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**'JEWS. YOUR HISTORY ON LITHUANIAN SOIL IS OVER!'
LITHUANIA AND THE HOLOCAUST IN 1941.**

by

Joachim Tauber

Nordost-Institut, Lüneburg

Abstract

For several years the murder of Lithuania's Jews as it occurred between June and December 1941 has been the focus of a public discussion which signifies that the past is being reappraised. The country is addressing only hesitantly Lithuanian participation in the mass murders which were initiated, planned and implemented by German occupation authorities. This essay provides a preliminary overview of recent research which, not least, was initiated by the 'Commission for the Investigation of National Socialist and Soviet Crimes on Lithuanian Territory'. It was established by the President of the Republic of Lithuania. The evidence gathered already makes plain that Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust was not limited to battalions of Lithuanian auxiliary police.

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Introduction

For Lithuania the Second World War only ended in 1990/91 when the Baltic State regained the independence which it had lost in 1939/40 as a result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Fifty years of Lithuanian history were marked by a Soviet dominion which was only temporarily interrupted by Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and the subsequent occupation of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. The implementation of the Stalinist system in Lithuania after the Second World War led to reprisals by Soviet authorities against the native population, especially before 1953. Apart from being associated with a brutal struggle against Lithuanian partisans (the so-called 'Forest Brethren'), Soviet occupation even today remains tied indissolubly to the deportation of tens of thousands of Lithuanian families to Asiatic

regions of the Soviet Union.¹ Collective memory has been stamped by the experiences of fifty years of a foreign domination which made the Lithuanians victims of a repressive system.

Although in comparison German domination was a much briefer episode, today more than ever it presents a challenge to Lithuanian society and how the country understands itself. This is because the murder of Lithuanian Jews under the aegis of Germany was unparalleled in terms of its speed and brutality. When the murders stopped temporarily in December 1941, 160,000 of the original 200,000 plus men, women and children had already been annihilated. The rest were fighting for their lives in the ghettos of Kaunas, Vilnius and Šiauliai. Only about 10,000 of the Jews who fell into German hands managed to survive the war. In fact, of all the Jews living in territories occupied by the *Wehrmacht*, those in Lithuania had the least chance of survival.²

1 The number of publications on this theme is now too large to summarise. Apart from memoirs written by members of the 'Forest Brethren' and collections of source documents, the historiographical reappraisal of the area began in the early 1990s. Particularly of note in this connection is the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania. It publishes the journal *Genocidas ir rezistencija* (see also the web site www.genoci.lt) For an English-language overview, see A. Anušauskas (ed.), *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States*. Vilnius 1999.

2 The statistics are based on Y. Arad, 'The Murder of the Jews in German-Occupied Lithuania (1941-1944)' in A. Nikžentaitis, S. Schreiner and D. Staliunas (eds.), *The*

This is the context for the following article which deals particularly with Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust. The theme remains controversial both in terms of extent and motivation. It is also of the utmost importance for the Republic of Lithuania today.³ In Autumn 1998 President Valdas Adamkus established the international 'Commission for the Investigation of National Socialist and Soviet Crimes in Lithuania.' The Commission is charged with presenting the findings of scholarly research in order to '... to answer difficult questions, [and] to overcome moral and psychological barriers which are blocking [Lithuania's] path to [becoming] a democratic and advanced society.'⁴ With this said, two remarks are necessary by way of introduction and to prevent misunderstandings:

First, this article cannot extend to include a treatment of German exterminatory policy, in particular the crimes of

perished world of Lithuanian Jews. 2003. They are a conservative estimation.

³ Extensive information in English and Lithuanian on the composition and activities of the commission can be found at www.komisija.lt. The commission's materials are only partly published and this article refers to them as *Commission Manuscript*. I thank my colleagues in the commission and the historians commissioned by them for allowing me to use their results and materials in this article. This essay cannot, however, deal with the findings of the commission regarding the Soviet occupation. Two books have now been published by the commission: C.Dieckmann, V.Toileikis and R.Zizas (eds.), *Murders of Prisoners of War and of the Civilian Population of Lithuania 1941-1944*. Vilnius. 2005; L.Truska and .Vareikis (eds.), *The Preconditons for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania*. Vilnius. 2004. Both titles carry articles in English and Lithuanian.

⁴ www.komisija.lt.

Einsatzkommando e cannot extend to include a treatment of German exterminatory policy, in particular the crimes of *Einsatzkommando 3* which was a unit of *Einsatzgruppe A* under *SS-Standartenführer* Jäger whose notorious reports provide the most dreadful testimony about events seen from the side of the perpetrators.⁵ But nonetheless German initiative, planning, implementation and supervision of massacres provided the necessary preconditions for the events which followed, as did the complete subordination of the Lithuanian administration to occupation authorities.⁶ And second, as in all European states, in Lithuania some people also provided assistance to persecuted Jews. Today we think there were about 3,000 such Lithuanians.⁷ Also many avoided dealings with murderers, for whom the word *žydšaudys*

5 Concerning Jäger, see W.Wette, 'SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (KdS) in Kaunas. Eine biographische Skizze' in V.Bartusevicius, J.Tauber and W.Wette (eds.), *Holocaust in Litauen. Krieg, Judenmord und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941*. Cologne. 2003. The Jäger report is reproduced in E.Klee, W. Dreßen and V. Rieß (eds.), „*Schöne Zeiten*“. *Judenmord aus der Sicht der Täter und Gaffer*. Frankfurt a.M. 1988 pp.52–62.

6 On the German occupation, see in particular C.Dieckmann, 'Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden' in U.Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945*. Frankfurt a.M. 1998. pp.292-329; also 'Persecution of Jews in Lithuania: Murders and other Crimes carried out during the First Days of the Nazi-Soviet War' in *Commission Manuscript*. According to Dieckmann, from the outset the security police in particular consistently extended the categories of victims until the the result was a 'systematic policy of murder'. Ibid p.17.

7 Valstybinis žydų muziejus (ed.), *Žydų gelbėjimas Lietuvoje XX. pasaulio karų metais 1941–1944* (Pavardžių rodyklė). Vilnius 2001.

(literally 'Jew-shooter') was created. This needs to be spelled out because some sections of the Lithuanian population still interpret the results of historical research as accusations of collective guilt.⁸

Inter-war years and the first period of Soviet occupation 1940-41

In order to understand Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust more clearly, we must look at the pre-war period and Soviet annexation. The young Lithuanian democracy which had grown up between 1918 and 1919 came to an end in December 1926 thanks to a putsch staged by junior officers at Kaunas garrison. Antanas Smetona became the representative and uncontested '*Führer*' of the authoritarian regime. He also became one of Lithuania's most famous politicians. As regards domestic politics, Smetona found support particularly among the military and the administration. Socially he was supported by the national Lithuanian grouping of the *Tautininkai* (literally 'the nationalists').

Despite propagating ethnic nationalism, even during the 1930s

⁸ For the best illustration of the historical events and the debates inside Lithuania, see S. Sužiedėlis, 'Thoughts on Lithuania's Shadows of the Past: a Historical Essay on the Legacy of the War', in Vilnius. *Magazine of the Lithuanian Writers' Union*, Summer '98, S. 128-146 (Part I). Also see *Vilnius*, Summer '99, S.177-208. (Part II) and by the same author 'The Burden of History', *Lituanus* 47, 2001, S. 47-60.

the regime abstained from any kind of political discrimination against the Jewish minority, even though there were no Jews in either the military or civil service. Above all anti-Semitic voices could be heard in economic spheres. This was because Lithuanian trade and economic organisations were only in the early stages of development and found it hard to deal with Jewish competition.⁹ In the 1930s, in the wake of the world economic crisis, the Lithuania state was only a weakly industrialised and relied on agricultural exports. Consequently on a number of occasions there were cases of unrest among the rural population. The situation even had to be suppressed by force in 1935. Smetona's regime was in no position to remove the obstacles blocking necessary reforms. Its structures were too inflexible and excessively focused on the Presidency – at least this seems to have been the case from today's perspective.

In the meantime foreign policy set backs and disasters piled up. In 1938 a Polish ultimatum forced Lithuania to enter into diplomatic relations with that state. Previously Lithuania had refused to do so on account of claims to Vilnius which Poland had occupied unilaterally in

⁹ Research on this topic is only in its early stages. See V.Vareikis, 'Preconditions of the Holocaust. Antisemitism in Lithuania in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.' *Commission Manuscript*.

1920. In March 1939 Lithuania was forced by Nazi Germany to cede Memel to the Third Reich. After Lithuania was allocated to the Soviet sphere of interest by the Hitler-Stalin Pact, finally it was annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1940. The shameful flight of Smetona, who had been the sole reference point for the political community for more than ten years, left behind a massive vacuum.

These internal and external difficulties led to a de-stabilisation of Lithuanian society which has been called 'atomisation'¹⁰ or 'moral crisis'.¹¹ Political cataclysm was followed by a fundamental and forcible social transformation under Soviet authority which embraced every area of life. Not only the representatives of the old order (such as military men, government officials and civil servants) lost out in this change of system, so did members of the free professions (such as medical doctors and lawyers). Farmers who owned their land lost out too. The measures subsumed under the concept 'Sovietisation' led to a complete breakdown of the pre-existing fabric of society and left in fragments the social relations experienced by a large part of the

10 M.MacQueen, 'Massenvernichtung im Kontext: Täter und Voraussetzungen des Holocaust' in W.Benz and M.Neiss (ed.), *Judenmord in Litauen. Studien und Dokumente*. Berlin. 1999. p.21.

11 L.Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai*. Vilnius. 1996. p.369.

population.

Under these circumstances the ground was prepared for a *Feindbild* which became just about universal during the year before the German attack: the Jewish population was represented as the real beneficiary of the loss of Lithuanian statehood. When the pseudo-elections to the national Seima were held in July 1940, a lot of voting slips gave vent to a well-established stereotype. Take one of many examples: 'Throw out the Jew-boys and foreign louts from the state administration.'¹² The joyous reception Jews gave the Red Army in June 1940 is remembered by many people and became the most immediate symbol for Jewish 'treason' against Lithuania.¹³ As a result, in early Summer 1941 'Jewish bolsheviks' had become a turn of phrase that was of more than just marginal significance.

What's more, the stereotype was bolstered by the anti-Soviet 'Lithuanian Action Front' which had been set up in Berlin by the former Lithuanian envoy and which drew support from representatives of all political groupings. In one of its most famous announcements, the

12 A.Eidintas, 'Das Stereotyp des jüdischen Kommunisten in Litauen 1940/1941' in Bartusevicius, Tauber and Wette (eds.), *Litauens schrecklichstes Jahr*.

13 For an example, see A.Eidintas, 'Žydai, holokaustas ir dabartinė Lietuva' in: A.Eidintas (ed.), *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla. Dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys*. Vilnius 2001, p. 66.

LAF 'repealed' the privileges granted by Grand Duke Vytautas to Jews, issued a 'warning' to them and demanded that they leave Lithuanian territory immediately.¹⁴ What sort of response the LAF's propaganda provoked is an open question, but there is no doubt that, on the one hand, its proclamations and announcements reached Lithuania,¹⁵ although on the other hand (as we will see), the LAF lacked an adequate infrastructure to enable it to agitate nationwide. In any case the underground material corresponded exactly to the image of 'Jewish Bolshevism' which many Lithuanians recognised as reality for themselves.

Recent research has looked beyond myth to identify historical substance. There can be just as little talk of Jewish dominance in government and the civil service as of Jewish pre-eminence in the NKVD. The participation of Jews in these organisations was roughly in proportion to their representation in the population as a whole.¹⁶ A

14 L.Truska, 'Preconditions of the Holocaust: The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the Years of the Soviet Occupation' in *Commission Manuscript* p.27 The quotation used in the title of this article is on p.28.

15 Truska, 'Preconditions' p.30ff.. This proves the distribution of pamphlets in Lithuania and, correspondingly, identifies their 'great influence on the consciousness of the Lithuanians' (p.44). More sceptical, however, is MacQueen, 'Massenvernichtung' p.23f.

16 Truska, 'Preconditions' p.44. 'Jews played no specific role in the structures of the Soviet Government, nor its repressive institutions.' On the ethnic composition of the

greater number of them were, however, involved in social organisations. It is not just chance that Jewish organisations stand out particularly in this regard because the new social order proved particularly attractive for younger Jewish people.¹⁷ Apparently the fact that Jews were now involved in the administration of the state – in contrast to what had happened during the inter-war period – played a part in providing the supposed grounds for the popular (but incorrect) assumptions about their relationship to Bolshevism.

Without doubt the majority of the Jewish population certainly only felt a limited affinity to the Soviet regime because they also suffered as a result of its ideological premises. This happened by virtue of their economic situation (thanks to the nationalisation of small firms and craft works which for the most part were owned by Jews) and their cultural-religious institutions (for example through the

membership of the Communist Party of Lithuania, see N.Maslauskienė, 'Lietuvos komunistų tautinė ir socialinė sudėtis 1939 m. pabaigoje-1940 m. rugsėjo mėn' in *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 1, 5 (1999) pp.77–104 and N.Maslauskienė, 'Lietuvos komunistų sudėtis 1940 m. spalio-1941 birželio mėn' in *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 2(6) (1999) pp.20–46. The Jewish proportion of the CPL membership was sinking constantly from June 1940 onwards and in June 1941 stood at 12.6%. Lithuanians comprised 46.4% and Russians 39%. There were also regional differences. In Kaunas up to June 1941 there was a strong Jewish element in the press and organisational cadre. On the NKVD, see L.Truska, 'Lietuvos SSR MVD-MGB personalo tautinė sudėtis 1940–1953 metais' in *Lituanistica* 4 (1998) pp.52–62.
17 Eidintas, 'Stereotyp.'

introduction of labour duty on the sabbath and the closure of Jewish schools). Lastly Jews were affected by deportations too.¹⁸ Actually, in proportion to their numbers the deportation of Jews might have been higher than that of Lithuanians. Even so, right up to the present day Lithuanian collective memory regards the deportations as an initiative targeted exclusively against their national group. All the same, the Jewish perception of the position was coloured decisively by the fact that the only alternative to Soviet authority was the occupation of Lithuania by National Socialist Germany. Only in this context was Soviet occupation regarded as the 'lesser of two evils.'¹⁹

On the other hand, as far as Lithuanians were concerned the German option was very attractive from the outset. This attractiveness was only increased by their experiences of the Soviets from June 1940 onwards and led to the hope that war would break out between the two dictatorships. The division between the aspirations of Lithuanian and Jewish sectors of society as they emerged between June 1940 and June 1941 amounted to a caesura which would prove decisive in the

¹⁸ See Truska, 'Preconditions' p. 18ff.

¹⁹ See the fundamental work D. Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils. Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Occupation 1939-41*. Philadelphia. 1995.

forthcoming events.²⁰

June 1941. Deportations, uprising, brutal 'day of reckoning'

The Soviet repressions had an effect that was frankly catastrophic. On 14 June 1941 there began throughout Lithuania long-prepared mass arrests and deportations of 'class enemies' and their families which were implemented right up until the German invasion. The course of the deportations (which involved seizure, transportation by lorry to a larger station followed by shipment by railway wagon) has etched itself deeply into Lithuanian collective memory, especially since the actions carried out in any given district could only be implemented thanks to information provided by and owing to the participation of local Communists. After 14 June 1941, Lithuanian society found itself in a state of shock. Rage and hatred against the occupiers, despair at the situation, uncertainty about their own fate - these all vented themselves in an emotional and partly irrational reaction to the news of the German attack: 'A wave of joy ... rose up inside me. All at once my mother, my brother ... and a few neighbours

²⁰ Eidintas, *Žydai* p.66 talks about a 'mental parting of the ways.'

ran around like mad people.²¹ The euphoria with which the Lithuanian population greeted German soldiers can only be understood against the background of the deportations.

At the same time there was an uprising against the Soviet occupiers which was mythologised after 1945. The LAF activists living in exile painted the picture of a monolithic, planned uprising that was executed by a general staff. In a ground breaking monograph, however, Valentinas Brandišauskas has proved that the LAF infrastructure outside of Kaunas was much too primitive to have been able to guide events. Throughout large areas of the land it was much more a matter of spontaneous rebellion breaking out against the Soviets. This was led either by officials who had been employed by the old regime or else people who had fled from the Soviets into the forests after 14 June.²²

The wild and highly charged atmosphere was further intensified by crimes committed by the Red Army and NKVD as they retreated.²³

21 Report of the partisan Kęstutis Miklasevičius of 29 June 1941, published in V.Brandišauskas (ed.), *1941 m. birželio sukilimas. Dokumentų rinkinys*. Vilnius 2000, p.44.

22 V.Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą (1940 06–1941 09)*. Vilnius 1996.

23 Compare with A.Anušauskas, 'Teroras ir karo nusikaltimai' in Liudas, Truska et

Unsurprisingly, therefore, from the very start there was a 'day of reckoning' with the 'Communists' - a category which above all included Jews. They were the preferred victims of the violence committed during those chaotic days. It should still be said, however, that they did not constitute a group of victims *per se*. Rather they, and others, were executed as 'representatives' of the hated Communist regime:

'Generally, the anti-Semitic discourse of the various police agencies and irregular units, as well as the voiced perceptions of much of the populace expressed in the press, still operated within the context of revenge, liberation and a struggle against Bolshevism, rather than within the rhetoric of racially motivated genocide.'²⁴

Even if victims belonged to different ethnic groups and their common characteristic was possession of a Communist mentality, nonetheless Lithuanian Communists had the best chance of escaping the orgies of violence with their lives.²⁵ By contrast it is quite clear that the

al (eds.): *Sovietinis saugumas Lietuvoje 1940-1953 metais*. Vilnius. 1999. pp.151-156.

24 S.Sužiedėlis, 'Lithuania, Summer and Fall 1941' in *Commission Manuscript* p.2. Eidintas, *Žydai* p.109ff., over-emphasises purely anti-Communist motives.

25 In Vilnius Lithuanians were clearly in the minority relative to the Polish and Jewish population and that is why the Lithuanian Security Police imposed only 'mild' punishments lasting several months against Lithuanian Communists. See M.MacQueen, 'Die litauische Sicherheitspolizei in Vilnius 1941-1944. Einheimische Gehilfen der Gestapo' in Bartusevicius, Tauber and Wette (eds.), *Litauens schrecklichstes Jahr*. The LAF declarations made before June 1941 already

Feindbild of the 'Jewish Bolshevik' was omnipresent. At the behest of the Provisional Government, reports about the uprising were written in all Lithuanian districts at the end of June and the beginning of July 1941. They show this have been the case, as we can see in the following example from Ukmergė dated 22 June:

'A great panic broke out among the Yids,²⁶ Communists and influential people in the town.... The Yids strapped sacks to their backs and fled on foot.'²⁷

Excesses, looting and the public humiliation of the Jewish population have all been recorded many times over. Events included the unimaginable horror of the pogroms in Kaunas which claimed the lives of thousands of Jews and, in this case, were carried out by

raised the possibility of an amnesty for Lithuanians who collaborated with the Soviet Union if they acknowledged their 'mistakes.' See Truska, 'Preconditions' p.29. At the end of July 1941 the state prosecutor of Šiauliai complained about the continued execution of alleged Lithuanian Communists with the following argument (which speaks for itself): 'The irrational annihilation of Lithuanians who have worked in Soviet institutions constitutes an annihilation of the Lithuanian nation itself and this hot-blooded over-enthusiasm must be opposed with all means available.'

Brandišauskas, *Siekiai* p. 88f.

²⁶ '*Jüdlein*' is used in the original text. Pejorative terms for Jews are often found in the reports and emphasise an anti-Semitic disposition.

²⁷ J. Vaičiūnas about the first days of the war in Ukmergė, 18. Juli 1941.

Reproduced in Brandišauskas, *Sukilimas* p. 154.

perpetrators egged on by German security police.²⁸ From the perspective of the Jewish population, the people carrying out the uprising were the sole bearers and executors of anti-Semitism. In line with Heydrich's orders, Germans stayed in the background.²⁹

Above all the role of the 'partisans' is central to an assessment of these first days after the invasion by German troops. The fact speaks for itself that as early as 24 June 1941 the Lithuanian military command in Kaunas ordered martial law for plunder and violent excesses. Also in 1942 the Lithuanian defence force newspaper said the term 'partisan' should not be applied to those who had failed to act 'in the interests of the nation' and who had 'sullied their names ... by stealing foreign property.' As a partisan put it, 'The one kind got hold of weapons and fought for the Fatherland. The other broke into shops, private houses and the homes of people who had fled whenever they had the opportunity in order to grab things for themselves, cart them off and bury them.'³⁰ Between 10,000 and 15,000 Lithuanians may

28 On Kaunas and the important question of the function of the pogroms, see Dieckmann, 'Persecution' p.43ff.

29 See, for instance, MacQueen, 'Massenvernichtung' p.25f.

30 For details and sources, see J.Tauber, '14 Tage im Juni: Zur kollektiven Erinnerung von Litauern und Juden. Versuch einer Annäherung' in Bartusevicius, Tauber and Wette (eds.), *Litauens schrecklichstes Jahr*.

have participated in the uprising and perhaps 300 died in the process.³¹

The real goal of the uprising was to restore Lithuanian independence, at least by creating a limited form of autonomy. A Provisional Government was formed in Kaunas on 23 June. Obviously it had only narrow powers since it was largely ignored by the Germans and was dissolved anyway in early August after the civil administration was established.

Until recently our evidence about the Provisional Government has been more or less restricted to the texts of its proclamations and the recollections of its participants. In 2001, however, the minutes of its meetings were discovered in Vilnius and were duly edited.³² The documents display an attitude towards Lithuanian Jews which calls to mind the legislative and administrative discrimination against their counterparts in Germany, not to say their economic expropriation as well. On 4 July the cabinet decided that the property nationalised by the Soviets 'would be kept by the Lithuanian state if it derived from Jews ... and other people who had acted against the interests of the

³¹ Brandišauskas, *Siekiai* p.79ff.

³² A.Anušauskas (ed.), *Lietuvos Laikinoji Vyriausybė. Posėdžių protokolai*. Vilnius. 2001.

Lithuanian nation.³³ In this way, and from the outset, the behaviour of *all* Jews was defined as hostile to Lithuania.

The Provisional Government was constituted in Kaunas and consequently witnessed the pogroms there which lasted several days. For instance it was well known that on the afternoon of 27 June massacres took place in the courtyard of the Lietukis Association. Victims were tortured terribly in public before being killed.³⁴ The Ministers were agreed:

'... despite all the measures which must be taken against Jews owing to their Communist activity and attacks on the German army, partisans and individual citizens, nevertheless public executions of Jews should be avoided. It is clear that such behaviour has been carried out by people who are not at all involved with the LAF, partisans or even the Provisional Government.'³⁵

Exactly what kind of 'measures' the government had in mind became apparent the next day when it approved the founding of a concentration camp for Jews which had been mentioned in a speech given by the

33 Ibid p.37.

34 The background to the blood bath still has not been explained. For German testimony, see Klee, *Schöne Zeiten* p.35ff. For Lithuanian testimony, see A.Dargis, 'Garsioji „Garažo byla“ nebaigta: aukos nutildytos, budeliai tyli' in *Eidintas, Lietuvos žydų* p.602ff. The investigation by Lithuania's general state prosecutor in 1994 was inconclusive.

35 Anušauskas, *Vyriausybė* p.18.

military commander. The Deputy Minister for Regional Economy (!) was named as a partner in the project.³⁶ A catalogue of anti-Semitic measures was enacted on 1 August (for instance the wearing of the Star of David) which culminated in the ghettoisation of the Jews. The preamble to the legislation justified the initiatives by saying that for centuries the Jews had exploited the Lithuanian population economically, had corrupted it and had betrayed it during the Soviet period.³⁷

It is evident that the Provisional Government was only concerned about the brutality and public nature of what had happened. Like many *Wehrmacht* commanders, it was hoping and trying to evade responsibility for the events. But when the Minister responsible for liaison with the occupation authorities, Zenonas Ivinskis, suggested condemning the mass murders and distancing the government from them publicly, he found no agreement among his colleagues. Decisive for them was the fact that national autonomy depended on the good

³⁶ Ibid p.20.

³⁷ Ibid p.135ff. The resolution separated the Jews into two categories: to the first belonged those who had supported the Soviets. They were to be arrested and held to account before a court. All other Jews fell into the second category.

will of Germans whom, consequently, one did not want to 'annoy'.³⁸ And here we hit on a theme which has largely been overlooked until now: the instrumentalisation of anti-Jewish measures and excesses in the service of genuine Lithuanian objectives. Could there have been a better way of impressing the Germans than embarking on an extremely severe initiative against their ideological 'enemies'? District police chief Audronis made the point well in a speech given to the administration leaders for Alytus region on 16 July 1941. After promoting a radical solution to the Jewish Question in the sense meant by the 'Führer' and describing contact with Jews as treason against the Lithuanian nation, in conclusion he stressed that unconditional support for Germany had to lead to the impression that 'we are worth independence.'³⁹ Michael MacQueen's thesis is worth thinking about in this context: '... to a large extent escalating anti-Semitism ... served

38 L.Truska, 'Ir atleisk mums mūsų tėvų bei senelių nuodėmes. Apie holokausta Lietuvoje 1941 m.' in Eidintas, *Lietuvos žydų* p.671.

39 B.Baranauskas and E. Rozauskas (eds.), *Masinės Žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944. Dokumentų rinkinys, Bd.2*. Vilnius. 1973. p.65. On Alytus, see the case study by Christoph Dieckmann, 'Alytus 1941–1944: Massenmorde in einer Kleinstadt. Ein Fallbeispiel deutscher Besatzungspolitik' in *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 2 (2001) pp.75-104. The following is emphasised in connection with the speech by Audronis: 'In Alytus, the form of the close co-operation with the German occupation authorities was based essentially on the assumption that only ideological proximity and absolute readiness to co-operate would smooth the way for a restoration of a Lithuanian state.' (p.87)

as a distraction from feelings of guilt experienced by many Lithuanians as a result of collaboration with the Soviets.⁴⁰

The systematic murder of Lithuanian Jews: the role of the Lithuanian administration and police

The chaotic outbreaks of violence and massacres which happened in the early days soon were developed by the Germans into a system of concerted persecution. Consequently the mass executions of Jewish men carried out by *Einsatzkommando 3* began in July and were extended in August to include women and children – so marking the start of the Holocaust in Lithuania.⁴¹ The notorious squad under *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Hamann⁴² was deployed for mass murder in the provinces. It consisted of Lithuanian personnel working under German leadership. As a mobile murder unit it killed just as many tens of thousands of Lithuanian Jews as did the *SD*-led Lithuanian

40 MacQueen, 'Massenvernichtung' p.25.

41 The question about the system of command and control as it involved the *Einsatzgruppen* is at the heart of a research discussion which cannot be addressed here. In any case the events in Lithuania prove that the extension of killing to women and children which can be observed in August marked a caesura in the path to the 'Final Solution'. See Dieckmann, 'Krieg' p.307ff.

42 The monograph by K.Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord. Die litauische Hilfspolizei, das Rollkommando Hamann und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden*. Frankfurt a.M. 1996 must be used very carefully. See the important review by S.Sužiedėlis in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. XXIX, 1998, pp. 84-88.

'Sonderkommando' which was active in Vilnius and executed people in the Paneriai woods.⁴³ The organisation and implementation of the massacres carried out by Hamann's unit raises a question which has only started to become more clearly defined in recent years. Before the arrival of this squad which was stationed in Kaunas, preparations were made locally which ranged from the seizure and internment of Jews to the identification of a site suitable for staging shootings. The heart of the matter relates to the role and function of the local Lithuanian administration in the genocide of the Jews.

Recent studies show that anti-Semitic regulations were issued by the Lithuanian administration even in the early days of the German occupation.⁴⁴ They ranged from the introduction of curfews and forced labour to the wearing of the Star of David and the designation of 'residential areas.' No doubt this happened through negotiation with the Germans, but the speed and frequently retrospective approval given to the measures by Germans were conspicuous. Often Jews had even been imprisoned in synagogues in advance of any official regulations.

⁴³ See Y. Arad, *Ghetto in flames. The struggle and destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust*. Jerusalem. 1980. p.66ff.

⁴⁴ See Dieckmann, 'Massenmorde' p.80ff. Further examples can be found in A. Bubnys, 'Holocaust in the Province' in *Commission Manuscript*.

Events in Utena were particularly intense. Here as early as 14 July under threat of being shot Jews were forced to leave the town and move to a 'forest camp.' About 2,000 people were guarded there by local 'partisans.' They murdered young men repeatedly until the Jewish population was killed by these 'partisans' and the Hamann squad in actions carried out on 31 July, 7 August and 29 August.⁴⁵ Everything that Hamann's men did was supported by local forces responsible for guarding victims and transporting them to the shooting pits. Generally-speaking local police were involved, as were 'partisans' specially recruited for the job. Preliminary research shows that the murder unit from Kaunas often was assisted by local men even when it came to the actual shooting.⁴⁶

Of vital importance in evaluating the role of the regional Lithuanian administration in the Holocaust is Order No.3 from the director of the police department in Reivytiš. Issued on 16 August 1941, this was strictly secret. At the very least it was distributed to all the police chiefs in western Lithuania:

⁴⁵ Bubnys, 'Holocaust' p. 78f.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

'Upon receiving this circular, in the places pointed out in the remarks, immediately detain all men of Jewish nationality from 15 years of age and those women who had become notorious in their Bolshevik activity, or who even now distinguish themselves by the same activity or insolence. The detained persons are to be gathered at the main highways, and when accomplished, this is to be immediately reported by special and most urgent means of communication to the Police Department. In the report, the number of such types of Jews who have been detained and collected is to be precisely indicated. It is necessary to make sure that the detainees are supplied with food and the appropriate guard, for which the auxiliary police may be utilized. This circular must be carried out within forty-eight hours from its receipt. The detained Jews must be guarded until they are taken and transported to the camp.'⁴⁷

But instead of transportation to a camp, Hamann's squad arrived. The order of 16 August created the logistical network on which Hamann (who worked closely with Reivytis) relied in the commission of mass murder. The fragmented holding in the Lithuanian state archive contains some acknowledgment reports from the local offices which show that in most cases *all* Jews were arrested. Just a few police chiefs restricted themselves to the literal terms of their orders and arrested men and 'only' Jewesses who were 'Communist.' Others could report that Jews had already been arrested or transported to a ghetto.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Sužiedėlis, 'Lithuania' p.7.

⁴⁸ See *ibid* p.16ff. In addition there were reports such as the following: 'All the Jewesses were well-known and even now, after the deportation of their husbands, brothers and children, they are spreading all manner of comments and even threats.'

Despite the disguised language of the order (which is something that we recognise well enough already from German archives), by the end of August at the very latest Lithuanian police must have been clear about the fate decided for the Jews.⁴⁹ Order Number 3, together with its apparently quick and efficient implementation locally, not only implicates the local Lithuanian administration in the Holocaust, it also explains how tens of thousands of murders could be committed in just a few months. Local preparation, logistics and support were all necessary components in the implementation of murder.⁵⁰

At the moment we still don't know much about the whereabouts of Jewish property which officially became the possession of the German Reich, a principle which seems not to have inhibited the enrichment of local communities. This was true especially as regards

They were all well-known when the Communists governed Lithuania.' Ibid p.17.

49 Sužiedėlis, 'Lithuania' p.18: 'Self-deception and the ability of people to overlook the consequences of their actions, particularly if they are not involved personally in the horrid and criminal final episode, are generally well-known. Collaborating officials have an obvious interest in following such behavioural norms, but that in no way minimises the actions of local police chiefs who arrested the 'citizens of Jewish nationality.'

50 Thanks to C.Dieckmann for the information that multiple changes of administrative personnel in July and August 1941 led to the introduction of radical representatives of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party. This certainly facilitated the events described in the text.

the 'Aryanisation' of Jewish property and furniture.⁵¹ With this said, it is still possible to identify a number of trends in what occurred. There were numerous provable cases of sums of money being extorted by the local administration in June and July, likewise victims were plundered immediately before their murder. Apart from all this, committees were also established in various districts and towns to distribute the possessions and estate of those who had been murdered (i.e. their furniture, clothing etc.). As expected, people who had been involved actively in the 'solution to the Jewish Question' were given preferential consideration. In Čekiškė, Kaunas district, such a committee registered an income worth 50,000 roubles.⁵² The behaviour of the chief of police at Butrimonys was an extreme case. He had his Jewish property transported away by lorry – a sight which led the locals to say, 'There goes Kasperskis, the King of the Jews.'⁵³

The Lithuanian police battalions researched by Arūnas Bubnys show the clearest connection to the Holocaust.⁵⁴ Of the 15 units

51 The corresponding research of the historians working on behalf of the commission is not yet complete.

52 Bubnys, 'Holocaust' p.32.

53 Ibid p.9.

54 For a summary of the conclusions, see A.Bubnys, 'Die litauischen Polizeibataillone und der Holocaust' in Bartusevicius, Tauber and Wette (eds.),

which were set up in 1941, currently 10 can be proved to have been engaged in murder, with the extent of involvement ranging from participation in a handful of executions to being downright 'killer-squads' murdering tens of thousands of people inside and outside of Lithuania. Lithuanian auxiliary police were also used to guard ghettos and Majdanek extermination camp. In part the behaviour of these policemen certainly corresponded to that of Reserve Police Battalion 101 as Christopher Browning reconstructed it, but one important difference has to be emphasised.⁵⁵ Regarding at least the units set up in Kaunas, these men were volunteers. After the 'National Labour Battalion' was involved in mass murder for the first time in Kaunas at the start of July 1941, 117 men were dismissed from service within a few days. Although we are not certain, this may well have been connected to the battalion's 'tasks'.⁵⁶

Nonetheless the vast majority of policemen 'functioned' in a way that was similar to their German colleagues. The Lithuanian police battalions operated most clearly as pure instruments of German

Litauens schrecklichstes Jahr.

⁵⁵ C.Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland.* New York: HarperCollins. 1993.

⁵⁶ Bubnys, 'Polizeibataillone.'

occupation, and the extent of those involved is clearly known and delimited. For contemporary discussions taking place in Lithuania about the events of June 1941, what happened in the provinces and the role of the Lithuanian administration are of much greater significance.

Conclusion

By way of preliminary conclusion we can say that the German⁵⁷ occupiers found in Lithuania an environment which accommodated their racial-ideological plans in a quite exceptional way. Even the state of research as described in this article provides an impressive documentation for the fact that far more Lithuanians were involved in the Holocaust than just those who murdered Jews with their own hands. How can we explain this finding?

As regards individuals, we certainly have to reckon with a complex of temporary and inter-penetrating motives: alongside

⁵⁷ The question of how many people were involved directly in killing often remains a prime issue. See Eidintas, *Žydai* p.162f. On the other hand, we can also refer to T.Sandkühler, 'Die Täter des Holocaust. Neuere Überlegungen und Kontroversen' in K.H.Pohl (ed.), *Wehrmacht und Vernichtungspolitik. Militär im nationalsozialistischen System*. Göttingen. 1999. p.40: 'All of the following people should be understood to belong to the perpetrators of the Holocaust: those who participated in the NS State's annihilation of men, women and children stigmatised as Jews through the preparation, distribution of orders and direct involvement in events. The annihilation of Jews involved an organised division of labour.'

ideological conviction, personal hatred and greed, feelings of power and career-mindedness, we must also take account of a putative 'revenge' – especially in regard to what happened during the June days. The question of structural pre-requisites for what happened is, however, much harder to deal with. Without doubt the perceptible disintegration of Lithuanian society from 1938 on helped give rise to deep apathy and paralysis. Soviet occupation destroyed the final social and political networks which bound people together. Against this background, the myth of Jewish Bolshevism became just as effective as a 'negative' template for action as Lithuanian nationalism did as a 'positive' one. The contrasting orientation of Lithuanian and Jewish society towards the German and Soviet options exacerbated the difference between them and promoted the separation between Lithuanian and Jewish spheres of life – something which had always existed anyway. Last but not least, the statements by the LAF and the decisions of the Provisional Government show the degree of effectiveness that the *Feindbild* had acquired in the meantime.

In addition, the putative partial identification with German aims (such as liberation from Bolshevism) and the aspiration for autonomy in Hitler's 'New Order' provided utilitarian grounds for anti-Semitic

measures extending as far as mass murder. The orgies of violence against the Jews that happened in the days immediately after the German invasion certainly were connected with the traumatic deportations which at the time were still current. We also have to say that, in the context of a generally increasing readiness to commit acts of violence, the decisive criterion for choosing a given victim has to be sought in their actual or supposed function during the Soviet period.

On the other hand, the change to racial grounds for defining who would become a victim was unique and must be ascribed to the German occupiers alone. The systematic annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry was initiated and implemented from the German side, in particular by the security police. The majority of Lithuanians were disinterested or 'neutral' over the crimes, as was the case with German society. With this said, a couple of significant differences must be noted. While discrimination against German Jews developed over a number of years, (leaving to one side the ghettos of Kaunas, Vilnius and Iauliai) developments in Lithuania were condensed into a matter of several months at most during which time administrative discrimination escalated into murder. Even more so than in Germany, there is a suspicion that in Lithuania many contemporaries regarded

'Jewish policy' as a minor issue. It was a brief episode - something which did not become part of their memory. Also although in Germany people could escape from reality by clinging to the fable that Jews were being resettled to the East, for the Lithuanian population there was absolutely no doubt about their true fate. If we agree with Ulrich Herbert that the behaviour of German society involved 'a distinct lack ... of moral substance', then there are points of comparison with the Lithuanian 'moral crisis' that require investigation.⁵⁸

The situation we have just described provides a number of painful discoveries for Lithuania today. They are discoveries which a society standing, now as before, under the shadow of Soviet occupation and its crimes can only address hesitantly and with difficulty. But it is unable to resist doing so. The dichotomy of having been victims of the Soviet occupation while *at the same time* perpetrators of the Nazi dictatorship is the intrinsic mental barrier which has to be superceded. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in the context of the uprising against the Soviets of June 1941, in which patriotic motives and brutal murders meshed together

⁵⁸ U.Herbert, 'Vernichtungspolitik. Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des Holocaust' in U.Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*. Frankfurt a.M. 1998, p.64.

inextricably at both the structural and individual levels.⁵⁹ The nature of the problem was reflected in the phrase, 'Genocide of the Jews – Genocide of the Lithuanians'. This was used up until the mid-1990s and sought to establish equality between both groups of victims. It was in part a rhetorical attempt to off-set blame for complicity in events. At the same time, however, the term '*Holokaustas*' began to be used nationally, indicating a new kind of engagement with the events between 1941 and 1944.

Current research will be given new impetus by the results of the Holocaust commission, but public debate will be affected too.⁶⁰ In recent years this has been carried out in a more critical and engaged fashion. In 1975 Tomas Venclova wrote:

'We have to speak about what happened [...] without internal censorship, without propagandist distortion, without a national complex, without anxiety. We must understand for all times that the annihilation of the Jews is our own annihilation, the humiliation of the Jews is our own humiliation, and that the destruction of Jewish culture

59 See J.Tauber, 'Zwischen Freiheitskampf und Massenmord. Versuch einer fiktiven litauischen Biographie aus den Jahren 1940 bis 1944' in K.Brüggemann et al (eds.), *Kollektivität und Individualität. Der Mensch im östlichen Europa*. Hamburg, 2001, p.405ff.

60 See Eidintas, 'Lietuvos Žydu' p.355ff. The commission has a special interest in how the Holocaust will be depicted in school books. Lithuanian officer cadets hear lectures on the topic given by historians at the War Academy.

is an attack on ourselves.⁶¹

A quarter of a century after this appeal to his fellow citizens, the time is now ripe to develop the kind of understanding Venclova was talking about – all the more so because since 1990 Lithuanians have been living not just in an independent state but, above all, in a democratic one.

The Author

Joachim Tauber researches at the Nordost-Institut in Lüneburg. He is a member of the Commission for the Investigation of National Socialist and Soviet Crimes on Lithuanian Territory. His e-mail address is j.tauber@ikgn.de.

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61 T.Venclova, 'Žydai ir Lietuvai' in Eidintas (ed.), *Lietuvos Žydų* p.409.