

INSURRECTION AGAINST THE SOVIETS

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The Western World Becomes Attentive

It has been customary in the western world to speak of the genocide and the russification of the nations behind the Iron Curtain by the Russian occupants. Attention also has been focused on the sufferings of those enslaved nations, but there has been little knowledge or discussion of the resistance against the Russian intruders shown by the local population. Such resistance did not seem to be possible, and the western world was considerably surprised when last year the German physician, Schalmer, the American Noble, and others, released from the Vorkuta slave labor, testified that even there the enslaved people had not lost the will to resist.

This also brought about a better understanding of the resistance of the Lithuanian nation, especially after the unexpected defection to the West of the Russian MVD colonel Burlichi. In June 1954 he testified to the so-called Kersten Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives that the underground in Lithuania still remains unbroken, and that this heroic resistance often causes deep thought even among Russian soldiers stationed in Lithuania to fight the underground.

In the light of these facts the reminder that such resistance against the Russian occupation of Lithuania has existed for a considerable time becomes much more credible to the western world. One of the main phases of this determined and continuous fight for freedom has been the armed revolt against the Red occupants which broke out in Lithuania fourteen years ago.

The Preparation

A conspiracy is almost an impossibility in a Communist-controlled country, where an individual is under constant observation and control. Thus as long as agriculture was not collectivized in Lithuania, conditions for a conspiracy were considerably better than usual because of the difficulty of closely observing agricultural workers.

Soon after the occupation of Lithuania by the Russians in 1940, a few Lithuanian officials and other leaders who had succeeded in escaping to the west assembled in Berlin. There they formed the Lithuanian Activists' Front (further referred to as the LAFi headed by Colonel Kazys Škirpa, then the Lithuanian ambassador in Berlin. Its operations were partially open and partially secret, and its purpose was to fight the Red occupants of Lithuania.

In the occupied country itself underground groups were already formed in various locations. On October 9, 1940, the LAF began the task of centralizing these groups, and within a half year it succeeded in establishing connections and preparing the underground for expected unified action. As Dr. Pranas Padalis, one of the leaders of LAF in the capital city of Vilnius, testified to the Kersten Committee in 1953, the local groups consisted of three or five persons, organized very similarly to the pattern of communist underground organizations. To conceal the existence of a centralized organization different names were used in different locations.

The groups under the control of the headquarters of LAF were prepared for the following assignments: to rationalize local resistance in order to reduce possible losses; to warn individual persons of impending arrest; to provide a source of information; and, in case of a war, to protect local population from violence by the Red soldiers or local communists, and to seize control of local administration.

A special assignment for the central headquarters of LAF was to maintain communications with the free world, providing reliable information in general and collecting information of the possibilities of war. In case of war the headquarters were prepared to lead the seizure of the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas and declare the restoration of Lithuanian independence.

The fulfillment of these assignments was possible only because the LAF had reliable members in the communist police — the militia, in the postal administration, in the military ranks, in hospitals and in similar administrative positions of importance. However, the execution of the assignments, especially maintenance of contact with the west .demanded the lives of a considerable number of these men.

The crossing of the border by the couriers and the signs of passive resistance throughout the country could not remain unnoticed by the NKVD. On April 7, 1941, the Commissar of Security Glad-kov supplied in a secret letter information that a secret and well armed underground organization existed in Lithuania. He wrote: "It is established that counterrevolutionary organizations existing on the territory of the U.S.S.R., as well as individuals among the counterrevolutionary elements, are collecting and striving to procure weapons and cartridges in order to organize armed struggle against Soviet rule.

"Especially energetic activity in this direction has been noted in connection with preparations for the First of May Day.

"The counterrevolutionary element is sending its agents to work in military warehouses, in the People's Commissariat of the Interior, Highway Departments, and other places where arms are to be found, in order to seize them or, at the opportune moment, to seize the warehouses, and they also purchase weapons from organization members and ordinary persons.

"On the fifth day of April this year, the theft of 500 hand grenades and as many capsules was discovered in the militia warehouse of the City Board of Vilnius.

"It is quite clear that this seizure of hand grenades was perpetrated in consequence of criminal negligence in arms accounting and guarding by militia workers, and because of the presence of a counterrevolutionary element in the militia personnel, which flagrantly perpetrated counterrevolutionary activities.

"Accounting for and guarding of arms, especially in the militia, remains on a wholly unsatisfactory level, and the enemy is taking advantage of this.

"Together with this, it must be noted that, in seizing weapons from the enemy, the NKVD personnel does not pay proper attention to the control of arms-accounting and security.

"The seizure of arms from the counterrevolutionary element and from the inhabitants in general, usually proceeds with impermissible tardiness, and the results are extremely insignificant. The seizures are carried out perfunctorily and singly.

"On the other hand, we know that the counterrevolutionary element on the territory of Lithuanian S.D.R. possesses large numbers of weapons." (Hearing before the Select Committee to Investigate the Incorporation of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R. House of Representatives... Part I, p. 342).

Dr. P. Padalis testified at the hearings of the Kersten Committee that the hand grenades mentioned in the secret report were seized by the members of the underground, and that they actually were in his custody for a period of several weeks.

The mass deportations on June 14, 1941, seriously damaged the organizational set-up. Also very disappointing was the fact that the Russian-German war did not begin on the expected day. The headquarters of LAF were transferred from Vilnius to Kaunas at an even faster rate, and the communication network was rebuilt in anticipation of the hour for an armed uprising.

The Execution

The fateful hour arrived on June 22, 1941, with the outbreak of the long expected war. Groups of underground activists immediately began executing their assignments, with the main operations centered in the city of Kaunas.

Around 11 p.m. on June 22 one of these activists details, executing the assignment to interrupt telephone communication, seized the main Russian military telephone exchange in Viliampolė, a suburb of Kaunas, and the city exchange in the main post office. Immediately the group leader notified the Soviet military commandant that German paratroopers had been dropped in the vicinity of Kaunas. After this intentionally misleading message the military telephone center was demolished and the telephone service in the city was discontinued, thus leaving the Russian troops in the city without telephone communications. Further progress of the insurrection is described as follows by Dr. Adolfas Darnusis, one of the officers of the LAF headquarters:

"At 3 a.m. of June 23rd, we gathered at the headquarters, located in the Kaunas home for the aged... and prepared the declaration of the restitution of Lithuanian independence and a short statement which were to be broadcast later that day. In the meantime throughout the night our men were at work in the studios of the Kaunas radio station.

Secretly stored spare parts were collected and delivered to the broadcasting studios by Red Cross ambulances. Then the roads leading to the transmitter were mined by Mr. J. V., an engineer, with his home-made land mines.

At 9 a.m. we were notified that broadcasting could start within a half hour and immediately left for the broadcasting studios. At our destination the gate was guarded by a group of activists and we were admitted after an exchange of passwords. The defensive strength of our group at the studios was very moderate, since we had no machine guns. Only later an airplane machine gun was installed at one of the windows.

Undoubtedly, a larger group of the Reds could have destroyed our group very quickly, but our strength at that moment was in determination and not in weapons. The carefully planned assignment had to be carried out, and there was no time to wait for reinforcements ...

At 9:20 a.m. we arrived at the broadcasting studios of the Kaunas radio station, and after a few short tests we contacted the transmitter (located in Ažuolynas, a suburban park of Kaunas. Ed.), by telephone. The leader of the group of activists at the transmitter then informed us that Ažuolynas park was full of Red soldiers and warned that his group would not be able to defend that transmitter in case of an attack after the broadcast had started.

After a short conference, we decided that a postponement was impossible but decided not to use loudspeakers in the streets in order to reduce the possibility of an attack.

Mr. Levas Prapuolenis then notified the group at the transmitter of the decision at the headquarters as follows: "...Request not to prepare transmitter for immediate use; broadcast will start within a few minutes..." The order was immediately acknowledged and executed.

Then speaking for the headquarters of the LAF L. Prapuolenis announced the restoration of independent Lithuania and formation of the Provisional Government. Then a short statement by L. Prapuolenis as the representative of LAF was read, and the broadcast was concluded with the singing of the Lithuanian national anthem.

We shook hands, having successfully concluded our main assignment.

Around 6 p.m. of June 24 the entire city of Kaunas was completely in the hands of LAF..." (Information taken from "I Laisve", 1954. No. 3-40).

However, now it was necessary to hold the city against the troops of the Red army and armed local communists who did not flee the city, and these operations demanded numerous heroic sacrifices from the Lithuanian insurgents.

Following the example of Kaunas, the insurrection quickly spread throughout Lithuania. Out of the estimated 90,000 armed participants in the revolt, about 4000 fell in fighting against the occupants. However, the ultimate sacrifice by these men carried high significance for the entire Lithuanian nation, since their blood testified that the propaganda of the occupant contending that Lithuania had voluntarily joined the Soviet Union was an absurd lie.

To the western world of today, which is beginning to notice more and more the resistance movements on the other side of the Iron Curtain, this insurrection, as well as the present underground movement of the Lithuanian nation, may well serve as an indication where to find dependable and effective allies in the struggle against world communism.

** * * The whole world must know that our proposal is not of a temporary character, has not been caused by incidental conjunctural circumstances, but is an expression of our constant termless volicy of peace, of which the fundamental element is preservation of independence of the young states which you are representing here. * * **

Mr. Litvinov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs in 1934. on the occasion of the extension of the pact of non-aggression, concluded between Lithuania and Soviet Russia on Sept. 28, 1926.

** * * You must take a good look at reality and understand that in the future small nations will have to disappear. Your Lithuania along with other Baltic nations, including Finland, will have to join the glorious family of the Soviet Union. Therefore you should begin now to initiate your people into the Soviet system which in the future shall reign everywhere, throughout all Europe — put into practice earlier in some places, as in the Baltic nations — later in others. * * **

Mr. Molotov on July 2, 1940.

