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Inhalt

Jewish politicians and the latter's entry into the Lithuanian Council opened the way for new forms of coexistence, striving both for Jewish national autonomy and integration into Lithuanian society.

Conclusions

Any political cooperation between the ethnic Lithuanians and the Jews of Lithuania was not based on tolerance on the part of the Lithuanians or patriotism on the part of the Jews. Rather, it was the circumstances of the situation that forced politicians from the two national camps to enter into compromises with each other. The mutually exclusive ideological positions of the two sides, as well as their independently formulated and distinct political programmes, remained deeply entrenched. This contradiction is well illustrated by what happened with the "Lithuania of Nations" concept, which was promoted by Lithuania's Zionists but which never received any expression of support, let alone any practical suggestions for its implementation, from either the Lithuanian Council or any other Lithuanian institution. Yet even today, among Jewish historians, the myth remains alive that the history of interwar Lithuania began with this project and was only later re-routed towards the model of Lithuania as a nation-state. Fortunately, although both Lithuanians and Jews, as shown in this paper, had started out being deaf to one another, a long-lasting period of dialogue and institutional cooperation subsequently developed. This not only helped the Lithuanian Council to survive but also supported Zionist politics. The interwar period in East Central Europe is generally considered to have been a time when nationalists from majority populations were in the ascendancy. Although the ethnic Lithuanian nationalists also thrived during this period in the Republic of Lithuania, so, incidentally, did the Jewish nationalists (Zionists) within Lithuania's Jewish community.

Vladas Sirutavičius

Antisemitism in Inter-war Lithuania

An Analysis of Two Cases

Lithuanian historians increasingly have focused their attention on relations between the Lithuanian ethnic majority and the Jewish minority and on the problem of antisemitism in the interwar period in Lithuania. New studies analyse relations between the two ethnic communities from the declaration of Independence in 1918 until the collapse of the state in the 1940 and discuss the character and dynamics of antisemitism in Lithuania.[1] However, much still remains to be examined in the relations between the politically dominant ethnic Lithuanians and Jews as the ethnic minority, with some outbreaks of antisemitism as yet inadequately explored.

This article will attempt to address a few of these problems. Firstly, it will examine the general socio-economic, political and cultural factors that had a significant impact on Lithuanian-Jewish relations and contributed to the rise of antisemitism. Secondly, it will examine in detail two outbursts of antisemitism, in 1923–1924 and 1929.[2] The first episode was a "campaign" in which signs in the minority languages

1 Liudas Truska, Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio, Vilnius 2005; Liudas Truska, Vygandas Vareikis, Holokausto prielaidos. Antisemitizmas Lietuvoje XIX a. antroje pusėje – 1941 m. birželis/The preconditions for the Holocaust. Anti-Semitism in Lithuania (second half of the 19th century – June 1941), Vilnius 2004 (in Lithuanian and English); Linas Venclauskas, Moderniojo Lietuviško antisemitizmo genezė ir raida (1883–1940), Kaunas 2008. For the sake of brevity, the terms "Lithuanians" and "Jews" throughout this paper refer to the large groups of "ethnic Lithuanians" and "ethnic Jews" in Lithuania, which does not preclude the possibility of a past or present commitment to Lithuania among Jews, nor the possibility of a shared identity.

2 We decided to select these two cases because in Lithuanian historiography they are discussed very briefly and superficially. See Alfonsas Eidintas, Žydai, lietuviai ir Holokaustas, Vilnius 2002, pp. 73; Vygandas Vareikis, Žydų ir lietuvių susidūrimai bei konfliktai tarpukario Lietuvoje, in: Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta. Lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a. – XX a. pirmoje pusėje, ed. by Vladas Sirutavičius ir Darius Staliūnas, Vilnius

were defaced and smeared on a massive and organized scale in Lithuanian towns. These signs were mainly in Yiddish and Polish, although in the city of Klaipeda, German signs were also defaced. The second episode was a pogrom against the Jewish community in Vilijampolė, Kaunas (Slobotke), when dozens of Jews were beaten. Criminal proceedings were eventually initiated against the perpetrators, of whom only a few received prison sentences. As well as looking at all relevant factors that gave rise to these incidents, this paper will offer a comprehensive analysis of the responses of the state institutions.

Throughout this paper, both a psychological and structural approach will be used to try to explain the tensions and violence between ethnic groups. The psychological approach posits that violence against different ethnic-cultural groups is not only the result of rational calculations, but also of emotions – fear, envy, or hatred – experienced in the context of relationships. For example, a perceived sharp rise in one group's social status vis-à-vis that of another is likely to cause strong feelings of envy. The same emotions could be caused by perceived discrepancies between the political and/or cultural status of different ethnic groups. The influence of emotions cannot be ignored if one wants to understand the reasons for violence against ethnic groups.[3] On the other hand, a structural analysis would argue that general ethnic tensions and violence are caused by the totality of structural factors, namely political, economic and social factors. This approach posits that periods of political tensions and crisis, of economic recessions and social upheaval, trigger ethnic tensions and violent outbursts. This is because ethnic minorities become "more visible" at these times and therefore become the subjects of scapegoating by the majority ethnic group, especially when such ethnic minority group is perceived to have some special social, economic or cultural status.

2005, pp. 169. The Vilijampolė (Slobotke) antisemitic disorders were discussed by Saulius Sužiedelis. See Saulius Sužiedelis, The Historical Sources for Antisemitism in Lithuania and Jewish-Lithuanian Relations during the 1930s, in: Alvydas Nikžentaitis/Stefan Schreiner/Darius Staliūnas (eds.), The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews, Amsterdam/New York 2004, pp.132. Archival documents have become available in the Lithuanian Central State Archive (Lietuvos centrinis valstybinis archyvas – LCVA) which give the researcher an opportunity to examine the character of antisemitic outbreaks more deeply and in greater detail. I would like to thank Dr. Gediminas Rudis from the Institute of Lithuanian history for suggestions in preparing this article.

3 For more details see Roger Dale Petersen, Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred and Resentment in Twentieth–Century Eastern Europe, Cambridge 2002, p. 17–32.

What factors influenced Lithuanian-Jewish relations and contributed to the development of antisemitism as it manifested itself in Lithuania?

First, the re-establishment of the state meant that ethnic Lithuanians became the politically dominant ethnic group, while Jews retained their ethnic minority status. As a result, Jews had only a limited influence on the country's politics. However, Jewish entrepreneurs maintained important social and economic positions within the society and the Lithuanian political and business classes, with their new political dominance, could not tolerate this.

In the business sector, the Lithuanian government responded to this mood in the country with policies that aimed to protect Lithuanian business and build up Lithuanian entrepreneurship while restricting and minimizing Jewish influence in the business sector. Both the government and Lithuanian businessmen saw the limitation of Jewish influence in the economy as a positive move that would strengthen the nation state. Thus, "in trying to tackle the task of overcoming its backwardness inherited from its forefathers", the Lithuanian government "essentially had to manoeuvre between indirect discrimination against Jews and positive support for Lithuanians".[4]

One example (among several) of indirect discrimination and positive discrimination was the introduction, in the mid-1920s, of the requirement that all business accounts be kept only in the Lithuanian language. Many Jewish craftsmen and small traders found this very difficult because they had not learnt to write in Lithuanian. Thus unequal conditions were created for Lithuanian versus Jewish businesses, giving Lithuanians the advantage. While not targeting Jews specifically, the requirement gave preference to Lithuanian businessmen.[5] This "tactical manœuvring" did not please all groups in Lithuanian society. Some radical businessmen urged the government to take more drastic legal and administrative measures "to push out Jews once and for all" from the business sector. They demanded direct discrimina-

4 Gediminas Vaskela, Lietuva 1939–1940 metais. Kursas į valstybės reguliuojama ekonomiką, Vilnius 2002, p. 176.

5 Rather hefty fines were handed out to those disobeying the law. Dov Levin, Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje, Vilnius 2000, pp. 98. Or another example: In 1933 the government introduced a permit system for public transport enterprises. Jews had been dominant in this field for a long time. After the introduction of the permits, the number of Jewish enterprises declined sharply. Later, a semi-governmental Lithuanian capital enterprise called "Auto" was founded, which received the majority of permits for transport services. Truska, Lietuviai ir žydai, pp. 110.

tion against Jews, especially in 1938–1939. However, the government did not acquiesce to these demands.

A second factor that influenced Lithuanian-Jewish relations was the Lithuanian attitude towards ethnic minorities, which tended to be rather negative. For example, it was common to doubt the loyalty of ethnic minorities to the nation state. Poles were often described as being hostile due to the conflict with Poland, and Jews as selfish, egoistic and unconcerned. Jews were accused not only of economically exploiting Lithuanians and taking advantage of their hardships and misfortunes, but also of being actively involved in the communist movement. These attitudes had a significant impact in the political arena. The Lithuanian political elite was prone to believing that Jews should be denied access to positions of state governance. This was especially true of politicians on the right. As a result, there were hardly any Jews in the executive or bureaucratic apparatus. Lithuanian historiography notes that in the very beginning of the state's formation, several Jews were appointed as senior ministerial officials and participated in the preparation of the 1922 Lithuanian constitution, or were appointed to various Seimas (parliamentary) commissions. Yet within a little more than a decade, a completely different picture had emerged. According to official statistics from 1934, of the 35,200 municipal and state civil servants only 477 were Jews. This number included teachers from Jewish schools.[6] A similar situation was to be found in the ministries, the police force and the military. In the mid-1930s in the Ministry of Defence, there were nine Jews out of a total of 1,800 civil servants; in the Ministry of the Interior, there were five Jews out of a total of 5,600; in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, three out of 162 civil servants were Jewish; the police force of 3,600 included two Jews; and the military had one Jewish officer among 1,300 in all.[7] Although the language issue may have played a part in discouraging Jews from entering the civil service, Lithuanian being mandatory in the civil service, a more important deterrent was the fact that selection of personnel was usually based on political, party or personal loyalties. With almost no Jews in political or party structures and with their loyalty to the nation state questioned, there was practically no possibility that Jews could pursue a career in this field.

A similar picture emerges in the case of local councils, primarily in cities. In the beginning of the state's creation, Jews played an active role in the formation of self-

6 Truska, Lietuviai ir žydai, p. 107.

7 Ibid.

governing bodies. Lithuanian historians found that, in 1918–1920, the number of Jews in city councils tended to fluctuate between 15 % and 20 %, sometimes going higher. For example, in the Kaunas city council in 1918, Jewish parties held 22 seats in total, representing 31 % of all council members. Only the Poles held more seats.[8] Jews usually formed a separate faction in city councils, irrespective of whether they came from one or several lists in the elections.[9] This political co-operation amongst Jews along ethnic lines caused dismay within the local Lithuanian population.[10] As a result, the law on municipalities was changed in 1929 and 1931, causing Jewish representation in local self-governing bodies in city and district councils to fall sharply. In 1931 the total number of Jews elected to city councils was 136; in 1934 this had dropped to 110, a 20 % decline.[11] That same year, the number of Jews elected to six district councils – Šiauliai, Telšiai, Raseiniai, Mažeikiai, Kretinga and Tauragė – was only 46 out of 1,929 members.[12] Even these few examples show that Jews were under-represented in self-governing bodies in the 1930s, especially in city councils. As in the case of economic policy, the new laws did not discriminate directly against Jews. Instead, they aimed to reduce the number of voters by introducing a property qualification, which gave voting rights only to farm and business owners and civil servants of various levels. More importantly, government-appointed administrators – district governors – started to play a much more significant role in elections.[13] They had great influence on the selection of candidates, on the formation of the local administration and on the selection and appointment of officials. Since they were often autonomous, these governors themselves could decide who became a municipal servant. Obviously, opportunities for Jews to pursue political careers were thereby reduced since Jews were not favoured by district governors.

8 Aistė Morkūnaitė-Lazauskienė, Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybių raida 1918–1920 m., Šiauliai 2007, p. 265–271.

9 Truska, Lietuviai ir žydai, p. 66.

10 Aistė Morkūnaitė-Lazauskienė, Interesai ir konfliktai. Vietinės savivaldos kūrimas 1918–1919 metais, in: Darbai ir dienos 34 (2003), p. 20–25; Venclauskas, Moderniojo lietuviško antisemitizmo genezė, pp. 151.

11 Saulius Kaubrys, Integration, Participation, and Exclusion: Lithuanian Jews in Municipal Self-Governments, 1918–1940 in: Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts/Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 10 (2011), p. 145–160, here p. 152.

12 Truska, Lietuviai ir žydai, p. 107.

13 Liudas Truska, Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai, Vilnius 1996, pp. 200.

A third factor in Lithuanian-Jewish relations was that Lithuanian culture became formally the dominant culture of the nation state. However, since Lithuanian culture was peasant-oriented, the minority Jewish and Polish populations held it in low regard. Lithuanians perceived that Jews preferred Russian culture and language to that of Lithuania and complained that they were promoting foreign cultures, although this was also true of Poles.

All these factors contributed to a rise in ethnic tensions in the multi-ethnic state. It therefore appears that the Lithuanian government was not really interested in Jewish political integration, whether during the so-called Seimocratic regime, i.e. until the coup d'état of 1926, or afterwards, during Smetona's autocratic rule. But there is no specific evidence suggesting that the Lithuanian authorities were interested in escalating ethnic tensions. Unlike other newly established countries in Central Europe, Lithuania did not enact laws to discriminate directly against Jews, such as numerus clausus. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, systematic covert attempts were made to reduce the role and influence of Jews in the economy and politics of the country, from a base that was already low. While Lithuanian authorities tried to relieve inter-ethnic tensions and contain further escalation of conflict, their aim was more to maintain the stability of the political system rather than to promote good relations among ethnic groups. But it was exactly ethnic tension and the ensuing conflicts that were jeopardising the stability of the state.

The socio-economic situation at the beginning of the 1920s was very difficult and was therefore conducive to the rise of inter-ethnic tensions. The country had still not recovered from the wars with the Bolsheviks and the Poles. In the cities, especially in the capital, Kaunas, there were basic food shortages.[14] City dwellers, and especially various bureaucrats, were discontented. In the press, Jews were blamed for these hardships. Accusations and rumours were rife that shop owners (the majority of whom were Jewish) were breaking trading rules. The Riflemen's Union, a paramilitary organization, was very active in blaming Jews in their journal Trimitas

14 See Laisvė, 1. 10. 1922, no. 149. The newspaper reported the lack of bread in Kaunas. Special shops were opened for the poor and needy where they could buy cheaper bread. Also see the official newspaper Lietuva, 29. 10. 1922, no. 246. On economic difficulties, growing prices, speculation see J.K. Litai ir spekuliantai, in: Lietuva, 9. 11. 1922, no. 254. M., Kova su brangymečiu, in: Lietuva, 18. 10. 1922, no. 238; Lietuva, 22. 10. 1922, no. 240; Kovai su brangenybe, in: Lietuva, 26. 10. 1922, no. 243.

("Trumpet"). In order to stabilize the situation in the capital, the government took administrative measures to drive some shop owners out of the city for "breaking certain trading rules".[15]

Political problems were added to the economic and social ones. In the spring of 1922, the Lithuanian public suffered a great political trauma when Vilnius and the Vilnius district were annexed to Poland. On March 24, the Polish Sejm ratified a declaration from the Middle Lithuanian Sejm for the incorporation of Vilnius and the Vilnius district into the Polish state. On 15 March 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers recognized Poland's eastern borders and Vilnius district as a part of Polish nation state. At almost the same time, in the beginning of 1923, Lithuanians took the Klaipėda district by force, although the final resolution of its legal status took longer to achieve.

A no less complex situation was unfolding in the country's internal political life. Elections to the first parliament of the Republic of Lithuania were taking place in the autumn of 1922. An electoral battle ensued which radicalized the public. Voters were urged not to vote for the ethnic minority lists (Polish, Jewish), claiming that voters might be represented in parliament by minority representatives disloyal to the Lithuanian state. As a result of this campaign, relations deteriorated between the ethnic minorities (primarily Jews and Poles) and the right wing factions (Christian Democrats, the Farmers' Union and the Labour Federation), the latter having won the elections with a fragile majority in parliament. The Polish and Jewish deputies protested against the election results, alleging that the proportionality principle was not followed when the votes were counted and that the law on voting was disregarded. Their complaints were ignored and the Polish and Jewish deputies refused to participate in the running of the parliament. The Jews withdrew from the Seimas on 17 November 1922. Jewish deputies returned to the Seimas only in March 1923 and joined other Lithuanian leftist parties in expressing a vote of no confidence in the government led by Ernestas Galvanauskas. As a result, the Seimas was dissolved and elections to the Second Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania were announced.

These political battles, the governmental crisis and the dissolution of the Seimas were all widely reported in the Lithuanian press of the day. In the right wing press, the

15 Abas [?], Mitingas Kaune dėl brangenybės, in: Trimitas, 14. 10. 1922, no. 40; also see Trimitas, 21. 10. 1922, no. 41; Trimitas, 4. 11. 1922, no. 43.

prolonged parliamentary-political crisis was blamed not only on the left but also on the ethnic minorities, including the Jews.[16] It was claimed that the Jews "were furious at everyone". Christian Democrats accused Jews of voting for the Social Democrats and the Bolsheviks, as if Jews who did so were disloyal to Lithuania. Their newspaper Laisvė ("Freedom") even announced that "Jericho's trumpets" would never demolish the Lithuanian state, but only "speed up the establishment of Lithuanian fascism".[17]

The Riflemen's Union and its periodical Trimitas played a very important role in stoking up antisemitism in late 1922/early 1923, regularly publishing articles of an antisemitic character. By the end of 1922, Trimitas had become increasingly blatant and aggressive in its anti-Jewish agitation. In each of the weekly November–December 1922 issues another antisemitic article appeared, culminating in a series of articles in the beginning of December ironically titled "Jews – our Friends" (signed by Jokūbas Blažiūnas).[18] Of all Lithuanian publications and journalistic press throughout the inter-war history, none was as antisemitic as Trimitas, with its xenophobic and racist overtones.[19]

It was in this context that a campaign began of defacing minority-language signs – first and foremost those in Yiddish. It was referred to in the press as the campaign of "smearing". Signs were vandalized not only in the larger cities (Kaunas, Panevėžys, Šiauliai, Klaipėda) but also in the smaller townships, through 1924. For example, in Panevėžys, the defacing started at the end of 1923. Signs in Yiddish and Polish were damaged. Police investigators found that soldiers, lower-ranking officers and riflemen took part – in all about 150 persons. Perpetrators were found to have been well organized, thus able to "work quickly".[20] No offenders were arrested. In Kaunas, signs were defaced by students and lower-ranking officers, with about

16 Kas atsitiko, in: Laisvė, 26. 10. 1922, no. 196; Mažumos ar didumos, in: Laisvė, 31. 10. 1922, no. 200; for more on the election results, see: Laisvė, 1. 11. 1922, no. 201; A. Jakštas, Naujasis krašto šeimininkas, in: Laisvė, 16. 11. 1922, no. 213; Ged., Nelipkit ant sprando, in: Laisvė, 25. 11. 1922, no. 221; D. D., Žydų balsai, in: Laisvė, 10. 12. 1922, no. 233.

17 Rinkimu rezultatai, in: Laisvė, 8. 11. 1922, no. 208.

18 Trimitas, 2. 12. 1922, no. 47; 9. 12. 1922, no. 48; 16. 12. 1922, no. 49; 23. 12. 1922, no. 50.

19 What value could thoughts of this nature possibly hold: "If the Jews were to leave Kaunas, nothing but a pile of shit would remain", or "this breed is in its final days [...] it is in degeneration, it cannot think nor rule. Jews are not the same type of people as other nationalities. They are overcome by an incurable, degenerative disease."

20 LCVA, f. 404, ap. 1, b. 141, p. 46, Report from the Head of Panevėžys district to the Director of Civil Protection Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 22. 11. 1923.

200 people taking part. About 30 were arrested, some "identified" by police officials while others were "named aliens". Unfortunately, the police inquiry documents give no information about those "identified".[21]

At almost the same time, new posters were being put up urging Lithuanians to struggle against "Jewish exploitation and domination" in Lithuania, to boycott Jewish businesses and to avoid any relations with Jews. One announced: "The Jews have redrawn their horrible scribbles on their signs [...]. We started with signs and windows, we will finish with the Jews' and their company's throats."[22] Such posters were usually signed in the name of the Lithuanian Fascist Executive Committee. Lithuanian intelligence had information on the fascists and their activities. For example, a departmental official stated that "the fascist organization started operating" in the beginning of 1923; its centre was in Kaunas; it had branches in other Lithuanian cities; and some of its members were known. Surveillance data showed that the more active members of the fascist executive committee in Kaunas were known to be connected to the newspaper Darbininkas ("Worker"). This paper was published by the Lithuanian Labour Federation, an organization close to the Christian Democrats. Others were students, members of the Riflemen's Union and lower-ranking officials. Members of the local branches tended to be younger students, civil servants and priests (as was the case in Ukmergė, for example).[23] The fascists were organizing meetings, deciding on what action to take against Jews, and preparing propaganda.

Correspondence between the relevant officials shows that none of the perpetrators of these attacks was ever formally identified, arrested or brought to trial despite police documents naming some of the more active participants.[24] Considering that,

21 LCVA, f. 384, ap. 2, b. 368, p. 13, Report from the army brigade headquarters major Mačiulaitis to the Minister of defence, 23. 2. 1923; LCVA, f. 384, ap. 2, b. 368, p. 14-14ap, Report from Kaunas district Military Commandant to the Head of army brigade, 22(24?). 2. 1923.

22 LCVA, f. 1265, ap. 1, b. 73, l. 35, Poster "Fellow countrymen" (March, 1923). Several different versions of the same poster were distributed in Lithuania at the time. They were all signed off the same way – Lithuanian Fascists Executive Committee. See: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 7247, l. 42; LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 7247, l. 47.

23 LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 7247, l. 3-4, "Fascists", a review from the Ministry of Defence General Headquarters Reconnaissance department [September, 1923]. (I must thank my colleague Dr. G. Rudys for this reference.)

24 LCVA, f. 404, ap. 1, b. 141, p. 47, Report from the Head of Panevėžys district to the Director of Civil Protection Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 18. 12. 1923. It was said in

according to the archives, the most active perpetrators in the smearing campaigns were members of the Riflemen's Union, and since those investigating them (police, county and town governors) were themselves military men, the investigations were hardly likely to have been carried out with the utmost diligence and conscientiousness. Rather, the reverse was true: The campaign received significant moral support from parts of Lithuanian society, including police officers and the local administration, who were in sympathy with the perpetrators and thus unlikely to act against them. Even attempts to identify those distributing proclamations were thus similarly doomed to failure. For example, the Šiauliai district governor, in his note to his superiors in Kaunas, claimed that approval of the fascists' posters was evident "among the representatives of the leading political groups" and added that "amongst those spreading the mentioned posters are individuals who participated in patriotic acts such as the liberation of the Klaipėda district".[25] In other words, the offenders were regarded as the patriots.

The central government did pressure local officials into taking "strict measures" against the vandals. Antisemitic proclamations were confiscated and destroyed and those distributing them were threatened with prosecution, while locals were warned to keep the peace. In the autumn of 1923, Minister of Internal Affairs Karolis Žalkauskas instructed all district governors to take action against sign vandals. He said: "Of late there have been many acts of vandalism against signs written in languages other than Lithuanian. Such acts are the greatest expression of a lack of culture. They discredit our position abroad and provoke one sector of the population against another."[26] In accordance with the minister's order, city and district governors (officers) were urged to take "strict measures against similar outbreaks", including those against various types of "antisemitic propaganda".

Eventually, the authorities started to introduce more stringent measures regulating the use of languages in public space. On 7 July 1924, an order regulating the use of languages in the public space was published by the Ministry of Internal

this document, that „Fourth Regiment Lieutenant Svylas is alleged to have participated in spoiling [...]".

25 LCVA, f. 412, ap. 5, b. 262, p. 4, Report from the Head of Šiauliai district to the Civil Protection Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs [1923].

26 LCVA, f. 1265, ap. 1, b. 57, p. 18, Order of the Minister of Internal Affairs no. 3041, 20. 10. 1923.

Affairs, stating that "the language of public announcements and signboards shall be Lithuanian". The order forbade signboard smearing or otherwise spoiling signs in languages other than Lithuanian and it placed a limit on signs and announcements in minority languages. These could be put up only in "yards and walls not visible from street or square" and could only be announcements of approved meetings. The order threatened a 1,000 Litas fine or imprisonment of up to one month for non-compliance with these provisions. These police-administrative measures seem to have been effective. The campaign of smearing signboards in minority languages, which went on from the end of 1923 and until the first half of 1924, was halted and never recurred on such a broad and organised scale.

The next anti-Semitic campaign to be examined is an eruption of violence against Jews that took place in Vilijampolė (Slobotke), Kaunas, in August 1929. Antisemitic attitudes combined with the identification of Jews with the communist movement, a notion prevalent in Lithuanian society, were the primary stimuli for this outbreak. The communist movement itself was considered by most Lithuanians to be disloyal and hostile to their nation state. We now know that, while Jews did indeed constitute a significant majority of the membership in the Lithuanian Communist Party (more than 50 %), the leadership was dominated by Lithuanians (with two Jews in a Central Committee of eleven) and the total membership in those organizations, at this time, was tiny – about 400. Indeed, if half of these members were Jewish, this would represent approximately .00129 % of the Jewish population.[27]

The violence seems to have been triggered when communists tried to hold a demonstration. According to Criminal Police records, on August 1, workers in Kaunas – most of them Jewish, and led by communist activists – attempted to mark "a day of fighting against the imperialist wars" (a.k.a. "International Red Day") with a de-

27 At the beginning of the thirties, Jews made up almost 54 % of party members. In 1935 44.2 % of party members were Jews, and by the end of 1939, Jews made up 31 % of party members. The total number of communist party members at the beginning of the thirties was about 700; in 1935 it was about 2,500; and at the end of 1939, it was 1,120. Historians use the numbers found in State security department reports. These data usually ignore those communist party members who were incarcerated. For instance at the end of 1939 about 290 persons were incarcerated for „communist activities", the majority of whom were of course party members. See Nijolė Maslauskienė, Lietuvos komunistų tautinė ir socialinė padėtis 1939 m. pabaigoje – 1940 m. rugsėjo mėn., in: Genocidas ir rezistencija 1 (1999), pp. 87; Truska, Lietuviai ir žydai, pp. 129.

monstration. Preparations for the demonstration were started as early as July, when the communists distributed announcements in Kaunas and its environs calling for a protest against alleged preparations for a war and for a general strike. However, the campaign failed. According to available police reports, workers – most of them Lithuanians – were not taken in by the communist propaganda and did not join the activists. Instead, a clash ensued between the demonstrators, the police and the Lithuanian workers.[28] All Lithuanian newspapers, regardless of their political preferences or affiliation, emphasized that it was not Lithuanian workers who had succumbed to communist propaganda. They did not notice, however, that the Jews had not succumbed either, as seen above.

As a result of the clash, 81 persons were detained, 76 of them Jews.[29] After police inquiries, 28 were released. The others received administrative sanctions and were imprisoned. Late that very same night, a pogrom was launched against Jews in Vilijampolė (Slobotke). Unknown persons demanded that passports be shown by passers-by in the neighbourhood of Slobotke. Jews presenting their passport would be beaten. Following the assault, the police started interrogations. Examination of the interrogation documents elucidates the nature of the investigation. From the very beginning, the interrogation was conducted in an unorthodox manner: All the blame for the unrest was put onto three Jews who were members of the Vilijampolė volunteer fire fighters team.[30] The Jews were accused of sympathizing with the communists and spreading groundless rumours about being persecuted and attacked by the police and Riflemen's Union members.[31] At the same time, the police investigation reports also concluded that no incidences of violent fighting or any disturbances had been recorded in Slobotke. However, survivors' testimonies told a different story: that

28 LCVA, f. 394, ap. 2, b. 858, p. 287–289, Criminal Police information, 5. 8. 1929, no. 35.

29 Sužiedelis, The Historical Sources for Antisemitism in Lithuania, p. 132.

30 LCVA, f. 394, ap. 15, b. 138, p. 297–298, Report from the Head of Kaunas district to the Director of Civil Protection Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 6. 8. 1929; ibid., p. 274–278, Summary of the Interrogation of A. Strumskis, the Head of second police station, undated; ibid., p. 273–273ap, Report from colonel Štencelis to the Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9. 8. 1929.

31 Ibid., b. 138, p. 294–295, Report of senior policeman A. Bartašius to the Head of second police station, 3. 8. 1929; ibid., Interrogation record of policeman P. Ratnikas, 3. 8. 1929, p. 293–294; ibid., Report from the Head of second police station to the Head of Kaunas city police, 3. 8. 1929, p. 292–293.

they were beaten by unknown persons and that the police had not taken any action against the attackers. According to the survivors, some of the perpetrators were armed and dressed in Riflemen's Union uniforms.[32] Later, the interrogation procedure established that about 30 Jewish persons had been exposed to physical violence.

For two weeks, there was no coverage of the attack in Slobotke in any Lithuanian newspaper. It was not until mid-August that the Slobotke assault was covered for the first time, in the government's official newspaper, Lietuvos aidas. The article said that "the unrest in Slobotke" must have been initiated by the same Jews who had taken part in the communist demonstration.[33] Once again, it concluded that "nationally mature workers" could no longer put up with the situation, and argued that since the majority of communist activists were Jews, therefore it was only logical that innocent Jews suffered. The incident was referred to as "a consequence of a displeasing communist wound".

However, at the end of August, events in the case took an unexpected turn. The same newspaper, Lietuvos aidas, gave a radically different interpretation of the Slobotke incident.[34] It recognized the fact that "excesses" had occurred in Slobotke (the use of the word pogrom was strictly avoided): "Several citizens of Jewish nationality were roughed up and beaten." It was noted that the head of the government, Augustinas Voldemaras, was informed about the events by the Idiše štime editor. Lietuvos aidas continued to write about "hearsay", suggesting that certain authorities should take the blame for failing to "control" hooliganism or even for "gratifying" the perpetrators. The article concludes with a strict warning that the perpetrators should be punished and that stringent measures should be introduced to deter such excesses and misdemeanours from recurring. A couple of days later, during a press conference, Voldemaras stated that the Slobotke incident had given rise to a lot of rumours. According to him, "no pogrom had actually happened", the motives of the attackers were not clear, the incident was under investigation and the case had been handed over to the investigator of special cases.[35] In conclusion, it was stated that

32 LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, p. 16–18, Complaints, 10.8. 1929; LCVA, f. 394, ap. 15, b. 138, p. 346–358, Interrogation records, undated; ibid., Testimonies, 16–20. 8. 1929, p. 298–345.

33 Dvi opos, in: Lietuvos aidas, 12. 8. 1929, no. 181.

34 Būkim tikri patriotai, in: Lietuvos aidas, 20. 8. 1929, no. 187.

35 P. ministerio pirmininko pašnekesys su žurnalistais, in: Lietuvos aidas, 29. 8. 1929, no. 195. The opposition press noticed the changes in Lietuvos aidas' interpretations and ironically

the "rioters" merely wanted to discredit Lithuania prior to the forthcoming session of the League of Nations. Since Prime Minister Voldemaras planned to go to Geneva to attend a session of the League of Nations at the beginning of September, this may have influenced his attitude toward the violence in the Slobodke neighbourhood.

It was at this moment, at the end of August and particularly in September, that the investigation of the case gained momentum. It was established that the attackers included police detectives, police officers and several riflemen. Quite a few of the police officers were officially reprimanded by the Minister of Internal Affairs and seven were dismissed from their duties.[36] The investigation resulted in 17 defendants in the dock.[37] However, the court proceedings were launched only in May of 1932, even though the investigation had been completed by 1930. During the trial, the prosecutor claimed that the attack on the Jews had been part of a premeditated and co-ordinated plan to cause "public unrest and to commit acts of personal violence against Jews with fists and bats". The prosecutor requested a sentence of three years of imprisonment to be imposed by the court.[38] The majority of the accused did receive prison sentences, however many of these were only of three to nine months' duration. Those convicted were taken to prison straight from the courtroom.

The question arises as to why this particular case took so many twists and turns. In the beginning, the Jews themselves were the accused, but in the end the case went to court and perpetrators were punished. The most likely answer appears to be that the accused (or at least some of them) were members of the "Iron Wolf" organization, which had been set up as a national guard movement loyal to Prime Minister Voldemaras himself. Lithuanian historians claim that the organization, founded in 1927, closely resembled the Italian blackshirt and Nazi paramilitary units.[39] The "Iron Wolf" was meant to be a secret paramilitary organization with tight internal discipline. Its statute stated that the "Iron Wolf" organization is the country's "internal army established to fight [...] internal aliens and anti-nationalist elements". Only Lithuanian nationals could become "wolves". The organization's activities were coordinated by the Supreme Headquarters (with A. Sliesoraitis as Chief of Staff. Sliesoraitis was also the editor of the radical right wing newspaper Tautos kelias). In 1929, "Iron Wolf" membership reached 3,500, with another 1,000 candidates. The majority in the organization were civil servants, teachers, security and police officers and students, and recruits were being sought. In 1928, Voldemaras became the head of the organization.

Then, in September 1929, just after his return from Geneva, Voldemaras was suddenly removed as prime minister.[40] Such a highly significant political event is very likely to have had a major impact on the on-going investigation into the Slobotke case and, indeed, judicial proceedings followed. In 1930, "Wolves" who were Voldemaras supporters staged at least three failed coups, attempting to return Voldemaras to power. When in May of the same year the organization was dissolved, the investigation into the Slobodke case was also completed. The authorities must have believed that an open court and the imposition of actual sentences would "pour cold water" over some "overheated heads", namely those extreme radicals still loyal to Voldemaras.

It should be noted that the judgement delivered by the court did not put an end to the Slobotke saga. After an investigation by the Court of Appeals, the imposed sentences were reduced further. Moreover, in 1934 the rioters filed clemency requests and these were granted. One might conclude that interested officials, at least those who were involved in the investigation of the case, regarded the convicted persons as the "patriotic element" pursuing the noble cause of fighting the communists, while the latter were seen as the ones destroying public order in the country.

commented them. Lietuvos žinios wrote that at the beginning incidents were called „patriotic workers action"; later, violators were described as hooligans. See Ministerio pirmininko atsakymai spaudai, in: Lietuvos žinios, 29. 8. 1929, no. 195.

36 LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 6-14, Correspondence of Special interrogator Žemaitis, 14. 9.–26. 10. 1929.

37 Slabados eskcesų byloj tieson patraukti 17 žmonių, in: Lietuvos žinios, 1. 10. 1931, no. 222.

38 The trial was widely covered in the opposition press. See Prasidėjo Slabados eskcesininkų byla, in: Lietuvos žinios, 23. 5. 1932, no. 115; Slabados ekscesininkų byla, in: Rytas, 23. 5. 1932, no. 97; Slabados ekscesininkų byla, in: Lietuvos žinios, 24. 5. 1932, no. 116; Slabados ekscesininkų byla, in: Lietuvos žinios, 25. 5. 1932, no. 117; Teismas nubaudė 12 Slabados ekscesininkų, in: Lietuvos žinios, 27. 5. 1932, no. 118; Slabados ekscesininkų byla, in: Rytas, 24. 5. 1932 , no. 98; Slabados ekscesininkų byla, in: Rytas, 25. 5. 1932, no. 99; A. Pauliuks, Slabados ekscesininkų byla pasibaigė, in: Rytas, 27. 5. 1932, no. 100.

39 Gediminas Rudis, Augustinas Voldemaras ir voldemarininkai, in: Augustinas Voldemaras. Pastabos saulėlydžio valandą, Vilnius 1992, p. 7.

40 For more details about the conflict between president A. Smetona and Prime Minister A. Voldemaras see Liudas Truska, Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai, Vilnius 1996, p. 190–194.

In conclusion, analysis shows that, while the two outbreaks of antisemitism in interwar Lithuania examined in this paper shared some features, they were also differed in some respects. The factors in common are well known to historians – social and economic difficulties, political instability and so on. But with regard to the campaign of sign spoiling, an important cause seemed to be the discrepancy between the status of Lithuanian as the state language and culture and its low prestige in the public space. This could be understood as a humiliation for which the destruction of signs in the languages of the "oppressors" was felt to be a sort of redress and a way to regain national pride. On the other hand, the violence in 1929 by Lithuanian right-wing radicals in Kaunas, Viljampolė (Slobodke neighbourhood) seemed to be related to that group's deeply rooted identification of Jews with communists. Both incidents were instigated by right wing radical groups, which produced antisemitic propaganda to fuel their campaigns. In the sign defacement campaign, antisemitic propaganda was found in the press in general and in the Riflemen's Union paper Trimitas in particular, but also in propaganda produced by the Lithuanian Fascist Executive Committee. Slogans in the press and in posters calling for a campaign to "purify" the public space of foreign languages created support within the Lithuanian community at large. Signs were defaced on a massive and organized scale by soldiers, lower-ranking officers, riflemen and students. The authorities reacted to the incidents ambivalently, probably because those lower-ranking bureaucrats responsible for security and the maintenance of public order were themselves sympathetic to the antisemitic activists, as were sections of the general public. It is the case that no signboard vandals were ever formally identified and arrested and no judicial proceedings were initiated, despite police documents showing that some of the more active participants of the smearing campaign were indeed known. It was only national officials who brought this campaign to an end, with their demands for stricter controls. The violence in 1929, in contrast, had few policemen or secret police officers taking part, but again, local officials took little interest and only the highest state officials responded with rigour. While these state officials saw the suppression of ethnic conflict as important to the stability of the regime itself, there was an even more potent explanation for their rigorous response. The perpetrators were part of a power struggle at the highest levels of Lithuanian politics and when their side lost, they were prosecuted.

Mordechai Zalkin

Sharunas, Prince of Dainava, in a Jewish Gown: The Cultural and Social Role of Hebrew and Yiddish Translations of Lithuanian Literature and Poetry in Interwar Lithuania

The establishment of an independent Lithuanian state following World War I marked, for the Lithuanian people as well as for the local Jewish community, the end of long years of subjugation to the Czarist regime. Thus, while breathing the fresh air of a new dawn, both local Lithuanians and Jews were hoping for a beginning of a new era. However, beyond the euphoric atmosphere that characterized the initial stages of independence and the wish to return to normal life after the turmoil of war, the question of Jewish integration into the new emerging civil society was crucial for both sides. Though the populations had lived side by side for centuries in hundreds of villages, towns and cities, this new encounter was informed from the outset by a whole world of mutual negative images as well as suspicions composed mainly of stereotypes and prejudices.[1]

The image of the Jew, prevalent mostly among Lithuanian villagers and countrymen, was of a traitor, greedy exploiter, lazy bloodsucker, parasite, usurer, miser and swindler, not to mention some more diabolic characters common to nineteenth century local popular discourse.[2] For their part, many Jews perceived the native Lithuanians as a primeval, undeveloped, primitive rural society. A typical illustra-

1 See Uriah Katzenelenbogen, The Jews among Subjugated Peasant Peoples, in: Mendel Sudarsky/Uriah Katzenelenbogen/J. Kissin, Lite, vol. I, New York 1951, p. 336–346. This essay is part of a research project financed by the Israel Science Foundation.

2 See M. Joniškis, Iš Pilviškiu, in: Varpas 12 (1889); R. L., Apie Nemuno troptininkus, in: Varpas 1 (1896); A.G, Lietuviškas darbininkas, in: Varpas 10 (1894); Perkūnas, Viršininkai, in: Varpas 8 (1895); Veversis, Musu darbas, in: Aušra 7/8 (1884); Teviniski varpai, in: Varpas 10 (1892); V. V., Iš Lietuvos, in: Aušra 7/8 (1885); j-b, Reikalingumas ir naudingumas prekystes, in: Varpas 7 (1889). For a detailed discussion see Ignas Končius, Žemaičio šnekos, Vilnius 1996, p. 60–76.