What Happened in Lithuania in 1940?

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On June 9, 2000, the Russian Foreign Ministry, reacting to a bill under discussion in the Lithuanian Seimas (parliament), declared that the Soviet Union had not seized Lithuania by force in 1940. The ministry insisted that in June 1940 Soviet troops entered Lithuania by agreement with the Lithuanian government and that this agreement had been "received within the framework of international law as functioning at that time." Moreover, the decision of Soviet leaders, in August 1940, "to accept Lithuania as a member of the Soviet Union" came in response to the request of "the highest governmental organs of the Baltic states." It was therefore improper "to qualify the entrance of Lithuania into membership in the USSR as the result of the unilateral action of the latter." Most Lithuanians disagree.

Leaving aside the controversies surrounding the Seimas's consideration of Lithuanian claims against the Soviet Union, and thereby against Russia, it would seem desirable to examine the Russian statement concerning the events of 1940 as a separate topic. History always runs the risk of becoming a tool of politicians and diplomats, who, like lawyers, often look to the past to document the positions that they want to take today. Discussion, of course, can follow a variety of paths: emphasizing the Soviet motivation for action in 1940, the details of the Soviet move into Lithuania, or the Lithuanians' reaction to the movement and their subsequent behavior. Since the Russian Foreign Ministry's declaration provided the impetus for this essay, let us use that declaration as the basis for response.

The relevant part of the Russian declaration reads as follows (in the interest of offering the most accurate translation, alternative translations of certain Russian words have been provided):

> The introduction of the forces of the USSR in 1940 was carried out with the agreement of the supreme leadership of this country, an agreement which was received/obtained within the framework of international law as practiced at the time. The authoritative/competent functions in the Soviet period here were carried out by the national organs of authority. The decision of the USSR Supreme Soviet of August 3, 1940 concerning the acceptance of Lithuania into the make-up of the Soviet Union was preceded by corresponding requests of the highest representative organs of the Baltic states.
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> In this way, it is unjust/illegal to qualify the entrance of Lithuania into the make-up of the USSR as the result of unilateral actions of the latter.

These four sentences constitute the outline for this essay.

– 1. "The introduction of the forces of the USSR in 1940 was carried out with the agreement of the supreme leadership of this country, an agreement which was received/obtained (*polucheno*) within the framework of international law as practiced at the times."

The key word here is "agreement" (*soglashenie*) – how was it "obtained" or "received"? Can the arrangement whereby, on June 15, 1940, Lithuania acquiesced to Soviet demands, be called an "agreement"? The Lithuanian government did not ask the Soviet Union to send troops. The Soviet Union presented Lithuania with a set of three demands that had to be accepted within 10 hours: the arrest of two Lithuanian security officials, the installation of a new government

favorable and acceptable to the Soviet Union, and the acceptance of Soviet military units in the major centers of Lithuania. Should the Lithuanians not agree to these terms, the troops would march in anyway. Lithuanians call this an "ultimatum."[1]

At this time, the Soviet Union was a de facto ally of the German Reich as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939; these two powers together dominated Eastern Europe. In secret protocols to the agreement of August and a subsequent agreement of September 1939, Germany recognized Lithuania as lying for the most part within the Soviet sphere of influence. (In January 1941 the Soviet Union bought Germany's remaining claim to southwestern Lithuania for some USD 7,000,000.) In explaining the move into Lithuania, the Soviet press at the time announced that the Lithuanian government was too pro-British and that it did not believe strongly enough in the lasting nature of German-Soviet friendship.

As for the "framework of international law," the period of 1938-1940 was undoubtedly a time of ultimata and violence. A commentary in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (August 3, 2000) spoke of Eastern Europe's living at this time by "the law of the jungle." Germany and the Soviet Union had divided Poland in 1939, and now German troops had just occupied Paris. Lithuania had already faced several ultimata: In 1938 Poland had demanded the opening of diplomatic relations, In March 1939 Germany had demanded the cession of the Memelland (Klaipėda), and in October 1939 the Soviet Union had demanded the right to station troops in Lithuania. Lithuania had yielded to all three ultimata; none of them, however, had led to the collapse of the Lithuanian government. But to assert that the Soviet Union acted within the "framework of international law" as it functioned in Eastern Europe in the spring of 1940 is not to set a very high moral standard.

Soviet views of international law, moreover, were in a state of flux, although in earlier years, governmental officials had made bold declarations on questions of aggression. In 1933 Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maksim Litvinov proposed to define the intrusion of military forces "onto the territory of another state" as "aggression" and he called for rejecting any effort to justify such action by referring to "the internal condition of any state." Fifteen years before that, the new Soviet government, in its Decree on Peace, declared, "If any nation whatsoever... does not have the right by free vote, with the troops of the annexing or generally the more powerful nation being completely withdrawn, to decide without any pressure the question of the forms of the political existence of this nation, then its incorporation is an annexation, i.e., by means of seizure and coercion."[2] *(Ed. note: It should be noted that, according to the information presented in the Russian media, the Moscow statement "received within the framework of international law as functioning at that time" is understood in the sense that the international law of that time allegedly did not forbid the threat of the use of force.*

Where such interpretation could have really existed, it would be associated exclusively with the Nazi attempts at the Nuremberg Process to justify the 1938 Austrian Anschluss as legitimate, as it was executed without any "spill of blood". The Court then found that, "such matters, even if true are really immaterial, for the facts plainly prove that the methods employed to achieve the object were those of an aggressor. The ultimate factor was the armed might of Germany ready to be used if any resistance was encountered". (See more in: Trial of the Major War Criminals, 22 International Military Tribunal, 435. - 1948).

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Besides, as far back as in 1938, the USSR representative at the League of Nations, commenting on similar methods, observed: "It must be clear that the League of Nations has no intention of changing its attitude, whether to the direct seizures and annexations of other people's territory, or to those cases where such annexations are camouflaged by the setting up of puppet "national" governments, allegedly independent, but in reality serving merely as a screen for, and an agency of, the foreign invader" (See.: League of Nations. OJ 340. - 1938).).

In Josef Stalin's Soviet Union, views of the rights of national self-determination and of the powers of international law soon became more conditional. In 1935 E. B. Pashukanis, a noted Soviet jurist, still accepted the existence of a system of international law with custom and treaty as its sources, but by 1938 his critics were denouncing him as having cast doubt on the distinctiveness of Soviet law. Andrey Vyshinsky, who at this time emerged as an authoritative voice in Soviet legal thought, later told the United Nations, "Law in general is nothing but an instrument of politics."[3]

Faced with the Soviet ultimatum of June 15, 1940 – Soviet troops were poised to march and the Lithuanians had the choice of accepting them or resisting – the Lithuanian government yielded. In the fall of 1939, Finland had opposed a more moderate Soviet ultimatum; as a result it had to pay a high price in the "Winter War" of 1939-1940 – but then it had preserved its independence. (In 1938-1939, on the other hand, Austria and Czechoslovakia did not resist Nazi Germany.) On June 15, before announcing the ultimatum, *Lietuvos aidas* (the newspaper of Lithuania's ruling party), spoke of Lithuania's good fortune in having such a noble neighbor as the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, "agreement" is too strong a word to stand alone in describing the Lithuanian acquiescence to the coming of Soviet troops; there was no negotiation on the terms. "Surrender" is more accurate.

And the "supreme leadership" of Lithuania did surrender. In accordance with the terms of the ultimatum, the Lithuanian authorities proposed a new prime minister (the Soviet Union rejected the nomination and installed its own choice) and called upon the Lithuanian people to receive the Soviet forces without resistance. The authoritarian president of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona, fled the country. One possible sign of dissent came in the publication of a proclamation that the Soviets had come to maintain Lithuania's peace and security: At the end of the text in *Lietuvos aidas*, the official information agency's name "ELTA" (Lithuanian Telegraph Agency) was printed upside down.

In sum, the Soviet Union, declaring that its troops were in any case moving into Lithuania, forced changes in the Lithuanian government. There was obviously no negotiated "agreement." In 1988-1989, the Soviet Foreign Ministry long denied the existence of secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact on the grounds that it could find no such text. The Russian Foreign Ministry's own publication of major documents in Soviet foreign policy during 1940 does not include any relevant documents concerning an "agreement" on the move into Lithuania.[4] Once in Kaunas, Soviet officials then directed further developments in Lithuania.

– 2 "The authoritative/competent (*vlastnye*) functions in the Soviet period here were carried out by the national organs of authority (*vlasti*)."

The thrust of this statement is unclear. Why would "the national organs of authority" in the Soviet Union not be carrying out state policy? The statement, however, does not specify the

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"constitutional" authorities of the Soviet Union, and perhaps there lies the explanation – *gde sobaka zaryta*.. This sentence invites a more careful look at the functioning of the Soviet system as a guide for understanding the events of 1940.

The impetus for transforming Lithuania in 1940 lay on the Soviet side. Without the coming of the Soviet armed forces, there would probably have been no major changes in Lithuania. There is no evidence that the Soviet troops themselves initiated any particular policies, although they of course facilitated all pro-Soviet demonstrations. We must look elsewhere for the engine of action, and this was Vladimir Dekanozov, the USSR Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, who came to Kaunas by special airplane flight on June 15 – but where did his authority come from?

As already noted, however, Soviet and Russian foreign ministry officials have released no documentation as to his activity. The available documentation on relations between the Lithuanian and the Soviet governments has a curious gap for the period of June 15 to August 3. In their day, Soviet historical authorities chose to end the fourth volume of the basic documentary collection "Sources for the History of the Lithuanian SSR" with the arrival of Soviet troops and the formation of a new government. When the Soviet Foreign Ministry, a decade ago, published a book of diplomatic reports on Moscow's relations with Lithuania in 1939-1940,[5] the material ended with the movement of Soviet troops into Lithuania; the volume ignored the subsequent events when Dekanozov was in Kaunas personally directing the course of events. We may conclude that the events in Lithuania were more significant now to other Soviet institutions, and this would mean first of all the Communist Party.

The Soviet state is best understood as having been a "party-state.". Lenin had created a new type of administration according to which the Communist Party constituted the sovereign authority, higher than the constitutionally defined governmental administration. The governmental administration, Lenin and his successors argued, was "an instrument" (*orudie*) of the class struggle, and it was the task of the party to wield that instrument. Speaking to the VIII Party Congress in 1919, Lenin, while advocating "democratic centralism," put his emphasis on the principle of a centralized party leadership: "The Communist party can fulfill its obligation only if it will be organized in the most centralized way, if iron discipline rules it... and if its party center constitutes the highest authoritative organ with wide powers."[6]

The "authoritative" organ of Soviet power accordingly was not in the government but in the party. In 1940, to be sure, the Soviet constitution did not reflect any such power structure. The 1936 (Stalin) constitution declared, "The highest organ of state power in the U.S.S.R. is the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R." Article 126 of the constitution declared that the party united "the most active and politically most conscious citizens in the ranks of the working class and other sections of the population." The earlier constitutions of the Soviet state (1918, 1924) did not even mention the Communist Party. Article VI of the Brezhnev Constitution of 1977 finally declared that the party was "the leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system."

Nominally, the sovereign institution of the party was the Party Congress, but since there was no such congress between 1939 and 1952, power obviously lay higher in the party structure, specifically in the Politburo and of course in Stalin's hands. Memoirs of former Soviet leaders after the fall of the Soviet order make this hierarchy clear. Both Vladimir Kriuchkov, head of the

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Soviet KGB in 1988-1990, and Egor Ligachev, a prominent party leader of the 1980s, called the Politburo "the highest political organ of the country." Nikolai Ryzhkov, another leading figure in the party in the late 1980s, considered it almost a demotion when, as a member of the Politburo, he was called upon to take the post of Prime Minister of the USSR.[7] The party executive was historically the supreme authority in the Soviet Union.

The party-state structure embodied Lenin's conception of a new type of political-social order. When Lenin professed disinterest in becoming the Chairman of the first Council of People's Commissars, he was expressing not modesty but rather his fundamental idea that the party was superior to the formal government. Government was an instrument to carry out the will of the party. Stalin came to power in the Soviet Union not through the governmental structure but through his control of the party. Mikhail Gorbachev's failed experiment in reforming the Soviet system into a "state ruled by law" (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*) meant the thought – never seriously carried out in his time – of subordinating the party to the constitutional order.[8]

The relationship of the government and the party can be understood in a simple diagram, a smaller triangle (or pyramid) within a larger one. The smaller one represents the constitutional order, the larger represents the party. The elaborate, sophisticated structure of the party gave it unprecedented means of controlling the society. A modified version of this diagram could include Lithuania after 1940 as a smaller, overlapping triangle, reproducing the power relationships of the Soviet state. The head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, who occupied a position in the overall pyramid equal to that of a party oblast committee first secretary, ruled over the constitutional structure in Lithuania just as the head of the A-UCP(b) ruled over the Soviet constitutional structure.

***insert diagrams ***

Vladimir Dekanozov, as Stalin's viceroy, brought this party-state system to Lithuania in the summer of 1940, and he used the Lithuanian government as his instrument for Sovietizing the country. With him came specialists for Soviet administration and for Soviet security organs. He installed himself in the Soviet embassy, and he imposed on Lithuania the Soviet party-state structure in which the traditional governmental forms were of only secondary importance. Lithuania became a part of the Stalinist Soviet party-state, administered within the A-UCP (b) structure long before it was formally incorporated into the governmental structure of the U.S.S.R.

3. "The decision of the USSR Supreme Soviet of August 3, 1940 concerning the acceptance of Lithuania into the make-up of the Soviet Union was preceded by corresponding requests of the highest representative organs of the Baltic states."

The Russian statement draws no connection between "the supreme leadership" of Lithuania mentioned in the first sentence and the "highest representative organs of the Baltic states" in this sentence. Barely seven weeks after the movement of Soviet troops into Lithuania, the USSR Supreme Soviet accepted Lithuania as the fourteenth republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In their time, Soviet historians argued that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia underwent simultaneous "socialist revolutions" in the summer of 1940; they argued that the presence of Soviet troops only allowed Lithuanians to decide their own destiny. In fact, the

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military established the controlling presence that allowed Dekanozov to fulfill his function as representative of the A-UCP(b). The process creating the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic was Dekanozov's work.

After his arrival in Kaunas on June 15, Dekanozov restructured the Lithuanian government, naming Justas Paleckis, a Lithuanian leftist who was not yet a member of the Communist Party, as Prime Minister. Paleckis had trouble at first understanding where his call to power had come from: "When, who and how is the new government of Lithuania forming?" he later asked. "Early in the morning of June 17," he continued, "they invited me to a meeting on the formation of a new government... When my name was raised, this was a complete surprise. But since this was a decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania, I had to throw all doubts aside and begin work."[9]

In August 1940, still confused, Paleckis asked Stalin personally about the institutional power structure in Lithuania. Stalin, smiling, explained: "Naturally the situation is complicated for the time being, but this is understandable in the present transitional moment. When you establish real Soviet rule, everything will fall into place. You will have an organ, the Biuro of the Central Committee, into which come all the basic leading comrades. There you will discuss all basic questions. The *polpred* [the Soviet diplomatic representative - aes] had to serve for a while as the plenipotentiary of the Central Committee of the A-UCP (b) and the central government, and he will help in the organization of Soviet rule." Eventually Paleckis understood: "Having become a member of the Biuro of the CC, which decided all questions of principle, I understood the significance of this basic leading and unified center about which Stalin spoke during our conversations in the Kremlin."[10]

Aided by specialists sent in from Moscow, Dekanozov worked through the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP), while the cabinet of ministers, headed by Paleckis, served an administrative function. Dekanozov and Paleckis brought a number of non-Communists into the first "People's government," but in historical retrospect it seems clear that they constituted window dressing for the Soviet takeover. For his part, Dekanozov pushed his program carefully, concentrating first of all on denouncing the Smetona regime in Lithuania, then promising to respect private property, assuring Lithuanians that agriculture would not be collectivized, and restraining any discussion of the possibility of joining the Soviet Union until mid-July.

The leading Lithuanian in the new order was Antanas Sniečkus, who in June emerged from a Lithuanian prison to become secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party. He entered the government as merely a deputy minister of the interior, nominally a lesser post than, say, Paleckis's, but from that position he headed the new security police, modeled after the Soviet NKGB. As party secretary he issued Dekanozov's orders in the party's name. In the semi-feudal structure of the Leninist-Stalinist system, Sniečkus came to serve as something like Duke of Lithuania until his death in 1974.[11]

The first key moves of the Paleckis government included the release of all imprisoned Communists, the legalization of the Communist Party, and then an order for all old political groups and societies to reregister. The LCP tolerated no organized legal opposition as it created new social organizations and directed the reorganization and then suppression of the press. As Paleckis recorded in his memoirs, "The purge of the state apparatus and the government from

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reactionary elements proceeded quickly."[12] On July 6 Dekanozov's government announced that on July 14 there would be elections for a new parliament, a People's Seimas. Time was short, but the LCP announced the formation of the Union of the Toiling People of Lithuania that offered a slate of candidates, including some ten non-Communists, with just one person designated for every seat in the new parliament. On July 11 and 12, the Soviet authorities reduced the possible points of opposition by arresting leading figures of the old regime and deporting some of them to the interior of the Soviet Union – this although Lithuania was still formally an independent state.[13]

When election day came, official returns reported that 95.5 percent of the population had voted, with over 99 percent of them supporting the official slate. Anna Louise Strong, an American radical who was in Lithuania through the month of July, approvingly called this "a figure unheard of Lithuania, unbelievable in any election in the capitalist democracies."[14] The contemporary Soviet Lithuanian press, however, reported even more "unbelievable" results: On July 16, *Darbo Lietuva*, which now replaced *Lietuvos aidas* as well as other newspapers, enthusiastically declared, "There are many places where up to 138 percent of those having the right to vote cast their ballots." Such reports would seem to make all official statistics meaningless and hardly worth discussing.

The voting done, the LCP organized mass meetings to call for the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union. The government made clear that it would provide the country with a new constitution, and as *Darbo Lietuva* put it on July 17, "Without Soviet power, creating a more beautiful life is unimaginable." The theme now was to "continue the work of Vincas Kapsukas," the Lithuanian communist who, at Moscow's orders, had proclaimed the establishment of a "workers' and peasants' government" in Lithuania in 1918. (Ironically, in the latter 1920s, Soviet historians criticized him for his lack of understanding for Lithuanian national aspirations.) The process went ahead quickly: The People's Seimas met on July 21 and in one day voted to rename the state the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and to request incorporation into the USSR.[15] A delegation of dignitaries solemnly traveled to Moscow to deliver this petition, and on August 3, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR granted the request, accepting Lithuania as the fourteenth constituent republic in the union.

Even before the USSR Supreme Soviet formally incorporated Lithuania into the U.S.S.R., Soviet officials treated Lithuania as their own. The deportations of July were mentioned above. On July 24, the Politburo approved plans for nationalization of banks and industry in the Baltic. On August 1, Viacheslav Molotov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and USSR People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, declared that the Baltic region properly belonged to the Soviet Union. The U.S.S.R., he proudly announced, in the last year had added territory with 23,000,000 inhabitants - this all, he insisted, "peacefully." (He obviously had to ignore the Winter War with Finland.) "Nineteen-twentieths of this population," he added, "earlier made up part of the USSR, but the imperialist powers of the West tore it by force from the USSR in a moment of its military weakness."[16]

In presenting his delegation's petition to the USSR Supreme Soviet, Paleckis, speaking in Lithuanian, displayed his new understanding of the Soviet order. "Long live," he cried out,

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"Stalinist friendship of peoples," "the liberated people of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic," "The great Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," "The government of the USSR and its leader Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov," "The All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)," and "the wise leader, the inspiration of the struggle and victories of laboring humanity, our friend and liberator– the great Stalin!" Stalin's name, according to *Pravda* of August 4, evoked "a storm of applause, a loud ovation in honor of Comrade Stalin, all rise. Calls of 'hurrah'." A few days later, at a Kremlin reception, Paleckis formally gave thanks to both the "Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government."[17]

Molotov's proud statement of August 1, emphasizing what he considered the Soviet Union's right to expand its western frontier from Finland to Moldavia, of course bolsters arguments that the Soviet move into Lithuania was not motivated by any vague "revolutionary" fervor, that instead the Soviet leadership was observing its own imperatives of geopolitics at a chaotic moment in European history. Molotov's "Great Power" conception of territorial rights, moreover, reflected the underlying principles of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that had provided for the division of East Central Europe between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

It remains yet, however, to define the relationship between the three major characteristics of this period: the presence of Soviet troops in Lithuania, Dekanozov's activity, and the social upheaval that Soviet historians called a "socialist revolution." Apart from Soviet motives for moving into the Baltic in 1940, did the population there really want to join the Soviet Union?

Anna Louise Strong had no doubts about Lithuania's "socialist revolution," that the leadership of the new order fully embodied the will of the people. The leaders, she insisted, "are widely known as patriots and greeted with great satisfaction," and the entire process "was all highly constitutional" and "imposingly correct." She herself saw almost no signs of resistance among the Lithuanians. Although she heard that some "old ones" disapproved of the new order, she claimed to have heard seventy-year old women speaking of "our father Stalin." When questioned about the deportations of former Lithuanian officials, which she did not mention in her book, she reportedly pointed out that the Soviet government no longer executed its opponents but rather simply moved them, thereby contributing to a healthy mixing of nationalities throughout the entire Soviet realm. According to an admittedly unfriendly commentator, she exclaimed, "A people who have received the protection of the great Stalin cannot conceive of greater joy."[18]

Leading members of the Lithuanian Communist Party guided Strong, who spoke no Lithuanian, but some other members of the new elite were not so sure of where events were leading them. Helena Korsakienė, a veteran radical whose husband became a leading Soviet Lithuanian intellectual, suggested that people outside Kaunas had little understanding of what was happening: "New people had come to power of whom they knew little.... They felt completely lost. Each, it would seem, was immersed in his own concerns. They wondered, what winds will yet blow, and in what direction?"[19] Strong's optimistic assessment of popular moods stands open to challenge.

Strong's account repeatedly spoke of Lithuanian Communist leaders' surprise at how easily the transformation of Lithuanian public life took place. The question therefore arises: Did Soviet officials from the start actually intend to incorporate Lithuania? Could local enthusiasts have in fact initiated the move - perhaps in an atmosphere akin to the forced collectivization of

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1929-1930 in the Soviet Union before Stalin called out "Dizzy with success"? This in fact seems highly doubtful. The simultaneous, coordinated paths that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all traversed in these seven weeks - the so-called "simultaneous" socialist revolutions -- were too well organized; Soviet authorities in any case distrusted mass spontaneity.[20]

The guiding hand in this process was Dekanozov's. He used the Lithuanian government, and the Lithuanian Communist Party, as his "instruments" to carry out the will of the Soviet party leadership. Throughout the process, Soviet propagandists insisted there was only one acceptable path for the country, and all were obliged to follow it. They concentrated on creating an image of mass support, and they called for determined measures against those who somehow opposed the new order and wanted to "sabotage" the elections of July 14. *Lietuvos aidas* of July 12, now already Sovietized, solemnly declared, "Whoever does not vote for the Seimas is voting for the enemies of the people." The next day it added, "No expression of gratitude to the Soviet Union can be too great." The Lithuanian Communist Party and the Lithuanian government served as instruments for executing the will of the A-UCP(b).

By the time the new Soviet state structure in Lithuania had been formalized, Dekanozov had long since left Lithuania. He had returned to Moscow, his job completed, when the People's Seimas voted to ask for membership in the USSR. In barely more than a month, he had reorganized the Lithuanian state, set the social and economic development on Lithuania onto a new course, and had contributed to the enlargement of the Soviet state. From November 1940 until the German invasion of 1941, he served as the Soviet diplomatic representative in Berlin. In December 1953 Stalin's successors in Moscow had him executed in their purge of Lavrenty Beriya's supporters in the Soviet system.

– 4, "In this way, it is unjust/illegal (*nepravomerno*) to qualify the entrance of Lithuania into the make-up of the USSR as the result of unilateral actions of the latter."

The four sentences together suggest that since the Soviet troops did not have to fight their way into Lithuania, there can be no talk of "unilateral actions." But on the other hand, the sequence of thought suggests that one should consider it natural, even *zakonomerno*, that when Soviet troops entered the land a Soviet republic should follow. Such logic should bolster the arguments of those Eastern Europeans who opposed allowing Soviet troops cross their lands even in the course of the Munich crisis in 1938. There is no evidence whatsoever to indicate that the Lithuanians knowingly invited Soviet troops and Communist Party representatives into the country with the aim of becoming a part of the Soviet Union. Whatever the reception of Soviet troops was in June – and there were people who welcomed them – Dekanozov's program had lain concealed. And to say, as Anna Louise Strong reportedly did, that Lithuanians welcomed the opportunity to become Stalin's children defies any independent sense of logic.

Did Lithuanians, nevertheless, in any way help the Soviet Union to incorporate Lithuania into the USSR? Yes, there were Lithuanians who participated in the process and helped. Was the incorporation a process in which the majority of Lithuanians had any significant voice or even any chance to express opposition? No, it was not. The election results of July 14-15, with their "overfulfillment" of whatever voting plan Dekanozov and his helpers had prepared, simply appear ludicrous. Soviet officials were clearly in charge of the process, supervising it, and determining the outcome; apart from producing documents to please the believers, they were not concerned with facing independent historical consideration.

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Was the incorporation of the three Baltic states in the interest of the Soviet Union? In his speech of August 1, Molotov put the strengthening of the Soviet Union in first place, but considering how quickly the Soviets fled Lithuania, the annexation of this region contributed little to Soviet defense against the German invasion of June 1941. One must remember that in 1940 it was not a matter of *either* Soviet *or* German troops in the Baltic-Soviet troops were already there as a result of the so-called "mutual assistance" pacts of 1939. On the other hand, in the tumultuous years of 1989 and 1990, more than one observer in Moscow expressed the thought that if Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were not part of the contemporary Soviet Union, there would be much less strife and controversy arising from Mikhail Gorbachev's political, social, and economic experimentation. In these terms, it could be argued that Stalin's annexation of the three Baltic republics was in fact a first step in the eventual dissolution of the Union.[21]

The Russian declaration of June 9, 2000, was not unexpected. A Russian diplomat in Riga had made just such an assertion at a meeting of the Latvian Historical Commission in July 1999. Maxim Litvinov declared that the first army to cross a frontier was guilty of aggression. At the peace negotiations with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk in 1918, the Soviet delegation bitterly opposed assertions that the Lithuanians, then living under German occupation, had expressed their will to separate from Russia: "Our position is that such a declaration can de facto serve as an expression of the national will only if it proceeds from a free vote in the areas in question on condition of the complete absence of all foreign troops."[21] If an apologist for Soviet actions in 1940 would claim that these statements have no relevance because the troops were Soviet, the answer might come back in Vyshinsky's words: "Law in general is but an instrument of politics." And to this we could add Mikhail Pokrovsky's statement that history is politics projected onto the past – all too often Pokrovsky's statement looks true.

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