



REVIEWER'S NOTES

UNDERGROUND
ANTI-SEMITES

On January 29, the Lithuanian Jewish Community, and then the Lithuanian Parliament and Ministry of Foreign Affairs received packets of proclamations, in which Jews were called "vampires of humanity", and accused of the genocide of nations... during the Second World War, and of crimes against humanity before and after the War. Attached to the proclamations were anti-Semitic caricatures - modernized copies of what used to hang in the streets of Lithuanian cities during 1941-1944.

The list of accusations against the Jews, according to its authors, is taken from... a book entitled "The case of the killing of Lithuania's Jews" by historian, Lithuanian Ambassador to Israel, professor Alfonsas Eidintas. A. Eidintas publicly expressed his anger that the quotations, which are taken from Nazi documents used in his book, to reveal Nazi crimes against the Jews, are attributed to him.

The creators of the neo-Nazi anti-Semitic falsifications call themselves the "National Minority Alliance". The Department of Minorities and Emigres has stated that this organization is "deemed inactive". Representatives of some sort of "Alliance" telephoned the LJC, and declared themselves not related to the proclamations.

Appearing on national TV on Feb. 6, LJC chairman S. Alperavičius reminded viewers that this anti-Semitic action coincided with the 85th anniversary of the historical conference of Jewish organizations in Vilnius, which supported the revival of Lithuanian independence, and its territorial integrity.

During 1918-1921, Jews supported Lithuania's struggle for independence not only via proclamations but also by voluntarily fighting, weapon in hand, for its liberation. In 1990 the Jews also supported the restoration of Lithuanian independence.

S. Alperavičius stated that inciting ethnic discord undermined the foundations of the country, and that

WILL THE SHAMEFUL SERIAL BE JUDGED BY LAW?

The first months of 2004 in Lithuania have been marked by an activating of anti-Semitic forces. The political crisis in the country continues, with no end in sight. And although LJC chairman Dr. Simonas Alperavičius has sent a statement to all state officials that Jewish organizations are public ones, not involved in political battles, there are certain elements in Lithuania which will not desist. There is a great desire by certain sectors to play out the element of political blackmail - "the Jewish card".

the tactic was a tested weapon of the enemies of Lithuanian independence.

The authors of the anonymous anti-Semitic proclamations are hiding underground. And for no reason: disgusting anti-Semitic gibberish has also been printed, legally, for almost an entire month, in "Respublika" - one of the country's most popular newspapers.

"RESPUBLIKA" - AGAINST THE JEWS

Dissemination of the underground proclamation was, apparently, just "reconnaissance in battle" - an attempt to find out how the Lithuanian public would react; and reaction was sluggish. That, it seems, was the signal to let loose the known master of anti-Semitic lies, Vitas Tomkus - editor of "Respublika". On Feb. 20, he began to publish articles from his vicious soap opera serial, "Who rules the world?".

The answer to this question was provided at the end of the century before last by czarist Russia's secret forces ("ochranka"), which had cobbled together a dirty fabrication called "Protocols of the Zion Wisemen" - in which the Jews are blamed for all of humanity's misfortunes. It's likely that V. Tomkus read a recent Lithuanian version of this "masterpiece", published by his colleague in a paper called "Žemaitijos parlamentas". Incidentally, there is also a "Mein Kampf" influence in Tomkus' writings: the

ochranka never mentioned homosexuals amongst the rulers of the world, while the insane Führer considered them no less a threat to the Aryans, than he did the Jews.

Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, V. Tomkus claims that Jewish mafiosi hide their bloody deeds behind the tragedy of the Holocaust in Lithuania, and that, "the tragedy of the genocide serves as a screen for criminals of Jewish origin". An accompanying caricature shows Jews and gays embracing a globe - an innovation which could have been the envy of the Nazi "Stürmer" himself. Similar publications appeared in the paper for three weeks.

THE LITHUANIAN PUBLIC WAS NOT INDIFFERENT

Anti-Semitic acts in Lithuania are nothing new. An unusual aspect to the campaign embarked upon by "Respublika", however, was that it encountered an active response from certain sectors of the Lithuanian public.

The first to react were the Franciscan monks Julius Sasnauskas and Arūnas Peškaitis - they resolutely condemned the publication of V. Tomkus' articles, and urged the Lithuanian public to take up its civic position regarding attempts "to awaken the demons of intolerance, social fear and hysteria, which threaten democracy in Lithuania".

On Feb. 26, 2004, at a ceremony held at the Lithuanian Jewish Com-

munity, to award the title of Tolerant Person of the Year, and honour its laureates and nominees, the LJC chairman read aloud an appeal sent to the Lithuanian President, Chairman of the Parliament, Prime Minister, and State Prosecutor.

"The Lithuanian Jewish Community is convinced that attempts to repeat the 'heroic deeds' of 1941-1944 will not succeed here, and our concern testifies to a sincere concern for our common nation, and for the safeguarding of its place in the family of European nations."

The appeal also emphasized that, "groups pernicious to statehood (...) are attempting to seek revenge by taking advantage of ethnic minorities".

The Simon Weisenthal Centre in Jerusalem expressed its anger at the "Respublika" articles and caricatures: "We request that you not only convey our feelings of deep anger and disgust at this anti-Semitic attack, but that you also demand strict legal measures be taken immediately against those who are responsible for these shameful acts, and for inciting racial hatred." This statement by the Centre was handed over to the Lithuanian Ambassador in Israel, A. Eidintas.

Eighty public organizations in Lithuania, and 69 individuals, including people living abroad - Tomas Venclova and others - have demanded that "Respublika"

cease printing anti-Semitic articles. They appealed in writing to the head of Parliament, and to chairmen of the Parliamentary Justice and Law and Order Committee, and the Committee on Human Rights, stating that, "silence by politicians and responsible state officials, and by media organs and those responsible for their co-ordination, in view of these particularly brazen anti-Semitic attacks, is upsetting and shocking to Lithuania's citizens, who esteem the most important values of democracy - freedom and justice".

FOREIGN DIPLOMATS UNEASY

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its strong protest to Lithuanian Ambassador A. Eidintas for the ongoing "Respublika" publications.

M. Graham, head of the European Union delegation in Lithuania, visited the Lithuanian Jewish Community. In his discussion with Community executive members, M. Graham stated that he was concerned that there has lately been an increase in anti-Semitic attacks in Lithuania, and emphasized that the campaign is being carried out not by a marginal publication, but by a national paper read by hundreds of thousands of Lithuanian citizens.

Action by the Lithuanian government regarding the "Respublika" anti-Semitic attacks was discussed

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in a meeting between Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antanas Valionis, and the EU delegate, M.Graham. The same topic was discussed at a meeting between deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Justas Paleckis, and USA Ambassador to Lithuania, Stephen Mull, who visited the LJC and spoke with its heads, on the eve of this meeting.

Chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament, A.Paulauskas, met in Vilnius with Israeli Ambassador to Lithuania and Latvia, Gary Koren. The Ambassador was positive about actions taken by the Lithuanian officials, but emphasized his surprise regarding the fact that these were so late in coming. "Any thinking person has only to glance at the caricature and caption in the paper, to understand that the publishers have crossed "the red line", - asserted Gary Koren.

LITHUANIAN OFFICIALS BEGIN TO TAKE ACTION

Chairman of the Parliament, A.Paulauskas, advised the State Prosecutor and State Security Department to investigate the legality of the anti-Semitic publications by

the "Respublika" newspaper.

However, the State Prosecutor, Antanas Klimavičius, declared that his department can begin a pre-trial investigation only after receiving its conclusions on the nature of the publications, from the Journalists' and Publishers' Ethics Commission. The Prosecutor has also made similar declarations re-

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garding anti-Semitic manifestations in the past.

STRANGE POSITION BY THE ETHICS COMMISSION

The Journalists' and Publishers' Ethics Commission was unable to come to any conclusion, and by way of justification, said that editor V.Tomkus did not appear at the meeting, which therefore had to be postponed. That same evening, the head of this Commission, Gintautas Songaila, said, over a private TV channel, LNK, that V.Tomkus' articles in "Respublika" are "more complex than anyone thinks, and that it is difficult to evaluate them categorically". In his opinion, those who denounce these publications violate the pre-

sumption of innocence, since in a democratic state, it is the courts which declare one's guilt.

Speaking at an official Parliamentary session held in honour of March 11, Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, and former chairman of the Parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, denounced the anti-

Semitic manifestations. V.Landsbergis declared that anti-Semitic attacks "in two Lithuanian gut-

ter newspapers" have demonstrated "the sort of Nazism that Europe has possibly not seen since the time of Hitler".

On March 12, three weeks after the start of the anti-Semitic "Respublika" publications, A.Klimavičius announced that the State Prosecutor is starting a pre-trial investigation of the publications, which he called anti-Semitic. The Prosecutor's Office intends to call as experts, culture and art figures, as well as writers. At the same time, the Prosecutor is awaiting its conclusion, from G.Songaila's headed Ethics Commission.

During its 14 years of independence, not a single anti-Semitic act in Lithuania has been judged legally.