

THE WORLD LITHUANIAN COMMUNITY

On the 28-31 of August, the World Lithuanian Congress took place in New York City. Concurrently a representative exhibition of Lithuanian art and a chamber music concert were presented, at the Riverside Museum; while in Carnegie Hall the combined forces of four choires, soloists and a symphony orchestra performed. Thousands of Lithuanians from the U.S.A. and other Western countries gathered in New York City for the occasion. 112 official delegates to the congress represented Western countries having substantial Lithuanian colonies, including the United States, Canada, England, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Germany, France, Italy and others. In all these countries Lithuanians have already been organized into national communities. And with this congress the process of welding these national groupings into one World Lithuanian Community reached its conclusion. In view of this occasion we would like to acquaint our readers with the reasons for the existence of the Lithuanian World Community and with the ideas upon which this community is based.



Concert at Carnegie Hall

Photo V. Mazelis

What needs did originally evoke the idea of a World Lithuanian Community? The old immigrants founded many organizations, particularly in the United States, where Lithuanians are most numerous (up to 500,000 or more). The new immigrants, the former displaced persons, also founded many organizations upon their arrival in the various countries. And truly, there was no need for another organization, but there was a need to combine all of the Lithuanians scattered throughout numerous countries and numerous organizations into one. The need was two-fold.

On the one hand, every organization not only unites but also separates. A religious organization, obviously, cannot include atheists among its members and inversely, Christians do not belong to a society of freethinkers. And if in other cases the division is not as extreme, it still exists. This differentiation leads to certain tensions which may develop into real conflicts. It is natural, that free men differ in their opinions. But from the national point of view there is a danger that these differences will obscure the essential point: national ties. **Lithuanian unity is the central idea upon which the World Lithuanian**

Community is based. In principle, this community unites all Lithuanians without exception, for it excludes only those who have sold themselves to the Soviet Union. These are a minority of the older immigrants who have been deluded by Communism. Regardless of the individual's religious, political or social views, the Lithuanian Community unites all into one body, the heart of which is **Lithuanian brotherhood and Lithuanian consciousness**. Lithuanian brotherhood bridges all differences, while Lithuanian consciousness illuminates the fact that in any battle the essential tie cannot be forgotten. The Lithuanian Community, in organized form expresses the Lithuanian will to preserve their nationality according to the slogan, "Lithuanians we were born, Lithuanians we must remain."

Secondly, it is necessary that the natural feeling of brotherhood become a united will to preserve it from degeneration into futile sentimentalism. Individual organizations (religious, fraternal and others) can only fulfill the limited functions for which they were founded. But they cannot perform those functions which demand the joint effort of all. Yet the refugees have the duty of preserving all the activities and institutions of the free cultural life which in normal times are fostered by the state. For the realization of these common aims the Lithuanian refugees united into a World Lithuanian Community. The genesis of the idea first occurred some ten years ago among displaced persons living in Germany at that time. These people had abandoned their native land, not of their own free will, but due to force. Some had been deported by the Nazis for forced labor in Germany. Others fled their homeland from the approaching Communist terror. Both groups tragically experienced the loss of Lithuanian independence, when the end of the war did not bring her freedom but a second occupation by Communist forces. Whether Nazi deportees or Soviet refugees, both found themselves sharing the common fate of a refugee. Having no other alternative, they emigrated to various countries. Although grateful and loyal to the new countries which accepted them, they, nevertheless, remain a unique kind of newcomers — **immigrants with the consciousness of political refugees**. The normal immigrants leave their homeland in search for a better livelihood and more or less sever their ties with the native land. They exchange homelands hoping for a better and happier environment. A political refugee, on the contrary, does not seek a higher standard of living but is primarily fighting his political fate. Not the search for happiness, but rather loyalty to one's self is the main concern of such a refugee.

For many of them personal welfare problems hardly exist: during the ten years of immi-grational life a comfortable standard of living has been achieved. Usually newcomers would be quite satisfied with this achievement, but a comfortable standard of living is not sufficient for political immigrants. Personal welfare cannot supplant the feeling of tragedy in face of the threatened destruction of one's nation. Nations are mortal. In this age it is not difficult to annihilate a nation of about three millions. Genocide is being carried out in Lithuania while the world is silent and refuses to see what it does not want to see. No Lithuanian, faced with this tragic possibility, can remain satisfied only with personal well-being and enjoy his personal happiness. The question does not concern only the restoration of a Lithuanian state, but it involves the life or death of the whole Lithuanian nation. In view of this, every Lithuanian exerts the will to remain within his own nationality regardless of the country assigned to him by fate. The World Lithuanian Community is the best means of expressing the will of Lithuanians in the free world **to remain within the nationality**, to preserve the ties and to remain Lithuanian wherever they may be.

But how can this will be realized in the "melting pot" reality which is the lot of all immigrants? How can the loyalty to one's native land be reconciled with loyalty to the new country? The problem can be solved without recourse to the "melting pot." And although the "melting pot" is the usual fate of the immigrant, it is an essentially futile solution. Futile from two points of view: that of the immigrant himself and that of this new country. For denationalization always implies de-spiritualization; all interests are reduced to the primitive drive for personal happiness; in fact this is equivalent to the stifling of all the profounder interests, for it involves abandoning all roots in the spiritual reality which is the respective national tradition. And in this manner, the country which gains this individual gains nothing more than mere "labor force." This "labor force" can be desirable and valuable as "raw material." Its social integration, however, always gives rise to problems. (It is not surprising that the question of personal and social adjustment, as well as juvenile delinquency, experiences its greatest intensity in the United States, which has frequently been identified with the "melting pot" approach).

The World Lithuanian Community is the expression of the Lithuanian determination to become acclimated not through passive submission, but through positive contribution of their culture to the country which has become their new homeland. This is determination to become integrated not through the loss of self, but through the preservation of one's self, and at the same time through the contribution of all that is valuable in the national tradition. This is the more difficult road, but it is certainly more fruitful. From the personal point of view, an individual, determined to follow this road, also chooses to face the tension between two cultures. In certain cases this cultural tension may give rise to problems of adequate adjustment. At the same time, however, this determination enables the individual to integrate himself freely and creatively within the new country rather than blindly submerge in the "melting pot." All countries are worthy of respect and patriotic love. But love, which remains blind, is of little value. True love is never satisfied with that which is, for it is always accompanied by the search for new roads and the imperative of profounder ideals. All countries are worthy of being valued, but no country is the "Kingdom of God," the final perfection. And, therefore, those who can enrich the cultures of their new countries by means of their particular national heritage are always of greater value than those who lose themselves and feel that the adoption was successful, while in reality it only added to the masses which are equally international in their primitive-ness. Freedom not to think, "peace of mind," Coca-Cola, portable radios, television crime stories and tasteless advertisements is not what America stands for; it means freedom of thought, the pioneering spirit, Emerson and James, Th. Wolfe and E. Hemingway, E. O'Neill and W. Faulkner. The same analogy is applicable to any other country. The acquisition of new customs and learning new language do not constitute complete integration. The loss of one's self is not necessary in this

process. Everywhere it is possible to remain oneself and everywhere this is necessary in order that one's individuality could enrich others. In founding the World Lithuanian Community, the Lithuanians of the free world have determined not to succumb to the "melting pot," but to remain what they are and at the same time make their own valuable contribution.

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