einsatzstab* reported that "the mood of the (Lithuanian) population vis-a-vis the Germans has noticeably worsened in the last quarter," emphasizing that „the national demands for the regaining of independence or, at the very least, a recognition of cultural autonomy, are equally strong among all strata.”⁷²

Large elements of the Lithuanian police and security apparatus continued their functions under German supervision, although here as well there appeared signs of disaffection and even open resistance. As result of the Nazi attempt to mobilize a Lithuanian SS Legion in the spring of 1943, tensions between non-Communist Lithuanians and the Germans broke into open conflict. The incompatibility of German and Lithuanian interests was exposed. This crisis also bared the growing rift between those who favored submission to Nazi demands, such as Gen. Petras Kubiliūnas and elements of his police apparatus, and Lithuanians demanding, at the very least, significant German concessions in return for cooperation in the war against the Soviet Union.

Lithuania's non-Communist resistance to the German occupation, a movement with a perspective different from that of the other anti-Nazi groups which were viewed with suspicion by most ethnic Lithuanians, evolved in its own way. The goals of the Soviet and Polish (*Armia Krajowa*) partisan movements were incompatible with Lithuanian national aspirations: the Communists evoked memories of Stalinist crimes and denied Lithuania's independence, while the Poles demanded Vilnius. Jewish partisans were feared as avengers. While the violence of the armed resistance groups paled in comparison with the Nazi genocide, all of the anti-German forces committed atrocities against civilians and requisitioned supplies from hard-pressed peasants.

The motley non-Communist resistance consisted of the now underground LAF (after late 1942, the Lithuanian Front or LF), the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (LLKS), the student-dominated Lithuanian Unity Movement, and groups corresponding to prewar political parties, such as the Populists. The LF and its allies represented a Catholic wing,

70 There are a number of such self-pitying passages in the aforementioned Blynas diary.

71 Juozas Brazaitis, *Raštai* [Works]. Vol. VI, Chicago 1985, p. 428.

72 Centre de Documentation de Juive Contemporaine (Paris), Rosenberg Collection, CXLIV-430, Wutz Report, 26 February 1942, 14.

while the LLKS and other groups can be described as a more militant “secular” faction. By late 1943 the various non-Communist groups had formed the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (VLIK). A detailed breakdown of the movement would reveal a wide and interesting spectrum from right-wing Nationalists to Social Democrats whose analysis is outside the scope of this study. An interesting aspect of the Lithuanian resistance movement was that some of the most militant nationalists, including officers involved in the killing of Jews, were also the most belligerently anti-German. While the rhetoric of the former LAF sounded a tone of regret at the Lithuanian-German divorce, the now unabashedly pro-Western LLKS took on a progressively sharper anti-Nazi stance, stressing repeatedly the historic animosity between the Lithuanians and their Germanic enemy as personified in the destructive medieval crusades of the Teutonic Knights. Both sides tarred the occupiers with the ultimate insult: the Nazis were no different from the Bolsheviks, the “red” equaled “the brown.”⁷³ Unlike the other resistance groups, the Lithuanian non-Communist underground required no ideological litmus test, only a commitment to the cause of independence – this was the one constant. Naturally, in this context it was agreed that nothing should be done to assist the Soviet military effort.

The German Security Police and SD reports correctly reflected the people’s repudiation of the Nazi policy towards Lithuanian independence and the increasing hopes of an Anglo-American victory as the major reasons for the nearly universal failure to enlist volunteers for the SS.⁷⁴ The Legion fiasco of 1943 contrasted sharply with the enthusiastic response to the call for the creation of the so-called Local Force (Lith. *Vietinė Rinktinė*) a year later. This time the Germans had agreed to Lithuanian conditions in their negotiations with Gen. Povilas Plechavičius, a charismatic anti-Communist officer of the old school: the proposed military units would be stationed only in Lithuania under native command and were to be outfitted with Lithuanian uniforms. On Independence Day, 16 February 1944, Plechavičius issued a public call for volunteers to defend the country. Within days nearly 20 000 men showed up at recruitment centers to enlist in the Local Force, which was widely perceived as forming the core of a future Lithuanian Army under conditions that, deceptively, resembled those of 1918–1920.

In contrast to the failure of the previous spring’s SS mobilization, the recruitment for the Force soon had to be halted because the flood of volunteers could not be accommodated. The very success of the Local Force triggered German resentment and the Nazis pressed further demands which proved unacceptable. Plechavičius refused to declare the Lithuanian people at war with the West and rejected the proposed assignment of Lithuanian volunteers to defend Germany itself. When the senior officers of the Force ordered their men to disband, they were arrested, but thousands of men fled into the forests and the countryside. A handful were executed and the remainder were rounded up and pressed into service in the Reich.⁷⁵ The violent end of the Local Force left only a diehard contingent favoring Lithuanian

73 Nepriklausoma Lietuva [Independent Lithuania], 3 February 1943; also in: Ekstra Leidinys, ibidem, 2 April 1943; cf. Laisvės Kovotojas [Freedom Fighter], 18 March 1943.

74 See the official Ost Meldungen 39 (29 January 1943), 1; 52 (30 April 1943), 1; 53 (7 May 1943), 20 (author’s archive).

75 For an overview of the Local Force see Bubnys, Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva (see note 66), pp. 405-423.

collaboration with the Reich. Remnants of the Lithuanian police battalions which had not deserted or been destroyed in battle, some of which were transformed into anti-aircraft units and stationed outside Lithuania, continued in the German ranks, but this service no longer had any meaningful political or ideological content.

In 1945 the last geopolitical prospect of Lithuanian independence rested on an unlikely repetition of the outcome of the Great War: a Russian reversal followed by Germany's defeat at the hands of the Western powers. As the Soviet steamroller neared, this dreamlike possibility of a Western alliance with a Hitler-less German regime against the Bolshevik menace was the only illusion which made sense.

Some Perspectives: The Tragedies of Collaboration

The contentious issues of Jewish behavior during the Soviet occupation and Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust has undermined rational discourse on the Stalinist and Nazi periods. Aside from seeking proof of their opponents' perfidy, many Jews and Lithuanians have shown little genuine interest in each other's history, especially the sufferings of the Other.⁷⁶ The bloodletting of the first days of the Nazi invasion in particular has created a vortex of conflicting memories which make meaningful discourse about the events of June 1941 difficult for even the most even-handed observers and virtually impossible among the elderly witnesses to the events. "Collaborator" is one of the common reciprocal epithets. The most egregious canards can be easily dismissed. Before their destruction, not Communism, but pious Orthodoxy, Zionist commitment and secular Yiddish culture described most Lithuanian Jews. Only the most embittered argue that Lithuanians are a nation of criminals.

Some of the images extant in supposedly scholarly formulations show little more nuance than the shopworn stereotypes. The brush of Nazi collaboration, when widely applied to entire peoples, can degenerate into meaningless formulations. The image of Jews cowering reluctantly behind Soviet power as the "lesser of two evils" against a vengeful anti-Semitic populace and the looming shadow of neighboring Nazi Germany reflects only one of a wide range of experiences.⁷⁷ In fact, before 22 June 1941, the admittedly tense Jewish-Lithuanian relationship was a web of mutual interactions. One should resist the temptation to read history backwards: before 1941 Jewish society was not a hapless body buffeted by a storm of anti-Semitism. The universal victimization of Lithuania's Jews began on 22 June 1941 (after which it is difficult to talk seriously of "relations" between Lithuanians and Jews – the latter were on death row).

As noted above, a sensible concept of collaboration should recognize a broad spectrum of possible behaviors, ranging from politically motivated conditional cooperation to complete identification with the goals of the occupier, genuine collaboration. (It should also be possible to construct a similar "spectrum of resistance" as well.) It is no simple task sepa-

76 This problem is nicely summarized in Alfred E. Senn, *Reflections on the Holocaust in Lithuania: A New Book by Alfonsas Eidintas*, in: *Lituanus* 47 (2001), No. 4, pp. 61-75.

77 See Dov Levin, *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941-1945*. New York 1984, pp. 21, 23. The author's idea that "Soviet rule in Lithuania did defer the Holocaust there for twelve months and seven days" is an incomprehensible rhetorical flourish which would only make sense if the Germans had attacked the USSR in the fall of 1939, or if the Lithuanians had initiated the Holocaust on 14 June 1940.

rating credible rationale from rank apologia. The difficulty of making existential choices is one of the usual self-vindications for those trapped by unsavory options, but moral and/or philosophical contamination can be one result from ignoring the nature of an evil ally. On the other hand, easy judgements about the geopolitical choices of those caught between Moscow and Berlin, the two most egregious foci of mass murder in the twentieth century, are no solution either. In 1941 the decision to fight one of the homicidal regimes of the Eastern Front, the worst slaughter-house in modern history, meant seeking the assistance of the other. Genuinely ethical choices, such as resisting *both* Hitler and Stalin, or Quaker-like nonviolent opposition to all evil state power, were excruciatingly difficult and could be dismissed as naïveté, or worse. Determining the “lesser of two evils” is not always an easy matter, at times begetting a morally compromising and subjective decision favoring the survival of some, mostly one’s own ilk, over others. The wisdom of such choices is evident mostly to the choosers and usually obvious only in hindsight. And there is always the question: a lesser evil for whom?

It is, moreover, useful to remember that the scale of comparative evil changes over time, and nowhere was this more true than on the eastern divide of what Mark Mazower has aptly titled “The Dark Continent.” Before 1939 Nazi repression paled in comparison to the Kremlin’s bloodletting. In June 1941 Communism’s body count still greatly exceeded that of the Third Reich, even within tormented and divided Poland. On the eve of Operation Barbarossa Stalin’s victims included thousands of captured Allied POW’s. The Nazis, as they assembled the largest invasion ever launched, still had considerable catching up to do in the field of mass murder. The rape of Ukraine, the siege of Leningrad and the horrors of Lithuania’s killing fields still lay ahead.

Unfortunately, the definitions of collaboration (and resistance, for that matter) are often too elastic and subjective, an easy way to increase or decrease the number of perpetrators or heroes, depending on the need. But it should be possible to concoct a reasonable formulation of *criminal* collaboration. Without absolving the Stalinists, it is safe to say, that for Lithuania during 1940–1945, the burden falls most heavily on the enablers and foot soldiers of the Holocaust. The responsibility of the Klimaitis gang, the “white armbands,” the Special Platoon and the police battalions is clear enough. The files of the Lithuanian archives certainly indict Reivytiš’ police department and the precinct chiefs, even if, in a few cases, the latter did not initially comprehend what “transport to the camps” signified. The more complex issues arise when we consider the role of those who genuinely believed that disreputable allies could bring freedom and independence. Certainly, people who became the willing servants of genocide deserve contempt, but the propagandists who internalized and then publicized Nazified racial notions must also share responsibility. The men who witnessed Nazism at close range should have grasped what lay behind Hitler’s blather about saving Western civilization. Some did know better, showing up the foolishness of those who did not.

Unfortunately for the reputation of the anti-Stalinist opposition, it came to be largely identified with the LAF. The Front, of course, was not alone in seeking out ideologically repulsive partners. In a sense, the Western democracies did much the same and called it the Grand Alliance. But there is a crucial difference, for even as Britain and America embraced *Stalin*, the majority of their citizens rejected *Stalinism*. By contrast, the most extreme Lithuanian collaborators emulated the value system, rhetoric and behavior of the

Nazis. There are, after all, many possible responses regarding the ideology and goals of one's prospective ally, ranging from reluctant accommodation to total identification. Befriending one devil to fight another is one thing; to be seduced into seeing the world through the devil's eyes, another. The racist philosophy expressed in Raila's action program transformed a tactical arrangement with Germany into an ideological alliance. While the less dogmatic LAF members had accepted the inevitable (and to some, distasteful) partnership with Hitler on grounds of *Realpolitik*, Raila and the more extreme wing of the LAF lionized the Reich's leading role in destroying the Judaized, Asiatic and barbarian Soviet ideology, hoping for the creation of a reorganized and harmonious family of European nations led by Greater Germany and anchored within the solid foundations of Western civilization. And one should note that, at any point, the PG and the supporters of independence had a choice during the first weeks of Nazi occupation in what to say and do even if their actions would not have affected the physical destruction of the Jews.

An abundant historical literature based on newly accessible archives has been building in Lithuania. The best of the new genre has revealed a reality more complex and troubling than the picture which has been heretofore predominant. One could even argue that since 1990 the most interesting and thorough research conducted on the Lithuanian Holocaust is now taking place in the Second Republic. Unfortunately, it has not been sufficiently accessed outside the country.

