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<http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/ciskauskas-1940-uju-lietuviu-aktyvistai-po-sunkia-ideologijos-nasta.d?id=37597143>

[Translator's note: Passages of direct relevant to the Holocaust are **colored in red, in the translation only**, for rapid reference.]

The Lithuanian Activists of 1940: Under a Great Ideological Burden

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Is the interpretation of history, a thankless task in general, necessary? But it is necessary to reflect on its most important dates, events, expressions and trends, so that the stages in the development of the [ethnic] nation wouldn't sink into the past and fade from memory. Only the word "why?" which most often divides society, politicians and historians as well, will remain beyond the limits of consideration this time as well.

Our attention should have been drawn at the beginning of October to a 70th anniversary, one which is viewed in extremely different ways. On October 9, 1940, less than four months after the beginning of the first occupation (the Soviet military occupied Lithuania on June 15, 1940), a secret council of members of the underground met in Kaunas and decided to create a resistance organization, later called the Lithuanian Activists Front (or LAF, and this abbreviation was also written LAF-30, supposedly to show that most of its members were young people under 30).

They only called themselves that on December 15, after the organization of Lithuanian political refugees was created in Germany on the initiative of

Kazys Skirpa on November 17, 1940, and whose establishment protocol was signed by 28 people. The LAF core abroad was made up of people of differing views, but were mostly nationalists and followers of Voldemaras. Perhaps this was responsible for the actively patriotic nature of this movement. Furthermore, on August 10, 1940, the Council of American Lithuanians was established, and somewhat later at a conference in Rome, the Lithuanian National Committee.

LAF's purpose was to oppose the Soviet occupation, its collaborators and, exploiting the future war between Germany and the USSR, to regain Lithuanian independence. This group was more than a propaganda, diplomatic, ideological and organizational structure; it was also an active battle unit. Armed units established themselves in institutions, schools and the military, usually led by officers, and quickly armed themselves.

Underground groups became active in the outlying districts, going under a number of names: the Lithuanian Security Guard, the Iron Wolf partisans etc. Two LAF headquarters were established, in Vilnius and Kaunas. This was done so that if the Soviets liquidated one, the other would remain operational. That's what happened, too. The Vilnius headquarters were destroyed on June 8, 1941, and the leaders were arrested and shot.

The primary method for the LAF to revivify Lithuanian independence was to organize an uprising and make a declaration of the restoration of Independence. Although the main text was lost in the confusion (as happened with the Act of Independence in 1918), the uprising began on time (at 10 AM on June 22, 1941, after canon had thundered from the direction of the border for 6 hours), and an appeal in different languages was delivered over Kaunas radio (L. Prapuolenis read it on behalf of the LAF at 9:28 AM on June 23, 1941). The formation of the Provisional Government of Lithuania was announced along with this, although its leadership had already been decided upon on April 22.

Two things in the formation and activity of LAF need to be considered. Of course, the Front, born in Berlin, could not be independent of the Nazi government and Nazi ideology. Their intelligence services followed every move of political emigrants and well knew of plans to establish the LAF. This is why Berlin tolerated and didn't hinder K. Skirpa's meetings and contacts with activists in Lithuania. In the final analysis the Nazis planned to

use the LAFists' hands to deliver a punch to the Soviet occupiers and thus weaken their strength before taking Kaunas and Vilnius.

As it later happened, German tolerance ceased when LAF activists helped drive out the Red Army, and finish off their collaborators, but then began to issue statements declaring Lithuanian independence. To wit, already by July 17, the Provisional Government had adopted a land denationalization law, and owners were to be returned 60 hectares of land, while the landless and smallholders were to receive land from the State Fund. Such reforms were not convenient for the German occupational government, especially since some of the young people from this organization began to oppose the new occupiers as well.

It's clear that the restoration of the independent state wasn't part of their plans. The Provisional Government lasted barely 6 weeks and on August 5 held their last meeting. A week later, on August 13, the government was dissolved, and a month later, on September 15, the LAF leadership signed a memorandum which announced the suspension of activity by the Front and annulled the declaration of independence. A week later and the LAF was liquidated as well, and its leaders sent to concentration camps. The activists scattered and reformed into different organizations, for example, the futurists chose the Lithuanian Front, the officers entered the secret military Lithuanian Freedom Army, and so on.

A few years later, on November 25, 1943, when the Germans had lost at Stalingrad, Kursk and in battles along the Dneipr, the Supreme Lithuanian Liberation Committee was established in Lithuania (Lithuanian acronym: VLIK), but it, too, only operated briefly, for a little under a half year. In April of 1944 the Gestapo sent VLIK leaders to prison, and members remaining at large fled to the West and continued their activity abroad.

That the LAF had to pay tribute to Nazi ideology is witnessed by the fact there was a distinct anti-Semitic stain in the Front's actions. As expressed recently in a statement issued by the Lithuanian Jewish community, it didn't take long for the anti-Semitic sentiments encouraged by the LAF to transform into the mass murder of Jews (on June 27, 1941, about 50 Jews were brutally tortured to death at the Lietukis garage site in Kaunas). The Provisional Government adopted laws that were unfavorable mainly to Jews. With just several days until the dissolution of the Provisional Government, they found the time to adopt the discriminatory Regulations of the Situation

of Jews, the statement [by the Lithuanian Jewish community] says. The model of the New Lithuania, borrowed from the Third Reich, was implemented in this way: “One Nation, One Party, One Leader.”

Despite this heavy ideological burden, the swift combat movement, even if it had not existed for a year, showed the world that the Lithuanians are not a nation of servile lackeys and collaborators, that the [ethnic] nation values and seeks to revivify at any cost the Act of Independence of February 16, and resolutely enters the duel with one or another occupier.

It's not difficult to perceive that, almost a half-century later, this Sajudis [movement, capitalized in this case to indicate the movement seeking Lithuanian independence from the USSR from 1988 to 1991] of activists was reborn under similar circumstances of rabid occupation. Soon we will mark yet another date: the establishing congress of the Lithuanian Perestroika Movement was held on October 22 and 23, 1988, and its two and a half years' work led to the restoration of the independent state. Of course it would be difficult to associate the LAF and the LPS (Lithuanian acronym for Lithuanian Perestroika Movement, aka Sajudis). It was a different time. A different geopolitical situation. A different mentality of [ethnic] nations thirsting for freedom. Different methods for seizing freedom.

But all the same, one would like to ask: will we sometime need to, and if it is needed will we be able to join in a united fist of resistance?