



THE OTHER SIDE

PARLIAMENT RECOLOURS THE PAST

"Parliament has re-written the history of the country", "Zenith of Parliamentary decay", "Parliament dumps the responsibility for the Jewish genocide onto Lithuania" - were the headlines appearing in Lithuanian newspapers when Parliament passed a law on Sept. 12 which recognized as a legal act Lithuania's provisional government's 1941 June 23rd "Declaration of the Restoration of Independence" [hereafter known as "Declaration" - M.Ch.].

This law notes that the principal goal of the armed uprising by the Lithuanian population on June 23, 1941 was... the struggle against both the Soviet, and the upcoming Nazi occupation (!!!).

The provisional government, made up on June 23, 1941 of rebels - "white ribboners" - lasted for 6 weeks and in effect made the transition from a Stalinist to a Nazi regime. Its activities were openly pro-Nazi, pro-Hitler.

Printed in the second edition of the newspaper "To Freedom" on June 24, 1941, was an "Address from the government of an independent Lithuania to the nation", in which the provisional government emphasizes its relationship with German Nazism: "We are particularly appreciative of the invincible German army's advance towards the East. (...) It has enabled us to declare an independent State of Lithuania. (...) It has permitted us to once again join the Western world of culture."

The proclamation extols "Hitler's world scale mission and its significance", and also warns that this mission "must be very well perceived, accepted, and wholeheartedly supported."

A telegram to Hitler signed by ministers of this puppet government states: "With the liberating storm of war having swept through Lithuania, the representatives of a free Lithuanian society send You, Leader of the German Nation, our deepest and true gratitude for freeing the land of Lithuania from the all-annihilating and killing Jewish and Bolshevik occupation and for saving the Lithuanian nation from humiliation, destruction, mad mass torture and murder, and express the hope that Your genius has intended for the Lithuanian nation to take part in Your guided triumphant feat in destroying Judaism, Bolshevism, and plutocracy, in defending individual human freedom, preserving Western European culture, and implementing a new European order."

The law passed on Sept. 12 of this year was carried by a vote of 48 members of Parliament, with 3 abstaining, and not one objecting. Among the 90 representatives of the nation who "happened" not to attend the sitting, were Parliamentary Chairman Vytautas Landsbergis, and Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights Emanuelis Zingeris.

EXPRESSED CONCERN

Director of the Research Cen-

ter on the Genocide and Resistance of the Lithuanian Population D.Kuodytė stated that during the time of the provisional government, Jews were killed in the Kaunas Vilth Fort, and the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos were established. "We will no longer be able to say that certain individuals are responsible for killing

STATEMENT FROM THE LITHUANIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

On Sept. 13, Chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community dr. Simonas Alperavičius took legal measures to denounce the law accepting the "Declaration".

S.Alperavičius stated that, to-

what earlier, E.Zingeris had also appealed to the President with an analogous request. The speaker had personal motives in this story: his father, Vytautas Landsbergis-Zemkalis had been minister of communal holdings with the provisional government back in 1941, and had issued a law declaring that buildings and land be-

longing to Jews had to be nationalized.

RETRACTION

On Sept. 19, V.Landsbergis raised a motion that Parliament consider a resolution recommending that this law be held at "the discussion stage", i.e., passed on a first reading.

Then he sent a letter to Serge Cwaigenbaum, Secretary General of the Congress of European Jews, informing him that, "On Sept. 19 Parliament voted to suspend the law on the Declaration of June 23, 1941".

"I did not sign the aforementioned law and did not send it for signature by the President. Which means that the law does not exist. It has not been and will not be passed," guaranteed V.Landsbergis.

A letter-statement to that effect by V.Landsbergis was sent to the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington.

IN THE OPINION

OF THE PRIME MINISTER

On Sept. 22, the Prime Minister issued a statement unequivocally denouncing the attempt to legalize the "Declaration".

The head of the Government declared that the debate about documents issued by the provisional government had been a mistake, and urged for repentance on behalf of those Lithuanians who by their actions had contributed to the Holocaust.

The Prime Minister's statement asserts that, "We must find the strength and the courage within ourselves to take a look at the black pages of our history. We must understand that the killing of Lithuania's Jews is a tragedy not only for the Jews, but in the first place for all of Lithuania. We cannot, we have no civil or moral right, not to see what was happening in Lithuania."

A.Kubilius appealed to the people of Lithuania: "Knowing the injuries inflicted on the Lithuanian nation in the 20th century, let us acknowledge the suffering of Lithuania's Jews of which we are all witness together."

"Anti-Semitism and nationalism are particularly dangerous to young, democratic states which have only recently liberated themselves from a totalitarian system; their brutal populism obscures people's minds. Only our enemies can have a vested interest in propagating these ideologies. I have rigorously denounced, and continue to denounce any manifestations of racism and anti-Semitism," declared A.Kubilius.

The attempt to acknowledge the June 23, 1941 "Declaration of the Restoration of Independence" as a legal act of the State of Lithuania fell through: author of the proposal Antanas Stasiškis - assistant to the chairman of the Homeland Union (Conservatives) and a former political prisoner - requested that the passed but not ratified law be revoked. All the same, all of these events testify to the fact that there are forces in Lithuania which are still plagued by a brown nostalgia.

Milan CHERSONSKIJ.

BROWN NOSTALGIA

This article deals with events which occurred during the month leading up to elections to the Lithuanian Parliament. Although the roles of certain individuals mentioned herein will necessarily have changed by now, we decided to present transactions in the manner in which they happened last September, since the issues underlying them will obviously long remain a real problem in Lithuania.



the Jews," - warned D.Kuodytė. She thinks that validating this law could result in Lithuania being included as a Hitlerite coalition country.

The heads of the Center claim that in ratifying the "Declaration", Lithuania accepts responsibility for crimes carried out in the 6 weeks during which the provisional government (made up by the Lithuanians and protected by the Nazis) acted - a period when 38,000 Jews were annihilated.

Laws validating discrimination against the Jews, concentration camps for Jews, and indifference to the killing of Jews (no publicly censuring declarations were passed, and the provisional government did not control participation by members of its subordinate subunits in the Holocaust) all propagated anti-Semitic sentiments and the participation of individuals and groups in the Jewish Holocaust - commented the Research Center on the Genocide and Resistance of the Lithuanian Population on the ratification of this law.

The "Days of Memory" study center for the Holocaust and Jewish Culture in Lithuania, Association of Teachers of Lithuanian History, Civic Initiative Center, Ch.Sugihara "Diplomats supporting Life" foundation, and the youth "Transilvanija" organization signed a petition stating that a law passed in haste by one third of the Parliament, without consulting historians and the public, was shocking in its political blindness and civic irresponsibility.

A week later, these same organizations published another petition which noted that, "the position of public organizations and the intelligentsia has remained typically passive. (...) Nearly all of the political parties did not express their opinion regarding this question."

The Union of Lithuanian Photo Artists, and Inforum added their names to this petition.

Other Lithuanian public organizations decided to observe events in silence.

gether with the aforementioned "Declaration", the provisional government at that time announced that it was revoking the Charter given to the Jews as far back as in the time of Vytautas, Grand Duke of Lithuania, and was thereby eliminating the Jews from Lithuanian life. The provisional government ratified its decisions in legal acts regarding conditions for the Jews, and in orders establishing the ghettos and the national defence work battalions which joined in the killing [of Jews - M.Ch.].

In his opinion, the law proclaiming the "Declaration" a legal act of the State of Lithuania is the first legal act insulting the Jewish nation in the new history of Lithuania. Until now, it had been claimed that the Republic of Lithuania was not responsible for the actions of the provisional government in 1941, for under the conditions of the Nazi occupation, the former had not been a free government. "Now that the provisional government has been legally acknowledged, the state practically accepts responsibility for the actions of that body," - said S.Alperavičius.

During the time of the Second World War, from the first day to the last, Jews were being mass annihilated on Lithuanian territory. Every day is thereby marked, though there were also special days in this respect. One of these is June 23, 1941, the second day of the war, when the mass killing of Jews - before the Germans even entered Lithuania - began. "White ribbon" rebels, who formed the provisional government on June 23, 1941, broke into Jewish homes, grabbing, plundering, and killing. That is the day when the "Declaration" was broadcast over the Kaunas radio.

V.LANDSBERGIS AGAINST V.LANDSBERGIS

An unprecedented situation developed: head of Parliament V.Landsbergis appealed to President V.Adamkus, asking him to veto the sadly infamous law. Some-

PUBLIC JUSTICE

President Valdas Adamkus considers the law legitimizing the "Declaration" to be a mistake. "A group of Parliamentarians took it upon themselves to create history with the aid of legislation, ignoring the negative conclusions laid out by the Lithuanian History Institute and the Research Center on the Genocide and Resistance of the Lithuanian Population." In his opinion, this law is harmful not only to Lithuania's international prestige, but also to civil accord in society.

In his response to requests by Parliamentary Chairman V.Landsbergis and Parliamentarian E.Zingeris, the President stated: "I do not know the reasons for the members of Parliament not taking part in the vote, and not declaring their position in Parliament. (...) I would like to say straight out that a simple veto is no longer enough to correct the mistake made by Parliament. This can only happen if society and the political parties understand and name their mistake."

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The attempt by a group of Lithuanian Conservative and Christian Democrat Parliamentarians to legally validate a pro-Nazi and pro-Hitlerite document was denounced in Europe and throughout the world. Uncertainties arose regarding the organizing of an international forum in Vilnius on questions of the looted cultural assets of Holocaust victims. Lithuanian leaders had hoped that the forum would demonstrate that the country is open to world cultures, and dedicated to the spiritual values of Europe.

The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a note from Israel expressing its concern regarding the law passed on Sept. 12.

The Congress of European Jews warned that its representatives would not attend the Council of Europe organized Vilnius Forum if measures to abolish this law were not implemented in the immediate future, and urged the Council

I HAVE THE HONOUR TO DECLARE

founded accusations. In this way they violated the traditions of the GDL and good Lithuanian-Jewish relations in an independent Lithuania.

The changed society essentially never condemned anti-Jewish policy and the subsequent Holocaust. One can only regret the fact that the Lithuanians did not manage to proclaim a declaration which would defend their citizens under the conditions of a new occupation, as the King of Denmark had done.

There is no one-sided response vis-a-vis how much the Lithuanian nation is to blame, but it would merit separating the Lithuanian nation as a totality which suffered from Soviet repressions and

which longed for freedom and independence, from power seeking structures and the dregs which served them.

One cannot disagree with Tomas Venclova, who states that in 1941 the rebels were "at the best very naive, and at the worst - carried out crimes against Jews, Poles, and Lithuanians themselves. They were the agents of a foreign state."

One has to agree with historian L.Truska's opinion, that in playing games with the Nazis, the provisional government lost. On the other hand - was it worth starting them, with the memory of the loss of Klaipėda territory in 1939, and the known historical fact that the Germans had never been friendly

regarding the Lithuanians.

I think that the provisional government realized its mistake fairly quickly, but it was too late for the Jewish nation to understand that it and the Jewish tragedy had nothing in common.

When talking about the tradition of the Jewish nation, one should keep in mind that despite several hundred years of friendly co-existence with the Lithuanians, before the tragedy the Jews were isolated from the Lithuanians. The Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) had a role to play in this process, for it revoked the right to sanctuary which had been granted the Jews, i.e., it declared them beyond the process of the law.

(cont'd. on p. 4)

Letters to the editor bear witness to the fact that a great many of our readers denounced the Parliament's decision to acknowledge the June 23, 1941 "Declaration of the Restoration of Independence" as a legal act of the State of Lithuania. We present for your information an abridged version of one such letter, written to us by a Lithuanian nobleman.

As an upholder of old-time noble traditions, I have the honour to declare that one can look upon the passed law in one way only - as a complete discreditation of the processes taking place in Lithuania and as an attempt to worsen what are already difficult Lithuanian-Jewish relations.

The events after June 21, 1941 were affected by changes in Lithuanian society - deportations, arrests, shootings by the Soviet occupants. Lithuania's intellectual sector - nobles who had fostered ancient traditions as leaders and participants in uprisings, and Lithuania's intelligentsia, which had developed at the turn of the cen-

tury - experienced repressions. Repressions did not bypass wealthy Jews, Poles, and other nationalities either.

The loss of an intellectual sector was a painful one for the Lithuanian nation, and time showed that the people who replaced them were unequal either in intellect or in political thinking. They equated Jews with communists, and ignored the fact that a significant proportion of Jews, among them the rabbis, were arch enemies of communism; they forgot their country's important developmental moments, e.g., sanctuary granted by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) to a nation living under un-