

Translation of:

http://www.alietuvis.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8339%3Aanaujas-vilgsnis--vien-kontroversikiausi-lietuvos-istorijos-fakt&catid=51%3Aaktualijos&directory=77

Translator's note: The sentence concerning the murder of "only" 5% of the Jewish citizens of Lithuania during the period of the Provisional Government is highlighted in red in the English translation for rapid reference (top of page 4). The sentence *is* not highlighted in the original Lithuanian.

A New Look at One of the Most Controversial Aspects of Lithuania's History

by Audronė Simanonytė in *Amerikos Lietuvis* (Alietuvis.com)

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The creative group from Lithuania that is behind the documentary film *The Uprising of the Enslaved* is currently visiting the United States. When the Lithuanian parliament declared 2011 The Year of the Defense of Freedom and Great Losses, the public enterprise E2K took the initiative to present a film about one of the most controversial aspects of Lithuania's history, the June 1941 anti-Soviet uprising. For several months now work has been going on for making the film. Testimonies of uprising participants and witnesses and commentary by historians has been recorded and authentic archival material has been collected. E2K director Agnė Zarankaitė, operator Andrius Bartkus and journalist Vidmantas Valiušaitis have travelled to the US to continue this work. During their visit the film group will meet with Lithuanian communities in New York, Chicago and Florida.

History Recalled

The Lithuanian Activists' Front (LAF) organized the June 1941 uprising in Lithuania. Preparations for the uprising began when it was learned that Germany was planning to declare war on Russia and that the Germans would soon arrive in Lithuania.

Lithuania had already lived a year under Russian occupation. The majority of private property had been nationalized, people's savings seized and the state's capital reserves taken, the infrastructure of the market economy destroyed, and people were persecuted and arrested, followed by mass deportations to Siberia that began in June, 1941. By announcing the uprising, the Lithuanian activists hoped to liberate the country from Soviet occupation and restore the sovereign state. There was also the desire to free political prisoners, to protect Lithuania's remaining wealth from destruction, and so on. There was a desire to show Germany as well as other countries that Lithuania was a sovereign republic, not a part of the Soviet Union.

The uprising began the first day of the war and lasted a week, from June 22nd to the 28th. A Provisional Government of Lithuania was formed and on June 23, 1941, a declaration of the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania and a call to the Lithuanian people to duty were announced over Kaunas radio. The composition of the Provisional Government of Lithuania was also announced.

Different Views of the Uprising

Historians have widely different views of the June, 1941, uprising. It was angrily condemned in works by Soviet historians; leaders of the uprising were painted blindly in the darkest hues. It was claimed that nation-splitters and "lackeys of the fascists" took part in the uprising. In works by Lithuanian emigré authors the uprising was usually exalted as a heroic deed of the nation that helped shake off the Soviet occupation and at least temporarily restored Lithuania's sovereignty. It is true that there were critical views of the uprising among the émigrés too. However, they were not dominant.

The most remarkable works on the uprising among the émigrés are Kazys Škirpa's *Uprising* and Juozas Brazaitis's *Completely Alone*. Brazaitis said the immediate goal of the uprising was achieved, namely, Lithuania was declared independent. A national government began governing the country. The political significance of the uprising was also achieved: the world was told of Lithuanians' aspiration to be independent and the Bolshevik lie that Lithuania

asked to enter the USSR in 1940 was denied. Also, the moral and psychological meaning of the uprising was very important for the nation. Kazys Škirpa and others hold similar views on the uprising.

The heroic understanding of the uprising was continued in newly-independent Lithuania. Edvardas Gudavičius thinks that the June 1941 uprising, although it had "a few dark blemishes," is "one of the greatest moments [finest hours] in our history," — "the heroic act of the nation," because Lithuania rose up and liberated itself over the course of several hours.

But former diplomat Vaclovas Sidzikauskas thought the uprising had taken place at the wrong time and thus had no determinant significance for Lithuania's freedom. Priest Feliksas Jucevičius, who has written much about the history of Lithuania, did not doubt the good intentions of the leaders of the uprising but said that good intentions aren't sufficient in politics, one has to foresee consequences as well, but LAF and the then-government of Lithuania did not. Jucevičius doesn't think Lithuanian independence was restored. He said the formation of a ministerial cabinet while the German army is overrunning Lithuania doesn't mean independence at all. Jucevičius agreed that it was due to the uprising that administration of the country passed into the hands of Lithuanians, but countered that the Lithuanian administration had to carry out German directives as well. Jucevičius compares the June uprising with a drowning man grasping at straws, "and that straw is the myth of German liberation. If we had a pathetic conception of Communism, the uprising showed that we didn't understand the Nazis any better," he writes. But the most categorical view of the uprising is by Tomas Venclova, for whom the insurgents are in the best case very naive, and in the worst, bloodied by crimes against Jews, Poles and Lithuanians too.

"It will be attempted in the film to look at the facts conscientiously"

One of the film makers, journalist V. Valiušaitis, says that under such conditions it is impossible to make a definite judgment about the uprising even today. "It is very complicated, controversial in its consequences, but most importantly this is a tragic historical period for Lithuania and the world," he said. "Until now political views have dominated with the aim of bending the actions and decisions then to political service today. History is still viewed with a certain a priori vision, always seeking to overcome at all costs some imaginary ideological enemy and "finish him off," instead of trying to look deeper and to understand the motivations which forced people to chose one or another side."

According to historian V. Brandišauskas, who has studied this topic broadly, Jews usually speak of the events of June 1941 as the fact of the organized massacre by the Lithuanian people of the Jews, exaggerating assessments to even include the idea that the reason for the uprising was just, allegedly, to kill Jews living in Lithuania.

V. Valiušaitis says that in the context of the film, of course, it won't be possible to avoid mentioning this topic, although, obviously, this is a different topic, demanding very careful and sensitive attention. He merely points out that the Jewish question was exclusively the affair of German special services, even their military administration was powerless to solve these questions, much less the provisional government of Lithuania. **It is appropriate to note that during the period the Provisional Government operated, i.e., from June 23 to August 5, 1941, 95% of Lithuanian Jews were still alive.**

To the USA on the Trail of Former Witnesses of the Uprising

The group of film makers behind *Uprising of the Enslaved* went to the US to film sites connected with uprising insurgents who had emigrated in the post-war period and also to meet still-living witnesses of the uprising. Making use of the opportunity, the film makers will also meet with society, discuss the film and the uprising and answer questions. There is also hope to find new, still unknown facts.

"The goal of our trip is purely creative," Valiušaitis said. "We've arrived here to film, to collect material. But if people appeared for whom this topic is important, and they would like to support the project, we, of course, would be very glad and grateful." Asked if there is a specific sum in mind, the journalist said there is no defined sum, and they are working with the minimum they have. [He added,] however, that the film's quality depends on the budget and any help will provide additional opportunities to the film makers.

So far the budget is small, work is being done funded by the production company E2K, headed by Saulius Bartkus. It is hoped that if there are funds in the future, it would be possible to voice-over the film in English as well, and thus it would become accessible to the international audience as well. An interesting detail: it takes about ten hours of work to make one minute of this kind of film.