



CONGRATULATIONS MAZL TOV!

FRIDA ZIMANIENĖ

Dear Frida!

From the very beginning of the rebirth of our community you have actively joined in its activities and worked at successfully resolving its organizational questions. Thanks to you, the lecture series has now been functioning for 10 years. Every Sunday we gather together to hear lectures and discussions, and to meet interesting people. Hundreds of experts on Lithuanian domestic and foreign policies, Jewish-Lithuanian relations, history, culture, art, religion and philosophy have taken part.

You managed to create an atmosphere of consistent goodwill and consideration towards others during the lecture series, and people have responded to you in kind. Our lecture series is often referred to as a unique phenomenon.

You have also worked hard to make "Jerusalem of Lithuania" an authoritative and respected newspaper world-wide.

The Executive of the Jewish Community of Lithuania congratulate you on the occasion of your honourable jubilee. We wish you long life, good health, and success in carrying on your fruitful activities.

Lithuanian Jewish Community Executive.



JOSEPH SHAPIRO TURNS 80

Dear Joseph!

The Executive of the Jewish Community of Lithuania offers its sincere congratulations on the occasion of your honourable 80th jubilee.



You fought heroically against the Nazis on the side of the anti-Hitlerite coalition during the Second World War. You have been actively involved from the very first days of the renaissance of our community in recreating its traditions, especially those connected with Yiddishkeit.

Your name is known among collectors-philatelists, philumenists, and numismatists in Lithuania and abroad. Exhibitions of your collections have been met with interest both in this and other countries. Your unique ex-libris exhibitions have been especially well received. The exhibit you have created on Jewish themes is very much appreciated by the community.

We wish you health and creative success.

Lithuanian Jewish Community Executive.

MARK GARBEL TURNS 70

Dear Mark!

Lithuania's builders know you as a highly qualified construction specialist with various directorial positions in construction organizations, and as an active participant in large projects.

With the restoration of Lithuania's Independence, you have also taken an active part in the rebirth of the Lithuanian Jewish community. At the present time you are overseeing the difficult issue of restitution of property lost by members of our community during the Second World War.

We congratulate you on your jubilee, and wish you strong health, unfailing energy, and fruitful work on behalf of our community.

Lithuanian Jewish Community Executive.



A journal entitled "Genocide and Resistance" (2000 Nr. 2 (8), p. 157-173) printed a review by authoritative Lithuanian historian }Valentinas Brandišauskas, called "A questionable choice by the 'front fighters', or - regard-ing A.Liekis' mediocre 'monograph'". The review deals with A.Liekis' book, "Lithuania's Provisional Government (1941 06 22 - 1941 08 05)", Vilnius, 2000. The book offers an extensive scrutiny of Lithuanian-Jewish relations and the Holocaust; "J of L" would like to acquaint our readers with that portion of V.Brandišauskas' review which also examines this issue.

PSEUDOHISTORICAL FICTION

In his evidence regarding the significant role of the Jews in the sovietization of Lithuania and their active participation in repressive soviet structures, A.Liekis mostly relies on an article by Juozas Prunskis, entitled "Lithuania's Jews and the Holocaust" (p. 271). The author must have, however, been aware of the fact that when writing his article two decades ago, prof. J.Prunskis did not have access to Lithuania's archives; there is therefore nothing odd in the fact that his use of the available literature, including primarily "a Lithuanian archive", formulated a particular image of Jewish soviet administration.

Today this issue has been studied sufficiently thoroughly in Lithuania; the work of Nijolė Maslauskienė and Liudas Truska is the best evidence of that fact. I would like to remind my fellow colleagues that such studies indicate that at different periods the Jews played different roles in the Lithuanian Communist Party and soviet repressive bodies. Although at certain moments this role was fairly significant (relative to their status as a percentage of the total Lithuanian population), it was not the Jews who determined Lithuania's occupation and annexation, nor the later process of sovietization, nor the deportations on the eve of the Second World War.

[...] One wonders where the author gets so many of his fictitious figures when referring to people who helped the Jews. For example, having named several Lithuanians who were shot for hiding Jews, he concludes that there were "hundreds" of such unfortunates (p. 274). If A.Liekis had been acquainted with the material at the Jewish Museum, he would have been convinced that approximately 50 people (and not exclusively Lithuanian) were shot for hiding Jews; but also that there were many more who suffered - i.e., who were arrested, imprisoned, etc.

There is also a lack of accuracy when talking about the achievements of the rescuers. His claim that priest Bronius Paukštys "rescued 120 Jewish children, who were hidden in the parish, the church and with acquaintances" (p. 275) is not correct: the figure is actually lower - 25 Jews. Obviously B.Paukštys risked no less by hiding 25 people, but that is another issue. Here we are talking about the accuracy of a historical fact.

According to A.Liekis, some intellectuals (Kipras Petrauskas, Vytautas Landsbergis-Zemkainis) rescued "a great many", and others (Kazys Grinius and others, p.274) only "many". However, documents show that the first two people each rescued one Jew, and that K.Grinius, a former Lithuanian president, rescued two. There are other such inaccuracies, though as stated earlier, they do not diminish the level of sacrifice of the rescuers. Unfortunately, one cannot say the same about the level of confidence in the material contained in this book. And it just so happens that the book's presentation of the "Jewish" theme is its most questionable aspect.

Let's start with the "Decrees on conditions for Jews". It has been much argued whether the Provisional Government approved them, or whether they are a falsification. According to A.Liekis, "this so-called document is constantly being quoted by people who are against Lithuanians and an independent Lithuania, especially by Jewish chauvinists and nationalists, and the KGB. It is published in all languages around the world, as if it were a truly serious document" (p. 232).

A.Liekis correctly notes that the minutes of meetings by the PG, which "could also serve to establish the credibility as well as the authors of laws, decisions, and circulars" have not survived (p. 212). But this does not prevent him from believing in the authenticity of certain normative acts passed by the PG, and doubting others. According to the author, misgivings re the authenticity of the "Decrees on conditions for Jews" arise because this document "has no signatures, and is very different from other do-

cuments both in its print and lay out, but mostly in its essence, which is alien to other Government documents and to its practices" (p. 231-232), because it was approved on Aug. 1, 1941 (i.e., at the end of the PG's term of activities), and because former members of the PG and organizers of the uprising told the author that this document never existed (p. 236). [...]

A.Liekis is not the first to doubt the authorship and authenticity of the aforementioned "Decrees", and there is nothing new in his arguments. They have been set out more than once in articles and memoirs written by emigrants. All one can say is that the last acts of the PG are dated Aug. 4, which means that the Provisional Government was still functioning on Aug. 1, and that it had not relinquished its right to pass laws. Besides, agreeing to deal radically with "the Jewish question" did not contradict existing PG ideological premises (I have in mind the fact that denationalization laws already limited civil rights for Jews, in that farms, buildings, and land which had been nationalized during the time of soviet authority did not have to be returned to Jews, that PG decrees prohibited Jews from involvement in commercial enterprises, and so on).

The lack of signatures under the "Decrees" is not a serious argument either. A great many researchers, A.Liekis included, make use of a publication released during the period of a post-war German government, entitled "Laws, decisions and decrees of the Provisional Lithuanian Government (1941. VI. 23 - 1941. VIII. 5)", and quote documented denationalization laws therein, without doubting their authenticity. But these are not signed either. They give the names of the head of the Government J.Ambrazevičius and some other official - usually that of chief of Cabinet Affairs J.Svelnikas, and less often, secretary Juozas Sakalauskas. [...] So it is not surprising that under the "Decrees on conditions for Jews" we find the names of J.Ambrazevičius and J.Slepetis, Minister of Internal Affairs (without any signatures). [...]

One might agree that the killing of the Jews at the "Lietūkis" garage has not been thoroughly researched. Many arguments have been raised as to the number of people killed, their political affiliations and type of work, even the date. But the claim that the "principal killer - a blonde fellow with a metal crowbar in his hands (who killed approximately 45-50 Jews) - is SS Obersturmführer Joachim Haman" (p. 254) is unexpected and quite "original". Although A.Liekis uses another author as reference, the fact that he quotes without commentary is tantamount to a confirmation.

Without delving into various historiographical interpretations of the event, we will say only that J.Hamann arrived in Kaunas on June 29, i.e., when events at the garage were already over. Besides, if we are to believe other photographic evidence, J.Hamann was not blonde, and he was somewhat older than the young man who is clearly seen in the well-known photograph from the "Lietūkis" garage killings.

In writing about this tragic event, A.Liekis is also not accurate in his treatment of an article by Alvydas Dargis (whose name does not even appear among his references), which was published in the "Lietuvos rytas" newspaper. A.Liekis states that, "many witnesses claim that there wasn't a single 'white-ribboner' among the killers" (p. 254). However, it was only the witness Henrikas Zemelis who claimed that among the ca. 10 civilians who were battering the group of about 30 Jews, with steel crowbars, he "didn't see a single one with a white ribbon on his sleeve". The other witnesses did not talk about this detail. [...]

When writing about the position of the Catholic clergy vis-a-vis the Jews, A.Liekis makes reference to an article published more than 20 years ago by bishop Vincencas Brizgys (p. 275-278). This article mentions many things: a letter by the bishops in

which they "remind Lithuanians not to shed innocent blood, not to touch the legacy of innocent people, not to intrude upon the property of arrested Jews"; a memorandum reminding the German authorities to the effect that "Jews are citizens of Lithuania, that according to international law the laws of an occupied country remain in effect, and that they protest the setting up of any sort of ghettos for Lithuania's Jews"; and a confe-

rence of bishops which took place in Oct. 1941, wherein "the first question to be discussed was help for the Jews" (p. 277).

Regarding the first 2 documents - the bishops' letter and the memorandum - one would like to enquire (for the author undoubtedly believes in their existence and in precisely these contents) where one might be able to see them? ... some knowledge of Lithuania's archives, and a certain intuition, however, tells me that there would be no point in waiting for a response to such a query.

And as far as the conference is concerned, one can briefly state that bishop V.Brizgys presented information "about his [...] discussion [on Oct. 8 - V.B.] regarding the Jewish question with first advisor Gen. Kubiliūnas, who made it clear that the Germans have reserved exclusively the right to deal with the Jewish question". One would therefore like to advise A.Liekis to do some research in the archives, or at least to avail himself of the newest studies on this subject. [...]

The claim that the entire Lithuanian nation has been blamed for the killing of the Jews (p. 293) should be based on the latest bibliographical material. Not having found any, A.Liekis presents a resolution passed in Munich back in 1947 by a congress of an association of Lithuania's Jews (p. 294-295). He also inflates a figure from a journal published in Israel, entitled "Lithuanian Crime and Punishment", to read that, "more than 23,000 Lithuanians participated in the massacre of Jews" (p. 297); even if this figure was correct, it is not "the entire Lithuanian nation", but approximately 1% of the entire nation.

One cannot know according to which reference the author claims that, "during the entire soviet period, the KGB only managed to account for ca. 800 Lithuanians who in any way took part - not infrequently under coercion - in the genocide of the Jews, even though there was no evidence to be found against the greater portion of them ('Jew-shooters' also meaning those forced by the Germans to transport Jews etc.)" (p. 295, 397).

In order to present even an approximate figure, or determine the level of "participation" in the Holocaust, one would have to study more than just a hundred of the criminal files held in the Lithuanian Special Archives. This archive has approximately 1,900 files just of "individuals (public officials, police, civil defence battalion officers, etc.) who collaborated with the Nazi occupational forces". One wonders how many of them A.Liekis is actually familiar with?

"The Archive of the Rescuers section at the Gaon Jewish Museum in Vilnius has collected data on almost 2,500 Lithuanian families who helped the Jews" (p. 295-296), - claims A.Liekis. Now let us read what Viktorija Sakaitė, a staff member with this department at the Museum, who has been collecting material for a number of years about individuals who helped the Jews, writes: "[...] A list of the names of more than 2,300 families [not just Lithuanians, as A.Liekis claims - V.B.] who helped Jews on Lithuanian territory has been compiled at the Archive of the Rescuers section"; "there is also a list of those who were rescued, with ca. 3,000 surnames and names..."

Publishing the text of a 1942 parody of the Lithuanian anthem with no commentary is inadmissible for an historian. One can understand (but not justify) when politicians behave in this manner. Meanwhile, as Saulius Sužiedėlis has correctly noted, an historian must delve into the historical context, and replace emotion with the language of the intellect. Which has already been done - only A.Liekis either hadn't noticed or hadn't wanted to notice.

Certain other assertions related to the subject of the Holocaust also ring improbable and biased, e.g.: "[...] a great many Lithuanians were discouraged with denationalization because the Germans did not allow property to be returned to the Jews" (p. 237). Or: "It has been noted that accusations by Jews abroad, primarily those living in the USA, regarding the genocide would change depending on the USSR and its CPSU and KGB policies" (p. 294).