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JOSEPH A. MELAMED

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LITHUANIA CRIME & PUNISHMENT

#4 JANUARY 1994

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PERIODICAL EMPHASIZING THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE RELATIONS WITH THE LITHUANIAN PEOPLE AND GOVENRNMENT

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE LITHUANIAN JEWS IN ISRAEL

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Joseph A. Melamed, Att. at Law

Starting with the present issue, we shall make efforts to enlarge our publication "Lithuania – Crime and Punishment", and to highlight more of the subjects and problems that concern the relationship between the remnants of Lithuanian Jewry, the Jewish people in general, and the Lithuanian people and their leadership. The accelerated pace aims to demonstrate the Association's firm resolve to step up its activities in this direction.

THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN OUR RELATIONS WITH THE LITHUANIAN PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT.

Following is an outline of the outstanding difficulties that are troubling our relationship with the Lithuanian people and government, and the proposed increased involvement and intervention of the Association to solve and/or overcome them.

A. The Lithuanian attempt to rewrite the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania and to deny their own crimes.

The proportion of Jews murdered in Lithuania during the Holocaust was one of the highest in Europe – over 94 percent! Many, if not the majority, of the victims were killed by the Lithuanians, directly or with their assistance or complicity.

In the first days after the Germans started their invasion into Lithuania – even before the Wehrmacht entered some localities or had completed the occupation of the country – the Lithuanian population hastened to unleash serious rioting against their Jewish neighbours; culminating in murder rape, looting, and vicious maltreatment of elderly Jews. All this happened publicly and in broad daylight, surrounded by a rejoicing mob of local inhabitants. In the first week of the invasion – between June 22 and June 30, 1941 – in about forty localities, the Lithuanians massacred some forty thousand Jews; mostly in the regions of Alytus, Kaunas, Kretinga, Mariampole, Mazeikiai, Palanga, Panevezys, Raseiniai, Sakiai, Siauliai, Skudas, Ukmerge, Utena, Vilkoviskis and Vilnius. According to a report by Colonel Jaeger who commanded a German Einsatzgruppe, his unit (actively assisted by Lithuanian murder squads and civilian volunteers) killed 137,346 Jews and local communists in the period of July 2 to December 1, 1941, in addition to the above murders.

Apparently, their lust for Jewish blood spread in their own country not fully satisfied, the Lithuanian killers voluntarily went to other countries occupied by the Germans (Bielorussia, Russia, Poland and other), on missions assigned to them by the Germans, murdering there myriads of additional Jews. The participation of Lithuanians in the killings of survivors went on at least until the final occupation of Lithuania by the Red Army, in August 1944.

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ארכיון
המרכז לחקר התפוצות
ע"ש גולדשטיין-גורן
אוניברסיטת תל אביב

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Attempts at dissembling the truth.

The Lithuanians are doing their utmost to whitewash their black record. They are, in fact, doing everything possible to rewrite the history of the Holocaust era, feeling embarrassed by the grave mark of Cain on their foreheads. In their attempts to conceal the traces of their crimes, the Lithuanians are using some of the following methods.

1.) Total disclaiming by the authorities of the part played in the Holocaust by their compatriots, and failure to apologize to their victims and to ask the Jewish people for forgiveness.

Unlike the leaders of other nations where Jews perished, notably the Germans, who accepted responsibility for Nazi crimes; the leaders of Lithuania – disregarding some noncommittal declarations that may be ignored – are adamant in their refusal to admit the extent of guilt carried by so many of their compatriots who took part in the killings of their neighbours. They are adding insult to injury by throwing unfounded accusations at the Jews of Lithuania, putting forward an impertinent and libelous "symmetry" thesis which claims that the alleged participation of Lithuanians in the killing of Jews was nothing but a retaliation for the participation of Jews in the Sovietization of Lithuania, which in 1940 led to the deportation of many Lithuanians to Siberia.

Preposterous allegations such as these only serve to make the cynical wickedness of their inventors more blatant. They undoubtedly remain true to Goebel's infamous theory; that the more often you repeat a big lie, more people will start to believe it. If, however, they would bother to examine the documentation in their own Archives, they would soon find out that the rate of Jews among those exiled to Siberia exceeded that of non-Jews by far. Out of 33,000 Lithuanian nationals deported, 7000 were Jews (that is some 25%) although the Jews constituted only 9% of the entire population at the time. Only 26,000 (1%) of an estimated 2.5 million Lithuanians were uprooted by Stalin, whereas the deportation rate of Jews amounted to three percent – 7,000 out of 230,000. Even in the matter of participation in the Sovietization of Lithuania, measured by the share of Jews in the Soviet administration of the country, it is undeniable that the Jews played a relatively minor role compared with the Lithuanians themselves. This can be clearly seen in the accompanying table (figures are for the year 1940/41):

Name of Soviet Institution	No. of members	Jews	%
The People's Seim (Parliament)	79	4	5
The People's Government	15	2	12.3
Sovnarkom (Council of Commissars)		1	
Politbureau of the Comm. Party	11	1	9.1
Central Committee Comm. Party	21	5	23.1
Party distr. Secretaries			4
Party deputy-Secretaries			8
Heads of the NKVD	4	0	0
NKVD Officials	297	20	7
NKGB Employees	285	36	13

Remarks:

1. The head of the NKVD was a Lithuanian, assisted by one Russian and two Lithuanians. The head office in Vilnius consisted of 74 communists, only five of them were Jews. All six regional chiefs of the NKVD were Lithuanian communists!
2. The deportations on June 14–15, 1941, were carried out by a team especially set up for this purpose. There was not a single Jew among the headquarter's office personnel, and only four or five of the members of the team were Jews.

The Lithuanian Jewry was not a communist community.

The tragedy that befell Lithuanian Jewry was twofold. The Zionists and the religious among them, that constituted the majority of the country's Jewish population, became themselves the victims of Soviet occupation and of its Jewish communist servants. These elements, who took charge of the Jewish Cultural life, destroyed Jewish culture, attacked religion, and (as stated above) helped exile to Siberia relatively more Jews than Lithuanians. In spite of these facts, the LIthuanians are now impudently accusing the Jews of abetting the Sovietization of their country. Those among the present-day Lithuanian leaders who so readily adopt the immoral principle of the so called "symmetry" are either ignorants or anti-Semites, or perhaps both, trying as they are to hold on to a big lie in order to "justify" the mass-murder of women, children, and elderly people, perpetrated by Lithuanians under the Nazis with unequalled bestiality.

Before the second World War, the Lithuanian Jews were Zionist and Orthodox in their majority, and the number of those beguiled by Moscow's phraseology was insignificant. The Jewish underground movement that existed in Soviet Lithuania struggled against the official policy by keeping alive the Zionist movement, preserving the teaching of Hebrew, seeking ways to smuggle out immigrants to Palestine, and helping each other to survive the hard times of that tyrannical regime. In the light of these circumstances, we must reject the false and shameful charges brought against us with uncompromising determination.

2) Omission, on all memorial shrines and monuments erected at sites of mass-extermination, of the fact that the massacres were carried out by Lithuanians.

To the extent that such monuments were erected at all, nowhere is there any mention as to who the killers were. The usual inscriptions condemn the "Nazis and their accomplices" or anonymous "Fascists"; but mentioning Lithuanians is taboo, as this would contradict the official attitude of turning a blind eye to their countrymen's crimes.

3) Designation of extermination sites (Fort IX for instance) as places where atrocities were allegedly committed by the Russians.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of Lithuanian's despicable tendency to make their bloody footprints disappear is to be found in Fort IX. This fortification – where myriads of Jews (men, women and children) were murdered in cold blood, mostly by Lithuanians – that could serve as a symbol of Lithuanians' bestiality towards Jewish fellow-citizens, is apparently too embarrassing to the authorities that are trying to re-design its past. The place has been turned into a museum; not into a museum that uncovers, and brings to light the true story of its past, but rather as a place where history is being misrepresented and falsified. The permanent exhibition shown at the graveyard filled with innocent victims killed by Lithuanians concentrates on "Crimes against the people committed by the Communists", as if the Russians are to blame for their death.

4) Glorification of murderers of Jews as freedom fighters against Russian oppression.

One of the biggest lies the Lithuanians are trying to spread and present as an historical fact is the story of the "revolt of June 1941". Everyone knows that the Germans did not require the help of those local "heroes" to drive the Soviet army out of Lithuania. From the beginning of the invasion the Russians started to flee from the Germans as fast as they could. The truth is, however, that the "heroism" of those "heroes", both civilians and uniformed ruffians, consisted only of sadistically murdering women, children and old people.

5) Rehabilitation of killers and their helpers, most of them legally convicted for their crimes by Soviet tribunals.

The Lithuanians do not disclose the real number of the criminals to which they have granted rehabilitation, according to a special law they enacted immediately after regaining independence. We estimate that about 30–35,000 people have enjoyed the grant; and are convinced that among them are many, if not most, of those who were involved in the active persecution of Jews during the second World War.

B. Restitution of Jewish property to the victims' lawful heirs.

Jewish private property in Lithuania, both movable and immovable, was proportionally vast. Most real estate in many of the small towns and villages, and much of it in the larger cities belonged to Jews. The Jews' share in trade and industry before the war was considerable, as was the role they played in the nation's economic development.

Soon after regaining independence, new Lithuanian legislation provided for the return of property confiscated by both former occupying powers. The laws were worded advisedly to favour Lithuanians who were deported by the Russians or Lithuanians whose property had been "nationalized" or stolen by the Soviets in other ways. The laws do not at all fit Jews who were victimized by Lithuanians, Soviets, or Germans. Legal conditions for the restitution of property make the process depend on the beneficiaries being both citizens and residents, which in effect means that people living abroad or people who are not Lithuanian nationals have no chance of getting anything back. On the face of it, the law does not discriminate between Jews and non-Jews. But at the same time, another provision was passed that limits the granting of citizenship to ethnic Lithuanians. Accordingly, Jews are not entitled to have their former nationality restored or obtain new citizenship. Most Jews living abroad are thus prevented from demanding restitution. In this matter, the Association of Lithuanian Jews maintains close contacts with the World Jewish Restitution Organization, as well as with other Jewish entities active in these matters. We also envisage appeals to the International Human Rights Organizations

and other influential bodies.

C. Anti-Semitism in Lithuania.

Some of the remnants of Lithuanian Jewry actually believed that the change in government, and the assumption of power by President Algirdas Brazauskas and the left, would herald a kind of new attitude toward Jewish affairs; an attitude that might hopefully affect popular moods as well. Reality turned out different, however. Unashamed and virulent anti-Semitism is obviously growing in the new Lithuania. Jew-haters are abusing the democratic freedom of expression to attack and besmirch Jews quite openly, without fear of punishment.

The above are the main problems that afflict our relations with the authorities and population of Lithuania, at the present time. The behaviour of the Lithuanians against the Jewish people, both the murdered and the survivors, is insulting and unacceptable. We, the survivors of the Holocaust, who managed to escape from the Lithuanian inferno, have a duty to carry out. We have a duty to remind world opinion of what the Lithuanians did to our less fortunate brothers and sisters, and to denounce their attempts to evade any responsibility. We have to appeal to all international institutions, drawing their attention to the fact that the Lithuanians continue to cause the Jewish people grievious harm in refusing to prosecute war-criminals, in holding back vital information on criminals living outside Lithuania, and in sabotaging the restitution of Jewish property to their rightful owners.

In view of the above, it seems imperative that all survivors and their descendants unite, organize, and cooperate for the sake of a common successful struggle against the unjust behaviour of the Lithuanians. The Association will become the central focus of all efforts directed towards redress and restitution. Our friends and readers are invited to advise and assist us in our task.

Joseph A. Melamed

STABLE TRADITIONS OF COEXISTENCE BETWEEN THE LITHUANIANS AND JEWS TO BE CONTINUED AND STRENGHTENED

The address of President of the Republic of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas made at the commemorative gathering at the Opera House in Vilnius on Sep. 22, 1993

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished foreign guests, representatives of the diplomatic corps,

On the day when we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Jews' genocide in Lithuania, when our national flags are tied with black bands, I would like to speak more extensively about the relations between the two nations.

Today is the day of pain, memories, deep remorse and hope. First let us observe a minute's silence to commemorate all those who perished during the terrible years of the Jews' genocide.

The Jews have lived in LIthuania for almost seven hundred years. Most of them settled in the times of Vytautas the Great. The formation of the peculiar identity of Lithuanian Jews with original philosphy and spiritual culture began during those times. Vilnius was destined to become the Northern Jerusalem, Lithuania was a country where there was no discrimination against Jews; they did not suffer moral or religious oppression. The Jews' rights and freedoms were guaranteed by the privileges granted them by the great Lithuanian dukes - from Vytautas to Zygimantas Augustas. Jewish communities were autonomous. As early as the Middle Ages, the Lithuanians noticed a peculiar trait of the Jewish people – their desire to gain knowledge, scholary and theological truth.

There were no ghettos, pogroms, religious discrimination against Jews in Lithuania and the Slavic lands under it during those times.

Having put an end to the Lithuanian statehood, the Russian Empire launched a really discriminatory policy: Jews had to pay double taxes compared with people of other nationalities. There were several attempts to sow the seeds of discord between the Lithuanians and Jews - over trade in cities, the relations between Jewish and Lithuanian traders in estates and villages. It must be said that both nations refused to rise to the bait. The two nations maintained normal mutual relations, respect and tolerance, and what is most important, ability to learn from one another.

Independent Lithuania will never forget Jewish volunteers who were killed in action for her freedom. Jews took an active part in the process of the formation of the state. In 1918, Nachman Rachmilevich was a member of the Lithuanian Council. Jacob Vigodski, Max Soloveitchik, Bernard Fridman, Simon Rozenbaum served as ministers for Jewish affairs of the first Lithuanian governments. All the Jewish communities were active voters during elections to Seimas and local councils.

Jewish educational, charitable, cultural, and religious institutions enjoyed a great financial support from the state.

There were over 100 Jewish primary schools, 20 gymnasiums and lower gymnasiums, a teachers' seminary in Kaunas, Rabbinical academies in Telsiai and Kaunas. Teaching was conducted in Jewish and Hebrew. Lithuanian history and the Lithuanian language were taught there. Jewish

communities had their own orphanages, old people's homes, hospitals. Today we can say that the contribution of Jews to Lithuanian trade, industry, crafts and art was considerable. There were a lot of Jewish physicians, lawyers, artists, and people of other so-called free professions as well as skilled craftsmen.

Before the war there was no anti-Semitic policy in our country. Archbishop Mecislovas Reinys, a well-known theologian and scholar, wrote in "The Problem of Rascism" in 1939 that one of the most important issues for every democratic state was to ensure the safety of her nationals, their property and rights. General space and concord originate from that. Without them, people's lives can become very poor, dramatic and nightmarish. As the worst example he mentioned Nazy Germany's policy towards Jews. Lithuania has every right to be proud of the fact that original Jewish outlook and culture flourished in Vilnius and all over the country, that Jews did not lose their national identity. Elijah Ben Solomon, the Vilnius Gaon, who lived in the 18th century surpassed a lot of renowned rabbis in wisdom. Mention should be made of the pioneer of the new Hebrew novel Abraham Mapu, the poet Abraham Lebenson, Mendele Moicher-Sforim, who wrote books in Yiddish. The Talmud and other religious, philosphical and other books for world Jewry were published in Vilnius. It is no wonder that having become a lively centre of Jewish religious and cultural life and Zionist movement, Lithuania gave the world a lot of famous people. Is it possible to imagine the 20th century European culture without the following artists, philosophers, scholars: Mark Antokolski, Isaac Levitan, Jasha Cheifetz, Jack Lipshitz, Haim Sutin, Ludwig Zamenhof and others who were born in Lithuania?

In the pre-war times, significant works were published by Isaac Kisin, a bibliographer, Simon Beliackin, a lawyer, Eber Landau, a physician. N. Arbit-Blat, a painter, Chanon Shulgin, an opera singer, Leib Hofmekler, a musician, and others were very talented.

Therefore the whole history of Lithuania is a history of peaceful coexistence between the Lithuanians and the Jews, among all people who live in Lithuania. It is no use painting it only in bright colours. It is, however, impossible to forget how fruitful was the interaction between nations, characters, customs, and cultures, what a valuable heritage for us and future generations.

Long before the imperial plot of the two powers — Hitler's Germany and Stalinist USSR — to day away with the independence of the Lithuanian State, demagogic slogans about "general equality", and "world revolution" unfortunately deceived a lot of Jews who got involved in antistate activities. Those people were not able to realize that Lithuanian Jews as well as Lithuanians would suffer reprisals and deportations after the occupation and annexation. We should not forget the Stalinist perfidy - the deceived people of both nations were used to sow the seeds of suspicion and distrust. Authoritarian dictatorship and totalitarism without perfidy cannot be imagined.

On June 22, 1941, a wave of spontaneous resistance rose in Lithuania. There was irrational revenge for the crimes of the occupation. A lot of Jews perished during those days. The resistance was provoked by people blinded by revenge who restored to violence. They were urged on by the turmoil of the first days of the war. People who had shed blood at the beginning of the war, were denounced in Lithuanian cities, towns and villages, they were branded butchers, and damned by their own mothers. Such is historial truth. It is dramatic, it is bitter, it is disagreeble, but today, on the day of the genocide of your people not a grain of truth should be withheld.

Hitler and Stalin respected each other. They learned from each other. What they had in common was paranoic thirst for the blood of the innocent. It was in Lithuania that Hitler intended to carry out a grand plan of Jews' genocide. Later he would boast that he had succeeded in implementing the fiendish scheme first of all in Lithuania. The documented evidence shows that the security police tried to remain in the background in order to show that Jews were being exterminated only by Lithuanians. A report by SS brigadenfuhrer, Stalecker says: "...it was very difficult to instigate pogroms against Jews on a large scale". Stalecker complains that local civil authorities and residents strongly resisted mass killings. Today it is clear that fascists were aided by few traitors.

Over 220,000 Jews were killed in Lithuania during the genocide. An inherent part of Lithuanian's inhabitants with their own language, customs, and religion perished. The Lithuanians were shocked by the loss. It is only natural that honest people all over Lithuania resented the genocide and terror in the Kaunas, Vilnius and Siauliai Ghettos. There were a lot of protests made to occupational authorities by Lithuanian public. Thousands of Lithuanian farmers, priests, physicians, and teachers saved Jews — children, women and old people. They expressed their solidarity with the resistance fight in the ghettos. The heroism of the rescuers, often modest ordinary people will be remembered for ever by grateful Lithuanians. Those people showed their real feelings that Lithuanians had for Jews whom they considered children of the same motherland. Ask people anywhere in Lithuania what they think of the Jews' tragic fate during the war and you will feel grief, pity, abhorrence of the evil and its perpetrators, and prayer: may it never be repeated.

Lithuania being in the process of becoming a state ruled by law is for legal assessment of the crimes committed in the Nazi and Stalinist times. There is no statute of limitations to crimes against humanity. Criminals must be tried by courts of law. At the same time we cannot approve of attempts to identify a handful of killers with the Lithuanian people, to damage the relations between the two peoples by groundless accusations. We resolutely denounce those authors who blacken and belittle the image of Lithuania and the Lithuanians in the

eyes of the world portraying them as a nation of Jew-killers. There has been more than one publication of this kind in foreign press lately. It is obvious that they are not conducive to historic truth and humanism. Statements that allegedly almost only the Jews are responsible for Stalinist ideas and practices, and the KGB activities that have appeared in our press are not conducive to it either.

The task of free press is to impartially write about historic events, not to exaggerate, to promote respect for one another. We will not be able to raise those who are dead. But historic memory is very important for the present and future.

After the restoration of the independence of Lithuania, Jews again enjoy equal rights. They can have their own schools, press, conduct other cultural activities independently. Thanks to individuals dedicated to the good of their people a Jewish day care centre, an elementary school (that has become a seconday school) were opened in Vilnius several years ago. There are Sunday schools where children are taught Hebrew in Kaunas and Klaipeda. A centre for Judaica studies has been opened at Vilnius University, the Jewish Museum has been engaged in wide cultural activities for some time.

As far as I know lots of obstacles had to be surmounted and difficulties faced to establish those educational and cultural institutions. But they were overcome by the Jewish Community's led by Simon Alperavicius efforts, enthusiasm, and determination to revive and save their language, traditions and national identity. Lithuanian Jews now residing in Israel have been giving them great support. Jewish cultural institutions have got aid from the government and will get it in the future. We are going to support all the initiatives and practical actions to have Jewish cultural treasures taken away brought back to Lithuania.

It should be noted that Jewish education system is wholy integrated into the Lithuanian one and in this respect it differs from schools of other minorities living in the country.

Most of Lithuanian Jews have left Lithuania for Israel and other countries because of various reasons: I am happy to say that they have not broken off their ties with Lithuania. We are proud of the works and love for our country of renowned intellectuals Icchok Meras, Grigori Kanovitch, Herman Perelstein and others.

Every democratic country has to ensure conditions for self-determination for all the nationals irrespective of their outlook, belief, and nationality. The more so that it is an important condition for the unity of society, political stability of the state and successful reforms.

The revival awakened not only the Lithuanian people. It awakened all national communities. The main concern was not to restore the rights of the Lithuanian people alone but also to foster and maintain the identity of the minorities. Lithuania was the first of all the post-communist states of Eastern Europe to pass the law on ethnic minorities in 1989 because it approved and fostered their rebirth. The law met all the basic requirements of international documents.

A just political step was made when the Lithuanian citizenship law which give all the Lithuanian residents the right to become Lithuanian nationals was passed.

These laws were a guarantee of the success of our national policy. They stopped various political insinuations both internal and foreign. The world opinion, international experts, most foreign politicians (even those who do not sympathize with Lithuania) speak favourably of the minorities' status in our country.

Lithuanian laws are orientated not only towards the individual's rights but takes into consideration collective interests of the minorities. Organizations of ethnic minorities are given privileges during elections to Seimas, there is an enrollment quota to Lithuanian establishments of higher education. It should be noted that there is no mention of collective rights in international documents and in many European countries they are not exercised.

A lot has been done but it does not mean that everything has been done. It is not easy for national communities to keep their identity and foster their culture under hard social and economic conditions. The state realizes and feels obliged to support their efforts. The state's help will be limited only by real possibilities.

I want to stress that national relations will expand normally and in a human way only when all government bodies and citizens as well as their organizations observe the laws of the Republic of Lithuania.

On the other hand, the life in Lithuania should be determined by today's realities, ideals of democracy and humanism but not bitter past memories or deleterious examples of neighbouring states.

In solving national problems, we all have to seek mutual understanding and agreement, we have to meet more often, confer and consult one another. If we really wish to overcome arising problems we have to give up unfounded suspicions and unreal demands when on the one hand tolerance and social stability, on the other hand simple duties to the state, responsibility for all these who live there are forfeited.

Unfortunately, history knows of painful lessons. The stable traditions of the life and coexistence between the Lithuanians and the Jews, however, were created by man's goodness, wisdom and love. To honourably promote and foster them is our duty, a duty of all Lithuania.

REMARKS BY THE EDITOR TO THE ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF LITHUANIA

Joseph A. Melamed, Att. at Law

George Orwell once observed: "Whoever controls the past controls the future. Whoever controls the present controls the past." The Lithuanians who control the present are trying with perseverance to take advantage of this control, by rewriting the past. On regaining independence, the tendency in Lithuania has moved frighteningly toward a

desire to "sanitize" the past and shrug off responsibility for the crimes committed by their people during World War II, a desire to put a final punctuation point on the cruel events of that period. As I wrote in the editorial of this publication, the Lithuanians are doing their utmost to erase from memory the atrocities committed, clear their reputation (not their conscious) and whitewash the black record of their criminal behaviour.

A typical method for accomplishing the above was demonstrated by the Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas when he proposed his "truth" in his address to the commemorative gathering at the Opera House in Vilnius on September 23, 1993 (see the address above). I must say that the contentions of the declarations expressed in his address, are in some way shocking; they fly in the face of all historical facts, and they certainly mock the suffering of survivors.

The President's speech starts with a historical synopsis on the background of the Jewish existence in Lithuania during the circa 600 years preceding the first occupation of Lithuania by the Soviets in 1940, continues with declarations on the role played by the Lithuanian Jews during the Soviet occupation, and culminates with numerous declarations on the tragic events that occurred during the second World War and the reasons that led to the total destruction of the Jewish community in Lithuania.

I shall not argue with the President's declarations on the old past, not even his general statement that "Therefore the whole history of Lithuania is a history of a peaceful coexistence between the Lithuanians and the Jews among all people who live in Lithuania". We all remember the various anti-Semitic organizations, such as the Voldemarists, "Verslas", "Jaunoji Lietuva" and others; we remember their slogans and deeds before the Soviet occupation.

We more strongly oppose the President's description of the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania (1940/41) and I would have very much appreciated it if the President had read the material concerning these years that is included in the editorial of this publication. Most of the statistics were taken from the work of Prof. Truska, a Lithuanian historian.

However, I was amazed when I read the President's description of the Lithuanians' attitude towards the Jews during the Holocaust. I can understand, in a way, the President's desire to protect his people and whitewash them from the justified blame in the destruction of the Jewish community. Yet, we cannot avoid and turn away from the true facts, facts that can easily be found and checked in the Lithuanian Archives – Lithuanian and not Russian. In those Archives (as well as in our own) one can find a vast documentation that proves, without any doubt, the guilt of the Lithuanian people.

I would like, therefore, to relate my remarks to a closer examination of some of the President's declarations:

1. Speaking of the Holocaust period, The President began by saying that on June 22, 1941, at the beginning of the German invasion of Lithuania, "a wave of spontaneous resistance rose in Lithuania".

There is no doubt that the President is perfectly aware that the Lithuanian "uprising" was not so spontaneous, but very thoroughly planned – mainly by the L.A.F. organization. We all know about the activities of the L.A.F. before the invasion and after it. One of the well-known radio messages, sent by the L.A.F. from Berlin on March 19, 1941, that was heard all over LIthuania, explicitly stated: "... when the march from the West (i.e., from Germany) will begin we shall let you know about it by radio and/or by other means. You have, then, to assemble all the communists and the other traitors so that nobody should escape the punishment for their activities. (The traitors will be spared only if they would prove, without doubt, that they have liquidated at least one Jew...)".

In the L.A.F. announcement on the radio on June 22, 1941, the day of the invasion, the L.A.F. declared: "At last, the expected hour has come to make the final account with the Jews. Lithuania has to free itself not only from the slavery of the Assiatic Bolsheviks, but also from the slavery from the Jews, a slavery that has existed for hundreds of years" (This announcement was also heard all over Lithuania). In another message, the L.A.F. declared again (this time in the name of the Lithuanian people):

"The old privileges granted to the Jews by Vytautas the Great are hereby fully revoked and forever... The new Lithuanian land will be constructed by its own forces, its own work, heart and wisdom. The Jews will be entirely alienated and forever. No Jew will have the right of existence in the new reconstructed Lithuania nor will he have any political rights. This way, we shall amend all the errors committed in this respect and shall liquidate the disgracefulness of the Jews."

There are testimonies, including the testimony of Mr. E. Zilberis, a longtime director of the Archives in Kaunas, that there exists in the Lithuanian Archives a vast documentation that fully describes the activities of the "Partisans" and other forces of the L.A.F. organization on the first week of the German invasion, including the killings that show, without any doubt, that the "uprising" was not spontaneous at all.

2. Describing further the events of the World War period, the President stated: "People who had shed blood at the beginning of the war, were denounced in Lithuania cities, towns and villages, they were branded butchers, and damned by their own mothers. Such is historical truth".

No, Mr. President, this is not the historical truth ! This too you can find out, easily, if only you would read the material available in your Archives, or else in the articles of your newspapers. There are photographs that clearly show how Lithuanians, some dressed in military or police uniforms and some with white armbands, kill Jewish people, while the local inhabitants, joyful as ever, encouraged them.

3. The President also asserted that only "a handful of killers" have participated in the killing of the Lithuanian Jews."

Well, this is certainly not true! Mr. Zilberis asserts that, according to the documents placed in your Archives the District Commanders of the Lithuanian Police followed the instructions given to them by the L.A.F. and started to organize police units (T.D.A.) in formations similar to those of the SS & the SA units. The L.A.F. members that lived in Berlin during the Soviet occupation volunteered early to join these units. These killer battalions, together with the "Partisans" of L.A.F., were the main murderers who savagely killed, approximately 40,000 Jews – men, women and children – in the first week of the invasion. In Kaunas alone, they killed in this one week approximately 10,000 Jews, mainly in places such as Viljampole, Petrasunai, the jail of Kaunas, the 7-th Fort, the Jonava street, the garage of Lietukis and others.

In July 1941, the name of these battalions was changed to "Police Battalions". There were 20 battalions of this kind. According to the count performed on August 1, 1942, the battalions included 8,338 officers & soldiers. Documents in the Lithuanian Archives show that the commanders of these battalions consisted of regular Lithuanian Army officers, mainly members of L.A.F., such as Colonel Andreus Butkunas, Colonel Karolis Debulevicius, Colonel–Lieutenant Antanas Spakevicius, Major Antanas Impulevicius, Major Kazys Shimkus, and many, many others. We should also remember officers such as: General Povilas Plechanavicius, the liason officer of the battalions with the German police; General Stasys Fundzevicius, member of the War Command of the provisional government; Colonel Jurgis Bobelis, War Commander of Kaunas and the Battalions of Kaunas, and others.

In the period from July 2 to December 1, 1941, these battalions, together with the unit of SS Colonel Jaeger, murdered 136,046 additional Jews in Lithuania alone. Other units of the T.D.A. murdered myriads more, mainly in Bielorussia and Poland They also murdered Jews that the Germans had deported and brought to Lithuania, from Germany, Austria, Cechoslovakia, France, Belgium, Holland and other places. These Jews were murdered in different places in Lithuania and Bielorussia including Ponar, near Vilnius, on the 9-th Fort near Kaunas, Minsk in Bielorussia, and other.

Zilberis has testified, based on documents available in the Lithuanian Archives, that the Provisional Government of Lithuania had instructed, officially, on June 28, 1941, to pay a salary to all "partisans" that were taking part in the activities of the battalions and other murder squads. The salary should been paid out, according to the instruction, during the entire period of their service. The above instruction was signed by Mr. Ambrazevicius, who functioned, at that time, as the Prime Minister, and by the head of the Chancellery of the Ministers Mr. Vilimas.

These are only some examples of the documents available in the Lithuanian Archives, as well as in our own, that clearly prove that in the murder of the Lithuanian Jews it was not "a handful of killers" that participated, as President Brazauskas asserts, but myriads. We, ourselves, have in our files the names of a great number of the murderers, and they will be included in our book: "The Black Book" which will be published in due time.

4. The President claimed that "there were a lot of protests made to occupational authorities by the Lithuanian public" (by Lithuanians against the genocide and terror in the Ghettos).

Unfortunately, Mr. President, we could not find any evidence of this. On the other hand, I remember perfectly well the cruelty of the Lithuanian police who guarded the Ghetto of Kaunas until its destruction.

5. The President also claimed that "thousands of LIthuanian farmers, priests, physicians, and teachers saved Jews – children, women and old people".

Thousands ??? – We wish it were true. The truth is, Mr. President, that during the whole occupation only a few, a handful of Jews, were hidden by Lithuanian families. Only in the last year of the war, in particular in the last few months when the Russian Army closed in on the Germans and their reoccupation of Lithuania became almost evident, did more Lithuanians, a few hundred, including the family of the previous President Mr. Landsbergis, dare to hide more Jews. We have made some research on this subject.

6. The President suggested: "Ask people anywhere in Lithuania what they think of the Jews' tragic faith during the war and you will feel grief, pity, abhorrence of the evil and its perpetrators, and prayer: may it never be repeated".

Well, Mr. President, the letter published here by Mr. Leimontas of Naujoji Akmene may serve, at least, as partial evidence of how some Lithuanians think of the Jewish fate. Mr. Leimontas seems to be a primitive person with limited knowledge of the Jews, but this is similar to so many in the towns and villages of Lithuania, not to mention the organized and non-organized "ideological" anti-Semites in your country.

7. The President declared: "Criminals must be tried by courts of law".

How many criminals, Mr. President, of those living in Lithuania have been tried by Lithuanian courts, after Lithuania regained her independence? Why, Mr. President, do the Lithuanian authorities hold secrets, why do they not disclose all of the material they possess concerning the killers who live outside Lithuania, in spite of the requests from official authorities of those countries who intend to try them for the crimes they committed during World War II in Lithuania?

8. The President complained in his address: "At the same time, we can

not approve of attempts to identify a handful of killers with the Lithuanian people".

We have already shown above that it was not a handful of killers that participated in the killings of the Jews of Lithuania but myriads of them.

Dear Mr. President, if only a handfull of killers had participated in the killings of the Lithuanian Jews; if thousands of Lithuanians had saved Jews; if "honest people all over Lithuania resented the genocide and terror in the Ghettos"; if "there were a lot of protests to the occupational authorities"; and if there had not been in Lithuania, during the war such a hatred against the Jews that prevented many of them from fleeing from the murderers, knowing that they would be delivered by the "good Samaritains" to the killers – the Germans alone would never have been able to annihilate 94% of the Lithuanian Jews.

Please do not forget, Mr. President, that the Lithuanians were a part of an industry of death, never seen before; An industry whose raw material was helpless and innocent people, including babies and old people, an industry whose product was corpses. In order for these people to be murdered, the people had to be transferred from place to place, pits had to be dug, shots had to be fired, the cries and shouting of the victims had to be heard, etc. etc. All of these could not have been done in full secret; most of the Lithuanians, at the very least, saw some of these actions or knew about them through their neighbors or friends – and yet few did anything about it.

When myriads of killers participated in the annihilation of more than 94% of a people in a country – most of them wearing official uniforms or armbands and were organized by an official organization backed by the official government; when some of the atrocities were committed in broad daylight, surrounded by a rejoicing mob of local inhabitants; when no protest was heard or no intervention felt – it seems natural that the nation is to blame. When the government that represented the Lithuanian people at that time passed laws that enabled the killings; and when no one protested or intervened against them – it seems natural that the nation is to blame.

When Lithuania regained independence and free elections produced a new government, and instead of then coming towards the tortured Jewish nation, and asking for forgiveness, putting to trial the murderers, and giving back the victims or their heirs the property stolen from them by Lithuanians; when instead the new government does everything to conceal the traces of murder, denies the murders or finds a pretext in false pretentions; and when there is no one to protest or intervene against this – it seems natural that the nation is to blame.

Mr. President, you may not like what was written in the editorial – but this is the truth and the truth only!

It is not our task to fight anybody nor to "blacken and belittle the image of Lithuania and the Lithuanians in the eyes of the world". On the contrary, we would like to find a way for "stable traditions of coexistence between the Lithuanians and Jews to be continued and strengthened". However, in order to achieve this task, JUSTICE must be done!

We have even opened a new page with the Germans, who were the source of all evil at the time of the Nazis. They have recognized their responsibility for the atrocities of the Nazi murderers; they have brought to trial many of the murderers, declared willingness to offer restitution to those Jews who were robbed by the Germans, and made reparations.

No nation can avoid justice for very long. Even when our generation of the Lithuanian Ghettos – who witnessed the atrocities of the Lithuanian killers, will approach the other world; our children and our children's children will continue our task. They will remember and know the truth regarding the deeds of the Lithuanian people against a great people, a people of culture and civilization, a faithful and loyal people that loved your country, a people that always strived for a peaceful coexistence with its neighbors. Rewriting history to one's favour will not solve the real problem.

Therefore, I appeal to you Mr. President, to listen to the cries of the Jewish People – victims of an atrocious Holocaust. The Jewish people is a peaceloving people – they do not pray for revenge but for justice.

Joseph A. Melamed

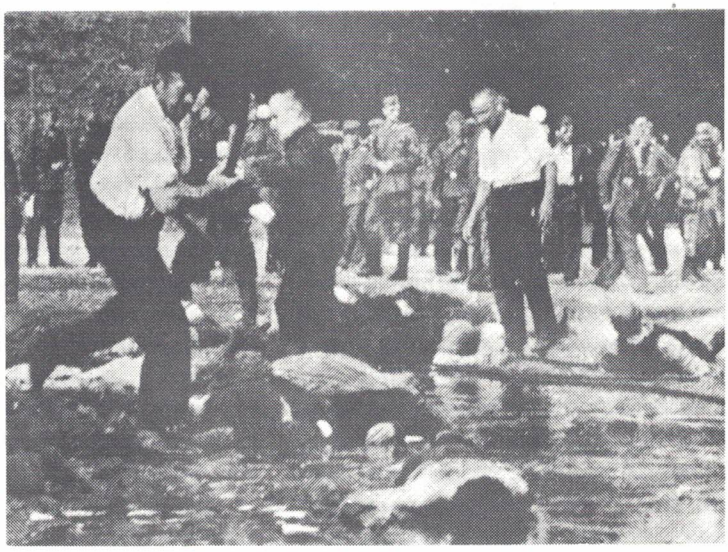
On August 24, 1993, the newspaper "Respublika" printed an article written by Kuteriavicius under the title "In Lithuania, as I understand from the press, democracy is in full bloom". The article quotes the Lithuanian Ambassador to the United Nations, A. Simotis, as saying: "Hitler declares that the Jews were a criminal people and ordered their annihilation. Today it's the Jews who are behaving likewise, claiming that the Lithuanians are a nation of Jew-murderers, and demanding an apology".

This is another expression, one among many, of the Lithuanian Antisemites. This "Gentleman" is not just a primitive peasant, but the official representative of the Lithuanian people at the highest international body – the United Nations...

A FEW REMINDERS OF CRUELTY



Lithuanians concentrating thousands of Jews
on the Seventh Forth



Lithuanians slaughtering Jews in Kaunas
(Vytauto Prospektas)





Lithuanians slaughtering Jews in Kaunas
(Kestucio St.)



Uniformed Lithuanians murdering the Jews from Panevezys



Girls from Rokiskis before their death



The cruel faces of some of the murderers





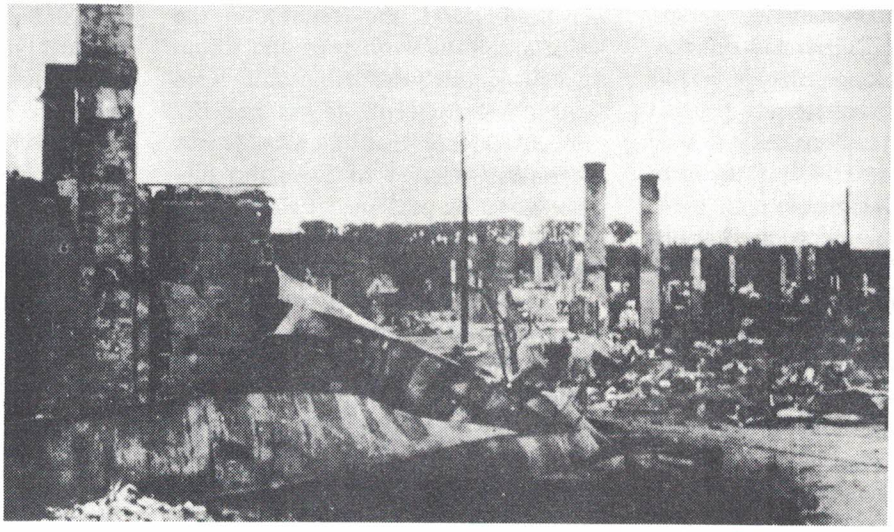
The murder of women in Kaunas region by uniformed Lithuanian ruffians



Beaten and Besmeared before their death



Corpses of Jews in the Ghetto of Kaunas



The Ghetto of Kaunas
after the Retreat of the Nazis

DAYS OF MEMORY CONFERENCE
(Held in Vilnius on October 11-17, 1993)

The promoters of "Days of Memory" – the Jewish Community of Lithuania and the State Jewish Museum – originally intended to open the conference on September 25, the official date of liquidation of the Vilna ghetto, in order to commemorate the "genocide" (as they prefer to designate the mass extermination) of all Lithuanian's Jews. Strong objections from Israel to this arbitrary choice (v. "Lithuania – Crime and Punishment", Nr. 3, page 14) made them change the name to the more generalized "Days of Memory", followed by the somewhat pretentious subtitle "International Scientific Conference", devoted to the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the ghetto of Vilna.

Highlights on the agenda were history and culture of Lithuanian Jewry (8 lectures); the mass murder, which they euphemistically refer to as "genocide" (11 lectures); the Resistance (4 lectures); the relations between Lithuanians and Jews (6 lectures). Half of the thirty lectures were invited from abroad, but most of them failed to show up. Four participants from Israel – Messrs. Benjamin Anolik, Ephraim Zuroff, Natan Cohen and Prof. Dov Levin – who eventually responded to the invitation, addressed the conference in Hebrew and their opening remarks were translated into Lithuanian and English, the official working language of the meeting. Most local Jews taking part in the debates and discussions used Lithuanian, while a few delivered their lectures in Yiddish.

Guest of honour at the opening ceremony was Mrs. Tova Herzl, ambassadress of Israel to the Baltic countries. The speaker of the Lithuanian parliament, Ceslovas Jursenas, welcomed the participants and presented Prof. Dov Levin with a Letter of Commendation signed by the President of the Republic, for his part in the armed struggle of Lithuania's Jews against the German occupation. 18 similar citations had previously been sent to prominent ghetto fighters from Kaunas and Vilna, among them Itzik Wittenberg, Chaim Yellin and the late Abba Kovner.

Some listeners gathered the impression that practically no significant new points were raised by the local lecturers and narrators, ignorant as they were of researches and memoirs published outside Lithuania in the last fifty years. For instance, the lecture given by Demetrius Galpernas (Dima Galpern), one of the survivors of the communist underground movement in the Vilna ghetto, corresponded exactly to the account given in a book on the same subject printed by "Der Emmess" in Moscow as far back as 1948! On the other hand, Natan Cohen, post-graduate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, managed to present a methodical and convincing analysis of the text of 18 personal diaries kept by Lithuanian Jews during the Holocaust. His findings left no doubt as to the horrified reaction of the writers to the murderous instincts demonstrated by their Lithuanian neighbours.

Following the mass-amnesty granted to the murderers of Lithuanian Jews and the vigorous protests which this measure provoked all over the civilized world, the lectures on the relationship between Jews and Lithuanians during the Holocaust were rather well frequent. It was probably no coincidence that the local Jewish lecturers preferred to avoid this subject as far as possible, in view of the social and ethnic dynamite it contains. They concentrated instead on dozens of cases in which Jews were rescued by non-Jews – Lithuanians as well as Poles and Russians. The names of some Lithuanian "Righteous Gentiles" were also mentioned in a paper sent from Israel by Mrs. Sarah Nishnit-Shener, but the number of these exceptions was too small to mitigate the indelible shock left by the abysmal hatred shown by the Lithuanians during the war. What she claims is, that those all too few exceptions prove that different patterns of behaviour were not impossible but, in fact, rare. As a person who in her youth grew up in a climate of affection for Lithuanian culture and Lithuanian patriotism, she was doubly disappointed. Writing in the vernacular, she used some harsh words which were listened to in silence and drew almost no reactions. The reception accorded to the fierce indictment produced by Ephraim Zuroff turned out quite different. His lecture, "The Memory of the Murder and the Murder of the Memory", concentrated mainly on the crimes committed by Lithuanians against their Jewish neighbours, not only at the beginning of the Nazi occupation but even earlier, during the interregnum, before the arrival of German troops everywhere. Tension mounted in the audience when the speaker quoted concrete examples of callousness, names of murderers, numbers of victims etc., and hostile interpolations could be heard. Questions and comments thrown at him afterwards included such as "what's your profession?" "what do you think of the Demyanyuk trial?", "how can you prove that Jewish babies were really killed in the manner you described?" "how many Lithuanians actually participated in massacres?".

Prof. L. Truska, who quite recently published in the local press a series of articles on the proportionately small role played by Jews in the Sovietization of Lithuania, claimed that Zuroff had charged the entire Lithuanian people with the murder of Jews. In his reply, Truska also reitrated the false version spread by the local press that there had never been any pogroms in Lithuania, admitting, however, that some 300 Lithuanian had indeed taken part in massacres –

number that equalled those who had rescued Jews. According to him, the vast majority had remained indifferent. He, too, was repeatedly interrupted and it took some effort to persuade him to proceed with his angry remarks.

Though his name did not appear on the list of lecturers, Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis, former President of the Republic (who during his term of office gave his blessing to the general amnesty enjoyed by murderers of Jews) was also allowed to address the conference on this delicate topic. Having been introduced by his Jewish friend, Sejm member Immanuel Singer, the ex-chief of state devoted most of his lengthy talk to the good relations that had prevailed between Jews and gentiles in the past and would hopefully be restored in days to come... Few were convinced by his pious optimism, because, at the time, the Jewish population of Vilnius was panic-stricken: a Lithuanian journalist had been shot dead and a Jew named Kaplan arrested as suspect. Insinuations in the media even referred to a Jewish or Israeli "mafia" and mentioned Jewish-sounding names allegedly involved. Fears were somewhat allayed when Kaplan was released on bail, but private interviews with Jews in Vilnius and other cities confirmed that many of them feel insecure and in danger of become scapegoats, should something happen – notwithstanding verbose speeches by former and incumbent politicians, like the address by Algirdas Brazauskas on September 22, 1993, on the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto.

From time to time, there comes a disturbing reminder that any complacency is out of place. For instance, the head of the small Jewish community in Siauliai recently got a letter from an unknown Lithuanian, signed J. Leimontis, who "explained" all the calamities that befall the Jews by their arrogant attitude toward grown-up gentiles in general and Christian children in particular, whose blood, according to the ritual murder libel, is used for baking matzoth for Passover (see thereafter letter of Leimontis free translated into English).

On the other hand, it should not be ignored that, on the occasion of the conference of remembrance, Antanas Terleckas, a right-wing politician, publicly repeated what he has been demanding for years: "The Lithuanians should openly admit their guilt and apologize to the Jews." Unfortunately, in present-day Lithuania, his appeals, which have been authenticated and recorded, have the effect of a voice in the wilderness.

In the final analysis, only 5,000 Jews – out of a total of 250,000 living there before the German invasion – remained in Lithuania and even those immigrated, in their majority, after the war, from other regions of the former Soviet Union.

The Editor

THE MEMORY OF MURDER AND THE MURDER OF MEMORY

Efraim Zuroff

(A speech delivered at the International Symposium on the "Days of Memory" on October 14, 1993)

No attempt to present the manner in which the historical record and the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania have been distorted or purposely ignored would be complete or even understandable without a brief summary of the events. Allow me to begin with two small details. The first relates to the attitude of the Lithuanian leadership prior to the Nazi invasion and the second reflects the practical implications of their relationship to the Jews.

Prior to, or on the day of, the Nazi invasion of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Activist Front issued a statement to the Lithuanian populace in which it clearly delineated its policy vis-a-vis the Jewish population. The Front, it should be noted, which was founded in Berlin in November 1940, was composed of representatives of all the major political parties and viewed itself as the leadership of the Lithuanian people. They left absolutely no doubt as to the fate in stone for Lithuanian Jewry upon their return to power in their homeland:

"The crucial day of reckoning has come for the Jews at last. Lithuania must be liberated not only from the Asiatic Bolshevik slavery, but also from the Jewish yoke of long standing.

1. The old rights of sanctuary granted to Jews in Lithuania by Vytautas the Great are abolished forever and without reservation.

2. All Jews, without any exception, are hereby ordered to immediately leave Lithuania... All Jews are excluded from Lithuania forever. Should anyone of them dare to expect any refuge in new Lithuania, let him know the irrevocable sentence passed upon them; not a single Jew shall have any citizenship rights or any means of sustenance in reborn Lithuania."

I do not know how many of those attacking Jews during the early days of the Nazi invasion actually read the leaflet, but in practical terms its contents were particularly well-received. The facts speak for themselves. In at least forty different communities Jews were physically attacked even before the arrival of Nazi troops. In towns such as Uzpalis, Zarasai, Balninkiai, Birzai, Girkalnis, Debeikiai, Dusetos and many others the local gangs of "Activists" did not require the Nazis' presence, let alone encouragement, to begin the persecution and murder of the local Jews. So while "the occupation" can be blamed for many things these acts of violence reflect a reality in which Lithuanians bear full respon-

sibility for the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence.

Once the Nazi army did arrive in the various cities, towns and villages, the role played by local collaborators in the murder of the Jews was extremely significant. In numerous communities, the treatment of the Jewish Community was exclusively in the hands of the Lithuanians. In other communities, Lithuanians were not in charge, but they actively and zealously collaborated in the program of torture and annihilation. The easiest thing in the world would be to dismiss these participants in the murders as criminals and hooligans who in no way represented or reflected the prevalent sentiments of the local population. But the enormous scope of the participation of local collaborators in the murders and the high percentage of them who were members of nationalist organizations, such as the "Siaulists", "partisans" and "Activists", along with the paucity of public protests regarding the mistreatment of the Jews makes it impossible to categorize the participants as outcasts or the dregs of society. On the contrary, in numerous instances it was the Lithuanian intelligentsia who played leading role in the murder of the Jews. To illustrate the dominate nationalist element in the atrocities, I would like to briefly quote from the testimony of a German photographer who witnessed the public murder of Jews in Kaunas on June 25, 1941:

"There were no more significant clashes in the city. Close to my quarters I noticed a crowd of qeople in the forecourt of a petrol station which was surrounded by a wall on three sides. The way to the road was completely blocked by a wall of people. I was confronted by the following scene: in the left corner of the yard there was a group of men aged between thirty and fifty. There must have been forty to fifty of them. They were herded and kept under guard by some civilians. The civilians were armed with rifles and wore armbands, as can be seen in the pictures I took. A young man – he must have been Lithuanian – ... with rolled-up sleeves was armed with an iron crowbar. He dragged out one man at a time from the group and struck him with the crowbar with one or more blows on the back of his head. Within three-quarters of an hour he had beaten to death the entire group of forty-five to fifty people in this way. I took a series of photographs of the victims... After the entire group had been beaten to death, the young man put the crowbar to one side, fetched an accordion and went and stood on the mountain of corpses and played the Lithuanian national anthem. I recognized the tune and was informed by bystanders that this was the national anthem. The behaviour of the civilians present (women and children) was unbelievable. After each man had been killed they began to clap and when the national anthem started up they joined in singing and clapping. In the front row there were women with small children in their arms who stayed there right until the end of the whole proceedings."

Besides the spontaneous attacks on Jews by vigilante gangs of "Activists" and "Siaulists" which took place before and during the initial weeks of the Nazi occupation, one must also stress the participation of the organized local Lithuanian police in the annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry. These units played a major role in the cities, towns, and villages as well as outside the borders of Lithuania. In fact there are few places, if any, in which there was no active participation by Lithuanians in the mass murders units of the Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalions, (Pagelbines Policijos Tarnybos Batalionas) which were formed from the National Labor Defence Battalion (Tautos Darbo Apsangos Batalionas) played an active role together with the Nazis in the persecution and mass murders of Jews throughout Lithuania. The 12th Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion was sent to Byelorussia on October 6, 1941 under the command of Major Antanas Impulevicius ostensibly to fight against "the Bolshevik army and Bolshevik partisans" but in reality to carry out the liquidation of the local Jewish communities. Please note Impulevicius' words to his men prior to their departure for their important mission:

"Soldiers, as you depart, fulfill your missions with resolute will, honesty and honor. Always and everywhere show yourselves worthy of the noble name of a Lithuanian soldier, because you are the representatives of the entire Lithuanian nation."

Indeed, these soldiers fulfilled their mission with zeal and devotion, which did not go unnoticed. In a letter to the Kommissar-General of Byelourussia in Minsk, the district commander of Slutzk wrote in great detail about how the Lithuanians carried out their mission in his town:

"For the rest, as regards the execution of the action, I must point out to my deepest regret that the latter bordered already on sadism. The town itself offered a picture of horror during the action. With indescribable brutality on the part of both the German police officers and particularly the Lithuanian partisans, the Jewish people, but also among them White Ruthenians, were taken out of their dwellings and herded together. Everywhere in the town shots were to be heard and in different streets the corpses of shot Jews accumulated. The White Ruthenians were in greatest distress to free themselves from the encirclement. Regardless of the fact that the Jewish people, among whom were also tradesmen, were mistreated in a terribly barbarous way in the face of the White Ruthenian people, the White Rutenians themselves were also worked over with rubber clubs and rifle butts. There was no question of an action against the Jews any more. It rather looked like a revolution. I myself with all my officials have been in it without interruption all day long in order to save, what could yet be saved. In several instances I literally had to expel with drawn pistol the German police officials as well as the Lithuanian partisans from the shops. My own police was employed for the same mission but had often to leave the streets on account of the wild shooting in order to avoid being shot themselves. The whole picture was generally more than ghastly".

The same unit performed similar tasks elsewhere in Byelorussia – Kletzk, Koidanov, Dukara, Rudensk, Minsk thereby playing an important role in the implementation of the Final Solution in that area.

If we add the service of Lithuanians as guards at the Treblinka and Majdanek death camps and other Nazi concentration camps as well as in the roundups in the Polish ghettos, we see that there was widespread Lithuanian participation in the implementation of the Final Solution primarily in Lithuania, but beyond its borders as well. The results speak for themselves. Lithuania had the highest victimology rate of all the Jewish communities in Europe. Of the approximately 220,000 Jews who remained in Lithuania under Nazi rule during the years 1941–1944, only 8,000 survived the war. If we add the murderous activities of Lithuanian units and volunteers who served outside the country, the picture which emerges is one of widespread collaboration, complicity, and support for the Nazis' plan to annihilate all of European Jewry.

On this background, the bravery of those few Lithuanians who risked their lives to save Jews becomes even more significant. The noble deeds of authentic heroes such as Ona Simaite, Bronius Paukstys, Petras Baublys, and Jonas Paulavicius, clearly show that alternatives did exist even under Nazi occupation. The problem was that relatively few made the same choice as these Righteous Among the Nations. Many more chose to join in the persecution and murder of Lithuania's Jewish citizens.

Once the war was over and Lithuania was liberated from the Nazis only to be occupied by the Soviets, a new battle began, the struggle for truth and memory. In a totalitarian state where history is more a function of ideology rather than chronology, a strange version of the events was presented. First of all the victims lost their national identity. They had the misfortune of being the members of a nation that wasn't recognized as such by the Soviet authorities. So all of a sudden, Jews murdered solely because they were Jews, became "Soviet citizens", deprived of their nationality by a regime determined to commit cultural genocide against the Jewish people.

But not only the victims were deprived of their identity. The perpetrators also underwent a metamorphosis at the hands of Lithuania's Communist rulers who turned German Nazis and Lithuanian collaborators into "Hitlerite fascists" or "bourgeoise nationalists" as if their Lithuanian origin has no connection whatsoever to the crimes they committed during the Holocaust. Those involved in leading this studied assault on memory were following directives issued by the Kremlin. In that respect, I would not blame the Lithuanian people for the work of the local Communists whose allegiance was to Moscow rather than to Vilnius. (By the same token I would not expect Lithuanians to blame Jews for the activities of Jewish Communists who knowingly broke with Jewish tradition and whose activities against Lithuanians were motivated by their Soviet ideology rather than their Jewish identity. On the contrary, had they retained their allegiance to Jerusalem, they never would have in any way actively worked against their Lithuanian neighbors.)

The attitude of those Communists is not of importance in this context. What is more relevant is what has happened in this country since it regained its independence. That is a far more authuentic Lithuanian response than the local application of Kremlin directives.

The record, from a Jewish perspective, is mixed. On the one hand there is the beginning of a new openness, yet on the other hand certain blind spots remain as dark as ever.

There are two ways to assess the Lithuanian response to the Holocaust since independence. The first is to examine the official government declarations and policy vis-a-vis the commemoration of the victims and various practical dimensions which relate to the events such as the prosecution of Nazi war criminals and the restoration of stolen Jewish communal and personal property. The second expression of Lithuanian opinion in this regard can be found in the media which has hosted a lively and frank debate on issues relating to the Holocaust during the past three years.

Let us begin with the attitude of the Lithuanian government. One of the first declarations issued by the Seimas (on May 8, 1990) was a condemnation of "the annihilation of the Jewish people during the years of Nazi occupation in Lithuania." Although the declaration was unequivocal in denouncing the genocide committed against the Jews, it purposely evaded the critical issue of Lithuanian partjcipation in the murders. Thus the declaration notes that "among the hangmen who served the occupiers were Lithuanian citizens as well." The use of the term "Lithuanian citizens" intentionally ascribes the blame to a category of people not restricted to those of Lithuanian nationality, which could even (by a twist of perverted logic) include Jews. This formulation ostensibly distinguishes between the blameless "Lithuanian people" and the murderers who were "Lithuanian citizens," when in effect, as clearly shown above, no such distinction exists. What makes this declaration even more problematic is that it clearly recognizes the existence of a Lithuanian people and in fact clearly states in its opening sentences that it is being issued by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania on behalf of the Lithuanian people (my emphasis – E.Z.), even though in theory the government of present-day Lithuania can only speak on behalf of its citizens, not the entire Lithuanian people, many of whom live abroad (and many of whom would probably staunchly oppose such a declaration). In other words, the Lithuanian government projects itself as the spokesperson for the Lithuanian people, but does not have the courage to condemn the active paticipation of "the Lithuanian people" or even "Lithuanians" in the murder of the Jews.

Another example of the attempt by Lithuanian leaders to minimize the guilt of their countrymen while acknowledging the fate of the victims and their national identity was the speech delivered by Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius at the dedication of the memorial monument at Ponar in June 1991. Instead of admitting widespread Lithuanian complicity, Vagnorius tried to minimize the scope of the murders: "This tragedy lasted for more than eye-blink, but at least three months." Unfortunately Lithuanian Jewry was forced to suffer at the hands of the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators for twelve times as long – three entire years. Even worse, Vagnorius attempted to equate the assistance provided to Jews by Lithuanians with the participation of Lithuanians in murder, an assessment not borne out at all by the historical record.

These public pronouncements which are produced for external as well as internal consumption reflect ambivalence on the part of Lithuania's leaders, who realize that in order to be accepted by the West they must mend their fences with the Jews. In this case, however, national pride conflicts with practical interest and the results are declarations which ostensibly consume the cake while leaving it whole. But on another level, several measures have been taken which cast serious doubt on the intention of the Lithuanian government to honestly face the past. The first is of course the rehabilitation granted to numerous individuals who had served in units which actively participated in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. The second was the passage of stringent laws concerning the return of property stolen during the war which make it almost impossible for Jews of Lithuanian origin and/or their heirs to obtain what rightfully belongs to them.

On the surface, the rehabilitations should not have posed a problem. According to the May 2, 1990 law on the "Rehabilitation of Persons Represented for Assistance to the Occupying Regime", participants in genocide were barred from receiving rehabilitation. The problem was, however, that those responsible for implementing the law were either ignoring the war records of the applicants or adopting an incredibly liberal definition of the term "participation in genocide". How else can one explain the rehabilitation of self-confessed murderers of Jews as well as of those who served in the infamous 12th Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion or at the notorious Majdanek concentration camp.

The widespread exposure of this scandal in the West and the demands made by Israeli leaders to cancel the unjust rehabilitations have led to the creation of a joint Israeli-Lithuanian commission of inquiry to review the rehabilitations. If the commission will be able to complete its work successfully to the mutual satisfaction of both sides, it will indeed be an enormous step in the direction of reconciliation and rapprochement. But it remains to be seen whether this will indeed be the case. In the preliminary discussions with Jewish and Israeli representatives, the arguments presented by both sides indicate the wide gap between the ways in which Jews and Lithuanians perceive the events. The most infuriating contention, from a Jewish perspective, was the studied attempt by Lithuanian nationalists to create a nonexistent symetry between the crimes against Lithuanians committed by Jewish Communists prior to the Nazi invasion and the participation of Lithuanians in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. The contention that the number of rescuers was greater or at least equivalent to the number of murderers is another preposterous claim that continues to cast its shadow on the relations between Jews and Lithuanians.

As far as the property laws are concerned, it still remains to be seen whether any changes will be made which will enable Jews living outside the country to regain their families' holdings.

The distinct ambivalence or selective vision with which the events of the Holocaust are viewed in Lithuania are clearly reflected in the local media as well. Following independence, and especially in the wake of the revelation of the rehabilitations granted to Nazi collaborators, the local media has dealt extensively with the question of Lithuanian complicity in the murder of Jews. On the one hand, there have been frank discussions of Lithuanian collaboration, but on the other hand there have been many vicious attacks against Israel and the Jews, including repeated attempts to create a nonexistent symetry between the victims and the prepertrators and the sparious claims regarding the numerical equivalency between Lithuanians who rescued Jews and those who murdered them. Another problem in this regard is the selectiveness of the Lithuanian press.

Just a few months ago, we experienced this selectiveness first-hand. As a member of a delegation sent by the Knesset to establish a joint Lithuanian-Israeli commission of inquiry to review the rehabilitations granted over the past three years, we obtained the verbal agreement of the Lithuanian authorities to our two major demands – access to all the files of "participation in genocide" which includes anyone who actively participated in any way in the persecution of civilians. The press chose for the most part to ignore the delegation and there was no mention of the fact that the Lithuanian authorities acceded to our demands. On the other hand, the refusal of the government to grant permission to the Simon Wiesenthal Center to open an office in Vilnius was prominently reported. Another pertinent example was the refusal of the press for many months to inform the public that in the wake of protests by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and other Jewish groups, six rehabilitations unjustly granted to Nazi collaborators had been cancelled.

There is no doubt in my mind that a very important battle is being waged in the media for truth and memory, a battle which is also being waged in the Seimas and in the political arena. The success of the struggle will ultimately determine not only the future of Lithuanian-Jewish relations and the relations between Israel and newly independent Lithuania, but

Lithuania's path to liberal democracy and the civilized family of nations. Only by openly and courageously facing its bloody history, can Lithuania hope to overcome the sins of the past and build for a better future.

We, at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, want to assist in that process and hope to begin work here in Vilnius in that spirit. A decision to the contrary by the Lithuanian government will be conclusive proof that those navigating Lithuania's future are still too scared to openly face their past. Ultimately, not only they, but the Lithuanian people as a whole will be forced to hear the bitter consequences of that unfortunate decision.

THE FORMATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE 12TH LITHUANIAN POLICE BATTALION

by Eliezer Zilber, Historian

Upon the initiative of Colonel Kazis Skirpa, the Lithuanian envoy to Germany, a "Lithuanian Activist Front" – "L.A.F." – was founded in Berlin, on November 17, 1940. Nationalist and fascist groups, calling themselves "partisans" and "activists" jointed together in this organization and, operating on Lithuanian territory evacuated by the Red Army, succeeded in murdering some 40,000 Jews within the first days after the outbreak of Russo-German hostilities, in June 1940. Wearing on their sleeves rubberstamped armbands identifying them as members of "L.A.F.", but frequently without any "legitimation" at all, they recruited themselves from all walks of life – the intelligentsia, working class, farmers, university and high-school students, former army officers and men, police officers, "marksmen club" teams, self-styled "Iron Wolves", members of the pro-fascist "Young Lithuania" movement, convicted criminals and underworld characters. As soon as they saw the green light, these armed gangs started to assassinate Jews, communists and young communists, gipsies and, to some extent, Poles and personal enemies. In downtown Kaunas alone they killed approximately 10,000 Jews and the rest in suburbs like Viliampole, Sanciai, Petrasiunai, Aleksotas, Sargenai, Jonavos Street, Green Mountain, Kaunas Jail, Fort VII and in garages on 17, Kestucio St, 43, Vytauto Prospekt and other places.

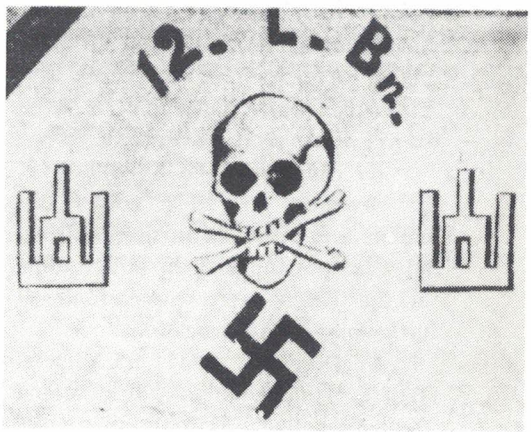
On June 28, 1941, the town-major of Kaunas, Colonel Jurgis Bobialis, issued an order creating the 1st police battalion, known by its initials "T.D.A." which in Lithuanian stand for "Protection of People's Labour". Ex-army colonel Andrius Butkunas was appointed leader of the unit, composed mainly of criminal elements, and ex-major Antanas Impulevicius became his second-in-command.

By Gestapo decree of July 24, 1941, even more reactionary elements, Voldemarininkai, members of the fascist "Iron Wolves" organisation, were placed at the helm of the Lithuanian head-quarters in Kaunas: Captain Stasis Kviecinskas became town-major and major Kazis Simkus was appointed commander of the 1st "T.D.A." battalion. Five similar battalions were formed in Kaunas at the same time, commanded by experienced Lithuanian army officers. By order of the German Ostland occupation authorities, dated July 30, all Lithuanian police units were subordinated to the H.Q. of the 11th German Reserve Police Battalion, Major Franz Lechthaler.

On August 7, 1941, seven platoons of the 1st "T.D.A." battalion were reconstituted in two so-called "Hilfspolizei" (auxiliary) battalions, the first under major Simkus, the second under major Impulevicius. The 1st battalion was stationed on Juozapavicius Prospekt, in the Kaunas suburb of Sanciai while the 2nd was actively engaged in the transportation and killing of Jews in the fortifications around Kaunas: Forts IV, VII and IX, and in the Mickevicius Valley. The same formation also guarded the local ghetto, the prisoner camps in Zapyskis and Pagelaziai as well as other strategic and civilian objects. On August 11-12, the same battalion shot 48 inhabitants in the village of Uzuseliai,. in the region of Jonava; on September 11-12 they shot 1,500 Jews in the villages of Seiriejai and Simnas, in the region of Leipalingis.

By order number 42, dated October 6, 1941, the battalion consisting of 23 officers and 464 NCO's and men, was dispatched to Minsk, to carry out "secret official assignments". The extant documentary evidence proves that the 2nd police battalion, together with the 1st, in support of the 11th German police battalion, actively participated in the mass-executions of Bielorussian Jews, POW's, communists and partisans.

A list compiled in 1962 for the trial of war criminals, cites the following figures for the extermination of Jews, prisoners of war, communists and captured partisans in the Minsk region, from October 6 to November 13, 1941:



The flag of the Murderous Battalion

1)	Autumn 1941, Minsk city (incl. local ghetto)	11,000
2)	Oct. 8, Town of Dukora, Puchawici region	617
3)	Oct. 10, Village of Sergeiewici, Puchawici reg.	19
4)	Oct. 10-11, Town of Rudensk, Minsk district	188
5)	Oct. 14, Town of Smilowici, Puchawici region	1,300
6)	Oct. 15-16, Minsk Camp (Communists)	625
7)	Oct. 18, Minsk Camp (communists)	1,150
8)	Oct. 21, Town of Dzerzinsk (NKVD)	1,000
9)	Oct. 26, Minsk City (captured underground fighters)	12
10)	Oct. 28-29, Town of Slutzk, Minsk district (ghetto)	5,000
11)	Autumn 1941, Town of Nezwis, Minsk district	1,500
12)	Nov. 9-12, Town of Borisow, Minsk district (ghetto)	8,000
13)	Nov. 13, Town of Kletzk, Minsk district (ghetto)	3,000
14)	Autumn 1941, Town of Berezin, Minsk dist.(Jews)	1,000
Total number of victims		34,401

Police Reichsfuehrer Heinrich Himmler, who had already sanctioned the formation and murderous deployment of the Lithuanian auxiliaries to the German Sicherheitspolizei and Ordnungspolizei in his order of the day of July 25, 1941, had every reason to declare himself satisfied. SS Obergruppenfuehrer Kurt Daluege, chief of the Ordnungspolizei H.Q., further confirmed this in his order of the day dated July 31, 1941.

By order of the German Ordungspolizei in Lithuania, Captain Kurt Spangenberg, head of the Dresden police force, was attached to the 2nd Lithuanian police battalion. He arrived in Lithuania on September 7,1941.

By Himmler's decree number 15, of November 15, 1941, unified discipline and penal standards, governing all Gestapo and civilian police units in the Reich, were imposed on all Lithuanian police formations.

In December 1941, SS General Jedike, commanding the Ostland Ordnungspolizei, introduced a new numeration from 1 to 15 for all Lithuanian police units. On December 22, 1941, the 2nd Lithuanian police battalion was detached from the 11th German Police Reserve Battalion and attached to the Ordnungspolizei, commanded by General Engel. Six weeks later, an order signed by the German District Security police commander in Kaunas on February 15, 1942, changed the designation from the 2nd to the 12th Battalion.

Regarding the Minsk "action", one should bear in mind that the Lithuanian units, commandeered to exterminate Jews and others in Bielorussia, were also needed to kill Jews deported from Germany to Minsk. Records kept in the Central State Archives in Prague prove that at a consultation held on October 10,1941 under SS obergruppenfuehrer Reinhard Heydrich, head of the SD, it was planned to send some 50,000 German Jews to their death in Minsk.

A book by Hirsz Smoliar, "From the Minsk Ghetto", also tells of the uprooting of German Jews and their extermination in the local ghetto:

"On November 7, 1941, at dawn, the ghetto was surrounded by a tight police cordon. During the day, 12,000 Jews were led out of the ghetto. Next morning, they were taken to Tutsinke, where open graves already awaited them. Inside the ghetto, no more illusions remained. Wild automatic and machine gun fire was heard quite clearly, confirming what happened to the inhabitants in the neighbourhood of Niemiga and Ostrovski streets...
After the November 7th massacre, the territory of the ghetto was substantially reduced. Houses evacuated by murdered Jews were turned over partly to Bielorussians and partly to foreign Jews (who were called "Hamburger", since most of them came from that German city)."

There are plenty of documents to prove the genocidal activities of the 1st-11th and 2nd-12th police battalions in Lithuania and White Russia. Women, children and elderly people they used to kill on the spot, with their rifle butts. The victims were forced to undress, robbed of their money, valuables and clothing. The dead, the wounded and the living were thrown together into mass graves and trenches. While carrying out executions, most of them were stone drunk and behaved like animals. Their hands, faces and clothes were spattered with human blood and quite often they washed it off in nearby farmyards. A report submitted on September 24, 1941 by Major Ramualdas Kiaulenas,of the Lithuanian General-Staff to the Commandant of Kaunas says:

"The soldiers belonging to the locally stationed Lithuanian battalions are behaving publicly in an undisciplined manner which irritates the population. On private visits they tell their hosts with obvious pleasure of the "satisfaction" they felt, killing Jews. Such behaviour has a demoralizing effect on the locals and, besides, they are revealing what should remain officially a secret matter".

Terrible scenes were witnessed at the killing of Jews and others in the region of Minsk. Dozens of documents recount the inhuman acts of the Lithuanian police hoodlums. Their cruelty is even described by Heinrich Karl, Slutzk district commissioner, in a report, dated October 30, 1941, sent to Wilhelm Kube, "General Kommissar" of Bielo-Russia in Minsk. The report closes with the words "... Please comply with my one and only request: save me in the future from this police battalion!"

In 1942 the effective strength of all Lithuanian units was registered. On August 26 of that year the 12th battalion consisted of 21 officers, 118 non-commissioned officers and 336 men. At the time, there were twenty active police battalions in whole of Lithuania, totalling 8,388, of whom 341 were officers, 1,772 NCO's and 6,275 servicemen.

The strength of these units was changing constantly, as sometimes whole battalions were being decimated in action against the Soviet army and partisans. In 1944, their activities declined. In view of the German defeats, and afraid of being called to account for their crimes, many of their members started to defect. 2,300 officers

and men had deserted by March 17, 1944. It should not be forgotten that while "on active service" they exterminated tens of thousands of human beings, mainly Jews, in Lithuania as well as in Bielorussia, Russia and Poland.

Public trials of some of the 13th and 12th battalions took place in Vilnius, respectively on the 26th of September and the 10th of October, 1962. The Central States Archives provided the court with hundreds of original documents and authentic photographs attesting to the bestialities of the accused. A collection of documentary evidence from both trials was published in Vilnius in 1963, under the title "The Victims of Murder Present their Case".

A partly list of the members of the murderous 12th Battalion:

Sentenced to the death penalty:		Others	
1.	Impulevicius Antanas — Major	12.	Danielevicius Vincas — Captain
2.	Uselis Juozas — Captain	13.	Levinas Jonas — Captain
3.	Kemzura Zenanas — Lieutenant	14.	Pukys Povilas — Captain
4.	Stankaitis Jonas — Second "	15.	Slyzys Eligius — Captain
5.	Cirvinskas Balis — Sergeant	16.	Tamosunas Juozas — Captain
6.	Davalga Jonas — Soldier	17.	Ausiura — Lieutenant
7.	Gaizauskas Bronius — Soldier	18.	Juodis Jurgis — Lieutenant
8.	Kolka Liudas — Soldier	19.	Gecevicius Antanas — Lieutenant
9.	Knirimas Juozas — Soldier	20.	Macisauskas Jonas — Lieutenant
10.	Planciunas Pranas — Soldier	21.	Saulevicius Pranas — Lieutenant
11.	Tinteris Povilas — Soldier	22.	Barzda Juozas — Lieutenant
		23.	Kvietinskas — Lieutenant
		24.	Lenkaitis Pranas — Lieutenant
		25.	Plunge Jonas — Lieutenant

On August 1, 1942, there were at the 12th Battalion – 21 officers, 118 sub-officers and 336 soldiers.

LITHUANIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE JEWISH MINORITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE HOLOCAUST:

The Lithuanian Press, 1991 - 1992*

Prof. Dov Levin - The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

This article addresses itself to one of the major problems that has emerged in Lithuanian society during the first period of independence from Soviet rule and Communist governance. The issue discussed is the mass murder of the Jewish minority in Lithuania more than 50 years ago during the Nazi occupation, and the involvement of Lithuanians in this action for political reasons and deep-rooted animosity. The problem has resurfaced in the wake of the mass rehabilitation of convicted war criminals, including murderers of Jews, by the Government of Lithuania. A range of opinions on this searing issue is presented through excerpts from newspaper articles representing all sectors of Lithuanian society today, from Right to Left.

The Jewish community in Lithuania, the largest in the three Baltic states, numbered only 160,000 souls before World War II. Even when in late 1939, the Vilnius (Vilna) region and its sizable Jewish population was restored to Lithuania, the Jewish minority in the country did not exceed a quarter of a million persons – roughly 8 percent of the population. World Jewry nevertheless regarded this community as a very important one, chiefly because of its contribution to and activities in Jewish national life, culture, and values. Even though the conditions of Lithuanian Jewry were relatively favorable in the interwar period, at least compared with those of the Jews in Poland and Romania, Lithuania has been notorious since the Nazi occupation period (1941-1944) for the following reasons:

1. The proportion of Jews murdered in Lithuania during the Holocaust period was one of the highest in Europe – 94 percent!

2. Most, if not the vast majority of the Jewish victims in Lithuania, were murdered by or with the active assistance of Lithuanians – most of them Catholics.

3. In the very first days of the German-Soviet war (June 1941), even before the Wermacht forces gained control of Lithuania, Lithuanian Gentiles committed grave assaults against their Jewish neighbors in at least 40 localities, including murder, rape, robbery, and savage mistreatment of the elderly. All these atrocities were public acts, perpetrated in full view of the often exultant local population.

4. A large number of Lithuanians who served in Nazi-sponsored military

* From: Holocaust and Genocide Studies, V7 N2, Fall 1993 pp247-262

or paramilitary formations were active participants in the murder of Jews in neighboring Belorussia and Poland; most of them were volunteers.

5. Even after the end of the Nazi occupation, when Lithuania reverted to being a Soviet republic, Holocaust survivors were frequently victimized by members of the local population.

Thus it is hardly surprising that many of the survivors slipped out of Lithuania even before the war ended, regarding the country as a slaughter-house-cum-cemetery. Both,those who left (or more precisely, fled) and those who stayed behind under Soviet rule, did everything they could under Cold War conditions to bring the Nazi murderers to justice. Their quarry included Lithuanians who had fled to the West in droves, where they received sanctuary. In time, Jewish organizations as well as government agencies joined this undertaking.

However, unlike the German national leaders, who accepted a certain responsibility for the crimes perpetrated by the Germans against the Jews, the Lithuanian leaders (with a few exceptions) refused, and still refuse, to acknowledge explicitly the extent of guilt incurred by numerous Lithuanians for murdering their Jewish neighbors. They even tender spurious counter-arguments. One of these proffers a symmetrical formula, according to which the slaughter of Jews in 1941 was merely retribution for Jewish participation in the Sovietization of their country in 1940. Unsurprisingly, this criminal distortion of fact has intensified the Jewish survivors' rage and resentment of the murderers and those who justified them. Another manifestation of these emotions is the vehemence of the accusations levelled against them as part of a bitter feud that raged for several years. Since this disputation was waged in writing only, there was no room at the time for a true dialogue between representatives of the Baltic countries and the Jewish survivors. The former lacked freedom of speech; the latter lacked a satisfactory point of departure.

Naturally, the Lithuanian emigre community was increasingly disinclined to bring Lithuanian war criminals to trial. One reason was the mortality of this aging population group, which included those suspected of killing Jews. Here it should be pointed out that even countries such as Canada and Australia joined the bandwagon too late.

Nevertheless, time had had its effect. The half-century since the Holocaust has occasionally witnessed certain important changes in the attitudes of some Jewish survivors, and perhaps also among some Lithuanians, toward the Holocaust and the lessons to be learned from it. One reason for these changes was the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in the course of which Lithuania regained its political independence. Another is a set of significant demographic developments among the community of survivors.

On several issues, such as the "symmetrical formula" (Lithuanian aid to the Nazis in 1941 in return for Jewish assistance to the Soviets in 1940), a virtually total rapprochement has occurred between establishment leaders in present day independent Lithuania and the leadership of the Lithuanian emigre community that has coalesced in the West. However, there is no doubt that the importance of these motley issues is progressively diminishing vis-a-vis the dynamic changes that are unfolding before our eyes.

The foregoing is background information for a discussion of facts of the past that still cast a very heavy shadow on the present and the foreseeable future. From this point on, we focus on relations between the Lithuanians and the Jewish minority in Lithuania during the transition period between yesterday's glasnost to today's protracted independence.

Coinciding with the Lithuanians' ethical and political pressure to rescind their commitments to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, and to break away from the Soviet Union, there have been growing indications of rapprochement toward and reconciliation with the Jewish survivors. Jewish cultural centers were set up in Lithuania as early as 1989, and the heads of these institutions were close to the new political establishment, Sajudis, the national renewal movement. In a similar vein, a Jewish school was established in Vilnius, where Yiddish and Hebrew were taught. Shortly after, a Jewish journal – „Yerushalayim de-Lite" – made its appearance in Vilnius. These actions were emphatically explained as attempts to rectify the outrageous national and cultural discrimination that the Jewish survivors had suffered at the hands of the Stalinist regime, which merely took the behavior of the Hitlerite occupation regime one step further. At this time, it was also strongly rumored that world Jewry would help the Lithuanian people achieve political independence and economic consolidation (by making investments, issuing loans, and brokering grants from the West), as the Jews had effectively and successfully done at the end of World War I. It is not surprising that the country's leaders, particularly Vytautas Landsbergis, who never forgets to mention that his mother saved Jews (in fact, she rescued one Jewish girl in the spring of 1944, at the very end of the Nazi occupation), issued diplomatic "proclamations of reconciliation" that were sweet music to the ears of world Jewish representatives. Concurrently, however, attempts to obfuscate the uniqueness of the Holocaust of Lithuanian Jewry intensified, as this event was artificially merged with accounts of episodes in the Lithuanian struggle against the Soviet regime. Thus, for example, documentary material on the deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia was included in a permanent exhibition at the Ninth Fort (where the Jews of Kaunas were slaughtered en masse)!

This is not an isolated example. When some Jews in Vilnius sought to erect a monument at the scene of the massacre in Ponar, the authorities emasculated the inscription, which was meant to commemorate the 70,000 Jewish victims who were "slaughtered and incinerated by the Nazis and their local collaborators." The word local, i.e., Lithuanian, was deleted because the authorities were unwilling to acknowledge (even indirectly) the iden-

tity of most of the murderers. The Lithuanian and Russian versions of the inscription were banned altogether, evidently out of apprehension that the younger generation of non-Jews might fathom the full extent of their fathers' misdeeds. It would therefore seem that, from the authorities' point of view, the monument was meant chiefly for Jewish tourists from Israel and the West, since both were sources of foreign currency!

Just before the monument with this misshappen inscription was dedicated, the authorities added insult to injury; at the site of the slaughter at Ponar, the names of fourteen Lithuanians who had recently died in political clashes with Soviet troops were prominently listed. Unsurprisingly, many Lithuanian exiles viewed this attempt to blur the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust as a desecration and/or yet another slap in the face of the monument's sponsors. The Association of Lithuanian Immigrants in Israel took vehement objection to the ceremony and everything connected with it, especially the participation of an official delegation from Israel headed by the Speaker of the Knesset (parliament), Dov Shilansky. A group of former partisans from Kaunas convened in this context, referring to Lithuania as a "land of blood, packed with Jewish graves" and making several resolutions of this nature that were disseminated throughout the world. Just the same, the ceremony was held on June 22, 1991, 50 years after the start of the Holocaust in Lithuania and the region. The Lithuanian establishment exploited the presence of the Israeli delegation to its utmost, emphasizing the "newly restored friendship" of Jews and Lithuanians, and the Government of Lithuania stepped up its efforts to persuade the Government of Israel to recognize independent Lithuania and establish diplomatic relations with it.

The Association of Lithuanian Immigrants, however, publicly urged the Government of Israel to refrain from taking any such step unless the Lithuanians "declared that remorse and asked forgiveness for their conationals' actions during the Holocaust period." The Lithuanians were also asked to bring the murderers of Jews, now at liberty, to justice. Nevertheless, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs hastened to grant Lithuania's request and that of the other Baltic states, recognizing their independence without attaching significant conditions, if any.

On September 5, 1991, two days after this gesture, The New York Times published a sharply worded front-page article condemning the rehabilitation in Lithuania of thousands of persons convicted by Soviet courts of war crimes in the service of Nazi Germany. It was known that some time earlier (May 2, 1990) the new Government of Lithuania had enacted legislation "restoring the rights of individuals who had suffered for their resistance to the occupation regimes." As the true significance of this law became clear, there were grave repercussions throughout the world. Thus, for example, the Minister for Foreign Aid of Sweden, Alf Svenson, announced that his country would reconsider its decision to assist the Baltic states. The anger and resentment were most intense, of course, among the Jews in general and the survivors in particular. In addition to a huge wave of protests and condemnations that were published in the press, a group of Holocaust survivors in Israel launched a journal entitled Lithuania—Crime and Punishment. One of the most vociferous protesters on the Jewish scene was the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which, apparently, had leaked the information to The New York Times. The director of the Jerusalem office of the Center Efraim Zuroff (an expert on Nazi war crimes in the Baltics and a key figure in exposing the scandal), travelled to Vilnius at once and met with media representatives, leading government officials including President Landsbergis and Prosecutor-General Arturas Paulauskas. It transpired that two issues lay at the root of the problem: the Lithuanians refused to publicize the names of all 35,000 individuals who had already been rehabilitated and received grants; and the term "participation in genocide" was so narrow defined as to exonerate anyone who had not actually pressed the trigger. Thousands of guards who transported the victims to the edge of the pit, showering them with beatings and abuse, were not only granted amnesty, but their pardon was reaffirmed by the office of the Prosecutor-General. Consequently, the notorious mass-murderer Alexandras Bendinskas, who had orchestrated the hellish torture of Jews in the Lietukis garage in Kaunas in June, 1941, is a free man today.

Amid all the furor, the voice of the handful of Jewish survivors who still lived in Lithuania was barely audible. Their main reaction, insofar as they responded at all, was rejection of the Wiesenthal Center emmissary's persistent intervention, which, they felt, was liable to arouse or intensify latent antisemitism. They even suspected that the whole matter was a KGB provocation. „Yerushalayim de-Lite" took a low profile and responded with the utmost caution. "We still live here," several contributng editors wrote to acquaintances in Israel in explanation of their self-imposed silence. It is no coincidence, however, that a more assertive journal entitled Etslenu has recently begun to appear.

If this is true of the Jewish press, how much more diverse and multifaceted is today's non-Jewish Lithuanian press. It embraces all spectra of politics and society, from far-right and ultranational-fascist groups to offshoots of the Communist party and the vestiges of the former Soviet regime. Before presenting a selection of excerpts from the Lithuanian press in 1991–1992 on Jewish issues, we should mention that since 1990, when the Soviet regime in Lithuania was abolished and the country declared itself an independent republic, journalistic interest in this subject has undergone quite a revival. There have been more articles on Jewish themes, and the variety of topics, subjects, and viewpoints has been expanding. The range of themes includes Albert Einstein's contribution to science, the life of Lithuanian emigres in Tel Aviv or South Africa, and nostalgic

sketches of Jewish life in Lithuania from the 14th century (when Jews first reached the country) until the Second World War. Since the percentage of Jews murdered in Lithuania was one of the highest in Europe, it is not surprising that the local media give this specific theme relatively wide exposure.

Two events that occurred in Lithuania in 1991-1992 elevated interest in this topic to new heights: construction of a monument (financed by Israelis) in memory of the Jewish victims of the Ponar bloodbath in Vilnius; and the mass rehabilitation (with compensation and benefits) of thousands of Lithuanians who had collaborated with the Nazis, including many implicated in the murder of Jews.

Of the plethora of articles, memories, and letters to the editor concerning these events, the following seven themes (some of which are already familiar motifs in the Lithuanian emigre press) recur:

1. Idealization of the past: Lithuanian Jews have dwelt there for over 600 years with full civil rights and cultural autonomy, living in peace and fraternity with their Lithuanian neighbors. Thus, of course, there were never pogroms in Lithuania, as there had been in neighboring countries.

2. Symmetry of events in World War II: During that period, Lithuania was ruled alternately by the twin devils, Stalin and Hitler. Since the Jews had assisted Stalin in the Sovietization of Lithuania and the deportation of Lithuanians, the latter merely paid them their just desserts during the Nazi occupation, leaving the score "even".

3. Misrepresentation of proportions and overemphasis of exceptions: Even if there were a handful of criminals who helped the Germans kill Jews for monetary gain and benefit, Lithuanian society as a whole had nothing to do with this; it had actually come to the Jews' aid and rescue. The names of individual Lithuanian righteous gentiles are repeatedly cited as proof in these articles.

4. Shock and outrage, coupled with constructive proposals: These were invoked in response to a wave of critical articles in the Western press (led by Stefan Kinzer's previously cited piece in The New York Times on September 5, 1991) against actions taken by the Government of Lithuania to fully rehabilitate persons once convicted by Soviet tribunals for various offenses including war crimes.

5. Reciprocity in punishing war criminals: Countering the accusation that the Lithuanian government had exonerated Lithuanian collaborators who had murdered Jews, it is argued that Israeli authorities are harboring Jewish KGB agents who had committed atrocities against Lithuanians.

6. Idealizing the present: Today, under independent Lithuania there is no obstacle to the resumption of good relations between the two peoples. Obviously, one cannot revive the 220,000 Jews slaughtered by the "Hitlerites", but unlike the Stalinist era, their graves can be tended, the nationality of the victims may be marked, and Jewish cultural and educational institutions shut down by the Soviets may be reopened.

7. A rosy future: The Jewish survivors are expected to act as their fathers did in 1919, i.e., to offer financial, political and moral assistance in consolidating Lithuania's status in the world and furthering its economic resurgence. Thus, the Lithuanians express support for Israel and hope for economic (investments) and cultural relations with it.

The brief examples below are very short excerpts of a longer text. They contain a mixed collection of the aforementioned themes as they were articulated and phrased in Lithuanian newspapers, accompanied by evidence adduced by the author on the basis of his experience and/or knowledge. The remarks, presented verbatim, are indicative of thinking in both the establishment and public opinion of contemporary Lithuania.

* An article headed "Let us Live as Brothers", by J. Sabaliauskas of Siauliai, takes a conciliatory tone. But Sabaliauskas, unlike many others, does not hesitate to condemn Lithuanians who, at the outbreak of the war, "attached white armbands to their sleeves" and set about killing innocent people in an attempt to lay hands on Jewish property. "I shall never forgive these Lithuanians," he writes.

Siauliai Naujienos, January 20,1991

* A petition was presented to the President of the Lithuanian Supreme Council, Vytautas Landsbergis, bearing the signatures of 13 Jewish women and men who had been incarcerated in 1944/45 in the concentration camps at Dachau and Stutthof, Germany. The petitioners protested against discrimination in the status of former concentration camp inmates, with everything this implies, as compared with the status and rights of citizens whom the Soviets had exiled to Siberia. Both groups, after all, were exiles!

Tremtinys, February 1991

* Jurist Matas Krygerys endorsed the aforementioned petition (demanding the equalization of the status and rights of former concentration camp inmates with those of exiles to Siberia) on the grounds that there was no reason to distinguish between Gestapo and NKVD abuses – especially since the inmates of the Stutthof camp included 46 Lithuanian intellectuals. Krygerys' conclusion: "Let's never forget the Hitlerites' deportations." This was also the title of his article

Tiesa, March 27, 1991

* Vigantas Vareikis believes that erstwhile relations between Jews and Lithuanians focused on economic affairs. Although there were clashes pogroms of the type that occurred in Poland or Romania were unknown in Lithuania. Most Jewish communist functionaries greeted the Red Army enthusiastically in June 1940, and played an active part in Sovietization. Much of his article ("The Tragic Month of June") dwells on the mass exile to Siberia that took place in June, 1941. The perpetrators of this crime, "Russian security agents and Communist activists [Lithuanian Jews and gentiles] managed to escape, as usual." Unlike most of his colleagues, Vareikis points to the bitter fact that a week later, still in June, "Jews were massacred in various locations in Lithuania, even

before the Germans arrived." He adds: "In the first days of the war, groups of Lithuanian volunteers organized pogroms; subsequently they 'operated' in the ghettos." Although he is aware that the Nazis asked others to pull their chestnuts out of the fire, he asserts that the Lithuanians' guilt is no less weighty for that. To reinforce this statement, he quotes an excerpt from an appeal by another Tomas Venclava to his Lithuanian compatriots: "Let's be consistent. If we say 'they deported us, they murdered us, we rebelled,' we must also say we killed. Although we were often victims, we were also something hangmen."

Mazioji Lietuva, June 26, 1991

* Under the headline "Why Make an Exception?" the author argues against the belief or demand that the Lithuanian State should rehabilitate and tend Jewish graves. "Why don't the Tatars or other minorities make a similar demand?" asks the author. In his opinion, this demand represents "the exploration of honest men," since the Jews are capable of looking after their graves themselves.

Kauno Tiesa, September 4, 1991

* In an article entitled "What do the Jews Want?" Rytas Staselis discusses the response of world Jewry to news of the exoneration of Lithuanian murderers of Jews. After a painstaking review of protests published by dozens of Jewish personalities and periodicals around the world, Staselis expresses the hope that, in the near future, a suitable answer will be provided to The New York Times' query. Nevertheless, he admits that several vague questions remain in this affair, such as: "Why did people fail to trust the Lithuanian judiciary and present information to journalist Stefan Kinzer concerning the mass exoneration, as it were, of 'murderers of Jews', while officials in the Office of the Public Prosecutor in Lithuania denied knowing who had collaborated with the journalist?"

Mazioji Lietuva, September 19,1991

* In an untitled but prominently boxed article, V. Kasauskiene, senior director of the Lithuanian Institute of History, expressed her opinion on whether a monument should be erected in memory of Jews murdered in the Holocaust. She maintains, among other things, that "from a historical point of view it would not be accurate to inscribe on the monument that the Jews were killed by 'the Nazis and their local collaborators', since some of the local collaborators and criminals were Jews." As proof, she quotes the names of four policemen in the Kaunas ghetto whom a Soviet tribunal convicted after the war for being "Hitlerite collaborators."

Liberalia, October 10, 1991

* On the same page, the Chairman of the Association of Lithuanian Immigrants in Israel, Sr. Abba Gefen, presents a biting response to the foregoing article. He condemns the current tendency of the Lithuanian establishment to obfuscate the matter, "in an attempt to conceal from future generations how tens of thousands of Lithuanians behaved like wild beasts, willingly collaborated with the Nazis, slaughtered Jews on Friday, went to confession on Saturday, and continued slaughtering Jews on Sunday." To substantiate their crimes, he presents a terse account of the barbaric massacre of dozens of Jews by Lithuanians in the Lietukis garage in Kaunas in June 1941, and the decapitation of Rabbi Zalman Osovski in Slobodka (a suburb of Kaunas) at approximately the same time. Speaking for the Association, Dr. Gefen asserts that the Lithuanians will be fit for independence only after they show by way of action that they profoundly regret the atrocities of the Holocaust, seek forgiveness for what happened, inscribe the tombstones in Jewish cemeteries appropriately, refrain from whitewashing Lithuanians' cruelties, and take action to ensure that coming generations will know the terrible facts.

Liberalia, October 10, 1991

* In an article entitled "Razor-Sharp Steps", Vilius Kavaliauskas responds to Stefan Kinzer's sharply worded front-page article in The New York Times condemning the mass criminals. "There is no doubt", Kavaliauskas admits at the start of his response, "that this article was hard for us to swallow". Just the same, he tries to convince us that "in the eyes of Soviet judges, all Lithuanian citizens were either fascists or the lackeys of fascists." This, however, he opines, does not turn all the persons convicted into Nazis. Indeed, the Office of the Public Prosecutor in Lithuania is attempting to rectify this injustice. In view of the tremendous amount of work involved, it is not surprising that "our prosecutors, in their haste, may have made some mistakes." Therefore, there is no point in denying everything blindly. Furthermore, now that the Supreme Council of Lithuania has officially declared that the perpetrators of mass murder during the war will never be exonerated, the matter must be dealt with on a purely professional level. This task too, perhaps, should not be entrusted to the Public Prosecutor or the State Security Department ("lest we make them into the heirs of the KGB!"); rather it should be given to the Ministry of Justice. Moreover, since most of the trials files prepared by the KGB in Lithuania were in the hands of Lithuanian functionaries, it would be a good idea to appoint several historians and jurists to deal exclusively with this matter. At the very least, the files of 12 exonerated Lithuanians who, according to the Associated Press, are suspected of war crimes, should be reexamined.

Lietuvos Rytas, October 11,1991

* "Who Poisoned Our Relationship?" is the leading question and the headline of an article by Vytautas Anulionis. Lithuanians and Jews had coexisted peacefully for centuries; together they established independent Lithuania and its economy. It was an errant ideology (Communism) that poisoned the relationship between them. When the war broke out, the Jews collaborated in the destruction of the Lithuanian people. And even if, for this reason, the victims' relatives did not always manage to contain their terrible thirst for revenge, "there was no substance to the wirdespread contention that the Lithuanians had been willing participants in genocide; this was a Nazi fabrication." The article ends with a plea to the Jewish intelligentsia to be more open-minded

and admit that "it was the Jews who first took up arms against the Lithuanians."

Panavezio balsas, November, 21,1991

* Juozas Fabijonavicius begins his article "In the Name of Truth" by recalling the 700-odd years in which Lithuanians and Jews lived in peace with each other. In his opinion, the idyll could have continued to the present day, had it not been for the pact between Hitler and Stalin – for which each of the two peoples paid a similar price. In this context, he points out that 50 percent of the Communist Party members who operated in the underground in Lithuania were longtime Jewish citizens of the country. He then states that the share of Jews who held high-ranking poisitions in the security apparatus of Soviet Lithuania was roughly as large. True, some Lithuanians risked their lives to rescue Jews during the Nazi occupation, but this cannot counter the fact that "members of our people stained their hands with Jewish blood." Since both the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania under the Nazi occupation and the mass murder of Lithuanians under the Bolshevik occupation were international crimes, "the reasons for and the magnitude of these crimes should be investigated in an international forum". A thorough inquest of this type is important and even vital to both peoples, and unless it is initiated immediately, "blame and curses may fall not only on those who were directly responsible for these crimes, but also on innocents."

Tiesa, November 22, 1991

* The Chairman of the Association of Jewish Scientists and Intellectuals in Lithuania, Bolotinas Viktoras, placed an advertisement containing the following statement: "It is neither our belief nor our wish that the Jews in Lithuania should remain only as museum pieces."

Mazioji Lieutuva, October 3, 1991

* In an article entitled "In a Fun-House Mirror", Alfredas Smailys castigates the Swedish press, particularly the Svenska Dagbladet, for blaming the inhabitants of the Baltic countries for the murder of Jews there in the Second World War and for exonerating their murderers today. Smailys counters the Swedish allegations by recalling Sweden's support of Nazi Germany, which it supplied with steel and other strategic materials for its war effort. The Jews were slaughtered as a consequence of orders emanating from Berlin. Furthermore, if there happened to be a guilty individual among the persons exonerated, it would be found out. "Nevertheless," Smailys concludes, "we shouldn't forget, too, that quite a number of Jews welcomed the Soviet regime in 1940, and afterwards especially in the post-war years, took part in the oppression of the Lithuanian people."

Kauno Aidas, December 14, 1991

* In a comprehensive article entitled "The Tragedy that Will Not Recur," Petras Stankeris described the Nazis campaign against the Jews (including the Final Solution) in considerable detail. One of the instruments that the Nazis exploited in their action was the Lithuanians' hatred that had accumulated in response to the "Red Terror." It was for this reason that, regrettably, some Lithuanians – who could only be termed "members of the underworld" – took part in the genocide of Jews. However, "there are neither documents nor other evidence attesting to the guilt of the LAF (Lithuanian Activist Front) or other Lithuanian nationalist organizations in the genocide of Jews."

Lietuvos Aidas, January 17, 1992

* Opposition journalist Vytautas Petkevicius, clashing swords with Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis with regard to accusations of having served the KGB, asks the President some embarrassing questions about his father's behavior during the Nazi occupation. Among other things, he wishes to know how Landsbergis' father, a Lithuanian cabinet minister at the time, whom a Soviet tribunal convicted for this (in absentia, since the elder Landsbergis had fled the country), was not only allowed to return to Soviet Lithuania but was actually given a citation? Another question had to do with Landsbergis' frequent boasting of the way his family had sheltered Jews. Petkevicius, who apparently knows that the family had taken into their home only one Jewish girl just before the Nazis' defeat, phrases his question as follows: "Who were these people [Jews], and what are their names?"

Opozicija, March 12-15, 1992

* In response to various opinions recently expressed in Lithuania concerning the need to support Jewish survivors who still resided in the country, Jonas Kazemekaitis of the district capital of Sakiai makes the following proposal: "It will suffice to give them back the possessions held by the 'Jew-shooters' [murderers] and their offspring, as well as the real estate that had belonged to the Jews. In Sakiai alone, there are still several two-story buildings that once belonged to Jews."

Opozicija, March 13-16, 1992

* Aleksas Kojelaitis-Kojalevicius vehemently protests the inclusion of his name on a list of persons who had participated in the massacre of the Jews of Kedainiai on August 28, 1941. On July 1, of that year, he says, he was appointed to the position of Labor Ministry Secretary in the town of Panoteriai. Never, during or after this period, had he belonged to any police or military organization. He believes the libel originates with a former NKVD officer, Shlomo Korlanchik (formerly of Kedainiai, now residing in Israel), who had frequently harassed him and his family in the past because of joint business ventures dating from the Lithuanian independence period. Thus he entitled his protest "Vengeance and Defamation" (Tai-Krestas ir Smeiztas).

Kauno Diena, August 8, 1992

* Antanas Juozulynas of the town of Kursenai sent a letter to the editor, which was published under the heading Pogromus renge jaunalietuviai (Pogroms Organized by Members of 'Young Lithuania'). The letter refers to what he regards as the demagogic version of events propagated by Sajudis members and Landsbergis supporters, to the effect that there had been no attacks against other minorities in pre-war Lithuania. "Pogroms against Jews," the author of the letter retorts, "were carried out openly and fearlessly. I

remember how in 1936, 1937, and 1938, just before the pogroms, members of the Jaunoji Lietuva organization in Kursenai would train for the pogroms by throwing stones, and when adults asked them what they were doing, they explained that a pogrom was about to be launched against the Jews. And so it was. At midnight, the sound of shattering glass and cries echoed from the streets where Jews lived... The authorities did not officially support such activities, but they turned a blind eye to the preparations and did not intervene."

Opozicija, October, 1992

* P. Siurkus, in an article entitled Nemaloni Dovanele (An Unwanted Gift), refers to the deportation from the United States to Lithuania of Antana Mineikis, who served in the Nazi death squads during the Holocaust. The deportation was carried out under a bilateral agreement. Appearing on Lithuanian television, Mineikis came across as a hearty old man who evidently had no idea why he had been extradited. Siurkus has the following to say on this matter: "Can't you find anyone in Lithuania who's familiar with Mineikis' heroic deeds during the years of Nazi occupation? Such people could surely be found if they were not afraid of being branded 'enemies of the nation.' "

Opozicija, October 1992

* The journal Tremtinys (the political prisoners' organ during the period of Soviet rule) published an article entitled "Paradas," by P. Uzubalis. Uzubalis rejects demands by Jews that Lithuanian war criminals be brought to trial, asserting that most Jewish murderers of the 1940s have fled to Israel. The journal also printed a response to this piece by the Kaunas Jewish Community Council, which stated, inter alia: "We can neither prove nor disprove that anyone fled to Israel. But what we can state with certainty is that Israel is not a refuge for criminals." An editorial in response to this proposes that Jews who had served as Soviet security agents and, as such, had interrogated Lithuanian political prisoners, collect and publish the facts.

Tremtinys, November 1992

* The same edition of Tremtinys includes an article entitled Nubraukus Nenaudelius (Eliminating the Useless) that opens with the following sentence: "It is worth mentioning that Lithuania had and still has residents who are extremely devoted to the country. Several such worthy families followed in their forebears' footsteps and settled in Israel, but quite a few have formed strong ties with Lithuania and are unwilling to leave their birthplace for the land of their fathers. On the subject of the loyalties of Lithuanian Jews, below are some facts that recently came to light concerning over 500 comrades who once belonged to the Kaunas branch of the Jewish Union, which fought for Lithuania's independence in 1918–1923.

Of the 542 war veterans: 68 were volunteers, 5 were officers, and 55 had other ranks; 4 were medics; 182 took part in battles; 10 were wounded; 245 were decorated, including six who received the Vytis Cross and one who was awarded a decoration known as the Gediminas; 210 received 'independence medals.' " The journal's editors solicited additional material from the readers.

Tremtinys, November 1992

* Under the headline Lietuvos Zydu Bendruomenes Valdybos Pareiskimas (Announcement by the Administration of the Jewish Community of Lithuania), the following appeared: "The Administration of the Jewish Community in Lithuania, meeting in special session, decided unanimously to publish an announcement protesting the recuttent wave of antisemitic items that are finding their way into the Lithuanian press with ever-growing frequency. The Administration wishes to draw the attention of the country's leaders to this phenomenon."

Kauno Diena, November 24, 1992

* Journalist Terese Banceviciute, in a special article, reported details of a press conference in Vilnius held by the Israel representative of the Wiesenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff. The purpose of Zuroff's visit this time was to prepare for the arrival of a delegation from Israel on the subject of the mass exoneration of Lithuanian war criminals. The Israeli delegation was to hold talks with the Lithuanian leadership on ways and methods of reinvestigating the files of Nazi collaborators. Zuroff noted that acting Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas had informed him in a meeting the previous day that the exonerations of five individuals were legally faulty. Israel had no objections to the exoneration law, but there were misunderstandings concerning its application. One of the problems was how to determine the degree of guilt of death-squad members. People who had served in such squads as cooks could not be compared to those who had shot innocents. The victims had not been equipped with video cameras. Since only those who served alongside them can testify today, it is important to cultivate an unsympathetic attitude toward war criminals. As for whether Israel would help Lithuania seek out the perpetrators of the "Red Terror", Zuroff agreed that Communist murderers, too, were culpable. This answer was used as the title to the article: "E. Zuroffas: Tur Buti Teisiami ir Komunustiniai Zudikai" (E. Zuroff: The Communists, too, should be brought to justice).

Lietuvos Ailas, December 3, 1992

* After the director of the Jerusalem office of the Wiesenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff, completed his four-day visit to Vilnius, the Lithuanian news agency ELTA released an official communique headed Reikalai Pajudejo is Vietos... (Things Have Started Moving...). The communique made the following remarks: the guest was received by the acting President of the Lithuanian Republic, Algirdas Brazauskas. E. Zuroff met with the leader of the parliamentary opposition, Vytautas Landsbergis, representatives of the Jewish community, jurists, and journalists. In his meeting with representatives of the Jewish community, he said:

I've come to Lithuania on behalf of the Israeli Knesset in connection with the bilateral interparliamentary committee, which is about to discuss problems of the Holocaust (genocidas).

It was V. Landsbergis who proposed the formation of such a committee when I met him on a visit to your country a year ago. Because of elections to our respective parliaments, and as a result of the discussion on Israel's proposal to include in the committee not only members of parliament but also experts, the committee took time to form. I was gratified to hear that the Lithuanian head of state, Algirdas Brazauskas, also favors the establishment of such a committee... The new Speaker of the Knesset, Professor Shevach Weiss, has been giving much thought and attention to the establishment of the committee.

Israel has already chosen several members for the planned committee. They are Member of Knesset and former Minister of Justice Dan Meridor, and Holocaust scholar Professor Dov Levin. Professor Levin, born in Lithuania, is famous for his publications on Lithuania Jews who were exiled by the Soviets.

Kauno Diena, December 4, 1992

SUMMARY

Even before Lithuania had completed its first year of independence, its broad national consensus disintegrated into a growing tide of qublic political fragmentation. Evidence of this schism was apparent even within the Sajudis movement. Sajudis activists have on several occasions accused others of being in the service of the KGB – not only in the past. Most of the allegations are probably true. Nor have members of other movements, of whatever national origin, been spared.

These and similar charges intensificantly on the eve of the elections to the Sejm (Lithuanian Parliament) in November 1992. Even today, after the Sajudis nationalist camp was routed, and after Algirdas Brazauskas, leader of the Leftist camp, was elected as acting President in place of V. Landsbergis, the internal tension and bleak economic situation have not yet abated.

In this atmosphere of fragile democracy on the one hand and fear of dictatorship on the other, murderers of Jews remain at liberty. Most Jewish property has not been returned, and the chances of its being returned are slim. Perhaps for these and other reasons, Lithuanian Jews are continuing to immigrate to Israel. Consequently, the number of Jewish survivors (i.e., those who lived under Nzai occupation for a certain period) among the 7,000-strong Jewish community of Lithuania is gradually dwindling. Approximately 500 of them are alive today, and their average age is 65. Several hundred Lithuanian Jews who spent World War II in the Soviet Union as refugees, evacuees, or exiles, are younger on average. Although they do not regard themselves as "survivors," they identify with the survivors in many respects, e.g., participation in memorial services. The vast majority did not witness the murderous acts that their gentile neighbors committed against members of their families. Moreover, the Lithuanian Jews who spent the war in Russia interrelated well with Lithuania gentiles whose circumstances were similar, especially when they were literally "in the same boat" (labor camps, exile camps [silka], the Lithuanian division of the Red Army). These good relations continued, to some extent, after they returned home from the war. Even relations between "genuine" survivors in Lithuania and the local population stabilized in time.

This trend is even more evident among the second generation of Jews born in Lithuania after the war. Hence it is no accident that the young Emmanuelis Zingeris was named to head the Jewish Cultural Organization in Lithuania. During the critical period of independence and its aftermath, when the support of the Jewish world seemed to be of the utmost importance, he also chaired the foreign affairs committee of the Lithuanian parliament. Needless to say, he and several of his Jewish colleauges were and still are very active in the Sajudis movement.

Another Jewish member of the Lithuanian establishment, the famous author Grigorijus Kanovicius, was chosen in 1989 to represent Lithuania in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. He is wont to denounce Soviet antisemitism frequently and raucously while praising the Lithuanians' attitude toward the Jews. In a well-known article, "The Jewish Pimpernel," he phrases the emigration fever of Lithuanian Jews in the form of a rhetorical question: "What motivates us to leave a Lithuania that has befriended us, and that fights fearlessly for its independence and for, I would like to hope, our national welfare?" It is important to note that quite a few Jews who were born after the war in Lithuania, or who relocated to Lithuania from greater Russia, already have close family relations with members of other national groups there. This factor, too, undoubtedly affects considerations for or against emigration, especially when the destination is Israel.

In light of all the facts and commentary cited here, we may conclude that today, roughly half a century after the Holocaust of the Jews of the Baltic countries, the post-Holocaust period – which includes concrete documentation of what actually took place – is quite clearly drawing to a close. The next period will be distinguished, inter alia, by the physical disappearance of the Holocaust generation in all its gradations. This, coupled with the geopolitical and social changes that the coming century will inagurate, also promise that future engagement in the range of topics surrounding the Holocaust of Lithuanian Jewry (from the recording of history to the restoration of property) may be handled with full possession of the facts, with less bitterness, and perhaps, with some kind of consensus on the part of those involved. Such an atmosphere, should it develop, may make it easier to strive for a "reassessment" of some kind, one that is more balanced from the purely ethical standpoint as well as the long-term historical one. This, of course, is no consolation for the terrible, inconceivable fact that the centuries-old Baltic Jewish community was totally and irredeemably destroyed in the Holocaust.

"REHABILITATION OF PERSONS REPRESSED FOR RESISTANCE TO THE OCCUPYING REGIME"

by Efraim Zuroff

(A report on my trip to Lithuania as a member of the delegation sent by Knesset Speaker Prof. Shevach Weiss).

The aim of the delegation which was headed by former Justice Minister M. K. Dan Meridor, and included Professor Dov Levin of Yad Vashem and the Hebrew University and myself, was to negotiate the terms for the establishment of a commission of inquiry which will review the rehabilitations which have been granted by the authorities (Supreme Court, Procurator-General and Ministry of the Interior) since independence. From our point of view, there were several specific problems with the attitude of the Lithuanians as revealed in my discussions with Lithuanian leaders (former president Landsbergis, President Brazauskas and other prominent political figures), as well as in my correspondence with the judicial authorities, primarily Procurator-General Arturas Paulauskas.

The first was our insistence on gaining access to all the files of those rehabilitated. To this day, no such list has ever been published. The Lithuanians had hereto been willing only to investigate specific cases that we submitted which we claimed were "problematic."

The second problem concerned the definition of "acts of genocide" which was used in determining who got rehabilitation. According to the rehabilitation law passed on May 2, 1990, anyone who had participated in "acts of genocide" was ineligible for rehabilitation. The problem was, however, that in our dealings with the Procurator-General we had seen that rehabilitations were confirmed in cases in which people led or guarded Jews on the way to be murdered or had served in murder squads, such as the notorious 12th Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion.

The third problem was one which emerged during our discussion with the judicial authorities. There is no provision in the rehabilitation law for the cancellation of a rehabilitation. To date, six rehabilitations have been cancelled in the wake of protests and submissions by the Jewish community and the Wiesenthal Center, but in effect this was done not strictly in accordance with the law which did not envision any such possibility.

In our discussions in Vilnius, it became clear that the final result of our effort would be determined by the president himself. Both the political leaders (Speaker of the Seimas Jursenas, Foreign Minister Gylys and members of the Seimas Foreign Affairs Committee) and the leaders of the judiciary (Supreme Court President Justice Losys and Paulauskas) agreed to support the establishment of the commission and cooperate if relevant, but the decision was ultimately to be made by Brazauskas.

At the meeting with the President it was obvious that he was anxious to end this issue and proceed to its resolution. On a practical level he spoke of the review of thousands of files (i.e. free access for the commission) and indicated that he would take whatever steps were necessary to insure that the commission was established. The latter promise is particularly important since Paulauskas made it clear that rather than amending the law to enable the cancellation of unjust rehabilitations, it was possible to achieve the same result by presidential decree.

As far as the definition of "acts of genocide" is concerned, in our meeting with Paulaukas he agreed that participation in persecution of civilians was sufficient cause to deny a person rehabilitation. In that respect, even those who did not personally pull the trigger were among those who in his opinion did not deserve to be granted rehabilitation.

According to our agreement with the President, Israel will send approximately three experts (lawyers and historians) to begin the process with their Lithuanian counterparts in the fall. My guess is that the review process will be very problematic and painstaking. Arguments over the level of proof necessary to deny rehabilitation will abound as well as questions regarding the burden of proof. Thus for example a critical question will be whether "mere" service in a murder squad is sufficient cause to deny rehabilitation.

In conclusion I would like to add one additional point. While the attitude of the new government is undoubtedly more positive toward our demands, they too are reluctant to confront the past. They do not try to claim as former president Landsbergis and his Sajudis colleagues do (in meetings with us as well) that more Lithuanians helped Jews than murdered them, or that a historical symetry exists in Jewish-Lithuanian relations (Jewish Communists carried out the genocide of the Lithuanian people and therefore Lithuanians participated in the murder of the Jews), but they too are reluctant to unearth the historical truth. A concrete indication of this attitude is the steadfast refusal of the new government to enable the registration in Lithuania of a branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. When I asked President Brazauskas about this he said that he would deal with this issue "next time", while his colleagues indicated that they would like nothing better than for this initiative to cease to exist. Obviously what scares them is the possibility that they might actually have to prosecute Lithuanian Nazi collaborators in Lithuania.

We publish, hereinafter, two pronouncements of Lithuanian citizens. One, by a typical primitive Antisemite, one of so many living in Lithuania, who expressed his thoughts in a letter addressed to the President of the Jewish Community in Siauliai, Lithuania, and some excerpts from an article and poems written by a Lithuanian poet who deplores the fate of the Jewish people in Lithuania. The latter, unfortunately, represents only a handful of the "Good Samaritains" that feel ashamed of the crimes committed by the Lithuanians.

The Editor

A letter sent to the President of the Jewish Community of Siauliai, Lithuania

To L. Lipshitz:

The fate that befell your people, the Jews, to be shot by the Nazis is the punishment you deserve for using in your religious rites the blood of Catholic children drained from their bodies by torturous means till they died in agony. It is plain that those victims of yours would have envied the quick death of the Jews shot, and this is an undeniable truth!

In 1937 I studied in the town of Linkuva, living in lodgings in Church street together with two sisters. In the V-VIth grades at school there were four Jews and a Jewess among my classmates. I was friendly with one of them, Davidson, and from time to time dropped in at his father's shop of colonial metal items to buy something for my craftsmanship lessons. I was a stout youngster, aged 14; my parents lived in the rural district of Vaskai, 17 kilometers away. The Davidson's shop was next to the church (it is no longer there).

One autumn evening I dropped in at the shop before closing time, and Judelis invited me to come in for a cup of tea (the dwelling rooms were beyond the shop, there was also a closed courtyard with outbuildings). I was surprised because they never invited me like that. The son and the father (about 40-50 years of age) seemed to be sort of nervous, hurrying, in motion all the time. On the way to the rooms – they were joined to the shop by a little corridor, from which one door led to the tea-room and another into the street – Judelis asked me to give them a hand with a barrel, which had to be moved or lifted in the courtyard. All of a sudden I realized that something was up, that it was a conspiracy to deal with me, so I darted to the door that led into the street – thank God it was not locked – and made away as quickly as I could. There was no more friendship!.

On another occasion, walking across the market-place on an early Sunday morning I heard the voice of a frightened woman or child calling for help. I looked around, but saw no one. The cry came from the direction of the houses where Jews lived and, scared, I thought that it was a victim for matzos!.

How many cases like that were reported all over Lithuania – of a child missing here and there, but these dirty things were hushed up, because you, the Jews, bribed everyone with your money.

So do not complain that fate turned away from you, you deserve the punishment. And how many NKVD-men there were among you, how many Lithuanians they made short work of, but not a single case was brought up against them, is this right?

I hear that when Jews were being led to shooting some of them said, "a few more days, and we would have paved the roads with your heads (of Lithuanians)!" That is to say that the war prevented them from doing this!

As for Lithuanians who helped some Jews, they did it in the noble belief that a man in misfortune must be assisted, for if they, in their turn, were down on their luck, someone might help them, too. There were also such who took the risk in exchange for the gold that some Jews managed to take away with them!...

J. Leimontas

Naujoji Akmene 31.08.1993

THE WORLD IS STILL INTERESTED

Vytautas P. Bloze
(from "Lietuvos Aidas" July 7, 1993)

We Lithuanians, hear continuous reproaches from Jews (the most recent one was voiced by Emanuelis Zingeris on the Voice of America) to the effect that the Lithuanian writers allegedly avoided and still avoid the subject of the Holocaust.

I leave it to our prose writers to admit or deny these reproaches themselves, but on behalf of the poets I venture to state that we did and do write, and, if God gives us health and strength, we will continue to write about the peculiar everyday life and culture of Lithuanian Jewish towns, which is, actually, no longer existant; about the joys, concerns and hardships of the Jewish community, and, ultimately, about the horrible Holocaust.

It would be insufficient just to

deny the above reproaches regarding the Lithuanian poets. We would be both right and wrong. For it is namely the poets who deserve a word of praise being the only ones, in the course of many years, to have tackled this subject (even as compared with the literature of our neighbours).

However, the impression that the subject was avoided could, indeed, be formed, especially by those whose knowledge of Lithuanian poetry is based only on publications of the recent years and on the creation of a few Lithuanian poets who were most popular. For it is they who avoided this subject for understandable and not quite understandable reasons.

Yet, the theme, which is a painful and burning one both,for the Jews and the Lithuanians, has since years ago, attracted the younger generation of poets of the late postwar period, the so-called modernists: J. Vaiciunaite, J. Juskaitis, S. Geda, M. Martinaitis and – fogive me, please, my immodesty, but when the muses are silent, you have to stand up for yourself – the author of these lines, who has by no means avoided the subject ever since the times of the first Thaw.

I will not try to speak for the Lithuanian poets of Jewish extraction who write in Lithuanian, since the reproaches did not seem to concern them. The very fact that they are among us with their own fate, common sufferings, sacrifices and ever new injuries sustained, to say nothing of their creation (which deals, in particular, with the topics of Jewish life and destruction) speak for themselves. (Neither am I going to touch upon the contribution of overseas poets, nor the creation of representatives of the earlier or later waves of emigration).

Thus, about the LIthuanian poets, i.e. about my generation and the one that emerged somewhat later (with which I am supposed to be linked as regards endeavours in attitude, subject matter and style).

For us to write or not to write (even if those were forbidden or unwelcome subjects) actually amounted to the Hamletian to be or not to be. This question, however, was accompanied by another one: how to write, what extent of openness should be adopted in dealing with this delicate subject? How to squeeze through the clutches of censorship? The problem was that because of the new suppression of the Jewish language and culture started already by the Soviets the subject of Jewish life and destruction was fraught with numerous associations thus becoming especially unwelcome to certain structures. In addition to that, Jewish intellectuals, the creative intelligentsia, in particular, were again in the lead of the new dissident movement scorning bans and reprisals. On any occasion they voiced the demands (for themselves as well as for all) for national schools, freedom of the press and of speech, and an unheard-of thing: free emigration. Moreover, these dissidents again brought up the subject of the not yet forgotten reprisals, which took the toll of the best representatives of the Jewish nation, too. They were also among the first to condemn the further reprisals of the new relapse of the Cold War Era.

Speaking about myself I must say that when writing on the tragic Jewish theme I had, certainly, in mind the plight of all our small nations dispersed throughout the world, the Lithuanians among them.

Yet, how to write? Only into the drawer? Or with certain discretion and disguise, but for the broad public? Or, perhaps, employing preterition not for everyone to understand, nearly ironic rhetoric curtsies to the authorities with subtle variation of meaning? Anything, just to break through the ice of silence piled up over the years! Or, may be, give the censors on purpose something to pick on so that they would be more trustful of those who are out to circumvent them?

Nevertheless, a number of those more open and defiant verses (mine, at least) must be still buried in the old drawers of oblivion and forfeiture... Many of them have been lost in one way or other. Some of them, after all those years of fermentation, or rather decay, already seem too old-fashioned and outdated even to me. They need reviving, but they demand effort and time (as well as means of subsistence) to be rewritten anew before publication so as to carry the message and not look altogether anachronistic.

Apologizing for all these lengthy and ambiguous contentions I still wish to supply a few commentaries to my poems published in this issue of the periodical, which might be worthy of note – now or some time. By the way, the verses published here form but a small portion of my poetic works on the subject of Jewish life and destruction. And these are the early works. Actually, it is important to emphasize just when the subject was first taken up. Especially so that at the time it meant breaking the first ice, and not just swimming freely – like it is now – in calm and fashionable waters and under approving eyes. It is also necessary to recall how these verses were composed as well as the possibilities (sometimes curious), or rather impossibilities of their publication (specifically for the author of these lines due to the fate of his parents' home bearing analogy to the above subject).

The poem "Why are you silent, earth?" The five stanzas are an excerpt from a longer poem entitled "I'll speak up when the time comes", which was written back in 1959 and published without any difficulties (in the Pergale magazine, it seems). Afterwards it was included in the first collection of my poetry "The Seven Mowers" (1961).

Neither Jewish, nor Lithuanian poets were allowed to tackle purely Jewish themes, the more so that of the Holocaust, at that time. There was a strict taboo in the Empire: the Nazis and their henchmen had killed not Jews, but Soviet people. In this fragment, therefore, (which contains everything that might be called the quintessence of the poem and the incentive to compose it) the fact that the victims of the massacre described are Jews is, alas, not mentioned. Moreover, in addition to this concession, to this forced use of allusions, the author was compelled to "spice" the verses with a few more stanzas (they are

omitted here) tailored in accordance with the trite and loud Cold War rhetorics.

When the poem was published, there were both attacks and "well-meaning" advice not to meddle. Much more important and significant, however, were the sincere gratitude and approval (especially on the part of the Jews), not yet abundant, but nevertheless already emerging.

I should also add that several lines of the poem, which were then intentionally blurred (the rough copy was more interesting), have been now restored or changed a little, having in mind that the present publication is not only a documentary, but rather a literary one.

"I don't want!" is a poem published in the Tiesa daily soon after it was written (1962). I could not yet speak openly about the massacres as those of Jews, but I tried – and that was one of the first attempts at the time – to say in a round-about way what was necessary to understand. That was a turn to the stilistics of "conspiring with the reader", i.e. saying as little as possible and only to those who are capable of catching the meaning at once. This became a very popular literary means afterwards.

After a couple of years the Jewish poet G. Osherovitch, who was then residing in Lithuania (having served a sentence in Soviet labour camps) translated the poem into Yiddish, and it appeared in the Jewish press of Moscow and Paris (and, perhaps, elsewhere, too). During the first authorized soiree of Jewish literature in the Soviet Union, which was held in Vilnius, the poem was recited both in Lithuanian and in Yiddish and won the sincerest applause of Jewish literary figures from different cities of the Soviet Union and their friends in Lithuania gathered in the hall of the Philharmonic.

The poem was also included in my book of verse "Cities that Do Not Burn" (1964).

Unfortunately, I did not succeed in publishing any more poems on the subject of the Holocaust in Lithuania in the course of several decades. The special services must have done a good job. Restrictions and bans became more severe.

I pursued the subject further writing for myself. As I said, the ice had been broken: it was as if easier and more interesting to write. The verses were, of course, destined to decay in the drawer and even had to be concealed from evil hands and eyes. No periodical agreed to accept them. If some of the poems did break away from the vicious circle and saw the light, it was not in Lithuania and not in the language of the original...

It is not quite to the point, perhaps, but I would like to mention that my poetry was subjected to increasing criticism at that time. It was labelled as extremist, obscure and modernist (a particularly strong accusation then). I did not, however, give up the subject of the Holocaust and the Jewish theme in general. On the contrary – from then on it became to me one of the most important and significant topics (which did not, unfortunately, enjoy much interest or attention either on the part of the literary science or literary criticism)...

VYTAUTAS P. BLOZE

TWO POEMS *by:VYTAUTAS P. BLOZE*

(translation from Lithuanian by Gita Markeviciute) (was published in "Lietuvos Aidas" on July 7, 1993)

1. WHY ARE YOU SILENT EARTH?

I ask the earth:
Why are you silent
Speak up, do speak up
From the depth of the forest!
Tell me how they soaked you
In the blood of atonement...
I am still short of images,
I am seeking a tune for my song,
And songs are so scarce -
Meaning ful, daring and new.

Pines rustle calmly.
Motley woodpeckers earnest at work.
The little diligent bee
Is attracted by the honey of heather.
The pines rustle calmly
And tell me a quite recent story,
Painting horrible images
On the green of their shawls.

Listen...
This isn't the droning of bees
Flying from blossom to blossom,
This isn't the woodpecker
Pecking the old dried-up tree,
These are war trucks with people
Driving into the forest,
These are villainous guns
Spitting bullets in the green woods of June.

It isn't the speckled cuckoo
Counting years at the top of an oak tree,
It isn't the birch-tree rustling
With its branches astir in the wind -
It's the lament that you hear
Of those buried alive in the sand soil,
Listen -
Someone seems to be moaning
Under your feet...

Oh, how soon the hot blood
Is absorbed by the ground,
Oh, how quickly the wound of the trenches
Is healed in the woods!
The pines that went grey on that night of horror
Are again standing green,
And the stones that were moaning in sorrow
Drowse lazily here again...

I ask the earth:
Why are you silent
Mark the Crusaders' offspring:
After God's bread and wine
And a share of his clothing
His head has been spinning...
The earth gave its answer:
I will speak up when need comes
In the language of apocalipses.
1959
***

2. I DO NOT WANT !

I do not want !...
I share with the people
the colours of the sun and the heavens,
the white stillness of mountains
and the amber washed up by the sea;
I share with the people
rye grain and the berries of forest,
the clear water of springs
and the concerns of tomorrow;
I share with the people
a seat on a bench in the gardens,
snowflakes falling in winter
and a room in hotels...

And suddenly I remembered those
who share
the dark of the grave...

They shot the women
from whom my mother
used to buy salt and flour;
they shot the youngsters
with whom I exchanged
postal stamps and pigeons;
they shot the bearded old men
to whom Dad threatened
to give the mischievous ones...

I was only eleven,
But I was fully aware
that it was the end of the world...

And all those who were killing
What about those who were killing
I ask you, what am I to do with those who
were killing?

I don't want to share with them
the colours of the sun and the heavens,
neither the white stillness of mountains,
nor the amber washed up by the sea;
I don't want to share with them
neither rye grain nor the berries of forest,
nor the water of cold springs,
nor the concerns of tomorrow.

I don't want them
to speak my language,
to walk on my grass
and to read my poems...
I don't want them
to buy salt and flour,
to delight in children and pigeons.
I don't want mothers
to scare naughty children
with them.

1962

הספריה

The following article was written by Mr. Goldsmith of London as a preface to the Lithuanian edition of Adv. Abraham Tory's book "Ghetto Every Day", which is based on the diaries that Mr. Tory wrote during his stay in the Ghetto of Kovno, where he served as the General Secretary of the Elders' council of the Ghetto.

Mr. Goldsmith was asked to write the preface, however, when he handed it over to the Lithuanian publishers, they requested him to introduce "some changes". They did not like it, since it contained some truth which, apparently, is inconsistent with the policy of the Lithuanian authorities of concealing all traces of the atrocities committed by the Lithuanians during WW2.

Mr Goldsmith, a proud Lithuanian Jew, did not accept any "corrections" and requested his manuscript back. The following is the complete and noncorrected text.

The Editor.

From the moment Abraham Tory's "Ghetto Every Day", his diary of the Ghetto of Slobodka (Viliampole), landed on my desk in its original Hebrew, I could not put out of my mind a deeply moving poem, "The Yellow Badge", by the great Yiddish poet H. Leivick.

"How would the Yellow Badge
Look upon the sleeves
Of my wife, my sons, my own sleeves
Against the background of a New-York snow?"...

How would the Yellow Badge look upon the sleeves of Sonia, Tessa, upon my own sleeve against the background of a London rain?...

When Leivick sent me the printed poem, he scribbled on the margin: "I hope I spoke for all those who are survivors-by-one-remove".

He did. He did.

I had heard snatches about life in the Ghetto ever since my first meeting with Abraham after the war. But here, in this book, between its hard covers, are the days in the Ghetto in all their harrowing detail, day after dark day, event after tragic event.

Two of the dramatis personage in the Diary were relations of mine, many others were friends from my childhood days in Jonava and my school days in Kaunas. And there are names of people I knew and revered in my student days. Abba Balosher, the scholar and wit, bibliophil and librarian; Dr. Moshe Brauns, my doctor; Feivush Goldsmith, my cousin, who helped to save the Diary and also built a bunker to save some people when the Germans set the Ghetto on fire before their retreat; above all, Dr. Elchanan Elkes, the indomitable leader of the Ghetto council. Let me record here how Israel's President, Mr. Zalman Shazar, described the role of Dr. Elkes in his eulogy for the Holocaust martyrs at the post-war Zionist Congress: "A true Reish Galuta (Exilarch) in the most tragic period in Jewish history."

The story is told that when Dante walked the streets of Florence, Florentines used to point at him and say: "Here walks the man who was in Hell and came back to tell the tale."

But Dante was in Hell only in his imagination. Abraham Tory was in

Hell in the flesh, with all his two hundred forty eight bones and three hundred sixty five senews, to use the picturesque Talmudic expression. This is something different.

Since I read the Diary, I sometimes have a sleepless night, and when I succeed to fall into an uneasy slumber at daybreak, I have a nightmare:

I stand there in the centre of Democratu Aikste, surrounded by SS men and Lithuanian guards (sauliai) in their uniforms. I am desparately trying to leave the accursed place but am unable to move...

Here but for the grace of God...

It is said that newspaper reports are the first draft of history. If so, books by eye witnesses are the second draft. The final draft, the definitive history of the Holocaust, is still to be written, probably by historians yet unborn. They will find invaluable source material in this remarkable book. In fact, Abraham Tory has fulfilled the prophetic injunction: "Bind up this Testimony" (Isiah, 8,16).

I wish I could sign off here. But I am keenly aware of the fact that this foreword is destined for the Lithuanian version of the book. And this creates an agonising dilemma. In normal circumstances, it would have been a pleasure to introduce the Lithuanian translation by a Jewish scholar (who, incidentally, hails from my native Jonava) of a book by a close friend of some sixty years standing. Once upon a time I used to write Lithuanian myself, and to contribute to Lithuanian newspapers and magazines...

But things happened since those good times. The appaling behavior of large numbers of Lithuanians during the Nazi occupation of the country cannot be dismissed as past history better forgotten. We must face the bitter truth. And the bitter truth is that Lithuanians had turned their country into killing fields. They have murdered in cold blood, often in the most cruel circumstances, scores of thousands of unarmed, defenceless and innocent Lithuanian Jews, even before the Nazis had time to put their apparatus of extermination into place.

Many Lithuanians served as henchmen to the Nazis during the occupation, some of them in the very Ghetto which is the subject of this book.

On the other hand, it is also true that a few Lithuanians, ordinary folk, have risked their own lives to save Jews by hiding them on their farms and in their workshops. Of those, the heroic figure of Father Broums Paukstys stands out. Some two hundred Jews have been saved through his efforts. Dr. Petras Baublys, the head of Lopselis, a Lithuanian orphanage, should also not be forgotten. And there were others. This truth, too, has to be acknowledged. So have to be the efforts of present-day Lithuanian leaders to effect a reconciliation, and their expressions of genuine regret. President Vytautas Landsbergis himself maintains contact with distinguished Israelis, seeking a reconciation between the two nations.

The abyss is still there. The famous Hebrew poet, Abraham Shlonsky, in a searing poem, an epitaph for the martyrs of the Holocaust, which is inscribed on the wall of Yad Vashem, says:

> "My eyes have seen desolation and grief
> And heaped anguish upon my heart;
> My goodness begs and urges to forigve
> But the infinite horror forbids a new start"...

No one wishes to visit the sins of fathers upon their children and grandchildren. A new Lithuania has been born. I sincerely hope that Abraham Tory's book will help to induce a mood of national remorse in the new Lithuania, and serve as a warning for future generations. Jews are no longer the classical victims of genocide. But genocide is still rampant. Other groups of fellow-human beings are still exposed. We must all remain on guard. In this spirit I sign my introduction.

Samas Goldsmitas

The following article was published (in three parts) in the local paper of Jonava (a small town about 30 km near Kaunas). The research was done by a local Lithuanian correspondent of the paper, Vilija Berkutaite, based on documents found in the local Archives.

The Editor

From the Archives

1. Girele — a Place of Mourning

This year marks half a century since the massacre of the Jews of Jonava and its environs at Girele. They were killed by a Nazi task force unit, which was on the rampage in Jonava and its environs at the start of the war, and by the Nazis' local henchmen, who made up a punitive detachment. This publication opens a series of articles devoted to the killing of the Jews of Jonava and its environs in the first years of Nazi occupation.

The Editorial Board

Following the retreat of the Nazis, on September 22, 1944 a commission was formed to inspect the site of mass killings perpetrated by the Nazis at Girele in 1941. The inspection began at midday. 7 pits were revealed: 3 were 50 m long, 6 m wide; 4 were of the length of 25 m and the width of 5 to 6 m. The depth of the pits varied from 3 to 4 m.

Two pits were excavated. At the depth of 2 metres a layer of ashes mixed with charred human bones was discovered. In one pit it was 70 to 80 cm thick. Those were ashes of

burnt human corpses. In 1944 the Nazi leadership aiming to cover up their crimes ordered to dig up the corpses and to burn them. In one pit handcuffs were found among the ashes. This testifies to the fact that there were handcuffed prisoners among those shot. Charred bones belonging not only to adults, but to children as well, were discovered in the pits. There were also metal items – hairpins, combs, hose-shoeshaped heeltaps from soldiers' boots... This shows that not only Jewish people of different ages were shot at Girele, but also Red Army servicemen, prisoners of war, Cartridge-cases from German sub-machine guns were also found among the bones. This indicates that those who were still alive were finished off in the pits. Thus, killed at Girele were the local Jews – old people, young men, women and children, as well as a number of Russian prisoners of war. The corpses were burnt, and the ashes were buried in the same pits.

In the summer of 1941 the Lithuanian henchmen of the Nazis brought a group of 20 prisoners to dig pits at Girele. They dug three pits. Two pits were dug by local residents rounded up in Jonava for this purpose. 20 young Jews were also forced to dig the pits. When the 20 prisoners brought earlier were taken back to the detention camp, the 20 Jews who dug the pits were shot. One of them attempted to flee, but he was caught and shot on the spot.

When the Nazis occupied Jonava, the Jewish residents of the town were rounded up at the former Lithuanian army barracks. They were guarded by the local Nazi henchmen. The Jews had to wear a yellow Star of David on the breast and on the back. They were marched off to the shooting site in columns of 50 to 100 people of different ages, some had to be led by others, as they could hardly walk. As a rule, about 10 armed guards were in charge of the column. The Jews were told that they were being sent to work.

Once, when a column of Jews was approaching the turn in the road which led to Girele, shots and cries were heard. A feeling of apprehension spread among the people, and they stopped. A young man broke from the lines and started running towards the river. The guards fired after him, but missed, as he was running across the field in zigzags. The man was the town's barber, who had been a pretty good football player in Jonava. At this moment a car carrying Nazi officers approached the scene. The car stopped, the officers in black uniforms opened fire, and the man fell down shot to death. The guards ordered four men to carry away to body to the common grave.

Here are the names of the killers of the Jews: Nedzelskas Stepas, Kazlauskas Vacys, Monginas Vacys, Stanisauskas Vladas, Pinkevicius Vacys, Gineitis Vladas, Simonis Petras, Simonavicius Jonas, Stankevicius Vytautas, Starka Jonas, Starka Stasys, Zimkevicius Stasys, Antanavicius Kazys, Polgrimas Petras, Januskevicius Jonas, Urbonavicius Feliksas, Pilipavicius Stasys, Novakauskas Petras, Autukas Kazys, Mockus Petras, Zilinskas Jonas, Trescinskas Petras, Gutauskas Stasys.

When the Nazis occupied Jonava, a punitive detachment was formed there under the command of reserve lieutenant Vladas Kulvietis, son of Juozas, born in the village of Bartoniai in 1894. Later on, junior lieutenant Jonas Jurevicius, son of Simas, born in Jonava in 1910, took over from him. The detachment numbered 114 men armed with rifles and pistols. Between August 14 and September 2, 1941 an estimated number of 2103 Jews from Jonava and other places were marched off in columns to Girele and shot there Deputy commander of the detachment was Jonas Zilinskas, son of Jokimas, born in the Karunava village.

2. The Testimony of Jonas Jurevicius.

Jonas Jurevicius, sone of Simas, born in Jonava in 1910, Lithuanian. Education: higher.

In 1930-1931 I served in the rank of lance-corporal in the fifth infantry regiment of the Lithuanian army. After the army service, between 1931 and 1935, I studied at the Faculty of Engineering and graduated from it successfully. In 1938, after 3 years of studies, I finished a military school and was given the rank of junior lieutenant of armoured troops.

In 1938-1940 I served in a tank unit and in 1940-1941 I was a junior lieutenant in the reorganized Lithuanian army. On the 24th of June, 1941, after the outbreak of the war, I was taken prisoner by the Germans and detained in a camp in Trakai together with other prisoners of war. I spent a month and a half there. After that I was transferred to Vilnius and released. I came to Jonava, where between September 1941 and September 1942 I was squad leader in a self-defence detachment . I was in charge of 60 or 70 armed men. The detachment was directly subordinate to the self-defence headquarters in Kaunas under the command of Colonel Labutis. Afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel Pokevicius took over from him. My squad was ordered to fight Soviet partizans, to guard railway and highway bridges in Jonava, Kalenai, Kedainiai, as well as the railway station in Gaiziunai. We were also ordered to take part in punitive actions: to arrest former Bolshevik activists and Jews. My squad shot around 600 Jews. I, personally, checked the performance of my men in charge of the arrested Jews as well as that of the sentries who guarded the bridges. I also sent them to perform punitive actions.

In October 1942 I was transferred to Kaunas, where I served as squad leader in the 1st company of battalion 245. The battalion was shortly to be sent to the Eastern front. I submitted a petition asking to be exempted from military service, but I was refused. I had an argument with battalion commander Lerentas because of that, and as a result he put me into jail for 3 months. When I was released from the jail in Kaunas, I was sent to a German battalion to serve as squad leader, and in 1943 we were transferred to the Eastern front. In 1945 the battalion was surrounded by the Russian troops, and I was taken prisoner. In 1946 I

was freed, returned to Kaunas, received a passport there and settled in the village of Skiriai.

When the shooting of Jews started in Jonava, I issued an order for the following soldiers of the squad to perform punitive operations: Stepas Nedzelskas, lance-corporal, a resident of Skaruliai; Vacys Kazlauskas, lance-corporal, a resident of Jonava; Vacys Monginas, private, a resident of Jonava; Vladas Stanisauskas, a resident of Jonava; Vacys Pinkevicius, sergeant, a resident of Jonava; Vladas Gineitis, private, a resident of Jonava; Petras Simonis, private, a resident of Jonava; Jonas Simonavicius, private, a resident of Jonava; Vytautas Stankevicius, private, a resident of Jonava; Jonas Starka, private, a resident of Joanva; Stasys Starka, senior sargeant, a resident of Jonava; Vincas Zinkevicius, private, a resident of Jonava; Kazys Antanavicius, private, a resident of Jonava; Petras Polgrimas, private, a resident of Skaruliai; Jonas Januskevicius, private, a resident of Jonava; Stasys Urbonavicius, sargeant, a resident of Jonava; Stasys Pilipavicius, private, a resident of the village of Bazeliskiai; Petras Samardokas, private, a resident of Skaruliai; Petras Novakauskas, a resident of Jonava.

This witness' testimony was given by Jonas Jurevicius to the investigator in Jonava on January 4, 1949.

3. The Murderous Third Squad.

The Nazi's Third Squad was in charge of the shooting of Jews in Lithuania on July 2, 1941. It was assisted by local henchmen. A report to Berlin dated December 1, 1941 gave an account of the bloody job of the squad and its henchmen. That was a secret document of state importance, with only five copies in existence. The mobile detachment under the command of SS officer Haman, which was subordinate to the commander of the third squad, did most of the killing. Together with their local henchmen Haman's murderers shot Jews in Marijampole, Girkalnis, Vandziogala, the forts of Kaunas, in Babtai, Panevezys, and Kedainiai. Shots echoed in Raseiniai, Ariogala, Utena, Ukmerge, Alytus, Rokiskis, Kaisiadorys, Seduva, Obeliai, Zarasai, Pasvalys, Prienai, Moletai...

The forests around cities and towns turned into common graves for Jews. Shots were heard in the environs of Jonava, too. Girele was the site of the massacre. As you might have already read in our publications, the number of people shot there is estimated at 2008.

In 1941, the murderous third squad, one of its units doing the bloody job in Byelorussia, too, completed its task: the report of December 1, stated that 137,346 people had been killed. The same report pointed out that the third squad had "resolved" the Jewish question in Lithuania – no Jews remained there, except for those who had been left as work force in the three major cities of Lithuania: about 4,500 in Siauliai, around 15,000 in Kaunas and as many in Vilnius. They were supposed to have shared the fate of the others, but the labour administration and military bodies which were in need of manpower raised objections to those plans. The report also indicated who had helped to achieve the "victory": firstly, the elite detachment under the command of Haman assisted by the local murderers. The report referred to the latter as the Lithuanian partizans. There was also close cooperation with the local authorities. The killings were carried out in a well-planned manner. The Nazis referred to them as "actions", and they were very thoroughly prepared: data being collected on the number of Jews and sites chosen for digging the pits, so that the shooting spots would not be more than 4 or 5 km away. The instructions envisaged even that the columns should be made up of no more than 500 victims, and that they should be separated by a distance of no less than 2 km.

The report complained also about the "difficulties" that had to be overcome. For instance, only 80 local henchmen had to tackle the job of shooting 3,207 Jews of Raseiniai. They worked in teams taking turns: 60 men were in charge of the columns and 20 did the shooting.

Regarding the Jews who were left as work force immediate sterliziation of the men was suggested. If a Jewish woman among the labour force turned out to be pregnant, she was to be shot without delay. Besides, a check of all detainees in Lithuanian prisons was conducted. Nearly in each town the local "administrators" kept around 600 people under arrest. The Nazis had to add it that a number of them had been put into jail because someone wanted to square accounts with them. Here is one of such examples cited in the report: in Jonava 16 residents of the town were kept in a dark cellar (8 m long, 3 m wide and 1.65 m high) for three weeks; all of them had to be released for lack of documentary proof of their guilt. Among the detainees there were also several girls between 13 and 16, who had joined the Young Communist League in order to get jobs.

In 1941 score-settling reached such a scale that the Nazis were forced to take certain measures in order to damp the ardour of the local "administrators".

The report makes mention of the shooting of Jews in Jonava, too. Among the victims killed at Girele in 1941 (between August 28 and September 2) there were 1,200 women and 244 children.

VILIJA BERKUTAITE



Cropses of Jews of Utena exhumed from the graves at Rasa, Utena, by an Inquiry Commission established by the Russians.

As in our previous issues of "Lithuania – Crime and Punishment", we include in this issue too, evidence on the destruction of a local Jewish community in Lithuania and the annihilation of its inhabitants by the Lithuanians or with their active participation.

In this issue we bring the testimony of an eye-witness, a survivor who describes the tragic fate of the Jews of Utena (The material was published in the book "The Jews of Lithuania" 4th Tom).

The Editor

UTENA

A district capital in eastern Lithuania, with a Jewish population of approximately 3,000 in 1941. A detailed description of their sufferings in the first year of the Holocaust was given by local survivors, among them Zadok Evyatar (Bleimann) The following account is taken from his personal story:

"I am the only one, – writes Evyatar – of the survivors of Utena who stayed in town to the very end, whose life was saved by sheer miracle. The German troops marched in on June 25, 1941 at 2 p.m. Their formations swept eastward on the highway to Russia. The local Lithuanians were rejoicing, putting their faith in those "saviours". They disclosed their intentions right away by storming into Jewish homes "to look for hidden weapons". The sole consequence of this enthusiasm was the death of a few persons. Those were the first Jews to be killed in Utena. Next morning, the Lithuanians started to hunt down Jews, forcing them to carry out quite unnecessary tasks, just in order to exhaust and humiliate them. At dusk, the life of every Jew was in danger. The Lithuanians would lead German units passing through the town to the Jewish quarter, where they used to break into Jewish homes, rioting, pillaging, beating up and torturing defenceless people. They also smeared the word "JUDE" on all Jewish houses to make it easier for the Germans to find their places of "entertainment". The maltreatment of Jews reached a new climax on the third day of occupation. In the late afternoon the Lithuanians came to the "Schulhof", the courtyard of the synagogue, broke into the temple and threw out all books and Torah scrolls. At the same time, they fetched Rabbi Zvi-Yaakov Bleimann, rabbi of the town of Varniai, who lived at the nearby home of Itzhak Feller, and frightened him into singing and dancing with a Torah scroll in his arms. Afterwards, they made a bonfire of all the books and by its light shaved the rabbi's beard, shot him and wounded him critically.

In the course of time, the cruelty against Jews became more organized and "legal". By special decree, Jews had to wear yellow stars of David on their clothes – front and back. They were forbidden to use sidewalks, to sell or buy anything from non-Jews, and all contacts between them and gentiles were practically severed. In addition, the Lithuanians began to arrest Jews suspected as communists. Suspicion knew no bounds and among those arbitrarily detained were two Jewish doctors, Judelovitch and Ast, thus leaving the community without any medical care whatsoever. The arrests, which soon filled the local jail, alarmed the Jewish population. Soon the synagogues, too, were turned into jails for Jews, Russians and communists.

On Monday, July 14, at 6. a.m. announcements signed by Mayor Dr. Stefanavicius, and by the Lithuanian military commandant were pasted on walls, ordering the expulsion of all Jews. They were told to leave by 12 noon on the same day for the small town of Moletai. They were allowed to take with them any belongings they could carry, but forbidden to destroy any property left behind. Each one had to carry identification papers. Every Jew found in town after the deadline would be executed on the spot.

The local mob could not wait for the deadline to expire. Before the expulsion edicts had time to dry on the walls, the Lithuanians started raiding Jewish homes, maltreating their tenants and arresting a large number of men. Panic-stricken, most Jews preferred not to waste any time packing and left in a hurry. Whatever they managed to carry with them was robbed on the way, anyway. The exodus of some 2,000 Jews from Utena was a terrible experience. All of them, including small children and decrepit elders, streamed to the nearby woods. Within a few hours, long-time residents were uprooted from homes in which their families had lived for generations.

On leaving town, they were directed to the Silani forest. At the entrance, each one had to present himself to a special committee whose members belonged to the local intelligentsia, including one female secretary. All names were registered and the Jews were told to hand over any valuables, particularly cash and gold. They were searched and one Jew found in possession of a few hundred rubles was shot on the spot.

Bereft of hope and personal fortune, those poor Jews were marched off into the forest, surrounded by armed Lithuanians who followed their every step with hate and suspicion. The guards started the rumor that the deportees would stay in the woods a

short while only and then be transferred to a special ghetto on Ozera street, back in town. The Jews spent their first night in the forest without any sleep; most of the night they stood around, scared and nervous. It was pitch-dark and nobody had been allowed to bring any matches or oil into the forest. Next day it rained and the deportees made makeshift shelters from branches and each family huddled down together under a tree.

A broadcast from Radio Kaunas did not fail to notice that by the middle of July, Utena had become – a great honour, indeed ! – the first "judenrein" town in the whole of Lithuania.

The Jews of Utena spent about three weeks in the woods, wet by day, freezing by night, weakening from hunger and diseases, with no medical assistance at all. After dark, the guards would fire frequently to frighten the people. Each morning, they would lead the men to do forced labour in town. There the Jews would see Lithuanians busy emptying Jewish houses. The people exposed in the woods would be given nothing but bread.

A few men returning from work, managed to smuggle in more food and some milk which were then rationed out to children and the sick. An exemplary atmosphere of solidarity and brotherhood prevailed among the Jews in their tragic predicament.

On Thursday, July 31, Lithuanian policemen appeared in the forest and checked all men and women between the ages of 17 and 55. I had to join a group forced to work in town, near the post-office, clearing away the debris of a bombed-out building. In the evening, before finishing our work, we saw many Jewish men being led out of the forest. Due to the darkness I was unable to recognize all of them, but I did identify the young Rabbi of Utena, Reb Nachman Hirshovitz, the former deputy-mayor Zhorat and his two sons; Reb Jehudah Epstein, the ritual slaughterer; Mr. Lawior, one of the local well-to-do people and other leaders of the community. Returning to our encampment in the woods, we encountered Lithuanians trying to form columns of Jewish men, amid shouting and cursing them for not being able to fall in line properly. Seven other men and myself, who had returned from work, were attached to this group, composed of some hundred men. A few minutes later, a Lithuanian police constable coming from town delivered some whispered message to the leader of the gang, who thereupon released us and let us rejoin our relatives.

Back in the forest, we learned that during the day about 500 men had been led out of the woods. Nobody could tell what had become of them. A short while later, heavy firing broke out quite suddenly. Nobody could imagine that those shots we heard were directed at our five hundred brethren, murdered then and there in cold blood by the Germans and Lithuanians. Rumors spread after the massacre said that the five hundred murdered men were seen working on the road and many Jews believed this to be true. Had they been less credulous, perhaps some of the younger people could have tried to escape and saved their lives.

Four days after the killing of the 500, Lithuanian "partisans" turned up and took away some forty girls, allegedly to work in the fields. When another three days had passed, excitement broke out all over the forest and people expected something to happen pretty soon. During the night between the 6th and 7th of August, the guards did not stop shooting for a moment. It was raining and people were unable to lie down. They wandered about under the trees, immersed in depressing thoughts about the fate that awaited them.

On the morning of August 7, 1941, the skies cleared and the Lithuanian auxiliaries arrived as usual to lead the men to work. Since not many male Jews remained, they started hunting for "dodgers" in the woods. On the same morning, the Jews were not taken to work but to the secret-police headquarters, where some of the men were released after producing papers identifying them as employed by the German army. The rest were taken to jail. In the courtyard we had to hand over our belts and all things we kept in our pockets, including personal documents. We were forced to sit there for hours. From the windows of the jailhouse, Jews brought there from the town of Vizuonis were looking at us. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, a German Gestapo officer arrived on the scene. We had to form columns and were marched out, after the gates had been opened. Advancing on the road, we saw at some distance a group of about forty women. They may have been the same girls that were led out of the forest a few days earlier. We were heavily surrounded by Lithuanians, including high-school students. After we had left town, they started to rush us and those Jews that were unable to keep pace, were shot on the spot. After a wild run of about two kilometers, we were told to lie down on our bellies. Anyone raising his head would be shot, they threatened. I was at the end of my tether and thankful for this short pause. While lying on the ground, we saw from afar the women being marched off and suddenly there was the sound of firing and female voices sobbing and shouting. It was then we understood what was in store for us too, soon.

Fifteen minutes later, half of the men in our group were told to get up and march forward. Being in one of the middle rows, I stayed in place. Once again we heard firing and shouting and then it was our turn. A blood-curdling view revealed itself to us: on a hill surrounded by trees on three sides, long trenches had been dug out. Close to one of the pits stood a masked Lithuanian holding a whip who lashed out at people passing in front of him. Afraid of getting hurt, the victims would run toward the edge of the grave, where a German soldier killed them with automatic fire. Next to a car parked nearby, stood the Mayor Zhukas, the district medical officer Jasinas, and other prominent Lithuanians and watched the proceedings.

Next to me marched my friend

Kalman Katz, a student from Utena, and both of us tried to escape. We started to run, but Katz was hit by a bullet, fell down and cried: "I am dying!". I was faster, jumped over the trench, but was also wounded in my leg. I passed out and rolled down the slope into a swamp at the bottom of the hill. Regaining consciousness, I started to crawl through high grass until I reached a reed-enclosed pond. I couched down in mortal fear until nightfall. All the while non-stop firing continued up on the hill, as more and more Jews were brought to meet their fate.

Strong rains fell during the night. When I tried to leave the pond, I was unable to move my legs, from the freezing water and the loss of blood. Making a superhuman effort, I managed to stand up and walk again. At first, I was thinking of returning "home", into the forest, but I soon understood the danger and, besides, I did not know the way. Meanwhile the rain had stopped, the skies had cleared and I began to find my bearings. I decided to walk in the direction of Kaunas. After three weeks of moving forward on roundabout roads, walking by night only, I reached the ghetto of Kaunas."

The remaining Jews of Utena, mostly women and children, were also killed on the hill shortly later and buried in mass-graves. The Germans kept alive a handful of Jews needed for expert work, but these, too, perished soon. The last one to hold out was the needle-worker Dov Korin, who was killed in November of the same year.

The mass-graves are situated in Rasa forest, near the mill, 3 km from Utena, on the road to Uzpalis. It was later discovered that there were four deep trenches, 4–5 meters long and 3–4 meters wide. Lithuanian witnesses testified, they had been dug by Jewish prisoners from Utena jail, a few days before the first "action".

On the list of mass-graves registered in the book "Mass-Slaughter in Lithuania", vol. 2, details regarding the ones in Utena are given as follows:

Site : Rasa forest, 2 km north of Utena. Time: July 31, Aug. 7 and Aug Aug. 24, 1941. Number of killed: Some 4,000 men, women and children

"DEFYING THE HOLOCAUST"

by Dr. Aba Geffen

ספריה
מס׳
לחקר יהדות ליטא

Dr. Aba Geffen, an Israeli diplomat and former Chairman of the Association of the Lithuanian Jews in Israel, survived miraculously, the horrors of the Holocaust. At the beginning of the German invasion he was in Kovno, Lithuania, where he studied at the local university, there he witnessed some of the atrocities committed by the Lithuanians against an helpless Jewish population, murdering, bestially, women, children and old people.

After a short stay in Kovno he went back, in mid July 1941, to his native village of Simna, whose Jewish inhabitants still enjoyed at that time some kind of liberty. But not for long: very soon the Jews of Simna were rounded up and were savagely slaughtered by the local Lithuanians, sharing the same fate with their brethren of all the other Jewish communities in Lithuania. Aba Geffen and his brother Joseph survived by hiding for three years in the barns and fields of the neighborhood of their native village.

Dr. Aba Geffen, in his new book "Defying the Holocaust – a Diplomat's Report", describes his experiences in this period of horrors as well as his participation in the plight and flight of the Jewish people, survivors of the Holocaust, who emerged from the valleys of death making their way to their Homeland – Israel.

Hereinafter, we bring to our readers a few excerpts from the first part of the book (which consist of four parts) "inconceivable savagery".

The Editor

"...Even before the Germans entered Kovno, the Lithuanian Activists Front attacked the Jews of Viliampol, a suburb called "Slabodka" by the Jews. First they forced the Jews to dance, then to recite Hebrew prayers and sing the Communist "Internationale". Finally, when the sadists tired of such games, they ordered the Jews to kneel and shot them in the back. Then they marched down the streets of Slabodka, broke into Jewish houses, and slashed the inhabitants to death.

Slabodka was known for its famous European Yeshiva. The Yeshiva is one of the oldest institutions in the Diaspora, but it reached the climax of its development and achievement in Lithuania. My grandfather studied at the Yeshiva of Slabodka, and I remember my father mentioning with pride that grandfather had been ordained there as a Rabbi by Reb Yitzhok Elhonon.

Reb Yitzhak Elhonon Sepktor was born in Grodno in 1817 and, after having served as Rabbi in various towns, he arrived in Kovno where he officiated until his death in 1896. He established a Yeshiva there for the training of rabbis and attained eminence as a rabbinic authority. He won universal admiration for his broad-mindedness, sincerety and peaceable disposition.

One of the most prominent scholars, who continued in the steps of Reb Yitzhok Elhonon, was cruelly murdered by the Lithuanians when they attacked Slabodka. After a night-long orgy of violence by the Lithu-

anian assasins, the Rabbi of Slabodka, Reb Zalman Ossovsky, was found bent over his bloodsoaked books while his severed head lay in another room.

Even as the Slabodka dead were being gathered up, seventy Jews were seized in the central part of Kovno, dragged into a nearby garage and battered to death with wrenches, hammers, and tire irons. The hose used to wash cars was forced into the throats of some of the men and water poured down their gullets until their stomachs burst. When the massacre was over, the garage floor was covered with human blood and entrails.

In addition to this wanton murder, the Lithuanian pro-Nazi Activists Front, which was preparing to greet the Germans with wild enthusiasm, conducted mass arrests of Jews and assembled them at various places. The commander of the Activists Front announced in a radio broadcast that Jews were shooting at the German troops. He warned that for every German soldier shot, one hundred Jews would be put to death.

Upon hearing this announcement, groups of Lithuanian pro-Nazi activists cast off all restraint. The Lithuanians believed that the more atrociously they behaved toward the Jews, the better they would be treated by the Nazis..."

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"...At Fort VII, in the course of about two weeks, from June 25 to July 7, 1941, eighty to one hundred Jews were slaughtered each day. On the eve of July 8, five thousand Jews were executed. The killings were interrupted the next day when a decree was issued ordering all the Jews of Kovno to move into a ghetto in Slabodka. Every Jew in Lithuania was now to wear a yellow badge shaped like the Star of David..."

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"...In the afternoon of Friday, September 12, Bogdanovitch came to the barn to tell us that the Jews had been moved out of the barracks. As we were talking, a peasant woman came into the yard and described seeing the Jews being led out of the barracks into the woods nearby. The men were walking with their hands tied behind their backs; the women walked arm in arm, and so did the children. There was weeping and wailing. At that moment we heard the sound of intermittent gunfire coming from the woods. It went on for over an hour. We were within earshot of the brutal slaughter of the Jews of Simna, innocent, pure souls, murdered only because they were Jews, and among them, our mother and little Yehudah'le.

In the evening, Bogdanovitch came, and his answers to my frantic questions told, in all their horror, the last moments of the lives of the Simna Jews. The LIthuanians torturned them with inconceivable savagery, until their senses and their human image were lost. With no strength to resist any longer, even spiritually, under a hail of blows, from whips and gunstocks, stripped almost to the skin, they were driven to the woods of near Kalesnik. Broken and enfeebled, humiliated, they moved in the slow rhythm of the death march. While still alive, our brethren of Simna were forced into a long, deep pit that had been dug in barbaric readiness and then, in coldest blood, the Lithuanian activists and German soldiers shot them down. After the slaughter the killers came out of the woods singing at the top of their lungs.

We were smothered in gloom. We thought we were going mad, and Joseph asked me, "Do you really believe that our little brother is dead and buried?"

It was hard to believe, but didn't we hear the shots with our own ears? I cursed myself for living, but I didn't want to die, and we had to concentrate on saving ourselves. We prayed to God to have mercy upon us and spare our lives..."

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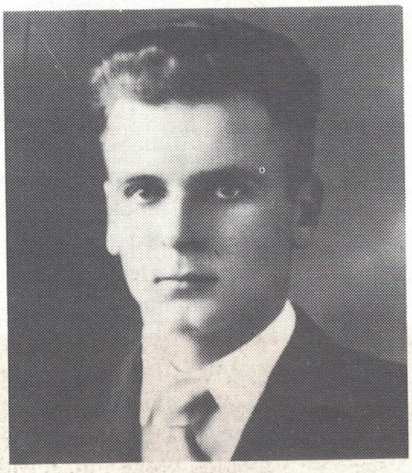
"...Those who were present during the shooting of the Simna Jews told Zhvinak that while some of the victims were hit by as many as ten bullets, many others were buried alive. They saw how the very earth seemed to rise up in revulsion. I was shivering all over while listening to him, and I thought of my poor mother and little Yehuda'le..."

MURDERERS' FACES

הספריה
מס'
לחקר יהדות ליטא



Antanas Impulevicius, a cruel murderer, Commander of the 12th Battalion lives (or lived) in the U.S.



Juozas Barzda, A cruel murderer Member of the 12th Battalion

(From the Archive of L. Zilberis)

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