

LITHUANIA 1940

REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE



Alfred Erich Senn

On the Boundary of Two Worlds
Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics

LITHUANIA 1940
REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE

On the Boundary of Two Worlds: Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics

9

Editor

Leonidas Donskis, Professor of Political Science and Philosophy, and Director of the Political Science and Diplomacy School at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Editorial and Advisory Board

Timo Airaksinen, University of Helsinki, Finland

Egidijus Aleksandravicius, Lithuanian Emigration Institute;
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Stefano Bianchini, University of Bologna, Forlì Campus, Italy

Endre Bojtar, Central European University; Budapest, Hungary

Kristian Gerner, University of Uppsala, Sweden

John Hiden, University of Glasgow, UK

Mikko Lagerpetz, Estonian Institute of Humanities, Estonia

Andreas Lawaty, Nordost-Institut; Lüneburg, Germany

Olli Loukola, University of Helsinki, Finland

Hannu Niemi, University of Helsinki, Finland

Alvydas Nikzentaitis, Lithuanian History Institute, Lithuania

Yves Plasseraud, Paris, France

Rein Raud, University of Helsinki, Finland, and Estonian Institute
of Humanities, Estonia

Alfred Erich Senn, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, and
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

David Smith, University of Glasgow, UK

Saulius Suziedelis, Millersville University, USA

Joachim Tauber, Nordost-Institut; Lüneburg, Germany

Tomas Venclova, Yale University, USA

LITHUANIA 1940
REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE

Alfred Erich Senn



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2007

Cover photo: “Hill of Crosses” (Lithuania).

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of
“ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for
documents - Requirements for permanence”.

ISBN-13: 978-90-420-2225-6

©Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2007

Printed in the Netherlands

Contents

	<i>Introduction</i>	1
I.	The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact	7
II.	The Vilnius Complex	27
III.	A Trojan Horse?	49
IV.	An Uncertain Winter	65
V.	The Soviet Invasion	85
VI.	The Refugee	103
VII.	Moscow's Proconsul	119
VIII.	The People's Government	135
IX.	From Underground	151
X.	"The Moor Can Go"	169
XI.	The Class Struggle	185
XII.	The Elections	205
XIII.	Sovietization	225
XIV.	The Balance Sheet	243
	<i>Notes</i>	255
	<i>Index</i>	287

Introduction

The purpose of this study is twofold. Its main focus is on the way in which Soviet officials arranged Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940. Its second purpose is to examine the collapse of the authoritarian regime that ruled Lithuania from December 1926 until the Soviet invasion of June 1940. The time period covered runs from the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, on August 23, 1939, until Lithuania's formal incorporation into the Soviet Union in August 1940. The study focuses mainly on political developments and not so much on the economic and social changes introduced by Soviet rule; the "sovietization" of Lithuania after its incorporation into the Soviet Union is a much larger subject that demands a broader examination than this study can offer. Similarly the question of Stalin's general motives in his foreign policy of 1939–1940, while certainly relevant to this subject, lies basically beyond its purview; the study focuses first of all on *the process* of the Soviet Union's formal incorporation of Lithuania.

In a secret protocol attached to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union divided East Central Europe between themselves; by this agreement, Lithuania fell into the German "sphere of interest." Germany subsequently traded Lithuania to the Soviet Union in exchange for a part of Poland that had first been designated for Soviet occupation. After Moscow had forced the Lithuanians to accept the presence of Soviet troops within their borders, Lithuania eventually underwent a radical social/political revolution and became a part of the Soviet Union. Soviet scholars long called the very idea that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact included a secret protocol a western fabrication, a falsification of history, and when they finally admitted the protocol's existence, they dismissed the thought that Soviet troops stationed in Lithuania had anything to do with the events leading up to Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR. Lithuanians, they insisted, had carried out a social revolution and of their own free will had requested incorporation into the Soviet Union. Few Lithuanian historians today accept such interpretations.

The speed with which the old order in Lithuania collapsed and the new one developed is striking. In August 1940, the Soviet Union swallowed all three Baltic states—Latvia and Estonia in addition to Lithuania. Some authors have suggested that the job of sovietizing Lithuania was easier than Moscow had expected, and contemporary German observers remarked that during June and July 1940 the Lithuanians showed more enthusiasm in popular demonstrations than did the Latvians or Estonians. It is not the purpose of this study, however, to compare the Lithuanian experience with the Latvian or Estonian experience; the purpose here is to examine the

process of the collapse of the old regime in Lithuania and the country's transition to becoming a union republic of the Soviet Union.

Historians have more or less established the major landmarks in the process of the Soviet Union's incorporation of Lithuania, and to recount enormous detail here would probably be unnecessary effort—there is, moreover, an ocean of details yet to pour out of the archives. The interesting problem, at least to me, lies more in the way that interpretations of those events clash than in the account of the events themselves. Therefore I have spread commentary on specific documents, specific events, the actions of specific persons, and generally the major lines of interpretation throughout the text. A critical reader may decide that I “may well” have used the phrase “may well” too much, but I have allowed myself some freedom for speculating on questions for which I have no clear answer, so to speak jumping the gaps between documents. My hope here is to stimulate others to investigate these questions more thoroughly.

A Lithuanian reader today might object that I have spent too much time discussing Soviet interpretations of processes and events, but Soviet historiography produced a considerable library of works describing the events of 1940. Western historians have used them, and these works have influenced western views in one way or another. Soviet historiography grossly misrepresented the spirit and actions of the time, usually omitting the regime's use of physical and psychological terror and also the new regime's glorification of Stalin. The exhibitions of popular enthusiasm that Soviet historians stressed only represented the surface of the “revolution.” Striking fear into the hearts of opponents, whether real or only potential, was an important tactic in the Soviet program for action, just as praise for the Stalinist system and its master was also a vital part of the program. Separating Stalin from the real, daily image of the Soviet Union in the 1930s falsified historical memory. The practice of ignoring Moscow's pro-German propaganda in 1939–1940 falsified historical memory. The efforts of some to argue that “everything would have been fine if not for Stalin” also distorted the reality of the day; Stalin was an overwhelming figure in the Soviet order; serious historiography of this period cannot just omit mention of his name. In turn, such manipulation of the historical evidence produced books and interpretations that still sit in libraries throughout the world, and I feel the need to respond.¹

Complicating this effort to evaluate Soviet historiography is the fact that some Lithuanian historians, trained in Soviet times, object to being held responsible for what was published under their names in those days. There is no clear way out of this situation. When Mikhail Gorbachev's advisor, Aleksandr Iakovlev, came to Lithuania in August 1988 and heard complaints about the distortions of Soviet historiography, he declared that the historians themselves had written all that material. The historians had of course been working under strict rules of censorship, but even when the rules had been

relaxed, there were established historians whose first post-Soviet writings indicated that they had in fact believed much of what they had written in Soviet times—as, indeed there are still people who believe what those historians wrote. Now some would prefer that those works be forgotten. Insofar as the materials published in Soviet times are still in libraries and on book shelves, this study must respond to them.

The issues considered in this study, although now over 65 years old, have echoes even in the twenty-first century. In the winter of 2004–2005, the presidents of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia agonized over whether to attend a summit gathering of world leaders in Moscow to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II. The defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 had only reinforced the Soviet hold on the three states, and now voices in all three were insisting that their presidents should attend this celebration only if the Russian government apologized for the action of its Soviet predecessor. The president of Russia, however, had no intention of apologizing. The presidents therefore had to choose between participating in a major world gathering or boycotting it in the name of historical grievances—or, as this study considers the events of 1940, in the name of historical “interpretations.”

“Interpretation” includes historiography, opinions, memories, and presumptions, together with clichés, self-delusion, and mystification, in short almost anything that might influence and color the understanding of a person studying or simply discussing the events of 1940 in Lithuania. The term “collective memory” is now popular, and this study experiments with this idea. But a major problem arises in defining the “collective” whose memory is being plumbed. Under Soviet rule the residents of Lithuania as a whole lost much of their sense of community; the society fractionalized into antagonistic sections. And conflicting memories now keep that fractionalization alive, in some ways even intensifying it. Contradictions and unconvincing arguments abound together with controversy. The polemical literature is enormous: Some works read like legal indictments, others tell heroic tales. Too much happened too quickly; “memories” could not absorb all the details; and then the surviving and conflicting “memories” nurtured feelings of persecution and suffering.

There is no way to reconcile the polar interpretations of events in Lithuania between August 1939 and August 1940. Soviet historians pictured the events of 1940 as a mass revolution in which the Communist Party provided the elite leadership that the situation demanded. The first step was the formation of a “people’s government,” “a transitional form on the road to a socialist state,” a “popular front” made up of the “non-communist anti-fascist Left” and supported by the “petty bourgeoisie.” As Soviet Lithuanian historians put it, “The theory of people’s democracy, the anti-fascist revolution, at that time constituted the basis for a new strategic orientation of the communist movement.”²

Post-Soviet Russian historians have tended to cling to this imagery. As the epitome of more recent Russian interpretations that the Lithuanians in 1940 wanted to join the Soviet Union, one can take the Russian Foreign Ministry's formal statement on the subject made public on June 9, 2000. The relevant part of the Russian declaration reads as follows – in the interest of offering the most accurate translation, I have provided alternative translations of certain Russian words.

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 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.

In this way, it is unjust/not objective [*nepravomerno*] to qualify the entrance of Lithuania into the make-up of the USSR as the result of unilateral actions of the latter.

This interpretation will be the subject of continuing consideration throughout this study.³

Diametrically conflicting with this is the view that the Red Army and the Soviet political police forcefully imposed alien rule on a people, staunchly anti-Soviet, who remained loyal to the old regime: In the heady days of 1988, an enthusiast cried, "Resistance began on June 16." In this argument, Lithuania became a sacrifice on the altar of Great Power machinations, and the world owes Lithuania reparations as well as apologies.

Between these two polar interpretations lies a broad spectrum of controversy concerning collaboration, deceit, coercion, and falsification, not to mention posturing. A more careful interpretation, with which I tend to agree, suggested, "The sovietization of Lithuania was not the product of the evolution of Lithuania itself, but the work of foreign forces that smothered the Lithuanian state and for this prepared a special framework as if it were the deeds of Lithuania itself."⁴ This is essentially the general approach embodied in this study.

Developing this study has been a fascinating experience. I first became intrigued by the problem when I began working as a member of the Latvian Commission of Historians studying the Second World War. The Russian Foreign Ministry's declaration of June 2000 provoked me to

respond, and when students in one of my classes in Lithuania could not clearly explain why they called the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania in 1940 “illegal,” I decided it would be interesting to investigate the entire complex of problems more carefully. I am particularly indebted to Leonidas Donskis for his encouragement when I suggested to him that I might study this topic.

As I then involved myself in this subject, it became more and more of a personal document, sending me back to my own personal experiences as well as my past historical research. Opinion and judgment play major roles in these pages, and therefore I have chosen to use the first person singular pronoun. There are significant gaps in the documentation, and in a number of instances I have constructed my own hypothetical bridges over these gaps. Accordingly, modern rules of “deconstruction” more or less demand that I make clear my own relationship to this subject. My parents met in Lithuania in 1923: My father, a Swiss, was a linguist who taught at the University of Lithuania; my mother, a native of the Kaunas region, had grown up trilingual, speaking Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian. My parents left Lithuania with their two daughters in 1930–1931. I was born in the United States, and I grew up with an American education. The events discussed in this study severed my parents’ connection with my mother’s family in Lithuania; we had no news of their fate until 1957, some 17 years later, and four years after the death of Joseph Stalin. Even when I visited Lithuania for the first time in 1960, I could not meet my grandfather—Soviet practice forbade me to leave the city of Vilnius and he, then over 90 years old, was unable to make the trip from Kaunas. As a result, we never did meet. I make no claim to being “objective”; to me “objective” as an adjective modifying an opinion or an interpretation is a meaningless word. My goal has been to offer a “balanced” account, justifying my conclusions.

Such a book is never the product of just one person’s travail, and I wish here to express my gratitude to a few of the great number of people who have helped me. Leonidas Donskis provided the initial impetus by encouraging me to take up this subject; Gediminas Rudis provided invaluable advice and aid to my efforts, as an outsider, to comprehend the issues and to find materials; and Gediminas Bašinskas shared with me the enormous collection of documents that he had amassed in preparing his own doctoral dissertation. As always I could also count on advice, ideas, and help from Alfonsas Eidintas, Liūtas Mockūnas, Česlovas Laurinavičius, and Linas Saldukas. Nijolė Maslauskienė gave me vital instructions on how to mine the riches of Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas. In addition one always needs the help of librarians: Silvija Velavičienė of the Mažvydas National Library in Vilnius, and Janina Masalskienė of Vytautas Magnus University Library in Kaunas gave me invaluable assistance. I owe special thanks to my Latvian colleagues Aivars Strange and Irene Sneidere. In addition, I want to thank the staffs at Išeivijos Institutas (Kaunas), Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas (Vilnius), the Central State Archive in Vilnius, the archive of the Lithuanian

Academy of Sciences and also the Manuscript Sections of the Academy of Sciences Library, the Vilnius University Library, and the Mažvydas National Library, the Laisvės Kovotojų Archyvas (Kaunas), and the Kaunas Public Library. My special thanks go to Daiva Simanavičiūtė for her work in preparing the final text for publication. Without the help of all these people, I could not have completed this study.

None of the persons I have mentioned, of course, should be held responsible for my views as presented in this study. If—and when—they find mistakes, I hope they can all feel that they helped me avoid even worse ones. I thank them all.

Alfred Erich Senn
Kaunas, 2006

I

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Article I: Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other either individually or jointly with other powers.

—Treaty of Nonaggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, August 23, 1939

“In the hands of the diplomats of the capitalist countries, nonaggression pacts, declarations of friendship, etc.... serve only as a form of artificial fog under the protection of which a war or an attempt at a sudden forcible overthrow can most easily and surely be prepared in the given international situation.”

—E. V. Tarle

“Of course the falsifiers of history and similar reactionaries are displeased with the fact that the Soviet Union was able to make good use of the Soviet-German pact to strengthen its defences; that it succeeded in shifting its frontiers far to the West and thus putting up a barrier to the unhampered eastward advance of German aggression....”

—*Falsifiers of History. An Historical Document on the Origins of World War II* (New York: Committee for Promotion of Peace, 1948), p. 49

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression treaty on August 23, 1939, just one week before German troops attacked Poland, the state that lay between these two giants. Remembered by many for the names of the two signatories, Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Viacheslav Molotov and German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact set off a process that eventually created a new geopolitical stage for Eastern Europe. In the 1920s, Germany and the Soviet Union had cooperated as a bloc opposing the so-called “Versailles system” in which England and France had supported the emergence of a north-south belt of smaller states between the two giants. In the 1930s Germany and the Soviet Union had become antagonists and rivals, but now, in 1939, they agreed to divide Eastern Europe into their own respective “spheres of interest,” essentially restoring the geopolitical landscape that had existed before the First World War. Two years later the two powers were at war with each other; and just four years after that, the Soviet Union, having established dominion over Germany's share of the spoils of 1939, controlled an empire that collapsed only in the last decade of the twentieth century. Even after the break-up of the Soviet Union, diplomatic turmoil has continued to swirl around the memory of the pact and its significance.

In the summer of 1939 the Soviet Union had been negotiating with England and France for the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact aimed at

containing German expansion. Complicated by the fact that Germany and the Soviet Union did not have a common frontier, these talks had involved discussions about guaranteeing the security of states bordering on Germany and the Soviet Union, including the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Finland, as well as the two Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia. The Soviet Union had insisted on its right to send troops and sea forces into the territory of its neighbors; the USSR's neighbors objected strongly to the thought of Soviet troops moving onto their territory. These negotiations collapsed with the signing of the German-Soviet treaty.

When the two ostensible antagonists shocked the world by announcing their "non-aggression" pact, outsiders immediately asked the question "What had these two powers agreed to?" For the better part of a decade, these two states had claimed to represent opposite ideological poles, even clashing in the civil war that had wracked Spain since 1936. As one historian put it, "coupled with the knowledge of the far-reaching demands that the Soviet Union had put forward to the Western Powers," western observers suspected "that the Soviet Union must have received from Hitler more than paper assurances of non-aggression."⁵ It soon became clear that the Germans had indeed offered the Soviets a better deal than the western powers had, but Moscow continually insisted that the talks with the western powers had failed not because Germany had offered more but because France and England had been "insincere" in pursuing an agreement.

From the Soviet point of view there would seem to have been two major considerations: security and the prospect of revolution abroad that would advance the interests of the Soviet Union. The pact with Germany allowed the Soviet Union to stay out of the fighting in the first two years of World War II; but there would remain questions as to how the Soviet Union might be affected by the conflict. In particular, in Moscow's view of Europe, the Baltic states held a geopolitical position analogous to the position of the Netherlands and Belgium in British foreign policy; the Soviet Union did not want to see either Great Britain or Germany in control of the Baltic states as a possible base for attacking the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Stalin could welcome war between the Germans and the western allies England and France; such a conflict would weaken both camps and lay the road open to the expansion of Soviet power in Europe. It is not clear which of these considerations came first to Stalin's mind in the fall of 1939, but they did not contradict each other. In the end, the Soviet Union obtained far more from the pact with Germany than it had demanded of the British and the French. The exact terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were not, however, immediately clear to outside observers.

The announcement of the pact aroused special concern in the three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Barely a generation old, born at the end of the First World War in the ruins of the Romanov empire, all three now lived under authoritarian governments that had previously watched

nervously while Germany and the Soviet Union had denounced each other and had called on, even challenged the rest of the world to choose between them. Now, when war in Europe seemed imminent, these two great powers were proclaiming friendship. What had happened to that great ideological spectrum? The Baltic governments found themselves adrift in a dangerous new world that, without their participation or even knowledge, had in fact transformed them into objects of barter.

The Nazi-Soviet agreement provided for the division of East Central Europe between the two powers. To be sure, territorial expansion usually does not usually constitute a part of a non-aggression pact, but in the 1930s, as the noted Soviet historian Eugene Tarle pointed out in an essay he wrote for aspiring Soviet diplomats, such pacts could create “artificial fog, under the protection of which a war or an attempt at a sudden forcible overthrow can most easily and surely be prepared.”⁶ For Nazi Germany the pact constituted the last diplomatic preparation for its war against Poland. For the Soviet Union, it meant neutrality benevolently inclined toward Berlin in the Nazi-Polish conflict, and it opened the way for the first revision of the Soviet western frontier since the signing of the Treaty of Riga with Poland in March 1921.

In a secret protocol to the non-aggression pact, the two powers defined their respective “spheres of interest” in Poland and the Baltic. In the Baltic region, the Germans recognized Soviet claims on Finland as well as on Estonia and Latvia, while Lithuania was to fall to Germany. As the pact established these provisions,

1. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the regions making up the Baltic states (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) the northern frontier of Lithuania will simultaneously serve as the frontier of the spheres of interest of German and the USSR. In this, Lithuania’s interest in connection with the Vilnius district is recognized by both parties.

2. In the event of territorial and political rearrangement of the regions making up the Polish State, the frontier of the spheres of interest of Germany and the USSR will approximately follow the line of the Narev, Vistula, and Sana rivers.⁷

In its negotiations with England and France, the Soviet Union had insisted on the right to send its troops into its Baltic neighbors—Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. These governments had themselves declared that they did not want such protection. Now Germany was giving the Soviets a free hand.

After Germany invaded Poland on September 1, the Soviet Union waited for the fall of Warsaw, the Polish capital, to claim its share of Poland, but although the German Blitzkrieg moved quickly across Poland, Polish forces determinedly defended Warsaw. On September 17, even though

Warsaw still resisted, the Soviet Union announced that the Polish state no longer existed, and Moscow sent the Red Army into eastern Poland, per its agreement with Berlin. While the Soviet Union quickly arranged for the incorporation of this territory, Germany completed its destruction of the Polish state.⁸

The terms of the Nazi-Soviet agreement were still secret, and Soviet sources insisted that the Soviet government was protecting the population of eastern Poland from the chaos of the collapse the Polish state. Neither side wanted to reveal that they had already agreed on the division of Eastern Europe; they both wanted to move on without their targets' realizing their ultimate intentions. But behind the curtain of Nazi-Soviet friendship, there was nevertheless determined competition between the two powers.

As Germany and the Soviet Union divided Poland, the four Baltic states mentioned in the protocol remained intact, but the two powers had other plans for their future. The protocol's division of the region, leaving Lithuania to the Germans and the other three to the Soviet Union, represented a compromise, but it also suggests that the Soviet Union had the stronger position in the negotiations. Without the benevolent neutrality of the Soviet Union, Berlin would have faced the prospect of a two-front war; the German government needed Soviet neutrality. Germany had a historic interest in Latvia and Estonia, and it had at first demanded at least the western part of Latvia, known as Courland. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, insisted that it had historic claims on all four Baltic states as successor states of the Tsarist Russian empire. Since, however, the USSR had no common frontier with Lithuania, Moscow for the moment recognized German political and economic interests in that country. The Germans had also insisted that in the partitioning of Poland, Lithuania should get the city of Vilnius/Wilno, which the Poles had ruled since 1920; the Soviet Union agreed without argument.⁹

Vilnius and its surrounding region now became a key issue in Nazi-Soviet relations as well as a major factor in Lithuania's further history. (Insisting that Vilnius was their historic capital; the Lithuanians called Kaunas, the actual seat of their government, only their "provisional capital.") While accepting German claims to Lithuania, the Soviet Union did not abandon its interest in that state, and it willingly agreed to assign Vilnius to the Lithuanians. In its peace treaty with Lithuania on July 12, 1920, Soviet Russia had recognized the city as part of Lithuania, but in October 1920 Polish troops seized the region, and Poland had ruled the city since that time.¹⁰ Now when the Soviet Union sent its troops into eastern Poland, the Red Army would be occupying Vilnius. We shall be considering how the Soviet Union systematically eroded Germany's designs on Lithuania; for now it seems fair to suggest that from the first Stalin wanted to include Lithuania in his share of the deal. In any case, the secret protocol left Lithuania's future much more in doubt than might appear at first reading.

Germany made its formal opening move toward Lithuania on August 29, three days before the invasion of Poland. Ribbentrop instructed the German envoy in Kaunas, Erich Zechlin, to notify the Lithuanian government that in the approaching conflict between Germany and Poland, Berlin demanded that Lithuania observe “completely unimpeachable neutrality toward us” or else Berlin would be “obliged to safeguard our interests in such a way as the resulting situation required.” Zechlin was also to point out that as European frontiers change, “the way is open to a fundamental change in the general political situation in Eastern Europe.” Ribbentrop was referring, of course, to the Lithuanian claim on the city of Vilnius. Some Lithuanians had already been speculating about the possibility of obtaining Vilnius in the shadow of the looming conflict between Germany and Poland. The Lithuanian government, however, still had no knowledge of the Nazi-Soviet division of Eastern Europe, and it responded to the German initiatives noncommittally.

Making clear that it considered “unimpeachable neutrality” to mean full cooperation with the Third Reich, the German foreign ministry then suggested that the Lithuanians might stage “some kind of demonstration on the Polish frontier,” and on August 30 it directed Zechlin to state “even more clearly” that “in the event of a territorial rearrangement taking place between Germany and Poland, Lithuanian claims to the Vilna area might also to a large extent be taken into consideration.” The Lithuanian government, however, under pressure from the British and the French not to take any action against the Poles, only affirmed its determination to remain absolutely neutral. On September 1, as German troops marched into Poland, Lithuania’s authoritarian president, Antanas Smetona, publicly declared: “The Republic of Lithuania remains neutral in the war that has just broken out between foreign powers.” In the first days of the war, Smetona ignored requests by both the German and the Polish ministers for meetings with him.¹¹

From Berlin’s point of view, if Lithuania ruled Vilnius, it would be a more valuable and loyal vassal, but if the Lithuanians did not take the city themselves, given its location in northeastern Poland, Vilnius would obviously fall to the Red Army—not the German Wehrmacht. (The Lithuanians seemed to have had some hope that the Red Army, which was allegedly marching to help fellow Slavs, the Belarusians and the Ukrainians, would stay out of Vilnius—this was not to be.) With the Red Army in Vilnius, Germany would have to deal with a much more complicated situation; the city and its environs would then be a significant entrepot for Soviet influence in Kaunas. Therefore the Germans wanted the Lithuanians to act: a Lithuanian attack on Vilnius would be of only negligible significance for German military plans, but such an action would reaffirm German arguments that the Poland was a raptor state. The Germans compared the Lithuanians’ concern for Vilnius with their own designs on

Danzig/Gdansk. Vilnius, they declared, had been “stolen by a Polish coup.”¹² Berlin urged the Lithuanians to act.

The Lithuanians had little understanding of the stakes involved in their behavior. The Germans were pressing them to move against the Poles. The English and the French were pressing them to remain absolutely neutral, and the Lithuanian government feared to commit itself. Once the war had begun, Polish refugees flowed into Lithuania, and even Polish soldiers sought refuge. Some 5,000 soldiers fled to Lithuania in the night of September 17/18, after the Soviet Union had announced that the Red Army would march. In the first months of war, most of Lithuania’s leaders believed that the English and the French would eventually triumph; the German minister in Kaunas informed Berlin that the Lithuanian government appeared to favor the Allied cause. For the moment, however, the Lithuanian government was only too aware that the German Wehrmacht and the Soviet Red Army stood much closer to Kaunas than any Allied force did.

Suddenly the winds, as felt in Kaunas, began to shift. On September 16, Molotov informed the German ambassador in Moscow, Graf Friedrich von der Schulenburg, that the Red Army would march into Poland perhaps as early as the 17th, and he inquired about German intentions in Vilnius. The German government now decided to avoid conflict with Moscow by ending its encouragement of the Lithuanians, and the German Foreign Ministry instructed Zechlin to “drop the subject of Vilna; please do not respond should it be taken up again by Lithuania, but rather cut short any conversations on the subject.”¹³ The German Foreign Ministry also protested to the Lithuanians about the “rumors” that Germany had been encouraging the Lithuanians to march on Vilnius. On the 17th the Soviet government declared that the Polish state no longer existed, and it announced that, in order to protect the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations in the Polish eastern lands, the Red Army was marching into the region. Warsaw had not fallen, but Moscow declared, “Warsaw as the capital of Poland no longer exists.” Soviet troops reached the city of Vilnius on September 19; on the 21st, its troops came to Poland’s former frontier with Lithuania, which Lithuanians always called “the demarcation line” rather than “the frontier.” Lithuania and the Soviet Union had a common frontier.

New, complicated negotiations loomed. Berlin asked how the Soviet Union intended to award the city to the Lithuanians; Moscow responded that it was not yet time to discuss “details.” When the Lithuanian minister in Moscow also asked about the future disposition of Vilnius, Molotov put him off. In Molotov’s words, Vilnius had to be a part of a general settlement of issues between Lithuanian and the Soviet Union as well as a part “the entire Baltic complex.” The Lithuanian minister reported home that he considered this response reassuring; Molotov seemed to be remembering Lithuanian claims on Vilnius. Holding Vilnius back as an “ace in the hole,” the Soviet Union now turned first to its relations with Estonia and Latvia. On September

19, the Lithuanian cabinet of ministers decided to remind the Soviet Union that Vilnius rightly belonged to Lithuania, and it resolved to defend Lithuanian territory should Soviet troops cross the demarcation line.¹⁴

For the moment, the Germans still prepared to cast their cloak over Lithuania. The German Foreign Minister invited Juozas Urbšys, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, to come to Danzig (Gdansk) to talk about cooperation between their governments. Germany drafted a defense treaty according to which Lithuania “stands under the protection of the German Reich” and the High Command of the German Wehrmacht would supervise the development of the Lithuanian army. To carry these arrangements out, “a permanent German military commission” would be stationed in Kaunas. The Lithuanians responded cautiously to these overtures, emphasizing their determination to remain neutral, but Urbšys prepared to travel to Danzig. To emphasize their neutrality, the Lithuanians refused to keep the plans for talks with Berlin quiet. They had notified the British of the German invitation to move on Vilnius, and now the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry notified the Soviets of Urbšys’s intention to speak with the Germans.¹⁵ Then, unexpectedly, Ribbentrop suddenly announced that he was too busy to receive the Lithuanian foreign minister. The Germans were obviously pulling back; and the Lithuanians understood little of what was happening.

The initiative in the changing situation came from Moscow. On September 24, the Soviet Union began executing its plan for “the entire Baltic complex” when it presented Estonian foreign minister Karl Selter, who was in Moscow to conclude a trade pact, with the demand that Estonia accept a military alliance or a mutual assistance pact with Moscow. During the Soviets’ earlier negotiations with England and France, the Estonians had opposed Soviet “protection” of this sort. Now they succumbed and on the 28th signed a mutual assistance pact that provided for the stationing of Red Army units in Estonia. On the 30th the Soviet government “invited” Latvia to send “plenipotentiaries.” On October 2 Molotov informed the Latvians that the Soviet Union intended to bring its relations with Latvia into line with its new relations with Estonia. On October 4 Latvia yielded. For the Soviet leaders, Lithuania constituted the next piece of the problem.¹⁶

On September 25, Joseph Stalin, the head of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) and thereby the chief authority of the Soviet party-state, personally suggested to the Germans a change in their respective “spheres of interest.” Germany should keep the province of Lublin, which German troops had already occupied, and should waive its claim to Lithuania; with the Red Army in control of Vilnius, Moscow already had an obvious advantage in dealing with the Lithuanians. The Germans, after some dickering over detail, accepted this proposal, and a supplemental secret protocol to a Nazi-Soviet Friendship Pact on September 28 awarded the Lublin region to Germany in exchange for extending the Soviet “sphere of interest” to include most of Lithuania. An additional provision, however,

declared that when “the government of the USSR takes special measures for the protection of its interests on Lithuanian territory, the territory which lies to the southwest of the line shown on the map will pass to Germany.”¹⁷ The two powers planned, for the moment, to divide up Lithuania between them, with the Soviet Union receiving the greater share.

Just why did Germany and the Soviet Union exchange Polish territory for Lithuanian? And just what were Stalin’s aims at this point? Aleksandras Shtromas argued that “some historians, especially Lithuanian émigré ones” have mistakenly assumed that Germany gave up Lithuania because the Lithuanians had refused to join in the attack on Poland. Only after Stalin gave up his claim to Lublin, declared Shtromas, did Hitler yield on Lithuania. Shtromas’s argument was part of his picture that the Soviet Union’s prime aim was to encourage conflict between Germany and the western powers.¹⁸ A contrary argument declares that Stalin threatened to create a Polish Soviet Socialist Republic, which Germany opposed; therefore Germany readily gave up Lithuania in exchange for the Polish territory. In the zero-sum game that Hitler and Stalin were playing—i.e., what one does not get, the other gets – Stalin preferred that Lithuania not be part of a foreign coalition that could turn on him, and he preferred to have as few Poles as possible in his empire.

As Shtromas suggested, Stalin indeed looked forward to profiting from an Anglo-German conflict. In a letter of September 7 to Georgii Dimitrov, the head of the Communist International, Stalin wrote that “we are not against” a war between capitalist states in which they “would weaken each other.” Hitler, *nolens volens*, was on his way to destroying the capitalist system. Poland, Stalin stated, was just another “bourgeois fascist state,” and “What would be wrong if in the destruction of Poland we spread the socialist system to new inhabitants in new territories?” Even before the movement of the Red Army, Moscow prepared to restructure the society of the new territories. On September 8, Lavrentii Beriia, the USSR People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD) ordered operational groups to prepare to seize strategic sites and to arrest possible opponents in the area into which the Red Army had not yet marched. When the army moved, state security was ready, and as one Ukrainian official later reported, “The members of the workers’ guard shot the majority of the army officers, policemen, landowners, and government officials on the spot.”¹⁹

The secret protocols of September 28 completed the groundwork for the eventual Soviet takeover of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The Soviet Union’s negotiations with Estonia and Latvia were aimed at the introduction of the Red Army into those two states, and Lithuania stood next on the Soviet agenda. The Soviet Union had also agreed to the repatriation of “Reich nationals and other persons of German descent” from Estonia and Latvia as well as from Ukraine and Belarus. Although the “repatriation” of Germans from Lithuania remained an open question, in the eyes of many outside

observers the departure of German nationals from Latvia and Estonia served as evidence of German acceptance of the Soviet Union's occupation and probable incorporation of these two states. Lithuania stood next in line.

The agreement to divide Lithuania appears an anomaly; although it clearly showed that the two great powers felt free to carve up any state as they already had Poland. In the long run the Soviet Union may well have had no intention of giving up any Lithuanian territory; by exploiting opportunities as they arose, in the end the Soviets took all of Lithuania. The final result cost Moscow money, but it gave them additional territory beyond the agreements of September 28.

Propaganda to convince Lithuanians that the Soviet Union only wished them well was already in action. On September 26, even before the new protocols came into existence, the Lithuanian Communist Party issued a call that Germany was preparing to take over Lithuania and that all patriotic Lithuanians should turn to the Soviet Union for protection: "Down with the German protectorate!" "Long live the Soviet Union—protector and liberator of small nations!" It is unclear just how much the communist leaders in Lithuania knew about the German-Soviet negotiations that now spoke of dividing the country in two—probably very little. (At this particular time, the Lithuanian Communist Party had no relations with the Communist International, the Comintern, in Moscow.) Germany and the Soviet Union were in effect allies, but communist sources in Lithuania worked to present the image that Lithuanians should welcome Soviet influence as the only effective protection against German domination.

The Lithuanian government immediately felt the consequences of this new arrangement between Berlin and Moscow. Germany cancelled its invitation for Urbšys to come for talks, and on September 29 Molotov invited the Lithuanian minister in Moscow, Ladas Natkevičius, to the Kremlin. As Natkevičius later commented, "When an envoy is invited to the Kremlin [*as opposed to the Foreign Ministry—aes*], there will surely be a discussion of greater significance." With such expectations, even before going to this meeting, Natkevičius made arrangements to fly to Kaunas immediately afterward with whatever new information and proposals he might get.

At their meeting, Molotov told him that Lithuania must now show its friendship for the Soviet Union and send a cabinet minister, perhaps the prime minister, to Moscow to negotiate. And he stated that Germany would not oppose whatever arrangement Lithuania and the Soviet Union might agree upon. When Germany was pressing the Lithuanians to march on Vilnius, the Lithuanians could get no response from Moscow as to the Soviet position; now Moscow made it patently clear to the Lithuanian government that Germany would accept whatever the Soviets demanded—in Natkevičius's words, that Lithuania "belonged politically almost 100 percent" to the Soviet Union. When Natkevičius tried to discuss the disposition of Vilnius, Molotov retorted that this would depend on

Lithuania's showing its willingness to cooperate with the Soviet Union. As Natkevičius left, Molotov emphatically declared, "Hurry, hurry. Remember, there is a war on, we cannot wait, and every hour is valuable."²⁰

Natkevičius immediately departed for Kaunas, where he met with Lithuanian President Antanas Smetona and officials of the foreign ministry. Soviet chief of state Mikhail Kalinin, he reported, had declared it was time to go beyond "platonic" friendship and had posed the question "To whom are you closer—the Germans or us?" Soviet foreign ministry officials had repeated the question. Not knowing that Berlin and Moscow had already made the important decisions between themselves, the Lithuanians debated the merits of leaning toward either the Germans or the Soviets. Smetona questioned why it was so urgent to act quickly and spoke of the danger of "a Trojan horse," commenting, "The cooperation of a small with a great does little good for the great and it can incur large cost for the small." Nevertheless the Lithuanian government saw no alternative to yielding: Natkevičius now returned to Moscow, and the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Juozas Urbšys, followed.²¹

Traditional Soviet historiography of the events of early October founded itself on the mythology that the Soviet Union and Germany were at this point competing for Lithuania. As Robertas Žiugžda wrote, in a book aimed at the English-speaking world, "It is evident that Nazi Germany was going to occupy Lithuania."²² At this point Berlin of course had its eye on the southwestern region of Lithuania, but as Natkevičius learned, Stalin could expect Germany to accept any settlement that the Soviets made with the Lithuanians.

On October 3, while Urbšys was traveling to Moscow, Molotov presented German ambassador Schulenburg with the Soviet plan of action: The Soviet Union would award Vilnius to the Lithuanians and inform them that they had to surrender part of their territory to Germany. The Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs suggested "the simultaneous signing of a Soviet-Lithuanian protocol on Vilna [*Vilnius*] and a German-Lithuanian protocol on the Lithuanian area to be ceded" to Germany. In response Schulenburg suggested that "the Soviet Government should exchange Vilna for the strip to be ceded to us and then hand this strip over to us." He then advised Berlin that he considered Molotov's proposal "harmful, as in the eyes of the world it would make us appear as 'robbers' of Lithuanian territory, while the Soviet Government figures as the donor." To this he added the thought that Germany might best delay its design on Lithuanian territory "until the Soviet Union actually incorporates Lithuania, an idea on which, I believe, the arrangement concerning Lithuania was originally based." German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop agreed, and the next day he instructed Schulenburg to ask Molotov not to discuss the matter with the Lithuanians and to get a Soviet agreement that "in the event" the Soviets sent troops into Lithuania they should "leave this strip of territory unoccupied."

Ribbentrop's response was too late; the Soviet government had already made its first move. At 10 p.m. on October 3, even before Berlin received Schulenburg's report, Urbšys met with Stalin and Molotov. Molotov informed the Lithuanian that Germany had recognized the Soviet interest in all three Baltic states. The Soviet Union in turn could not be satisfied with Lithuania's "neutral" position. Stalin then personally laid out three proposals: a mutual assistance pact, a treaty for the transfer of Vilnius to Lithuania, and a treaty surrendering a part of Lithuania to Germany. Explaining the German demand, Stalin claimed that the Soviets had persuaded Berlin to reduce its ambitions in the Baltic. The Soviets had tried, he continued, to persuade Germany to return Klaipėda to Lithuania, but Berlin would not consider that. He also declared that the Soviet Union had no interest in infringing on Lithuania's sovereign rights, its constitution, or its social structure.

The assertion that Lithuania would have to surrender territory to Germany stunned Urbšys, but the Lithuanian foreign minister took up Stalin's points in order. He argued that a mutual assistance pact was not essential, that Lithuania wanted a clearer definition of the size of the Vilnius region, and he called the thought of surrendering territory to Germany "the greatest injustice that one could imagine." Stalin, who always showed a penchant for moving populations from place to place, suggested that the Germans in Lithuania could be repatriated to their homeland, and that Lithuanian immigrants from the lost territory could take their places. The Lithuanians nevertheless protested that they could not tolerate the carving up of their state.

On the subject of a mutual assistance pact, Molotov called Lithuanian declarations of neutrality inadequate. He warned that a situation could arise whereby the Soviet Union would consider it necessary to ignore those claims of neutrality, and Stalin declared that "the existence of neutral states is a fiction." Therefore the Lithuanians had to accept the introduction of Soviet Red Army units within the boundaries of their state. Both Soviet leaders reiterated their respect for Lithuania's independence and eschewed any thought of changing its "internal economic and social system." Urbšys called the movement of Soviet troops into Lithuania "occupation," but Stalin and Molotov dismissed this thought. The presence of Soviet troops, they declared, would actually guarantee Lithuania's security. Urbšys later recounted that Stalin had even promised, "Our garrisons will help you put down a communist rising if such should occur in Lithuania."²³

Urbšys vainly argued that Lithuania could guarantee its friendly neutrality toward the Soviet Union, but the Soviet spokesmen stressed the theme that the ongoing war could suddenly bring new and unanticipated problems. Stalin warned that the British and the French had obviously miscalculated that the Soviet Union would immediately to go Poland's aid if Germany invaded and had therefore refused to sign a pact with Moscow.

Now they were at war without the Soviets' aid. Formal pacts constituted the best guarantee of support. Lithuania had to be careful in its relations with the British and the French and understand that the Soviet Union was offering it the best guarantee of its security.

On the question of defining the Vilnius region, the Lithuanians were shocked to discover that the Soviets were offering them only one fifth of the Vilna territory as defined in the Soviet-Lithuanian peace treaty of July 12, 1920. (At that time in 1920 the Soviet government was at war with Poland, and although the Red Army was marching through the region, the final division of the territory was still problematic as was indeed the future of the Lithuanian government if the Red Army had then conquered Poland.) The Lithuanians insisted that the Soviet government should recognize the boundary as drawn in 1920, but the Soviets simply declared that the boundary of 1920 was inaccurate. Natkevičius argued that the territory constituted an economic whole. Stalin nevertheless sketched out the boundary that the Soviets had determined, and he also pointed out that the Poles would resent Lithuania's taking this territory. The Lithuanians, he emphasized, were dependent on Moscow's good will.

On the question of surrendering territory to Germany, the Lithuanians proposed to do nothing so long as the Germans presented no clear demand. Stalin, however, replied that he had "given the Germans a promise," and he suggested that the Lithuanians could negotiate with the Germans in Moscow where the Soviets could help the Lithuanians avoid being "deceived." The Lithuanians nevertheless insisted on postponing any consideration of this question. Urbšys closed the meeting by saying that he had no power to enter into such radical agreements. When Urbšys, in departing, expressed unhappiness that Germany had seized Klaipėda and now Lithuania faced other demands, Stalin reportedly exclaimed, "Germany tears away your territory. We, to the contrary are giving to you. What comparison can there be!"

An hour or so later, the Lithuanians received a telephone call inviting them back to the Kremlin, and at 2 am in the morning of the 4th, they again sat with Molotov. The Russian now gave them drafts for two treaties, one a mutual assistance pact and the other an agreement on the transfer of Vilnius. Urbšys protested that the terms of the mutual assistance pact, which provided for the Red Army's entering Lithuania, essentially constituted the occupation of Lithuania. Molotov replied that the Lithuanians now had to show their friendship for the Soviet Union, and he declared that the Latvians and the Estonians had not looked at their mutual assistance pacts in that way. As for the size of the Vilnius region, Stalin pointed out that Belarusians had claims on that same territory. As a compromise on the question of the Red Army's stations in Lithuania, Stalin proposed to reduce the size of the military force from 50,000, the number that the Soviets had first presented, to 35,000. Urbšys again insisted that he had to consult with Kaunas, and he

declined Molotov's offer to let him use the telephone to get Kaunas's response.²⁴

When Schulenburg, on October 4, asked Molotov to divulge nothing in regard to the German-Soviet division of Lithuania, Molotov responded "that, unfortunately, he had been obliged yesterday to inform the Lithuanian Foreign Minister of this understanding, since he could not, out of loyalty, act otherwise." An hour later, Molotov reported that Stalin was "personally" requesting the German Government for the moment to refrain from claiming Lithuanian territory. The German foreign ministry thereupon saw no alternative but itself to tell the Lithuanians of the arrangements while insisting that it had persuaded the Soviets to transfer the Vilna region to Lithuania. The German minister in Kaunas, Zechlin, had to assure the Lithuanians that the Germans did not consider the cession of territory to be urgent at this time. On the other hand, the Germans had no intention of giving up their claim, and they asked the Soviets, in the event of sending troops into Lithuania, to leave the territory "free" and to let the Germans decide when to take further action.

The Soviets had skillfully exploited and at the same time compromised the German designs on southwest Lithuania. It would seem that Molotov intentionally delayed telling Schulenburg of the Soviet plan to inform the Lithuanians of this agreement so that Berlin could raise no formal objection to the tactic before the Soviets employed it in their meeting with Urbšys. When Schulenburg delivered Berlin's official response, Molotov could say that he had informed the Germans of his intention before he had spoken with Urbšys, but that he had been "obliged to inform" the Lithuanians of the arrangement. Stalin had in fact presented it as the third major point in his statement to Urbšys, and it would appear that the Lithuanian foreign minister was so shocked by this revelation that the Soviet demand to station troops in Lithuania appeared to be a far less egregious infringement on Lithuanian sovereignty. In turn, in response to the German complaints, on October 8, Molotov formally assured Schulenburg that the Soviets would not occupy the territory that the Germans claimed and that Moscow would wait for Germany "to determine the date for implementing the agreement."

After his night of meetings in the Kremlin, Urbšys briefly returned to Kaunas for consultations, and at 10 p.m. on October 7 he and Natkevičius were again at the Kremlin. He spoke at length about Lithuania's historic geopolitical concerns, and Molotov heard him out. Urbšys told his Soviet counterparts that the Lithuanians were ready in principle to sign a mutual assistance pact, but he offered his own government's proposal for such a pact. The Lithuanians particularly questioned the need for stationing Soviet troops in Lithuania. Molotov returned to his key themes: that the Soviet Union had to plan its own security, that Lithuania would be receiving Vilnius (a cause in which the League of Nations had failed them), and that the Soviet Union had persuaded the Germans to reduce their claims on Lithuania. The

two sides agreed that the Germans at this point were not pressing their claim on Lithuania. Molotov agreed to pass on the Lithuanians' proposals to Stalin.

Summarizing the meeting, Natkevičius declared that it had taken place in "a sincere, comfortable spirit." Two months later, Urbšys wrote, "The impression of the Lithuanian delegation, as it returned to the mission after the meeting, was unanimously such: for three-fourths of the meeting, it seemed that, perhaps, we will be able to convince the government of the Soviet Union not to place its army on Lithuanian soil, and that Molotov and his aide were perhaps beginning to understand our situation. But the end of this meeting and Molotov's words dispersed our illusions." In his memoirs, he called the Lithuanians' attempts to argue with Molotov the equivalent of throwing "peas against a wall."²⁵

The next day, the 8th, the Lithuanian delegation met again with Stalin. As Urbšys tried to explain his government's position as he had to Molotov the day before, Stalin interrupted, "You are proving too much!" Stalin rejected the Lithuanian counterproposal for an agreement, and he declared that introduction of Soviet forces into Lithuania would bring tranquility to the region. Stalin offered to reduce the number of troops to 20,000 but they would stay in Lithuania indefinitely. When Urbšys again objected that the stationing of troops in Lithuania constituted occupation, Molotov and Stalin insisted that a capitalist country would occupy Lithuania, but the Soviet Union had no intentions of compromising Lithuania's independence. The Red Army would provide Lithuania with "a giant shield" (*bol'shoi shchit*). Soviet protection, he declared, would be far better for Lithuania than German domination. Molotov, moreover, insisted that the Lithuanians had to agree to the same terms that the Estonians and Latvians had accepted. Vladimir Potemkin, the Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, threw in the observation that "Lithuania is showing no enthusiasm for recovering Vilnius."²⁶ The Lithuanians obviously had to understand that Vilnius would come at a cost. Although the Soviet representatives wanted to sign a treaty immediately so as to link it with the anniversary of the Polish move into Vilnius on October 9, 1920, Urbšys put off agreement, insisting that he had to consult with his government. As if to emphasize the urgency of a quick agreement, the Soviet press prominently carried stories of meetings and demonstrations in Vilnius celebrating the thought that Vilnius, together with western Belarus, would be incorporated into the Soviet Union in the next few weeks.²⁷

The Lithuanian delegation, with new instructions in Kaunas, returned to the Kremlin at 9.30 in the evening of October 10. The Soviets had now decided not to allow the Lithuanians to separate the two questions, the disposition of Vilnius and the introduction of Soviet troops, and Molotov presented them with a single treaty, writing the transfer of Vilnius into the mutual security pact. The Soviets had accepted two points from the Lithuanians' counterproposal, but Molotov now displayed a short temper.

The Lithuanians felt that without Stalin present, the Soviet stance was harsher. The territorial demarcation of Vilnius was less favorable, the Soviets spoke of 30,000 troops rather than 20 as Stalin had suggested two days earlier, and the treaty would now be in force for 15 years rather than just for the duration of the war. The Lithuanians briefly returned to their mission to discuss the situation in private, but then came back ready to sign the agreement. On this occasion, Stalin came in only at midnight, Molotov told him the matter was settled, and the gathering had refreshments, speeches, and toasts, while officials prepared the final text for signing. In the conversation Stalin coyly sounded out the Lithuanians on the question of formally naming the Soviet charge d'affaires in Kaunas, Nikolai Pozdniakov, the Soviet *polpred*, plenipotentiary representative. Urbšys endorsed the thought. Even the signing of the pact, however, did not end the festivities; Stalin insisted that the Lithuanians join him in another building where they watched two movies.²⁸

Stalin, it might be noted, apparently played a planned role in the talks with all three Baltic states. The Estonians and the Latvians reported that at certain moments he would strike a conciliatory pose. He did this with the Lithuanians too, and gossip that reached the Lithuanians reported that Stalin actually overruled the thoughts of several other Soviet leaders on the Vilnius question. To assertions that the Lithuanians constituted only a small minority of the city's population, Stalin reportedly insisted on recognizing the Lithuanians' historic claim to the city. At the same time, of course, he reminded the Lithuanians that the Poles would oppose his decision to turn Vilnius over to them and that the Lithuanians accordingly could not expect France and Great Britain to accept their claim for Vilnius. In sum, Stalin stressed that the Lithuanians needed Soviet support to keep Vilnius, and he developed his own role as the "great friend of nationalities."

The treaty opened the way for the Soviet occupation of Lithuania and for Lithuania's ultimate annexation into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, although neither the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact together with its protocols nor the Soviet-Lithuanian mutual assistance pact spoke directly of these outcomes. In 1939 and 1940 Molotov offered several different interpretations of Moscow's relationship with Lithuania. On October 31, 1939, he called talk of sovietization of the Baltic States "useful only to our common enemies and to all kind of anti-Soviet provocations."²⁹ In August 1940, speaking to the Supreme Soviet in anticipation of the annexation, he used a more imperial tone, speaking of the Soviet Union's "right" to this region, which he alleged the western powers had torn from the body of Russia in 1917–1921. The first of these statements insisted that the Soviet Union had no secret plan to annex the Baltic states, and the second asserted the Soviet Union's rights to the region. In later years he stated simply that the Soviet Union had to take over this region for strategic considerations.³⁰

For Soviet commentators over the years, such statements closed the subject, and they displayed no inclination to consider contradictions between them.

Over the years, Soviet historians did their best to control discussions of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Until the German invasion of June 1941, Moscow of course publicly spoke only of friendship with Germany. The Germans believed that Molotov considered the British his country's greatest enemy. Speaking on the first anniversary of the pact in 1940, Molotov declared that the pact had blocked British and French intrigues aimed at causing war between Germany and the Soviet Union. The continuation of the war after the fall of Poland, he declared, was the result of the refusal of the English and French refusal to accept Germany's peace proposals, which he noted, the Soviet Union supported.³¹

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, when the western powers agreed to look on the Soviet Union as an ally, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact could retreat quietly into history while the "Grand Alliance" warred against Hitler. Soviet spokespersons declared that Stalin "knew all along" that the Germans would attack and that he used the respite between 1939 and 1941 to prepare Soviet defenses, including defenses in the newly absorbed Baltic states. But at the end of the war, as the "Cold War" began to develop, the pact came rushing forward again as an object of controversy. In 1946, the Soviet representatives at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials assiduously opposed any discussion of the treaty. The American representatives at the trials, on the other hand, objected to any statement that might have recognized the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic states.³² Although the party line in Soviet historiography after the war usually emphasized that Stalin had used the time from 1939 to 1941 wisely, even this thought itself eventually came under fire in discussions of Soviet historians.³³ Nevertheless, they did not challenge the official interpretation of the incorporation of the three Baltic republics. Whatever their interpretation of Stalin's attitude toward Hitler and the Germans, Soviet historians and commentators completely separated the subject of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact from consideration of the circumstances of the incorporation of the three Baltic states in 1940.

For half a century, the Soviets' key tactic in this question was to deny the existence of the secret protocols dividing Eastern Europe with the Germans. They resolutely held to the interpretation that the secret protocols of August 23 and September 28 were a fiction, that there had been no such agreements. The Soviets, they argued, had in fact forced the Germans to retreat from their territorial ambitions in 1939.³⁴ To almost his dying day, Molotov insisted that there was no such agreement. On April 29, 1983, when a friend asked him whether any such agreement existed, Molotov declared, "There was not. No, that is absurd.... No, no, in my opinion, everything was very clean and there could be nothing of such an agreement. I was very close to this, in fact I participated in this matter. I can firmly say that this is

unconditionally a fabrication.”³⁵ Molotov was, of course, not just “close” to the negotiations; he signed the secret protocols.

When faced by German microfilms that showed the text of the protocols, Soviet historians refused to acknowledge the authenticity of the copies. They insisted that one could only trust originals, and these were not to be found in either German or Soviet archives. In 1988 Lithuanians began to challenge Soviet historiography, and they ridiculed this argument. At a mass meeting in Vilnius’s Vingis Park on August 23, 1988, the Lithuanian poet Justinas Marcinkevičius declared, “In these days Moscow’s scholars again announced in the press that they are still unable to find those protocols in Soviet archives. Laughable, nothing more. Here it is entirely clear the Moscow does not find what it does not want to find, what is unnecessary to find. They can search, but they do not have to find.” He suggested that some Baltic historians and archivists should go to Moscow to help in the search.³⁶ Soviet historians still rejected the microfilmed text, noting that Molotov’s signature appeared as “Molotoff”: they insisted that he never signed his name that way.

As Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* slowly crept into the historical profession in 1988–1989, the discussions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the period of official Nazi-Soviet friendship became more intense. As a western critic wrote, “In the USSR, the Nazi-Soviet pact is a live and passionate political issue. For Soviet intellectuals it is emotionally one of the most difficult of all their country’s acts with which to come to terms.”³⁷ Baltic historians took the lead in challenging the official Soviet history of these events, and Soviet historians reluctantly, grudgingly, retreated. In December 1989 the Soviet Congress of People’s Deputies finally acknowledged the protocols’ existence.

This sort of resolution of a historical question of itself says a great deal about the role of historiography in the Soviet system. Historians had to insist that a document did not exist until a group of politicians had declared that it did. Such historiography can only be considered the maidservant of the ruling circles.

After having acknowledged the existence of the protocols, Soviet authorities still insisted that the incorporation of the three Baltic States in 1940 was not a direct consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. They insisted that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia had experienced simultaneous and spontaneous social revolutions, and that the Red Army had played no role in these processes. Indeed they even argued that the pact had nothing to do with Hitler’s preparations to attack Poland. This argument declared that the non-aggression pact with Germany and the mutual assistance pacts with each of the three Baltic states constituted completely justifiable actions aimed strengthening the Soviet Union’s defenses. Soviet historians argued that the Soviets moved into Lithuania *to protect* the Lithuanians from the Germans. To be sure, if the Germans had not conceded Lithuania to the Soviets, they

would probably have moved in themselves, but the details of the German-Soviet negotiations on partitioning Lithuania cast a heavy shadow of doubt over such glowing depictions of Soviet altruism.

In the West over the years, there were historians who accepted the existence of the protocols but then chose to argue that these documents spoke only of the Soviet Union's "sphere of interest" in the Baltic, and that this did not mean incorporation. In the case of the territories of eastern Poland, however, where the protocols also spoke of a "sphere of interest," in September 1939 the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party was already planning the "new revolutionary order" that would bring the region into the USSR. To this end it ordered the division of the territory into Belarusian and Ukrainian parts and called for the election of "People's Assemblies" that would request annexation to the Soviet Union.³⁸ Clearly, the use of the term "sphere of interest" in no way limited plans for annexation of the Polish territories in question.

Many, if not most, western commentators have declared that the pacts clearly "implied" incorporation. In the heat of the Cold War, some even simplified the process, declaring that the Soviet Union incorporated the Baltic states in 1939. As George Kennan wrote, "It is ironic to reflect that these three little countries, the first to establish normal relations with Russia, should also have been, together with Poland, the first to be swallowed up again by Moscow in 1939, when Russia and Germany moved together to smash the European order established by Versailles."³⁹

Kennan's memory may have leaned more on personal reminiscences than historical documentation. In 1939, many contemporary western observers considered the Baltic republics doomed: The Soviets now had a stronger position in the Baltic than they had demanded from the western allies in the negotiations of spring and summer of 1939. On October 3 an editorial in *The New York Times* declared, "The swift and cold-blooded manner in which sovereign nations are summoned one by one to hear what their future status is to be shows Stalin to be something more than an apt imitator of Hitler. His method of intimidation and conquest is quicker and quieter." On October 11 the same newspaper wrote, "Russia's swift invasion of the Baltic sets a new record in the current competition for naked aggression." The Nazi-Soviet agreements, however, did not specify a Soviet occupation, however the participants might have envisaged the future.

There appeared to be an understanding, rather than a formal agreement, between the Nazis and the Soviets that the Soviet Union would annex the Baltic states. The communications between the German diplomats in October 1939 spoke openly of the prospects of the Soviets' sending troops into the Baltic and even foresaw Soviet annexation of Lithuania. The secret protocol of September 28 implied this, declaring that when "the government of the USSR takes special measures for the protection of its interests on Lithuanian territory, the territory which lies to the southwest of the line

shown on the map will pass to Germany.” Schulenburg spoke of delaying the German claim to Lithuanian territory “until the Soviet Union actually incorporates Lithuania, an idea on which, I believe, the arrangement concerning Lithuania was originally based.” The German-Soviet division of Lithuania made no sense without the assumption that the Soviet Union planned to incorporate its share, just as Germany would incorporate its share. Few could foresee how Stalin would outmaneuver the Germans and eventually persuade them, for a price, to give up their claim to a piece of Lithuania.

In sum, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, providing for the division of Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, laid the foundation for the Soviet Union’s incorporation of the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. There was, to be sure, probably no detailed plan as yet, but the ultimate intention of the Soviet leaders would seem to have been clear. The question was then how the Soviet Union would impose its will in Lithuania, and with that issue in mind, we must now turn our attention to contemporary events in that state.

II

The Vilnius Complex

“Therefore such allusions should be answered so clearly that there can be no doubt that the basic point of Lithuanian policy and its attitude is strict neutrality which we are firmly determined to defend in any situation and on any question.”

—Juozas Urbšys, declaration of May 10, 1939

“The Smetona leadership withdrew from the question of leadership in the liberation of Vilnius just because its internal political situation paralyzed meaningful decisions.”

—Kazys Škirpa

“In my opinion, demobilizing our army we surrendered.”

—Vaclovas Šliogeris, a Lithuanian army officer

The Soviet occupation of Vilnius in mid-September 1939 gave Moscow a powerful weapon to use in its dealings with Kaunas as well as with Berlin. Had the Lithuanians chosen to attack Poland in cooperation with Berlin as the Germans had urged, Lithuania's fate, while still highly problematic, would undoubtedly have been different. The Soviets had in fact urged the Lithuanians not to act: The Soviet *polpred* in Kaunas reportedly told his hosts “Don't get your finger caught in the door,” and he told a member of the Lithuanian foreign ministry that a move on Vilnius would be “suicide.” Two Russian historians have called the Mutual Assistance Pact a “compromise”—in response to Lithuanian objections, the Soviets had agreed to reduce the size of the Red Army contingent in Lithuania to 20,000—but they too recognized that Moscow was operating from a position of strength.⁴⁰

The “Vilna Question” had tormented international institutions throughout the period between the end of “The Great War” of 1914–1918 and the outbreak of new conflict in the fall of 1939. Poles saw it as a Polish city, Lithuanians as their capital. The Soviet Red Army had delivered the city to the Lithuanians in August 1920. In October of that year Polish forces had then driven the Lithuanians out and had seized the city for themselves. In 1923 the western powers recognized Polish rule there, but the Lithuanians refused to accept this verdict. The Soviet Union and Germany had considered it useful to support the Lithuanians in this question because the Polish-Lithuanian conflict had severely hindered western efforts to organize effective cooperation between the new states of Eastern Europe. In 1939 Moscow emphasized the thought that the League of Nations had not helped the Lithuanians to gain Vilnius; therefore, the Lithuanians should all the more appreciate what Moscow was willing to do.

For Lithuanians, who had developed “homeland” (*tėvynė*) and “Vilnius” as key conceptions in their national self-consciousness, watching the collapse of Poland in September 1939 had brought varying combinations of hope and despair. What would be Vilnius’s future? Or even Lithuania’s future? When the Red Army occupied Vilnius, the Lithuanians told themselves that surely the Soviet Union would pass the territory to Lithuania, but what would it mean for Lithuania’s future to “recover” Vilnius from Soviet hands? Great Britain and France had already demonstrated their opposition to Lithuania’s taking Vilnius in alliance with the Germans; what would they now say about the Russians? And the most important question of the moment for many: What price might the Soviets extract for the “gift”? As the Lithuanian historian Liudas Truska has put it, not wanting to take Vilnius themselves, the Lithuanians now accepted it from Stalin’s hands. Politically and morally speaking, this was not the same, but “The nation understood the cost of recovering Vilnius.”⁴¹ But did it?

New disputes and uncertainties arose in Kaunas once the mutual assistance pact had been signed. Who should get the credit for this grand achievement? The authoritarian government, concerned about its own image in this process, wanted to claim the credit. Opponents of the government—and there were many, at all levels of the society—resented the thought of the government’s claiming a victory, and these opponents displayed a strong predilection to give more credit to the Soviet government for its generosity than to credit the Lithuanian government for its wisdom and competence. The Soviet mission in Kaunas reported home that there was a significant sentiment for the idea that the Red Army should not stop at the “demarcation line” but should continue on to Kaunas. The Soviets, with some justification, looked on Vilnius as a useful key to the hearts of the Lithuanians.⁴²

After considering who should get credit for joining Vilnius to the Lithuanian state, there remained the question of significance and consequences of the introduction of Soviet troops into Lithuania. For the moment, all non-communist Lithuanian parties, from left to right, preferred to emphasize the thought of “regaining” Vilnius and to accept the coming of Soviet troops as a necessary fact of life rather than to raise it as a matter of public concern. Although some leftists expressed the thought that Soviet forces should drive the present regime out of power, neither the government nor the traditional opposition wanted publicly to discuss the presence of Soviet troops as a “cost” for regaining Lithuania’s capital.

For the government, the acceptance of Soviet troops constituted a sign of weakness, and it preferred to minimize public discussion of the question. When Urbšys returned from Moscow, he had to leave the train outside of Kaunas so as to avoid a formal reception. Soviet officials in turn objected to the Lithuanian government’s reluctance to celebrate the Red Army’s coming. In the tortured negotiations with England and France during the summer, the Soviets had insisted that whatever the Baltic governments

said, the common people in the Baltic wanted the Red Army to come; they expected Lithuanians to stage some sort of grand welcome, expressing gratitude for the Red Army's readiness to protect the country. The Soviet propaganda machine also wanted the Lithuanians to spice their gratitude with thanks and respect for the wise, generous leadership of "the great friend of the working people of the world, Comrade Stalin," and they resented the Lithuanian government's restraint.⁴³

In 1939 the head of the Lithuanian government was Antanas Smetona, whom a military coup had installed in power in December 1926. At that time, charging that a communist plot had been afoot, the new government had promptly executed four Communist Party members and had subsequently dissolved the parliament, the Seimas. Since then, Smetona's position and his authority rested on the support of the military. He liked to say that the "nation" had called him to power, first in forming a new government in 1918–1920, and then again in 1926 when a leftist coalition government was allegedly steering the country to disaster. Before the First World War, Smetona had been a bank clerk in Vilnius, but in the first years of independence, he stood out as a conservative, nationalist leader, albeit with only a small popular following.⁴⁴

In the first three years of his authoritarian regime, Smetona had shared power with his prime minister, Augustinas Voldemaras. In 1929, however, Smetona ousted Voldemaras and over the next decade, he consolidated his rule—but Voldemaras continued to pose a threat to his position.⁴⁵ It was generally said that Voldemaras's supporters, called *voldemarininkai*, were strong among the younger army officers. In 1934 Smetona faced down an abortive military coup that was aimed at returning the former prime minister to power. In September 1939 the *voldemarininkai* demanded that the Lithuanian army take Vilnius, and in their frustration when the government refused to act, they threatened a coup. No such action occurred, but Smetona was always concerned about Voldemaras's intentions.

After Smetona forced Voldemaras out of the government, the two men had harsh words about each other. Voldemaras told Soviet interrogators that Smetona's fundamental characteristics were "mysteriousness, pretense, and weak will."⁴⁶ Smetona in turn told an American acquaintance that Voldemaras, "a man of small stature but of great talents," might have "become a great political personage." But he "lacked sincerity, was unreasonably obstinate, had blind faith and admiration for himself, undue and unfounded suspicion of others, was superstitious and lacked a sense of realities."⁴⁷

In his thirteen years in power, Smetona had reinforced his position with martial law or "heightened state protection," a strict "Press Law" (adopted in 1935), and a secret police system, the *Saugumas*, that worked to identify all possible opponents, including army officers, priests, university professors and students. In 1935 he banned opposition political parties, and

then in 1938 he decreed a constitution that formally gave him the power to dictate laws and even single-handedly to amend the constitution. The governmental structure provided for a parliament, the Seimas, but that body had no power independent of what the president would recognize for it. As Liudas Truska has described the governmental structure, “The government was responsible not to the Seimas but to the president, and he only to God and History.”⁴⁸

Smetona liked the image of being a philosopher-king. According to my father, who worked with him in the 1920s, Smetona would lecture dinner parties on the philosophy of Plato. He prided himself on being a master of Lithuanian literary style, and as Truska has noted, he was particularly passionate about lecturing at the university, an occupation that constituted an endorsement of his qualifications as an intellectual. In fact he did not have the documentary qualifications to lecture at the university, and his appointment had involved some academic intrigue. My father, who joined the faculty at the same time, later declared that Smetona had no right to the title of “Doctor,” which he in fact freely used: “I know that he did not complete his university studies, and this was apparently the reason why he could not start to practice law in Vilna where he settled down in 1902. During his school years he had to work for a living and took part in all Lithuanian activities—social, charitable and political. The fact that Smetona had no graduation certificate was revealed to me in the fall of 1922 at a meeting of the Humanistic Faculty of the University of Lithuania, when his friends elected him to a lectureship in that Faculty.” Smetona’s adulatory biographer, Aleksandras Merkelis, wrote that in 1902 Smetona graduated from St. Petersburg University with “a second degree jurists’ diploma.” Merkelis recognized that this did not of itself qualify Smetona for a position at the university, and he declared that the faculty, in accepting Smetona, recognized “his broad erudition” as “a satisfactory equivalent for a scientific degree.”⁴⁹

Smetona justified his political power by claiming that when Lithuania became independent, the people had not been ready for democracy, and therefore the coup of 1926 had been necessary. But he did little to foster the development of a civil society. His administration called itself “authoritarian”; but he insisted that his government was “democratic” in that he “understood the nation” and “the nation” had entrusted him with power. Supporting him was the one legal political organization in the country, *Tautininkų sąjunga* (Union of Nationalists), which in 1933 elected him as its leader for life. (This study will use the Lithuanian name *tautininkai* because “nationalist” could confuse the group with the *nacionalistai*, “nationalists,” who supported Voldemaras.) By the late 1930s, his regime was becoming more and more unpopular, and not a few commentators have argued that Lithuania was incapable of resisting a foreign invasion.⁵⁰

Many western diplomats called Smetona a weak and indecisive leader at the head of a corrupt regime that survived only because its

opponents could not organize themselves. One American called him “a sorry, weak but stubborn figure, heading a nepotistic Government whose reputation for corrupt practices is arousing the hatred and contempt of Lithuanians in general and particularly of the agricultural classes.” The British charge d’affaires in Kaunas, Thomas H. Preston, called him “a President whose weakness and lack of decision are now almost proverbial.” Another American diplomat declared that the regime “has for some time been untenable and it continues in power only by virtue of the dissension and distrust in the ranks and in the command of the opposition.” In 1939 and 1940, the Latvian minister in Kaunas reported home that Smetona wanted to copy the Italian and German regimes but that his attempts were doomed to failure: His regime was unpopular and its social base was too narrow.⁵¹

For most of his time in power Smetona ruled with the help and advice of his brother-in-law, Juozas Tūbelis, who headed the *Tautininkų sąjunga*. Tūbelis’s death in the fall of 1939, at the very time of the negotiations in Moscow, left Smetona with no close advisors whom he completely trusted. Some critics suggested that the two men’s wives, who were sisters, Sofija Chodakauskaitė-Smetonienė and Jadwiga Chodakauskaitė-Tūbelienė, were actually directing the government’s work. An American diplomat reported, “Mesdames Smetona and Tūbelis do not hold government positions but they have been active in state affairs, and while they may have failed fully to estimate the extent of recent changes in the situation at home and abroad, are believed to be two of the most forceful and intelligent individuals on the contemporary scene.” In 1940, John Gunther, a popular American journalist of the time, wrote, “The president of the republic, Professor Smetona, is best known for his remarkable wife, who is a powerful personage in the affairs of the little state.” After pointing out that her sister had been married to Tūbelis, Gunther concluded, “The two sisters ran the country.” In June 1940, after Smetona had fled the country, the Lithuanian Saugumas, the state security service now in the service of the pro-Soviet regime, reported that people in the Panevėžys region of Lithuania welcomed “the fall of the Chodakauskas dynasty” that had dominated local politics.⁵² (The *Saugumas* will be of growing significance as this study proceeds, and therefore I will use this Lithuanian name for this “state security” agency.)

As was the style in the 1930s, a cult of personality grew around Smetona. He took the title of *tautos vadas*, leader of the nation, a title equivalent to Adolf Hitler’s *der Führer*, or Benito Mussolini’s *Il duce*, but still less grandiloquent than Josef Stalin’s *genial’nyi vozhd’ vsego chelovechestva* or “genius leader of all mankind.” Some intellectuals who complained about the cult did not blame Smetona personally so much as they did the sycophants who surrounded him, censored publications, and told him what he wanted to hear. But Smetona chose to have such people around him. As Liudas Truska has written, “from his collaborators the president did not

require original ideas, critical comments, but rather devotion and obedience.” Smetona would quickly dismiss cabinet members who showed independent opinions.⁵³ After proclaiming the new constitution in 1938, the regime held a presidential election in November of that year under rules that carefully insured Smetona’s position, selecting 120 “representatives of the people,” who then were to vote for a president. On November 14, 118 “representatives” voted for Smetona, two ballots were blank. Smetona had no open rivals for power.⁵⁴

Under the banner of *tautiškumas*, “nationalness,” perhaps better translated as “Lithuanianness,” Smetona envisaged the consolidation of a Lithuanian national state in which the minorities perforce must yield place to Lithuanians but which also enthroned his own position as “leader.” In 1931, explaining the interrelationship of his own position, the government, and the *Tautininkų sąjunga*, he declared, “Discipline passes from the president through the state to the *sąjunga*, and through it to the society.”⁵⁵ In January 1940 he developed this theme, declaring that *Tautininkų sąjunga* was in fact not a party. A party, he explained, represented the will of a segment of a society, while the *sąjunga* was an aid to the government, educating society for “the ideal of national unity.”⁵⁶ He directed the party and chose its leadership.

Although communists characterized the regime as bloodthirsty and anti-Jewish, Smetona himself did not share the penchant for racial or class violence that characterized both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Even some of his harshest non-communist critics considered him basically a moderate, perhaps caught in the trap of maintaining himself in power. In 1940 an American diplomat called Smetona “a tolerant man in everything except one point. That point is his personal power.”⁵⁷ While in America during World War II, responding to an observation that his supporters in the United States were moved more by “emotion than understanding,” Smetona admitted that even in Lithuania the ideology of “Lithuanianness” was “clearly understandable” only “to a few,” and he added: “Up to now no one has formed it into a system.” When one of his supporters asked him to explain the system, however, he declared that he did not have an adequate library to draw upon, and he suggested that his correspondent just ask him questions.⁵⁸

In his foreign policy after first coming to power, Smetona, together with Voldemaras, had supported the basic lines that his predecessors had developed, namely aligning his government with Soviet and German foreign policy—this despite his determined anti-communist domestic policies. After the Poles had seized Vilnius in October 1920, the Lithuanian government declared that Lithuania and Poland were in a state of war. The western powers basically supported Poland as a buffer between Germany and Soviet Russia; therefore the Lithuanians looked to these two revisionist powers for support and, when considered necessary, for protection against the Poles.

Moscow and Berlin willingly and repeatedly obliged in the interest of containing and weakening Poland. In 1923 both Moscow and Berlin quietly supported the Lithuanians in seizing the city of Klaipėda/Memel and driving out a French military unit stationed there. In 1926, when the leftist government in Kaunas signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, even Smetona's then minuscule *tautininkai* party welcomed the action. Immediately after the coup d'état of 1926, the American minister in the Baltic reported home, "Smetona has never tried to conceal the fact that he is a Russophile and a Germanophile. He is a firm believer in the theory that Lithuania's future is not to be made dependent upon the West of Europe and especially not upon any one or more of the Allied Powers. It is his conviction that Russia and Germany are the two countries with which Lithuania should make close political connection. He gives the impression of being rather suspicious of Great Britain and France, and feels that England is not at all sincere in the advances which it has made in the direction of improving its relations with Lithuania."⁵⁹

In the 1920s, Lithuanian diplomats considered this alignment with Germany and the Soviet Union as something akin to a partnership. The Lithuanian minister then in Berlin once characterized the situation as "a triangle, Moscow-Berlin-Kaunas."⁶⁰ As a geometric figure, however, the cooperation represented perhaps more of a straight line. On a map, Kaunas essentially lies on a line drawn between Moscow and Berlin, and both Germany and the Soviet Union considered it in their own interests to help the Lithuanians on occasion. At times, to be sure, Lithuania's two large neighbors considered the Lithuanians too adventuresome and demanding, even irresponsible. In 1927, for example, talking with German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann about the latest crisis in the Polish-Lithuanian conflict, Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, sighed, "Remember, in this serious question you represent three countries. You must protect the German interests, the Russian interests, and you must protect Lithuania from itself."⁶¹

At the end of the 1920s, when German-Soviet relations cooled, Lithuania's situation, as one of the successor states lying in the north-south belt between these two giants, became more problematic. After the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, German-Soviet relations became increasingly antagonistic. The Lithuanian government, on the initiative of then Foreign Minister Stasys Lozoraitis, quietly considered the idea that Poland was less of a threat to Lithuanian independence than either Germany or the Soviet Union, and it investigated the possibility of some sort of rapprochement with Poland. The "Vilna Question," however, militated against open consideration of this line. Throughout the democratic years of 1920–1926 and the authoritarian years after 1926, hostility toward Warsaw was one of the major binding emotions for Lithuanian politics, and Smetona's own authoritarian regime had drawn on these passions to mobilize

popular support. When news of the secret contacts with the Poles leaked out, Smetona, faced by the threat of public displeasure, immediately squelched his foreign minister's initiatives. The Lithuanian decision to cease such efforts was a contributing factor to the Polish decision in March 1938 to force a crisis and to demand the opening of diplomatic relations.⁶²

The Polish ultimatum, delivered in the shadow of Hitler's incorporation of Austria, exposed the weaknesses of the Smetona regime, and at the same time it opened a debilitating era of ultimata. The Poles demanded the establishment of diplomatic relations; the Lithuanians surrendered. Popular opinion ran strongly against the government's making this concession; some intellectuals concluded that the crisis was a staged event to facilitate an unpopular move in foreign policy; but ultimata now became standard diplomatic weapons. In the fall of 1938, the Munich agreement, by which Czechoslovakia surrendered the Sudetenland to Germany, raised serious questions for the Lithuanians as to whether England and France could offer significant help to Lithuania in any moment of crisis. In March 1939 when Germany demanded that the Lithuanians surrender Klaipėda/Memel, the Lithuanian government saw no alternative but to yield. In October 1939 when the Soviet Union demanded the signing of the mutual assistance pact that would admit the Red Army into Lithuania, the Lithuanians again yielded. There was yet to follow the Grand Ultimatum of June 1940 that constitutes the core event of this study.

The government's quick surrender to the Polish ultimatum of March 1938 had shocked the Lithuanian public, and the cession of Klaipėda in March 1939 evoked unprecedented national passions throughout the country. The Lithuanian government had considered the German demand for Klaipėda "a question of time" rather than a "surprise,"⁶³ but many in the public believed that the government had now made too many concessions, first to the Poles and now to the Germans. Nationalists had already complained that the government was yielding to Polish pressure and was abandoning Lithuanian claims to Vilnius, and then when the government surrendered Klaipėda, more Lithuanians feared for the future of their state. Citizens expressed concern and wanted more forceful government policies. The government responded by appealing for unity and encouraging more nationalistic feelings, but Lithuania remained a small state adrift in an increasingly turbulent international environment. In the words of Leonas Sabaliunas, an American-Lithuanian historian, "at no previous time was the nation's will to defend itself so divorced from its potentiality to do so as at that moment."⁶⁴

The rising controversy forced Smetona, at the urging of army chief General Stasys Raštikis, to accept four opposition political leaders into a new coalition cabinet. In 1935 the Lithuanian government had banned the parties that these particular leaders represented—the leftist Populists and the more conservative Christian Democrats. In December 1938 the government had

accused Christian Democrats of conspiring with the *voldemarininkai*. Now the regime appeared to be in retreat, but the symbolism of the concession was greater than its practical effect. Smetona and the *tautininkai* remained in power; the parties themselves remained banned. This “compromise” nevertheless marked a serious fissure in the government’s image.

The first result of establishing a compromise government was a growing demand for more concessions. In April 1939 mass meetings throughout the country criticized the regime and rejoiced at the thought that the government was being forced to bow to public opinion. As Sabaliunas described the situation, “They reproached government leaders for being secretive about impending perils which menaced all, they warmly applauded the new administration and the army, and called on their fellow citizens to stand ready to defend the fatherland.” They also, Sabaliunas continued, “urged a return to democracy.” The government, however, made only limited concessions. It released some prisoners, but on May 10 it announced an emergency law giving local administrators extraordinary powers to silence any criticism.⁶⁵

In the spring and summer of 1939, as war clouds gathered in Eastern Europe, the Lithuanians found themselves in an ever more threatening situation. Whereas in 1938 some Lithuanians had feared a German-Polish agreement to divide Lithuania, in March 1939, after the Nazis’ incorporation of Bohemia and seizure of Klaipėda, Poland seemed destined to become Germany’s next target. What could this mean for Lithuania? Some Lithuanians feared that Germany might not remain satisfied with just Klaipėda and might yet demand more territory from Lithuania or even put an end to Lithuanian independence. In summer of 1939, all three Baltic states nervously watched the fervid but unproductive talks between Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union on the possibility of forming an alliance to contain Germany. The Soviet Union’s demand for the right to send the Red Army into Poland, Latvia, and Estonia raised considerable concern. If the western powers accepted the Soviet insistence on guaranteeing Latvia and Estonia, would that automatically leave Lithuania to the Germans?

The thought now arose in some quarters that the Lithuanians might take advantage of a German-Polish conflict to send their own forces into Vilnius, but the Smetona government rejected such thoughts. On May 11, the day after the government’s decree giving local officials extraordinary authority even of censorship, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys declared Lithuania’s complete and absolute neutrality:

Some time ago, when tension between Germany and Poland increased, there were certain cases where foreign diplomatic representatives in their private conversations with our diplomatic representatives had alluded to the fact that Lithuania, taking

advantage of an opportunity, might bring up its territorial demands...

It is clear that the present dangerous situation imposes upon us a particular duty of caution. Therefore such allusions should be answered so clearly that there can be no doubt that the basic point of Lithuanian policy and its attitude is strict neutrality which we are firmly determined to defend in any situation and on any question.⁶⁶

Some Lithuanian nationalists wanted their government to become more forceful and to seize Vilnius, but Urbšys's declaration still defined Lithuania's position when war began in September 1939.

The Lithuanians now found themselves on the horns of a dilemma, caught between the two giant neighbors who insisted that small states could not maintain neutrality and independence. The leaders of the Lithuanian government believed that in the long run the western Allies would triumph, but in the short run they had to find a place between Germany and the Soviet Union. Hand in hand with the policy of neutrality went new emphasis on military preparedness. Schools intensified their military curricula, and the national Riflemens' Union, *Šaulių sąjunga*, called by some a "National Guard," expanded its recruiting and fundraising. For foreign observers, this led to some speculation as to the political ambitions of Lithuania's military, which had first brought Smetona to power. The memory of the abortive coup led by younger officers in 1934 still lingered. In 1935, an American observer had reported that the army officer corps was "well organized and probably contains a greater number of Lithuanians of more than average intelligence than any other group in the country," but added that older officers were much less critical of Smetona than the younger ones were.⁶⁷ Nevertheless Smetona and the *tautininkai* remained securely in power, while opposition politicians could only complain to each other.

Soviet officials watching the turmoil in Lithuania believed they could detect "a window of opportunity." Throughout 1939 Nikolai Pozdniakov, the head of the Soviet mission in Kaunas, complained that the Lithuanian government feared Germany to the point it would allow no public discussion the international situation. "As a result of the Lithuanian authorities' fear of their fascist neighbor," he complained, "we are deprived of the possibility broadly to inform the Lithuanian population about our land—in the press, in films, lectures, etc." Nevertheless, he asserted, Lithuanians nurtured "secret, quiet hopes that the Soviet Union would block German moves eastward."⁶⁸

Pozdniakov was to play a major role in Lithuanian politics over the next year and a half. He became the plenipotentiary Soviet minister, *polpred*, in Lithuania in October 1939, after the conclusion of the mutual assistance pact. A worker from Moscow, he had fought in the Red Army, and he was a student in Sverdlovsk in 1924–1925 at the time Stalin lectured there,

assuming his own new role as the major Marxist ideologist of the time. As a Lithuanian communist newspaper put it, "Under the influence of Stalin's lectures, [Pozdniakov's] political horizon broadened and his Marxist world view formed." He entered the diplomatic service in 1931, serving as first secretary in Sweden until 1935 and then briefly first secretary in Germany. In 1936 he had come to Lithuania as first secretary, and had subsequently served as chargé d'affaires.

In 1940 he served as the local director of the Soviet takeover of Lithuania, and after Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union, he even became a Lithuanian deputy in the USSR Supreme Soviet. During that election campaign for the seat in the Supreme Soviet, the Lithuanian Communist Party newspaper *Tiesa*, December 31, 1940, called him "a brother of the Lithuanian people." In his work as the Soviet diplomatic chief in Kaunas, he was rather scornful of his host government. After the announcement of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, he characterized both the Lithuanian leadership and its "poor stratum of political cadres" as being so confused that they did not dare express opinions.⁶⁹

On September 1, as German tanks rolled, Pozdniakov's task, in accordance with the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, was to advise the Lithuanians to be more forthcoming but still reserved toward the Germans but also to discourage them from any move against Vilnius. He reported home that the Lithuanians feared the Germans more than they did the Soviets. Smetona once again asserted Lithuania's determination to maintain absolute neutrality, but speculation about Lithuania's designs on the Vilna region intensified. Enthusiasts in Kaunas called for Lithuania to realize the dreams of a generation and to send its army into Vilnius. At the end of August Voldemaras suddenly came to Kaunas from his exile in France, but the authorities arrested him and in January he again left the country. Pozdniakov endorsed the Lithuanians' determination not to move on Vilnius, he speculated that the Lithuanians were hoping for a quick end to the war in which case Vilnius might fall to them.⁷⁰

Smetona and officials of the foreign ministry diligently avoided responding directly to the German urging to take action against the Poles. British and French sources put pressure on the Lithuanians to refrain from "stabbing Poland in the back," and there was some fear that if the Lithuanians moved, the British might declare war on them. On September 5 the Lithuanian cabinet of ministers formally decided against action that would make Lithuania Germany's ally and it disapproved of a move against Vilnius as being, under the circumstances, "immoral." It did not respond to German urging to mount some demonstrative action on Lithuania's Polish frontier, and it even hesitated to order mobilization of the Lithuanian military. At the same time, the government had to respond cautiously but basically affirmatively to the German pressure for closer relations.⁷¹

The Lithuanians as yet had no sure knowledge of the territorial arrangements of the Nazi-Soviet pact, although they suspected there had been a secret agreement connected with it. Rumor had it that Pozdniakov had called the Baltic states “the property of the USSR.” The Lithuanians could only speculate about whether the Germans and the Soviets had now drawn Lithuania into their net. On September 13, the Lithuanian foreign ministry sent out a circular to its diplomats abroad asking them to sound out their sources to draw up a profile of Soviet intentions.⁷² The Soviet move into eastern Poland on September 17 and the Red Army’s quick occupation of Vilnius aroused new concerns and confusion; Lithuania and the Soviet Union now had a common frontier. But the Germans still seemed intent on influencing Kaunas. Believing that there was some sort of competition between the Germans and the Soviets over Lithuania, the Lithuanian government chose to move slowly. At the same time it assured the people that while it could not reveal its plans, it understood what it had to do. In the mean time, the people must not discuss matters that they do not fully understand, and they must not spread rumors.⁷³

Then suddenly the winds changed, and the Lithuanians felt themselves pulled eastward rather than westward, suddenly drawn to Moscow rather than to Berlin. Observers have spoken and written both affirmatively and scornfully of the idea that Lithuanians thought they might exploit differences between Berlin and Moscow, but in practice Kaunas had no room to move. Once Berlin had traded Lithuania to Moscow, the Germans refused to comment on Moscow’s pressures on the Lithuanians no matter how the Lithuanians tried to sound them out. (On October 7, Ribbentrop notified German ministers in the Baltic that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland do not belong to the German sphere of interest and that they should avoid any such discussions.) As *Lietuvos aidas* told its readers on September 30, it should be clear to everyone that “a new powerful axis—the Moscow Berlin axis—has formed, although it is not called an axis.”

The Lithuanian government could at last comprehend the change in its environment when Natkevičius came from Moscow on September 30 and reported on his meeting with Molotov. After a discussion lasting over two days, Smetona approved the recommendation that Lithuania accept the principle of a mutual assistance pact. The Lithuanians hoped that the Soviet Union was ready to give them Vilnius, and Smetona empowered Urbšys to go to Moscow to negotiate.⁷⁴

At this point, the Lithuanian government essentially made clear that whatever words it used, it would not rely on military force. It had announced a mobilization of its armed forces after Soviet troops had moved into Poland, and on October 2 it called off that mobilization. According to Defense Minister Kazys Musteikis the government had decided that mobilization was too costly. An officer reportedly objected: “If we demobilize the army, Lithuania will be lost! Can maintaining the exchange range of the lit [*the*

Lithuanian currency—aes] be so important that we are ready to risk Lithuania's freedom?" Musteikis replied simply that that was the government's decision, and the military had to comply. A British diplomat sympathetic to the Lithuanian cause wrote of such a decision, "But neutrality is possible only in a system governed by law and backed by a strong armed force or geographic inaccessibility, or both. These conditions lacking, neutrality is reduced to a mere scrap of paper." The Lithuanian officer put it more directly: "In my opinion, demobilizing our army we surrendered."⁷⁵

When Urbšys returned on the 4th after his meetings with Stalin and Molotov, the Lithuanian government had to face the new realities in Eastern Europe. The Lithuanian government now had only words as weapons. The situation was reminiscent of the first days of the Lithuanian republic in 1918 when Augustinas Voldemaras, then the new prime minister, declared that Lithuania need only declare its neutrality and neighboring states would have to respect it.⁷⁶ The fundamental problem of the day, as one participant in the government meetings put it, was how "to avoid Soviet army garrisons in Lithuania." Smetona reportedly declared that to admit Soviet troops would be the end "of Lithuanian independence."⁷⁷ The government requested information from Estonia and Latvia on the results of their current experiences with Moscow. Lithuania's ministers in London and Paris reported their hosts' support for Lithuanian independence but added the reservation that England and France could not directly help Lithuania at this time and that both governments were hesitant to recognize Vilnius as Lithuanian. Škirpa could get no clear answer in Berlin. Lithuania stood alone. The Lithuanians could remember only too well that a year earlier the Germans had been ready to march into Czechoslovakia before the western powers had given them the Sudetenland. Now, apparently with Germany's support, Moscow was acting in a similar fashion.

The Lithuanian government drew up a three part program: the Lithuanians certainly wanted to take Vilnius, they wanted to avoid accepting Soviet garrisons, but if forced to do so, they wanted to limit those garrisons to the Vilnius region, in no way admitting them into Kaunas. Urbšys should propose that Lithuania, with Soviet help and guidance, would strengthen its army and its border defenses. To show their seriousness, the Lithuanians named Kazys Bizauskas, Lithuania's Deputy Prime Minister, and General Stasys Raštikis to accompany Urbšys on his return to Moscow.

Urbšys was back in the Soviet capital on the 7th, and the Lithuanian government could only wait nervously for news. On the 9th, Edvardas Turauskas, a deputy foreign minister, telephoned Moscow to learn how matters were going. Urbšys gave a terse answer. "We spoke several hours, even the 'senior' (*vyriausias*) participated. Our theses were not accepted." Bizauskas and Raštikis returned to Kaunas that same day to report on the talks. Bizauskas declared that "the Russians don't completely believe us," and he offered the conclusion "Even if we don't take Vilnius, there will be

garrisons.” Smetona then launched into a discourse, weighing alternatives and possibilities in what others considered his typical professorial manner. For the Lithuanians the issue was a choice “of one of two evils”: accept, weaken Lithuania’s sovereignty, but remain independent, or reject the proposed alliance and probably lose their independence. There always seemed to remain the possibility that the German-Soviet friendship would fail, and therefore Smetona as usual thought about playing for time, stalling, or as his critics frequently put it, doing nothing. The meeting decided to accept the proposed treaty but to try to reduce the size of the Soviet garrison and to block the German designs on southwest Lithuania. The meeting’s conclusion was to accept the Soviet terms “and quickly.” With these instructions, Bizauskas and Raštikis returned to Moscow.⁷⁸

The atmosphere in Kaunas was tense as officials waited for news of the next meeting, to take place on the evening of the 10th. As Turauskas later described the moment, “The wait was long and uneasy. We felt like we were sitting on a volcano.” While Urbšys and the delegation were still closing the agreement in the night of October 10th–11th, Turauskas called the mission in Moscow to learn how matters were going. Since the talks took place in the Kremlin, no one at the mission could say anything substantive. At the Kremlin, there had been a celebration and then Stalin had insisted that his guests watch two films with him. Urbšys and his company returned to the mission only at 7 am on the 11th. By that time, the Soviet news agency TASS was already publishing the text of the agreement; Kaunas had not yet heard from its negotiator.

Up to this point, the Lithuanian public, even the intellectuals who pestered their friends and acquaintances in government for news, knew little about the substance of the negotiations. They only knew that Lithuania and the Soviet Union would now sign some sort of agreement. Lithuanians generally expected to receive some territory, although perhaps not the city of Vilnius, and rumors of the stationing of Soviet troops in Lithuania took various forms. An undercurrent to these stories carried the thought that the Soviet Union might well go on to swallow Lithuania. There were, to be sure, those who welcomed the thought of Soviet troops’ entering Lithuania and unseating Smetona. The news as it came offered relief to those who had feared the worst: the Lithuanian state still stood, and Vilnius would now in fact become the capital of Lithuania.

The news of the agreement spread rapidly through Kaunas on the morning of the 11th, and the government staged demonstrations at the War Memorial in Kaunas and at the president’s palace. The government, naturally enough, wanted the demonstrations to be restrained, to emphasize the “return of Vilnius,” and to advertise this as a great achievement of Smetona’s leadership; it wanted the demonstrations to be a paean to the wisdom of “the leader of the nation” and his loyal supporters, the *Tautininkų sąjunga*. At the same time it wanted to play down the sign of weakness involved in its

acceptance of the entry of Soviet troops into Lithuania. The government as well as a good part of the population preferred to emphasize the most favorable parts of the agreement. The demonstrations, however, did not proceed according to plan.

All work stopped at 11 am; people gathered for rallies. Government supporters hailed the return of the city of Vilnius but pointed out that the Soviets had given the Lithuanians only a small part of the territory that they had promised in the treaty of July 1920. Critics of the regime, together with pro-Soviet elements, begrudged the Lithuanian regime any harvest of good will, and they publicly emphasized the Soviet Union's generosity as the focus for the joyous moment.

The Soviet mission in Kaunas received three delegations in the course of the day, while at the meeting in front of the presidency, designed to express the people's gratitude to the nation's leader, a radical journalist, Justas Paleckis, disrupted the proceedings. The meeting had begun with Smetona's appearance on the balcony and the singing of the national anthem. Paleckis then immediately began to speak, denouncing the government and calling for the creation of a "Lithuanian Labor Republic." Smetona retreated from the balcony, and the meeting broke up. When Smetona demanded that Paleckis be arrested, the Minister of the Interior, Kazys Skučas, refused to act, and Smetona exclaimed, "If the president is insulted, that is nothing to you."⁷⁹ Smetona's first consideration in the turmoil remained his own position.

Paleckis had apparently acted on his own initiative. He had asked the advice of the Soviet mission in Kaunas but the staff carefully refused to get involved. In his speech at the presidency, Paleckis had in fact supported the work of the Constituent Assembly, 1920–1922, and its constitution, the constitution that Smetona had overthrown. He later went on to the Soviet diplomatic mission where he expressed his gratitude to Molotov and Stalin for having delivered Vilnius to Lithuania, and he pointed out that this was the second time that the Soviet government had turned the city over to the Lithuanian state. In his words, Vilnius would now be "a worthy bridge between the Lithuanian nation and the nations of the USSR."⁸⁰

The organized demonstrations of sympathy for the Soviet Union and of gratitude for the cession of Vilnius aroused considerable concern throughout the Lithuanian government. Stalin had of course promised that the Red Army would not interfere in Lithuania's internal affairs, but the Lithuanian government feared internal disorder that might have some sort of Soviet support. The authorities launched a wave of arrests as they attempted to settle the troubled atmosphere in Kaunas; a police guard directed demonstrators away from the Soviet mission. The Lithuanian security forces, the Saugumas, arrested Paleckis and sent him out of the city. When Urbšys returned to Kaunas, the government insisted that he receive no special

fanfare. The government wanted no more demonstrations; the return of Vilnius was not an unqualified success for Smetona personally.

Smetona's thoughts seemed to revolve first of all around the security of his own position. Although his regime still stood, he may well have been worried about the problems of taking Vilnius as much as he was concerned about admitting Soviet troops into Lithuania. In the coming days and weeks, to the surprise of some of his enthusiastic followers, he showed no eagerness to move his office from Kaunas to Vilnius. As the Lithuanians quickly discovered, occupying and administering Vilnius, which was heavily populated with Poles and Jews and crowded with refugees fleeing the Germans, presented the government with great security threats. Officials of the Polish Government in Exile denounced the Lithuanians' participation in this "partition of Poland,"⁸¹ and both the French and the British opposed the thought of moving the Lithuanian government to Vilnius. While such complaints underscored the Lithuanians' dependence on Soviet good will in their hopes to retain Vilnius, Smetona also feared that the arrival of Soviet troops foreshadowed still more aggressive actions by Moscow.

Smetona now began to think of the possibility that he would have to flee Lithuania. His secretary later quoted him as saying that if the Soviets took over Lithuania, it would be more difficult for him to flee from Vilnius than from Kaunas. Whatever unease he felt from the demonstrations of October 11 and 12, however, it would seem that he showed no interest in internal reform, and when members of his government broached the idea of new land reform, he angrily rejected the thought.⁸²

The questions whether Smetona could have avoided the Soviet invasion by sending the Lithuanian army into Vilnius at the beginning of September and whether Lithuania should have resisted the invasion in October have remained moot issues for commentators and historians down to the present day. Smetona had relied on his declaration of neutrality as Lithuania's shield, but in the face of Nazi and Soviet aggression, this strategy failed. "Neutrality" can be an effective policy only when neighbors, especially Great Powers, are ready to recognize it, and Lithuania could not find its isle of neutrality and tranquility in the stormy East European sea of 1939. Applying the terminology that the Russian foreign ministry used in 2000, Lithuania's declaration of neutrality did not fit into "the framework of international law as practiced at the time," especially considering the geopolitical realities of Eastern Europe and the framework of the Soviet and Nazi conceptions of Eastern Europe's reconstruction.

Kazys Škirpa, the Lithuanian minister in Berlin, was probably the major critic of Smetona's decision not to send troops into Vilnius. Even before the war, supporters of Voldemaras were arguing that Lithuania should take advantage of the crisis in German-Polish relations and seize Vilnius. Škirpa had specifically argued for a pro-German orientation of Lithuanian foreign policy. Just as German and Soviet officials, before the Molotov-

Ribbentrop pact, had argued that the Lithuanians should choose between Berlin and Moscow, Škirpa also argued that Lithuania had to choose, and he firmly believed that Germany would determine the geopolitical future of Eastern Europe. He wanted Lithuania to attach itself to that German future. Urbšys's declaration of neutrality on May 11, however, had tied his hands as a representative of the Lithuanian government.

In his memoirs, Škirpa scornfully criticized the entire scope of Lithuanian foreign policy at this time.⁸³ Arguing that recovery of Vilnius should have been Lithuania's primary goal in the first weeks of the war, he called the declaration of neutrality, which "no one recognized," bankrupt—it only showed the government's weakness. Neutrality, he said, was "a fatal error."⁸⁴ The failure to take Vilnius by force of Lithuanian arms constituted the major step in the process of Lithuania's losing its independence. He complained that foreign ministry officials had ignored and even sabotaged his efforts on behalf of Lithuania. He considered all three major foreign policy officials—Edvardas Turauskas, Kazys Bizauskas, and Juozas Urbšys—incompetent, calling them bureaucrats without any diplomatic vision, and he repeatedly wrote that when hostilities actually began on September 1, Urbšys, the nominal foreign minister, was "vacationing" in Italy. (Urbšys was actually taking a cure for tuberculosis in Davos, Switzerland, but there was some speculation about his being away for so long.) With such weak assistance, "the Smetona leadership withdrew from the question of leadership in the liberation of Vilnius just because its internal political situation paralyzed meaningful decisions."⁸⁵ In his own memoirs, Turauskas insisted that he and others did everything they could to block efforts aimed at linking Lithuania to Hitler's "star."⁸⁶

In later years, living in the United States, Škirpa expressed regrets that in the first days of the war he had not tried to influence Smetona directly, but there was such a "political gulf" between the two that they had no occasion to meet and discuss issues. Škirpa had been an army officer. He was the military chief of staff in the leftist government that the Lithuanian military overthrew in December 1926, and he had played a role in the abortive action of military leaders in 1934. His diplomatic career, as minister in Warsaw in 1938 and minister in Berlin 1939–1940, in fact constituted a form of political exile. There were indeed few reasons for Škirpa and Smetona to meet personally and to discuss fundamental issues of foreign policy in early September.

When the Germans urged the Lithuanians to move on Vilnius, Škirpa argued, such an action would not have constituted "aggression" because Poland had wrongfully seized the territory in 1920 and the Poles therefore could not in good conscience object. At the beginning of the war, he noted, the Lithuanian minister in Moscow, Natkevičius, wrote to Kaunas, "The key to Vilnius should be sought in Berlin." But when Škirpa informed his government that he had discussed with the Germans the possibility of

action, he received a reprimand for having deviated from his instructions to maintain strict neutrality. Upon learning that the Soviet army might enter Poland as early as September 16, Škirpa pushed his government harder, but still to no avail. The Lithuanian government refused to act, and Škirpa had to accept the fact.⁸⁷

The argument that the Lithuanians could have moved into Vilnius without serious opposition from the Poles is in fact symptomatic of the Lithuanians' passionate lack of understanding of Polish claims to the city. In 1920, when the Lithuanians had the approval, even the encouragement, of the western powers to move on Vilnius so as to block the Soviet Red Army from taking the city, local Poles, even though their government had acceded to that western pressure, still resisted the Lithuanian advance, thereby helping the Red Army to reach the city first. A Lithuanian move into Vilnius in September 1939, against the advice of the British and the French, would have been far more controversial, and given the fact that local Polish units in the Vilnius region offered some resistance to the Soviet advance, the Lithuanians would surely have met with armed opposition. Whether the Smetona government looked back at the experience of 1920 as a precedent, however, is of course doubtful; in any case, it chose not to act.⁸⁸

On September 21, Škirpa, in Kaunas to report Germany's invitation to Urbšys to come for talks, finally had occasion to reprimand Smetona for his inaction that had left Vilnius to Soviet occupation. According to Škirpa's account, Smetona "animately complained that he had not been adequately informed by the foreign ministry and that the Russian Red Army's invasion into the Vilna region had caught him by surprise."⁸⁹ Others quote Škirpa as saying that Smetona cried while he spoke these words. In any case, the Red Army had already occupied Vilnius. Participating in a cabinet meeting on the 22nd, Škirpa favored a positive response to Ribbentrop's invitation, and the cabinet agreed. But by the time Urbšys notified Zechlin of this decision, the Germans and the Soviets had made other arrangements for the disposition of Lithuania.

In his memoirs, Škirpa objected strongly to statements by others that suggested that he had "supported the German proposals." He was, he argued, Lithuania's agent, not Germany's, and, as his job demanded, he had only forwarded the communications from the German government and had urged careful consideration. What he recommended to Kaunas, he declared, he "did without any preliminary contact with any of the Germans." It was just a shame, he declared, that "our political leaders of that time... did not show the political awareness to take advantage" of the opportunities that they had.⁹⁰

What might have happened had the Lithuanian army marched on Vilnius? Even when living in the United States after the Second World War, Škirpa insisted that it would have been to Lithuania's benefit to have sent its army into Vilnius in September 1939. As he put it, "the fundamental error producing such a sad result was refraining from the march into Vilnius."

Taking Vilnius, he argued, would not have violated the policy of neutrality, bankrupt as it was, because the Poles had no right to the city. At the very last minute before the Red Army's arrival, he argued, even Polish administrators in Vilnius had pleaded with the Lithuanians to do something.⁹¹ Despite Lithuania's failure to act, moreover, the situation might have been "saved" had Urbšys responded more quickly to the German invitation to hold talks. During the war, Škirpa claimed that Antanas Merkys, for one, had expressed regret that Lithuania had not moved into Vilnius in September.⁹² The Soviet Union then could not have used the city a bargaining chip in negotiating first with Germany for a trade in their respective spheres of influence, and subsequently with Lithuania for a mutual assistance pact. Germany would not have traded Lithuania, and Soviet troops would not have entered Lithuania in the fall of 1939, much less in June 1940. At the end of the war, he insisted, the Soviet Union would have made Lithuania into a "people's democracy," like Poland, rather than a union republic like Latvia and Estonia.⁹³

"Counterhistory," rewriting history as Škirpa imagined that it could have developed, is an evanescent enterprise, subject to bursting at any moment. This study aims at understanding what happened in 1939–1940, not in offering alternatives of "what could have been" or "what should have been." Nevertheless, Škirpa's counterhistory demands a response. To begin at the end, such a wartime policy on the part of the Lithuanians would have made them an "enemy nation" to the western allies, and the masses of Lithuanians who in 1944–1945 chose flight rather than Soviet rule, including Škirpa himself, would have found little sympathy among the western powers for their plight. Just to consider the Vilna Question, it would seem doubtful that in 1945 the Soviets would have agreed to leave the territory in the possession of Lithuanians who had sided with the Germans. (In 1939 even Stalin had emphasized that he considered the region ethnically Belarusian.) Given the Soviet interest in annexing the Baltic port of Königsberg, which they renamed Kaliningrad, they surely would not have left it as an "exclave" on the other side of an independent Lithuania, such as it now exists, and they probably would have included Klaipėda in the Kaliningrad region. And to look back at the events of 1939, Škirpa's assertion that the Poles could raise no objection to a Lithuanian move into Vilnius because they knew they had no right to the region was totally without foundation; it was an illusion. In all, Škirpa's argument would not seem realistic.

Another line of speculative counterhistory might actually arouse more discussion. Had the Lithuanians fallen into the German orbit in the fall of 1939, what might have happened to Lithuania's Jews? Dov Levin has declared that the Soviet move into Lithuania in June 1940 had put off the Holocaust for a year and a week, but in fact, without the experience of a year of Soviet rule, would there have been such a violent outburst of rage and hatred against the Jews in Lithuania as there was in the summer of 1941? Many commentators and historians conclude that the year of Soviet rule

contributed significantly to the horrors of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The shock of seeing German forces in action and enduring Nazi occupation *before* Soviet occupation might have pushed Lithuanians in quite a different direction than the one they followed having first experienced Soviet occupation. Such thoughts, of course, also belong to the realm of speculation, but they may well have more cogency than Škirpa's arguments do.

Turauskas, on the other hand, steadfastly maintained that in September 1939 the Lithuanian government had followed the only proper course: "That Lithuania acted correctly, not engaging in the 'Vilnius adventure,' I remain convinced even today."⁹⁴ Contrary to Škirpa's conviction that the Germans were setting the tone in German-Soviet relations, Turauskas argued that at this time the Soviet Union was pursuing the more assertive and formative line in their evolving relationship. Given the way that Stalin eventually managed to wrest the southwestern part of Lithuania from the grasp of the Germans, Turauskas's arguments have some weight.

As it was, in dealing with the Lithuanians the Soviet Union had had a powerful weapon at its command as a result of its occupation of Vilnius and the Vilna region. In dealing with Estonia and Latvia, Stalin and Molotov relied just on the force of their words, backed up by the threat of military action. For the Lithuanians, they of course used the precedent of their agreements with Estonia and Latvia, together with the threat of independent action in the event there should be no agreement, but they also dangled Vilnius as a carrot.

The Lithuanian government felt that it had to react positively to the dangling carrot, regardless of the threat they might perceive in the stick that the Soviets were carrying. Essentially they accepted the carrot because they believed that the Soviets would use the stick anyway. For twenty years the Lithuanians had been proclaiming Vilnius to be their capital. The Smetona regime had recently heard complaints that it had surrendered both Vilnius and Klaipėda. Now Smetona had the opportunity to claim a major victory—and with the blessings of both of Lithuania's large neighbors. Those blessings, however, came with obligations that the Smetona regime was not so eager to assume. Many Lithuanians echoed the new, sad thought: "Vilnius mūsų, o mes rusų" (Vilnius is ours but we are the Russians'). Lithuania could do nothing about the introduction of Soviet troops into the country—Soviet troops in fact already occupied the Vilnius region—but the government worked desperately to put a distinctive, positive "spin" on its public interpretation of the treaty itself.

In taking Vilnius from the hands of the Soviets, and with German approval, the Lithuanians were essentially realizing the major principle of their foreign policy of the 1920s, when they had aligned themselves with the German-Soviet anti-Versailles camp. Smetona's biographer Merkeliš attempted to picture the international configuration in a different way, saying

that Lithuania was able to keep its balance between three large neighbors in the 1930s, but that with the destruction of the Polish state, it fell prey to Nazi-Soviet cooperation. This interpretation, however, ignores the “Moscow-Kaunas-Berlin triangle” or straight line mentioned above; in the 1920s Lithuanian leaders had hoped for German and Soviet support of its claims to Vilnius and apparently had few worries about the destruction of Poland. They clearly did not consider the existence of an independent Poland as any sort of guarantee for Lithuanian independence. As matters now stood, Vilnius bound the Lithuanians closely to the Soviet Union. The Poles, with the support of the western allies, protested, and all this made Stalin a stronger and more essential supporter of the Lithuanians.

Through the years, Lithuanians have consistently insisted that Poles fully understood that they had no right to Vilnius. In his time Škirpa argued that there would have been no Polish opposition to a Lithuanian move into Vilnius in September. (Vilnius Poles in fact displayed considerable hostility to the Lithuanians in the coming months.) In the 21st century, a Lithuanian historian can insist “Poland had no right to Vilnius” either in 1920 or in 1939. For most Lithuanians, Vilnius lay at the core of their conception of Lithuanian statehood, and they wanted to believe that their neighbors all recognized this.⁹⁵

A discussion of the ethnic character of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was at one time the largest state in Europe, runs far beyond the bounds of this study. Suffice it to note the claims of the Belarusians to that history, which I mentioned in the previous chapter, and to say just a few words here on the claims of the Poles to the Vilna region. Contrary to the claims of the Lithuanians, most Poles believed that they had every right to “Wilno,” which they considered a Polish city. As the American historian Timothy Snyder put it, the Lithuanians now had to “recreate Vilnius as a Lithuanian city.”⁹⁶ From the Polish point of view, the Lithuanians had made themselves accomplices in the destruction and partition of the Polish state; the Poles, of course, saw no corollary in their own participation in carving up Czechoslovakia after the Munich agreement of 1938.

The Lithuanians nevertheless rejoiced at the “recovery” of Vilnius. The emotional investment that they had put into their visions of Vilnius as their capital deeply colored their reactions to this engagement with Moscow. Church services celebrated the news, and the Lithuanian media spoke warmly of the “traditional friendship” between Lithuania and the Soviet Union. As a newspaper sympathetic to the Voldemaras cause exclaimed, “The Soviet Union respects a nation’s right to an independent existence, and in regard to the Lithuanian nation—in the solution of the Vilnius problem—it has repeatedly honored and implemented both this right of the Lithuanian nation and its own commitments.”⁹⁷ The government proclaimed the recovery of Vilnius to be a major accomplishment: “This service to the country will for long be a bright light to the Lithuanian Nation and a source of great honor

and pride to the *Tautininkų sąjunga*.” On the other hand, the government now faced the new, enormous problem of incorporating Vilnius into the body of the Lithuanian state.⁹⁸

III

A Trojan Horse?

“A nation is composed more of the dead than of the living.”

—Augustinas Voldemaras,
Lithuanian Yellow Book, 114–16

“They did not give us all this for our beautiful eyes...”

—Kazys Grinius, Lithuanian Prime Minister, 1920

Trojan horse—“someone or something intended to undermine or subvert from within.”

—*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*

On October 14, Smetona’s Seimas ratified the mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. The government’s official mood of the moment found expression in the speech of deputy Mečys Kviklys, who praised the “leadership of the powerful Soviet Union, who, one can say, atoning for tsarist Russia’s guilt in the troubles and sufferings of the our people, today show their noble impartiality and great generosity toward us, a small nation, in returning that which both historically and ethnically belonged to us through the ages.” He still went on to complain that the Soviet Union had not yielded all the territory inhabited by Lithuanians, but he concluded with the thought that “Soviet Russia is a state whose word one can trust, in whose good will one cannot doubt.”⁹⁹ This was a hopeful statement, asserting that the Soviet Union was accepting responsibility for historic wrongs against the Lithuanians, complaining that the Soviet Union had not fully recognized what was due the Lithuanians, and working to convince listeners that nothing bad would come as a result of the movement of Soviet troops into the land.

“Trust” was a key word in the political vocabulary of the day, together with “good will” and “sincerity.” Could Lithuania, could Latvia and Estonia, “trust” the “good will” and “sincerity” of Soviet promises, nay Stalin’s promises, that the Soviet troops moving into the Baltic had only defensive purposes and that the Soviet government had no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of any of the three countries? In a major speech in January 1940 Urbšys declared that those who criticized the mission of Soviet troops into Lithuania “have based their argument on the view that the Soviet Union was not sincere.” These people, he declared, were mistaken.¹⁰⁰ Privately, no one in the government could be so sure.

As of the fall of 1939, Lithuanians had contradictory images of the Soviet system, but they had a positive image of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy. There were stories of arrests, to be sure, but the stories of persecution in Germany were hardly better. The Soviet government had steadily supported Lithuania in the Vilnius question, and in the mid 1930s, even

Smetona and some other government leaders had suggested that perhaps Lithuanian culture could survive better under a Soviet protectorate than a German one. For a generation, the Soviet Union had had the image of being a friendly state. The Soviets claimed to have protected Lithuania against a Polish threat in 1927 and then again against the Polish ultimatum of March 1938. Now, as the choice began to appear more urgent and real, Lithuanian officials hesitated to make a commitment, while a number of leftist intellectuals, increasingly hostile to the Smetona regime, expressed enthusiasm for the coming of the Red Army, apparently convinced that Lithuanian language and culture would thrive under Moscow's umbrella and apparently not even considering the possibility of Lithuania's losing its independence.

Some critics have called the Red Army a Trojan horse, but others, considering the deceit involved in the original Trojan horse, wondered whether the Vilna region itself was to be a Trojan horse. Did the Soviet Union turn Vilnius over to the Lithuanians with the thought that it would eventually take over all of Lithuania? (Before the Lithuanians entered the city, the Lithuanian Saugumas speculated as to whether the Soviets expected to get the region back with "all bolshevised Lithuania.")¹⁰¹ The original Trojan horse had been an inanimate object with troops hidden within it; rather than concealing troops, Stalin's "gift" of Vilnius to the Lithuanians came clearly wrapped in Red Army units. Nevertheless, Vilnius itself might well be considered a "Trojan horse" in this drama; all the more so because Lithuanians were not wont to look critically at their own claims on the city. Vilnius now became the source of great stress for the Lithuanian government and a major vehicle for the Soviet penetration of Lithuanians' consciousness.

The city's multi-national population posed a myriad of problems for the Lithuanians. At the beginning of the 21st century, when Lithuanians constitute a majority of the residents of the city of Vilnius, it is perhaps difficult for a foreigner—certainly for a Lithuanian—to understand the controversy over the city in the first half of the 20th century, when Lithuanians constituted only a few percent of the inhabitants of both the city and its surroundings. The present-day Lithuanian majority is a relatively recent development, perhaps realizing itself only in the decade following Stalin's death in 1953. When I first visited Vilnius in 1960, I found that I had to speak Russian rather than Lithuanian to make my way around; Poles I met told me that they spoke Russian in public. On my second visit, in 1970, I could speak Lithuanian almost everywhere. To be sure, using the same—unscholarly—test in 1988, I found I could shop in the city on a Saturday morning speaking only Polish. The city's history is a multi-national kaleidoscope.

The original, original inhabitants of the Vilna region were ancestors of modern day Lithuanians, but as the city developed in its capacity of capital of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy, it drew residents from all peoples in Eastern

Europe. Before Lithuania's union with Poland, the official language of the Grand Duchy's administration was an ancestor of modern Belarusian. Slavic culture spread into the city's hinterland. Jews came in increasing numbers over the centuries. In the 400 years of the union between the Grand Duchy and the Kingdom of Poland, the city took on a Polish face even though according to the 1897 Russian Census, Jews constituted a plurality of the population, some 39%. World War I and two decades of Polish rule further altered the ethnic balance in the city. By 1939 Polish authorities claimed that Poles constituted at least 70 percent of the population.¹⁰² After the outbreak of war, the number of Jews in the city grew as Jewish refugees from other parts of Poland fled to Vilnius, especially after it seemed that the Soviet Union would turn it over to Lithuania; many came with the hope of obtaining exit visas to escape Eastern Europe and the Nazi threat altogether.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Lithuanians admitted that in the city their numbers were few, but, claiming the Grand Duchy as their historic state, they insisted that Vilnius should be the capital of their new national state. Poles, Jews, Belarusians might all disagree with the Lithuanian claims to Vilnius, but the Lithuanians were adamant. The city's history, the Lithuanians insisted, belonged to them whatever the mixture of people then living there might be. As Augustinas Voldemaras once wrote, "A nation is composed more of the dead than of the living." In the 1960s, I once challenged a prominent Lithuanian diplomat of the 1920s to justify Lithuania's claim to the city; he responded, "Just let us rule Vilnius for ten years, and you will see how it will become Lithuanian." Most of the prominent leaders of the Lithuanian national movement before the First World War, including Antanas Smetona, lived and worked in Vilnius. Lithuanians argued that the natives of the region would surely realize their ethnic Lithuanian heritage once a Lithuanian national administration was in place; Poles who moved to Vilnius in the 1920s and 1930s, they declared, were only foreign immigrants without any right to stay on once Lithuanian rule was "restored."

As national states came into being in Eastern Europe after World War I, Vilnius's history constituted a kaleidoscopic peephole on the turmoil accompanying the process. When German troops withdrew in January 1919, the Lithuanians raised their national flag there for only one day before Polish forces marched in. The Poles in turn almost immediately withdrew in the face of the advance of the Western Red Army. For three months Vilnius was the capital of a Soviet republic, first called the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and then the Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic—often called the "Lit-Bel republic." Polish troops seized the city in April 1919 and held it until July 1920, when the Red Army returned. The Soviet Union now recognized the city as Lithuanian, but only after the Poles had defeated the Red Army's march on Warsaw, did the Soviet authorities turn the city over to the Lithuanians, who held it some six weeks before Polish forces

drove them out. The Lithuanian government refused to give up its claim to Vilnius and declared that it was in a state of war with Poland. Kaunas, it continually stated, was only Lithuania's "provisional capital."

Polish commentators frequently argued that the Kaunas government's stance was a tactic to facilitate its goal of eradicating historic Polish influences in Lithuanian society and culture. Whatever its conscious or subconscious rationale was, the Lithuanian government, in the 1920s and early 1930s, based both its domestic and foreign policies on an anti-Polish foundation. The passionate, uncompromising position epitomized in the slogan "Mes be Vilniaus nenurimsim" (We will not quiet down without Vilnius), blocked governmental moves toward improvement of relations with Poland, and it even evoked strong criticism of Smetona's refusal to join the Nazi cause and send troops into Vilnius in September 1939.

Against this turbulent background, when the Lithuanian government in October 1939 could finally gain power over the city, enormous practical matters arose. For a generation, Vilnius had been a provincial city of Poland, cut off from its natural hinterland. Kaunas, in contrast, was now a European capital city. In 1937 a Swiss friend of my father's described the city's new face: "You would no longer recognize the city of Kaunas... One can almost say that no stone remains atop another. A broad network of streets extends across a region formerly empty and now occupied by simple homes and beautiful villas. The intensive bus service in the city and in the province leaves hardly anything to be desired. Even the workers of the suburbs have long since become accustomed to running water and sewers... In a word—Kaunas has developed into a city."

Although Kaunas was only Lithuania's "provisional capital," after the Polish ultimatum of 1938 had forced the Lithuanians to open diplomatic relations with Warsaw, some city authorities in Kaunas began to think of the need for new governmental buildings befitting a European capital. The recovery of Vilnius instead posed tremendous costs that eventually demanded considerable sacrifice from Kaunas. In the short run, possession of the city carried with it the problem of caring for some 14000 Polish soldiers and thousands of Polish and Jewish refugees; in addition, during the second half of September and the first half of October, the Soviet authorities stripped the city of its valuables, even some of its factories. In the long run, in later years when funds were available for capital construction, the lion's share of the money went to Vilnius, not to Kaunas.

Despite the excitement at getting Vilnius, the government had to wait to show its authority. On October 16, the Lithuanian and the Soviet governments exchanged notices of the mutual assistance pact's ratification. When would the Soviet Union now physically transfer Vilnius to Lithuanian sovereignty and when would the Soviet troops enter Lithuania? (Soviet troops of course already stood in the Vilnius district.) Almost as imposing a question was: How would Lithuania administer the Vilnius territory and how

would it handle the obvious social and economic problems that it would face there? Now that it could rule the city, the government faced a tangle of threatening new problems.

The very first complications that the Lithuanians faced obviously arose from the Soviet occupation of the city. When the Red Army had occupied the city in July 1920, the fledgling Lithuanian Communist Party used it as a base for plans to overthrow the Lithuanian government in Kaunas. It gave up those plans only after the Red Army had begun its retreat from Warsaw. Now, in the fall of 1939, news came that the Soviet authorities were arresting potential opponents, stripping factories, and even encouraging Belarusians to claim the city and its surrounding lands. In their talks in Moscow, Stalin had pressed the Lithuanians to act quickly because, as he put it, the local population in the Vilna district was showing great enthusiasm for the Soviet order, and if the Lithuanians delayed too long, the Soviet Union would not be able in good conscience to turn the Vilna region over to them. With the news that Lithuania would take over the city, Belarusian authorities, claiming sovereignty over the city's history, carried off books and archives from the city's libraries.

When Stalin urged the Lithuanians to act quickly, he of course knew that the sovietization of Belarus was proceeding according to Moscow's plan rather than just through spontaneous local action, but he nevertheless could have been concerned about establishing Belarus's territorial identity before the meeting of the Belarusian "People's Assembly." When Soviet troops marched into eastern Poland in September 1939, the Politburo, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, not a formal agency of the government as defined in the constitution but the all powerful organ of the Soviet party-state, dictated the policy that the occupation authorities were to follow. In a document entitled "Protocol No. 7 of the Decision of the Politburo of the AUCP(b) Central Committee for September 4 to October 3, 1939," that included details on mobilizing party resources, the group laid out the process for annexing the lands taken from Poland. Under the protection of the Red Army, local Communists were to divide the territory into a Belarusian and a Ukrainian section and establish "a new revolutionary order." (The territory of "Western Belarus," it might be noted, included "the Vilnius district.") Provisional administrations in Belostok and Lviv were to arrange the elections of "People's assemblies." Elections would take place on October 22, and the assemblies would meet on the 26th. The key issues in the election campaigns, the Politburo decreed, would be the establishment of the Soviet order, the incorporation of Western Ukraine into the Ukrainian SSR and of Western Belarus into the Belarusian SSR, land reform, and the nationalization of banks and large industry.¹⁰³

The Soviet operation in Ukraine and Belarus would eventually serve as a blueprint for the work of the Soviet camp in all three Baltic states in 1940, but in October 1939 the first question at hand for Lithuanian-Soviet

relations was when would the Soviet government actually turn Vilnius and the surrounding region over to Lithuanian administration. While Lithuanian and Soviet officials negotiated the conditions and rules for the stationing of Soviet troops in Lithuania and also the details of the new Lithuanian-Soviet frontier, Kaunas expressed serious concerns about the behavior of the Soviet forces in Vilnius. The Soviets were reportedly stripping factories, hospitals and schools of equipment, machinery, furniture and even food supplies. On October 19, the government instructed Natkevičius in Moscow to protest the looting, the arrest of prominent Lithuanians, and even the lack of respect the local Soviet officials were showing to its plenipotentiary in Vilnius, whom Soviet officials did not even permit to come to Kaunas for information and instructions. (In May 1940 the Soviet government declared that it would return nothing taken from Vilnius in the fall of 1939.) On the same day, Urbšys asked Pozdniakov when the Lithuanians could take over Vilnius. On the 21st, when Pozdniakov reported that he had as yet received no response from Moscow, Urbšys complained about the growing anarchy in the occupied territory.

On the 22nd, Molotov informed Natkevičius that the Lithuanians “can begin gradually to go into the Vilnius region” and that a Soviet military commission would immediately go to Kaunas the next day to fix details. The process, however, moved only slowly, as the negotiations were difficult.¹⁰⁴ Lithuanian military authorities could not find space in Vilnius to house Lithuanian troops. In addition there were countless preparations: selecting police and military units as well as administrative personnel. Although Kazys Bizauskas, a Christian Democrat, was first designated to be the chief administrator of Kaunas, Smetona then installed Antanas Merkys, the mayor of Kaunas, in that position. On the 24th, Urbšys sent notice to the Vatican that Lithuania expected to be consulted on the naming of a new Archbishop in Vilnius. Finally, on October 28 the Lithuanian army solemnly advanced onto Vilnius under the leadership of General Vincas Vitkauskas.

The Lithuanians entered the city with great ceremony, and at first without any significant opposition. The authorities in Kaunas had carefully selected both troops and police for this service, and the soldiers and police who entered Vilnius in Lithuania’s name had orders to be on their best behavior: “In our Vilnius march we must be smart, lively, and orderly.” As the Lithuanian Minister of Internal Affairs, Kazys Skučas, told the police, they had to understand that this was Lithuanian territory, but they would confront a different culture than what they knew. Most of the people had yet to learn—or, as Lithuanians frequently put it, “relearn”—the language. “Be carriers of culture,” he directed. The Lithuanian press spoke glowingly of the troops being greeted with flowers.¹⁰⁵

Although the first reactions of the populace throughout the region were basically favorable, Lithuanian Saugumas officials reported that Polish “nationalists” in Vilnius jeered the Lithuanian troops and that the Polish

church hierarchy prevented the ringing of church bells in celebration. The Red Army broke up a few small anti-Soviet demonstrations on the 28th, but more worrisome for the Lithuanians were various demonstrations by Polish youths. On the 29th, one group of demonstrators publicly and defiantly sang the Polish national anthem, “Jeszcze Polska niezginela” (Poland has not yet perished). Moreover, thunderclouds of uncertainty hung over the city: lack of jobs, uncertainty about the value of the Polish zloty, the problems of dealing with an estimated 100,000 rubles put into circulation by the Red Army, and massive shortages of food. Under the Soviet administration, peasants were said to have been leery of delivering food to the city for fear of its being confiscated by the Red Army; Lithuanians spoke of feeding 20–25,000 persons each day. In addition, on October 30 a Lithuanian report spoke of “great hatred toward the Jews.”¹⁰⁶

On October 31, a large scale anti-Jewish pogrom exploded. The action may have originated in the lines of people gathered at bread stores; amid reports that Jewish storekeepers were hiding food; calls for “vengeance” multiplied. By 9.30 a.m. demonstrators were interfering with traffic, and when the police tried to restore order at 10 a.m., violence erupted. Lithuanian reports spoke of trouble “in almost all the central streets of the city of Vilnius.” In four streets of the old city—Chopin, Konska, Zavalna, Subačiaus—demonstrators broke windows and looted stores. In the ghetto area, Dominikonų and Vokiečių Streets, demonstrators called out “Down with the Lithuanians, give us the Soviets!” At the Dawn Gate, on the edge of the old city, 300 workers demanded more pay and cheaper bread, and they cheered Soviet troops. (Soviet soldiers remained in Vilnius through the winter.) Demonstrators on Didžioji Street whistled at Lithuanian soldiers and called out “Long live Stalin!” and “Go back where you came from!” In the afternoon Lithuanian troops dispersed some 200 youths who had gathered on the same street to beat Jews. “Terrible riots,” declared the Lithuanian Saugumas.¹⁰⁷

In the succeeding days, the Lithuanians broke up scattered demonstrations more quickly. A demonstration of 20,000 Poles in the Rasų cemetery shouted slogans “Precz z zydami!” (Away with the Jews!). 2000 activists marched into the city, but the police quickly contained them. Lithuanians characterized the disturbances as “Polish vengeance against the Jews,” but spokespersons for Vilnius Jews aimed sharp criticisms at the Lithuanians for not having intervened sooner and more forcefully. A Jewish delegation reportedly requested the Red Army to “bring about order in the city.” According to official Lithuanian accounts, the Soviets declared that keeping order was now “the task of the Lithuanians,” but Soviet tanks appeared in the streets. Jewish merchants demanded guarantees of protection before they would reopen stores. Although some kept repeating the charge that the Lithuanians “let the Poles beat and rob” the Jews, by November 6 the Lithuanians believed that they had survived the worst.¹⁰⁸

The pogroms and riots were a serious embarrassment for the Lithuanians. In first reporting the Lithuanian entry into Vilnius, *Lietuvos aidas*, the newspaper of Smetona's *Tautininkų sąjunga*, had trumpeted stories of the joyous reception the army was receiving. The first report of trouble, published in *Lietuvos aidas* of November 2, spoke of incidents between Poles and Jews, incited by criminal refugee elements in the population. Lithuanian state authorities, the report declared, will act strongly against any disorders. On November 6 the newspaper emphasized the pro-Soviet demonstrations. Antanas Merkys, the government's plenipotentiary in Vilnius, spoke of "various criminal elements" in Vilnius, and Kazys Skučas, the Minister of the Interior, offered a lengthier statement, saying that there had been "some incidents" (*išsišokimu*) for the authorities to deal with. He blamed "refugees" first of all, but he went on to explain that the troubles arose from "hatred of one group of residents toward another, the disagreement of one national minority with another." This, he declared, led to "unacceptable excesses." He explained, "Here I have in mind first of all the Jews and the Poles in Vilnius," but he insisted that he considered this the action of individuals rather than of national groupings. "Nevertheless," he declared, the "Jewish community" must accept "moral responsibility" for those of its "conationals" who interfere with "administrative organs." In conclusion, he declared, "the Government deeply regrets" the events in Vilnius.

The reports of Lithuania's military officials analyzed the events very differently. Calling the 31st an "ill-starred (*nelaiminga*) day," reports characterized the pogroms as "the vengeance of the Poles against the Jews" and criticized the Lithuanian police force as inexperienced and unprepared. The police lacked personnel who spoke Polish or Yiddish, and they did not know the streets of Vilnius. "It seems to me," declared one report, "that the police chief was at fault," and therefore the military had to step in. A week after the events, it might be noted, the military officials involved had to respond to complaints that they had overstepped their authority in those crucial days.¹⁰⁹

Other commentators have offered a wide variety of interpretations of the origins of the riots. The Lithuanians saw the disturbances as the result of tension between Poles and Jews, in which the Lithuanians had to be the arbiters. The Poles, they would say, still hoped that the French and the English would quickly win the war, and they sought revenge against the Jews, who had allegedly supported Soviet rule. Lithuanians, in these stories, were not responsible for the troubles, and Lithuanian police officials had suffered injuries, even one death. A Polish historian has seen the disturbances as "symptomatic of the views and position of a significant part of Polish society."¹¹⁰

Writers concentrating on the experiences of the Jews have looked at the events from different, and at times conflicting, perspectives. Henri Minzeles has written of Poles' rioting with the slogans "Down with the

Lithuanians,” “Down with the Jews,” and “Down with the Soviets.” Using the passive voice Dov Levin put the blame on the Lithuanians: “With the encouragement of the Lithuanian police, a pogrom was staged, killing one Jew and wounding nearly 200.” N. N. Schneidman wrote that the Lithuanians “helped” the pogromists. Solomonas Atamukas identified Polish nationalists as having begun the disturbances, but he charged that Lithuanian police had not acted to control the situation and had even supported the action. The Lithuanian Communist Party blamed “Lithuania’s police agents and fascists.” Anna Louise Strong, repeating Lithuanian Communists’ views in the summer of 1940, unreservedly blamed the Lithuanians for the pogroms: “Promptly the Smetona government staged one of the worst pogroms in Vilna’s history, attacking under the name of ‘Jews’ all persons who had shown sympathy with the Red Army.”¹¹

Up until the violence at the end of October and beginning of November, Vilnius had been a haven for Jewish refugees from both the Red Army and the Wehrmacht. “Vilna fever,” it was called. In the words of Dov Levin, “Vilna was the only remaining escape route from occupied Poland.”¹² Vilnius was a gateway for leaving Eastern Europe altogether—emigrating from Lithuania should surely be easier than emigrating from the Soviet Union. Once in Vilnius, refugees lined up at the Lithuanian consulate to obtain visas to travel on to Kaunas where they could seek visas to go to other lands. The violence of October 31, however, cast a long shadow over Lithuania’s image as a haven, both for refugees and also the native Jewish population of the country.

The violence complicated the task of the Lithuanian government. Probably the vast majority of Lithuanians, obsessed as they were with images of Vilnius as their capital, had not considered the actual problems of administering the city, where Lithuanians constituted a small, if not minute, minority. They had apparently not expected opposition: the Lithuanian government now claimed to rule Vilnius and its inhabitants should obey. The people should become loyal Lithuanian citizens; they should learn, or “relearn” Lithuanian. Lithuanians could not comprehend that Poles would consider the Vilna region *Polonia irredenta*, and they presumed that the Jews would simply accept the new administration. As the Lithuanian military complained, the police had no plan for dealing with large scale opposition. This all cost the prestige of the Lithuanians heavily, particularly in questions of Jewish acceptance of Lithuanian rule.

Of the two major nationalities in Vilnius, the Jews were undoubtedly more amenable to cooperating with the Lithuanians than were the Poles. But Jewish society in the Vilna region of course had deep, significant political divisions. Among the activists were communist sympathizers, especially among the poor and the young; there were Zionists on both the left and the right, who wanted to live elsewhere, in a Jewish state. Conservative and passive elements, who just wanted to live their own lives, were nevertheless

probably in the majority. According to most testimony, many—perhaps even most—non-Communist Jews in Vilnius seemed to prefer Lithuanian to Soviet rule in October and November of 1939.

Of the groups in the Jewish community, however, the pro-communist activists were probably the most visible in public, and they evoked the strongest reactions as they cheered the Red Army. Some demonstratively left to go to the Soviet Union when the Red Army drew its troops back. As Dov Levin wrote, “In the latter half of October, shortly before the expected entry of the Lithuanian army, the exodus assumed mass proportions... While some emigrants were motivated to relocate by their pro-Soviet ideology, others chose to leave Vilna in order to escape the reputedly anti-Semitic ... Lithuanian regime.” In another work, Levin had more specific comments: “For a variety of economic and political reasons, approximately 300 Jewish workers at the Elektrit factory and their families accompanied their employer to Russia. In addition several thousand young Jews, primarily Leftists who had served in the militia or in the Workers’ Guard, also went along.” Anna Louise Strong later wrote that when the Soviet Union delivered Vilnius to the Lithuanians, “Some twenty thousand of Vilna’s workers, especially the Jewish, didn’t wait for this pogrom. They went with the Red Army into the USSR.”¹¹³

Many Lithuanians in turn had traditionally looked at Jews as the mainstay of the communist party. Skučas’s criticism of what he considered the “provocative” actions of Vilnius Jews, cited above, reflected past problems in the relations between the Jews and the Lithuanians, and at the same time his comments bode ill for the future for the future of Jewish-Lithuanian relations. Echoing the Lithuanians’ perceptions of the public actions of Jewish radicals, Skučas called for “responsible” Jews to recognize their “responsibility” for restraining those who act “destructively.” This reflected what Alfonsas Eidintas has called the “Jew-Communist’ stereotype” in the Lithuanian mentality.¹¹⁴ Although, as of the fall of 1939, the traditions of the past 20 years in Vilnius were different than those in Kaunas, nevertheless, Skučas’s statement could serve the reader as a harbinger of emotions that welled up under Soviet rule in 1940 and 1941: many non-communist and anti-communist Lithuanians considered Jews to be agents of Soviet communism.

Besides concerns about sympathies that elements in the Jewish community might have for Soviet rule, Lithuanians faced the problem of dealing with the Poles in Vilnius. Reports abounded that the Poles had concealed guns and that they were plotting against the Lithuanians. Polish radio broadcasts from the west called on Poles to keep up their spirits and work for the reestablishment of their state, urging them not to “collaborate” with the Lithuanians. Both Lithuanian and Soviet officials anxiously worked to control this threat of resistance throughout all of the territory into which the Red Army had moved. The western allies, however, urged the

Lithuanians to treat the Poles carefully; French military intelligence was using them as a resource.

Lithuanian authors have prided themselves on the aid that the Lithuanian authorities gave to Polish refugees in Vilnius in the winter of 1939–1940. Liudas Truska, quoting an article in *Lietuvos aidas*, wrote that the authorities helped the Poles in every way, from buying up worthless zloty to financially supporting Polish educational and cultural institutions. Polish nationalists, however, complained bitterly that the Lithuanians were cruelly discriminating against everything Polish in the region: “Neutral evidence confirms the fact that women and children have been beaten unconscious in the streets by the Lithuanian police at Wilno.” In the words of the Polish government in exile, “Lithuania, instead of regarding Wilno in the light of a trust and a bond for future collaboration, chose to practice nationalist oppression within the territories ‘ceded’ under the aegis of Germany and Russia.”¹¹⁵

The Lithuanians would have liked to reduce the Polish population of the region. Merkys spoke of “unnecessary elements” in the population of Vilnius. Urbšys told a British diplomat that “there were 100,000 Poles too many in Lithuania.”¹¹⁶ The Lithuanian government anxiously asked the Soviets to accept former Polish soldiers who were natives of the Belarusian or Ukrainian lands. When western diplomats objected to such action, the Lithuanians assured them that this would only include “volunteers” who wanted to return home. Soviet officials to the contrary told the Lithuanians they should be more accommodating toward the Jews in Vilnius and they were “too gentle” in dealing with the Poles.¹¹⁷ Then there were the social and economic problems: unemployment and food shortages. The Lithuanians brought in food, struggled to provide work, expelled suspect Polish youth from the city, planned land reform to help the population in the countryside, and breathed sighs of relief as the inflow of refugees waned.

The exact ethnic make-up of the Vilna region at this time was and is the subject of considerable speculation and calculation. As noted above, Poles claimed to be 70 percent of the population of the region. According to a German estimate that circulated widely in the diplomatic community, Belarusians constituted 33 percent of the population of the region as a whole and 19 percent of the city’s population. Poles made up about 28% of the population of the region as a whole and 48% of the city’s population. Jews constituted 17 percent of the regional population and 30 percent of the city’s population. According to this estimate, Lithuanians made up 20 percent of the region’s population and only one percent of the population in the city. The numbers of course do not consider the fact that many people were multi-lingual and had no clear national identity. Other estimates put the Poles in the city as low as 40 percent and the Jews at 35 percent. Estimates of the numbers of refugees ran to over 10,000 Jews and some 14,000 Polish soldiers plus perhaps 4–5000 additional Polish refugees.

If Lithuania kept these borders, the addition of almost half a million new residents, of whom only some 20 percent were Lithuanians, posed serious threats for the future not just to the Vilnius region but for the whole of Lithuania. In the 1920s, just the arrival of a handful of German deputies from Klaipėda in the Lithuanian parliament had upset the relationship between Lithuanian political parties. The minorities wielded the balance of power in the left's victory in the 1926 parliamentary elections, and the military coup of December that overthrew Lithuanian constitutionalism had given as its justification the threat of a communist coup and also the threatening power of the minority deputies in the Seimas. In Smetona's authoritarian system, the addition of this new population perhaps posed no immediate threat, but it held the potential for considerable trouble in the future.

The absorption of the population of the Vilna region could proceed only slowly. Although some Lithuanian authors have described the satisfaction of Vilnius and Kaunas Jews in their being able now to enter into closer ties, other writers have emphasized the cultural differences that had developed between the two groups in the two decades of their having been sequestered into different national states. These differences could even arouse social tension—what language did people use when speaking in public? Lithuanians distrusted the use of Russian or Polish language; if a Jew could not speak Lithuanian, Yiddish should be the vehicle for communication.

The specter of the Holocaust, and specifically the killing of Jews in Lithuania after June 22, 1941, has deeply affected the judgments of all historians who have described the relations between Jews and Lithuanians before that time. Therefore it should be noted that the Lithuanian government also received good comments on its policies at this time toward the state's minorities, and especially toward the Jews. Henri Minzeles, who criticized the Lithuanian police for their behavior in Vilnius on October 31, nevertheless called the Lithuanian government *assez tolérante*. According to Israel Cohen, "Under the rule of the Lithuanians the people breathed more freely and the Jews enjoyed a feeling of comparative relief," and he described the "attitude of the Lithuanian government itself" as "one of satisfying tolerance." In March 1940 an American diplomat in Kaunas reported home, "I have the honor to report as of possible interest to the Department that the Lithuanians are becoming, since the beginning of the war and the annexation of the Vilna Territory, more and more conscious of the presence in their midst of large minority groups which they feel will be difficult if not impossible to assimilate. In general they have not been intolerant of their minorities and have been fairly ready to afford refuge in their country to foreign exiles."¹¹⁸

The Lithuanian government understood only too well the task it had undertaken in trying to absorb Vilnius, and it took a series of actions aimed at isolating elements in the region that it considered potentially dangerous.

There had been proposals to make Vilnius an autonomous multi-national region, but the government decided that it should be Lithuanianized. Non-Lithuanian critics spoke of “zoological chauvinism.” The government blocked free movement out of the Vilna region, and it imposed strict standards for residents of the region seeking citizenship. It first restricted citizenship to inhabitants (together with wife and children up to the age of 21, and adult children living with them as of October 27, 1939) who were living in the region on the date of the exchange of ratifications of the Soviet-Lithuanian peace treaty of 1920 and who on October 27, 1939 had a permanent domicile on the territory. With this, the Lithuanian government aimed at denying citizenship to refugees and to Poles who had moved into the region in the 1920s and 1930s. (Lithuanians commonly declared that the worst trouble in Vilnius came from Poles who had moved into the region between 1920 and 1939.) Between November 29, 1939 and May 6, 1940, the Lithuanian government reportedly issued 20,000 passports. On May 6, 1940, the government liberalized its conditions, and in the next month and a half, it issued another 5000 passports. This still could not satisfy the government’s critics, but the events of the summer of 1940 made all discussions of the topic moot.

The beginning of this chapter raised the question, Was Vilnius meant to be a Trojan horse for taking over Lithuania? *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* actually offers two definitions for “Trojan horse,” one more active and definite and one more passive and indefinite: “a large hollow wooden horse filled with Greek soldiers and introduced within the walls of Troy by a stratagem during the Trojan War” and secondly, “someone or something intended to undermine or subvert from within.” The Soviet action in delivering Vilnius to the Lithuanians might be analogous to send the wooden horse into Troy, but the behavior of the soldiers did not fully fit the second definition. In the first six months of their stay in Lithuania, the soldiers’ behavior was exemplary, and many Lithuanians began to breathe more easily.

Giving the city to the Lithuanians helped Moscow to obtain the Lithuanians’ acceptance of Soviet troops as part of the mutual assistance pact. Just the threat to invade had been enough in dealing with the Latvians and the Estonians, and probably the Lithuanians would have yielded even if Vilnius had not been at stake. Just why did Stalin insist that Vilnius should be a part of Lithuania? Lithuanians themselves have shown a strong disinclination to consider this question since they consider their own claim to the city clear, historical, and even divinely ordained. To be sure, when the Lithuanian Constituent Assembly in 1920 discussed the ratification of the Lithuanian-Soviet treaty of July 12, 1920, Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazys Grinius declared that treaties were made on the basis of “*do et des*, I give and you give,” and he went on to say, “They have not given us all this [*i.e. the Vilnius region—aes*] for our beautiful eyes, not from good will, they gave it

when they were preparing to war with the Poles.” In 1939 Lithuania’s political leaders did not want the public to look too closely at the concessions involved in the mutual assistance pact, and Lithuanians paid little attention to the question of just why Stalin gave them Vilnius.

A first response to this question might point to the fact that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact recognized Lithuania’s claims to Vilnius. But this fact alone does not provide a satisfactory answer. Stalin refused just to surrender the city; he dangled it before the Lithuanians’ eyes. It would seem possible that Stalin’s strategy here involved also his designs on eventually negating the German claim to southwest Lithuania. Refusing to give Vilnius to the Lithuanians at this point would have strengthened Germany’s claim to a piece of Lithuania.

Most likely, it would seem, is a factor that the German ambassador in Moscow reported home: Stalin wanted as few Poles within the Soviet state as possible, and awarding Vilnius to the Lithuanians would, in time, contribute to that end. (He may well have considered the Lithuanians stronger antagonists of the Poles than the Belarusians would have been.) More than once the German ambassador had observed that Stalin did not want to create a “Polish Soviet Socialist Republic” or any autonomous Polish region on the western frontier of the Soviet Union. Awarding the city to the Lithuanians served to weaken the Polish position as a neighbor. Vilnius was a key railroad hub in this region; without it Poland’s potential power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union would be considerably weaker. Furthermore, Stalin had traded the Lublin district with its Polish population to the Germans for Lithuania. In sum, the Soviet troops in the Vilna region served Stalin’s purposes by strengthening his western frontier and gave him a firm foothold in Lithuania. Their role in revolutionizing Lithuania lay in the future.

Another question arises here: Since communists living in Vilnius constituted an important reinforcement for the Lithuanian Communist Party, did the Soviets’ cession of Vilnius strengthen the Lithuanian Communist Party’s role as the dictionary’s “someone or something intended to undermine or subvert from within”? Moscow’s basic instrument of revolution in any of the territories into which the Red Army advanced in 1939–1940 was the local communist party, and the complex of problems emanating from Lithuania’s annexing Vilnius included some for the Lithuanian Communist Party too. The communists in Vilnius/Wilno had been a part of the Polish communist organizations, and in the course of the Stalinist purges of foreign parties in the latter 1930s, the Communist International had dissolved the Polish Communist Party. In the fall of 1939, while the Red Army held Vilnius, Soviet authorities worked to strengthen the communist base there, but neither the communists in Kaunas nor the communists in Vilnius were strong enough to push for a change in government. There were, moreover, signs of disagreement between the two camps.

In March 1941, a member of the American embassy in Moscow visited Lithuania and subsequently wrote, “This national antagonism [*between Poles and Lithuanians—aes*] had gone so far that a movement was started in Vilna for the creation of an autonomous Vilna district as a foundation for a new Soviet Socialist Republic.” Stalin, he continued, had rejected this thought, declaring, “I have stated on more than one occasion that Vilna was, is, and will be the capital of Lithuania.”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, the friction between the two party organizations continued, the American recounted, “and the party in Kaunas is still resisting the transfer of the Government to Vilna.” Lithuanian historians with access to party archives have not delved into this question, but the fact that the American found any such thoughts in Lithuania suggests that there may in fact have been some sort of friction. In any case, while its opponents might consider it a “fifth column,” the Lithuanian Communist Party was as yet too small and underdeveloped to fulfill the dictionary definition of “Trojan horse.”

Whatever fears Lithuanian politicians might have had about both the coming of Soviet troops and Vilnius’s possible role as a Trojan horse, the situation in the country remained calm in the winter of 1939–1940. As time passed, the leaders of all three Baltic republics became bolder in asserting that they were still independent. They could not, of course, ignore, as imagery puts it, “the five-hundred pound gorillas” sitting in their respective living rooms; as will be discussed in the next chapter, they always had to keep in mind the danger of angering the Soviet government. But the soldiers in Lithuania displayed exemplary behavior. For the moment the situation in the Baltic seemed fortuitously stable; Stalin’s key agents to “undermine and subvert” the three Baltic governments were still in Moscow.

IV

An Uncertain Winter

“We declare that the twaddle about ‘sovietization’ of the Baltic countries is useful only to our common enemies and to all sorts of anti-Soviet provocateurs.”

—Molotov, October 31, 1939

“On this occasion I cannot stop without having expressed my satisfaction with the high leadership of the Soviet Union.”

—Antanas Merkys, to the Lithuanian Seimas, October 28, 1939

“The need for order is greater and more important than the need for freedom.”

—Domas Cesevičius, head of the *Tautininkų sąjunga*

The winter of 1939–1940, between the first and the second intrusion of Soviet forces into Lithuania, constitutes a point d’appui for sharply conflicting interpretations of the subsequent sovietization of the country. At the one extreme Soviet historians celebrated the good behavior of the Red Army units in Lithuania and focused their attention on the authoritarian practices of the Smetona regime as well as on the social and economic troubles of the country. In their interpretation, the Red Army did not compromise Lithuania’s sovereignty; it only strengthened its security. At the other extreme, writers critical of the Soviet system have pictured the Soviet forces as simply biding their time while Lithuanians desperately looked for a way to escape the noose; in their accounts, there would seem to have been little sympathy in Lithuania for the prospects of joining the world of Joseph Stalin. In between these extremes lie all the various denunciations of the Stalin regime and the Smetona regime as well as explanations of the imperatives of *Realpolitik* in the chaos of the developing World War.

The question of Soviet attitudes toward Germany and toward the conflict between Germany and the Anglo-French alliance lies at or near the core of all the controversies in understanding and evaluating Soviet policies in the Baltic in the period from the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 to the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Did the pact arise from defensive or aggressive motives? Was it a means of avoiding conflict with Germany or of encouraging Germany’s conflict with the western democracies so as to improve the prospects of the spread of Soviet communism across Europe? This study concerns itself with the Soviet move into Lithuania; therefore, Stalin’s motives in approving the agreements of August 23 and September 28 lie outside its purview.

Nevertheless one must consider Stalin’s own comprehension of Hitler’s intentions after the start of the war and what he could do about them.

Did the almighty Soviet leader view the non-aggression and friendship pacts of 1939 as a stopgap measure to win time in preparing for an inevitable attack? (And then did he actually prepare for such an attack?) Or did he accept the pacts at their face value and did the Soviet government really mean its repeated public declarations of German-Soviet friendship in that crucial period? Between these two extremes, there are other lines of thought suggesting that over time Stalin's position gradually shifted from a calculated acceptance of the German initiative in 1939 as a useful agreement with considerable territorial compensation, over to a genuine belief that Hitler would not recklessly attack the Soviet state.

The events of 1941–1945 so colored the historical memory of the pre-war period that the modern reader can all too easily dismiss the propaganda fog that obscured the actual course of events in 1939–1940 and confused the people of Lithuania and the Baltic. In the fall of 1939, as Soviet forces took their positions in the three Baltic republics, many people in those states were predicting conflict between the Soviets and the Germans, and government leaders in Lithuania believed that the western Allies would defeat Germany in the war. For Lithuanians, to be sure, the prospect of an Allied victory raised concern about the future of the Vilnius region. The Soviet press, meanwhile, trumpeted German-Soviet friendship, and both the Soviet government and the Soviet press evidenced far more hostility toward Britain and France than to Germany. Soviet officials constantly pointed out that Lithuania had now received Vilnius not once but twice from Soviet largesse—and what had the League of Nations or England or France done for Lithuania? Moscow pressed the Lithuanians to yield to Germany's economic demands and objected to Lithuanian sympathies for the cause of the western powers. As time went by, and Berlin and Moscow strengthened their political and economic relations, the German-Soviet "axis," as *Lietuvos aidas* called it, seemed to become stronger, and Soviet propaganda services denounced any who doubted the firmness of German-Soviet friendship.

Once Stalin's Moscow had established the line of German-Soviet friendship, it was difficult, if not dangerous, for Soviet citizens to suggest anything else. In his memoirs of this period, the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg related that when he returned to Moscow from Paris in the late summer of 1940, he was convinced that the Germans intended to attack the Soviet Union. The Moscow press, however, declared "that friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Germany had grown stronger." Ehrenburg spoke of his concern to Solomon Dridzo-Lozovsky, a deputy commissar of foreign affairs, but Lozovsky "listened to me absent-mindedly, without looking at me and with a melancholy expression." When Ehrenburg challenged his nonchalance, Lozovsky replied, "Personally I find it very interesting. But you know that we have a different policy."¹²⁰ Whatever Molotov's own views might have been—he was a member of the Politburo as

well as head of the government—his subordinates dared show no initiative to consider alternatives to the official line of friendship toward Germany.

On the other hand, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, as already noted, did not explicitly provide for the Soviet annexation of the Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, although the Germans expected that this would be the eventual fate of the three republics. In the fall of 1939, the Soviet government carefully avoided any indication of planning to sovietize the Baltic republics. In his speech to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on October 31, Molotov spoke very positively about Soviet relations with all three Baltic states, declaring that the mutual assistance pacts had strengthened Soviet defenses on the Baltic Sea. Contrary to reports in “some organs of the foreign press,” he continued, the pacts represented no interference into the affairs of the Baltic States. He asserted that the noble principles of Soviet foreign policy were visible especially in the cession of the Vilna region to Lithuania. The Soviet Union, Molotov explained, had not given Vilnius to Lithuania “because the Lithuanian population predominated. No, in Vilnius the non-Lithuanian population constitutes the majority.” The Soviet Union was doing this to satisfy the “historical past” of the Lithuanian people. “We declare,” he added, “that the twaddle (*boltovnia*) about ‘sovietization’ of the Baltic countries is useful only to our common enemies and to all sorts of anti-Soviet provocateurs.”¹²¹ Political leaders in all three Baltic states welcomed the thrust of Molotov’s assurances.

Engaged in the process of incorporating the Belarusian and Ukrainian territories taken from Poland and also discovering Finland to be a more determined and dangerous opponent than the three smaller Baltic republics had been, the Soviet leadership for the time being left its “Trojan horses” in all three Baltic states quietly in place, ready to move but for the moment restrained from action. At this point it would be possible to identify three basic Soviet instruments in Lithuania: the Soviet military, the Lithuanian Communist Party, and the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kaunas. The Soviet government ordered the military to keep to its bases and not to agitate among the locals. The Communist Party, weakened by the Stalinist purges of the latter 1930s and now concerned about merging the communist organization in Vilnius into its structure, had neither the strength nor the leadership to act forcefully at this time. In the fall of 1939 it was not even a recognized part of the Soviet-led Communist International, the Comintern; Moscow would have to approve its leadership and its “line”—was the party for or against Nazi-Soviet cooperation? The diplomatic mission received strict orders to concentrate on its relations with the Lithuanian government. As Molotov warned Nikolai Pozdniakov, “I categorically forbid you and all workers in the mission, including the military attaché, to mix into interparty matters in Lithuania, to support any oppositional currents, etc. The least effort of any of you to mix into the internal affairs of Lithuania will incur the

strictest punishment of the guilty person... It is necessary to reject gossip about the 'sovietization' of Lithuania as provocative and harmful."¹²²

Ever since Stalin had established himself in power in the latter 1920s, the Soviet Union had avoided chasing will-o'-the-wisp revolutions around the globe. Under Stalin's doctrine of "Socialism in One Country," the interests of the Soviet party-state came first, and sympathizers abroad had the primary task of supporting the policies of the Soviet state. In the fall of 1939, state policy, as defined under Stalin's leadership, involved expanding the Soviet Union's western frontier in piecemeal fashion, choosing targets carefully and proceeding in orderly but unstoppable fashion. As the practice in Belarus and Ukraine demonstrated, there had to be proper organization of the revolutionary restructuring of governments and societies. As far as Soviet interests in the three Baltic powers went at this time, there were to be no irresponsible, uncontrolled, or spontaneous disruptive actions. Moscow directed identical parallel policies in all three republics.

Questions and disputes of historical interpretation of this period can arouse controversy even in the 21st century. In February 2005, amid debates in the Baltic republics as to whether their chiefs of state should participate in the 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact had less significance in the coming of World War II than did the Munich agreement of 1938 whereby Hitler won western approval for Germany's seizing the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union, he asserted, had simply been securing its justifiable interests in the Baltic: "In order to ensure its interests and its security on its western borders, the Soviet Union chose to sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with Germany." To this he added advice to historians: "I would advise the new-found historians, or more precisely, those who want to rewrite history, that before rewriting it and before writing books, they should learn to read them."

For historians who do not care to have governments' dictating to them, Putin's advice bordered on the humorous, but his statement about Russian "interests" in the Baltic aroused controversy in the Baltic States. Are there age-old Russian interests in the Baltic littoral that the tsars, Stalin, and now Putin were pursuing as geopolitical imperatives? Putin's argument ignored the Soviet claim in 1940 that the people of Lithuania wanted to join the Soviet Union; it rather echoed Molotov's later statements about the Soviet Union's right to all territory once a part of the Russian Empire. Did Putin's statement in 2005 foreshadow renewed efforts by Moscow to take over the Baltic in a revival of tsarist Russian imperialism, a *Russia irredenta*?

Few commentators, however, challenged Putin's underlying argument that the Soviet Union had signed the agreement with Germany as a defensive measure to restrain Germany rather than as an aggressive action. This was a common interpretation by Soviet historians who wrote after the conclusion of World War II, and in post-Soviet times Russian historians have

presented the same type of arguments. But in the period of 1939–1941, western officials viewed the Soviet Union as a virtual ally of Germany. Soviet Russia openly sympathized with the Nazis' military cause. On October 31, 1939, Molotov told the USSR Supreme Soviet that Germany "wants peace" while England and France "advocate ideological war against Hitler." Only after the German attack of June 1941 did Moscow see the justice of "ideological war against Hitler," and because wartime western leaders then looked at Moscow as an ally in the struggle against Nazi Germany, many western historians have accepted arguments similar to Putin's—*post hoc ergo propter hoc*. In such discussions the argument that the Soviet move into the Baltic was justifiable because of its defensive motivation assumes that the Soviet government had the right to occupy and incorporate other states as it saw fit.¹²³

The forward march of Soviet borders, however, stalled when the Soviet leadership had trouble with Finland, which the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact had defined as lying within the Soviet "sphere of interest." In early October the Soviet government summoned the Finnish Foreign Minister to Moscow, intending to present similar demands to those forced on the Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Finns declared that they would not accept such a mutual security pact, and the Soviets then concentrated on territorial demands, emphasizing their concern for the defense of Leningrad, which lay just 32 kilometers, 20 miles, from the Soviet-Finnish frontier. When the Finns insisted on genuine negotiations, Molotov declared that the Soviet Union had presented its minimum demands, and these were not negotiable. At the end of November, having proclaimed the establishment of a revolutionary Finnish government, the Soviet Union invaded Finland, bombing Helsinki and other cities. The Finns resisted, but time was on the side of the much larger antagonist. On March 12 the two sides signed a peace treaty whereby the Soviets annexed more territory than they had first demanded, but the war had cost Soviet prestige dearly.¹²⁴

In the winter of 1939–1940, public opinion in England and France regarded the Soviet Union as a virtual ally of Nazi Germany, and sympathies in the so-called "Winter War" lay almost entirely on the side of the Finns. Germany had the luxury of watching as a neutral while tension grew between the USSR and the western powers. There were reports that a French expeditionary force might go to Finland. The Soviet *polpred* in London, Ivan Mirsky, spoke of "a rabid anti-Soviet campaign" in England. When League of Nations officials called on the two sides to end hostilities, Molotov simply denied that the Soviet Union was at war with Finland. To the contrary, he asserted, it had signed a mutual assistance pact with the "Democratic Finnish Republic," a government just created in November and immediately recognized by the Soviet Union, and now the USSR was only helping this government to rid the country of its former rulers. This was a civil war, he declared, and the persons appealing to the League "are not the real

representatives of the Finnish people.” The League of Nations Assembly subsequently denounced the Soviet invasion, and the League expelled the Soviet Union from its membership.¹²⁵

The three Baltic governments watched the Soviet-Finnish conflict anxiously but quietly. The Finns had dared to resist, where they had not. In September and October the Soviets had threatened to send troops into their countries if they refused the mutual assistance pact, and the attack on Finland showed that this threat had been real. The Soviets even used their new air and naval bases in Estonia for attacks on Finnish targets. Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians expressed sympathy for the Finns, but their governments did not dare to antagonize the Soviets. Soviet and Russian historians have argued that the Red Army did not interfere in domestic affairs in the three republics during the winter of 1939–1940, but the Soviet government’s hand lay heavy on the republics’ foreign policies.

The debate in the League of Nations over the Soviet-Finnish war made clear the Baltic governments’ dependence on Moscow’s good will. On December 4 Urbšys telegraphed the Lithuanian delegation in Geneva, “Bearing in mind our treaty with the Russians and our general political situation, we must not antagonize the Russians in Geneva STOP Please maintain the greatest possible reserve and neutrality in the Finnish-Russian conflict keep in contact with the Latvians, Estonians, and the Russians themselves STOP Nowhere vote against the Russians STOP.” When the League Assembly voted to expel the Soviets, the three Baltic republics abstained. (They had hoped that their representatives would be able to walk out of the meeting before the vote, but this proved to be impossible.) The moment was particularly embarrassing for the Lithuanians in that they had believed themselves to be in line for a seat on the League Council; now, under the shadow of being viewed as Moscow’s agent, they had to withdraw their candidacy.¹²⁶ The League debate was a powerful reminder of both their own uncertain position and Moscow’s readiness to use force.

Under the circumstances, the Lithuanians could not be at all sure of their future. Soviet propaganda proclaimed that the Soviet Union had saved Lithuania from the war, but the fact that the Soviets were using their Estonian bases against the Finns bode ill for any future conflicts. The Soviets were trumpeting their friendship with Germany, but the presence of Soviet troops in Lithuania guaranteed that if—or when—the Soviet-German alliance collapsed, Lithuania would be one of the first battlegrounds.

Kaunas was already a diplomatic battleground, with the Lithuanians’ takeover of Vilnius as one of the major issues. At the beginning of September, the English and the French had warned the Lithuanians against any moves on Vilnius in cooperation with the Germans, but in October they found it expedient to accept, for the time being, the Lithuanians’ explanation that the Soviet Union had “forced” Vilnius on them. Although Lithuanians considered their possession of Vilnius a fact established for the ages and

many wanted to believe that the Poles recognized the justice of Lithuanian claims to Vilnius, diplomatic uncertainties persisted. The Polish government-in-exile strongly denounced first the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland and then the Soviets' cession of Vilnius to the Lithuanians, and it filed a complaint with the League of Nations. The British warned the Lithuanians against infringing on Poland's territory, but the Lithuanians could point out that the Soviets had already taken a sizeable piece of the Polish state. According to the American historian David Crowe, the British calculated that at any future peace negotiations it would be easier to take Vilnius from Lithuania than it would be from the Soviet Union; a British diplomat told the Polish foreign minister, "Incidentally, from the point of view of the Polish Government, there would appear to be certain practical advantages in a Lithuanian as against a Soviet occupation of Vilnius."¹²⁷ For the moment the British mission in Kaunas took care to make no sign of recognizing Lithuanian sovereignty in the city.

Although Lithuania was now in fact a Soviet protectorate, it passed through the long and uncertain winter of 1939–1940 still an independent state at least in form. With Soviet troops stationed within its frontiers, it could not be absolutely neutral in international affairs, but government leaders continued to claim that it was indeed a neutral state.¹²⁸ German agents and Allied agents prowled Kaunas seeking information and trying to influence the Lithuanian government and the Lithuanian press. Smetona remained in office and received foreign diplomats. The Soviet government nevertheless demanded that the Lithuanian government act in an obedient manner; it complained that the Lithuanian press was showing too much sympathy for the Finns. From the Soviet point of view, all three Baltic governments remained suspect because of their resistance to Soviet concerns and desires.¹²⁹

Publicly, representatives of the Lithuanian government went to great lengths to assure its citizens of the Soviet Union's sincere good will and friendship toward Lithuania. "Sincerity" and "trust" kept resounding in discussions of the Soviet government. Government spokespersons repeatedly referred to past Soviet support against the Poles. On October 28, Merkys told the Lithuanian Seimas, "On this occasion I cannot stop without having expressed my satisfaction with the high leadership of the Soviet Union." The Soviet leadership had again "shown great and sincere understanding of our nation's vital interests" and had employed its "great military superiority" in the interests of "truth and justice" by delivering Vilnius to the Lithuanians. On November 3, *Lietuvos aidas* praised the Soviets' "peace policy, denouncing aggression," and it declared that the Soviets' refusal to interfere in its neighbors' domestic affairs "naturally wins ever greater and greater trust." On that same day, Smetona, after receiving Pozdniakov's credentials as Soviet *polpred* in Kaunas declared that "Lithuania's historical fate has been tied in a positive sense with Russia." In January 1940, Urbšys criticized

“pessimists” who declared that Lithuania was no longer independent. As late as April 17, 1940, Merkys, now Lithuania’s prime minister, declared that the “Lithuanian government finds no grounds for thinking that any danger threatens Lithuania.”¹³⁰

Through the winter of 1939–1940, most Lithuanian leaders continued to believe that the western powers would win the war against Germany, and this prospect offered some hope that in the future the Lithuanians could escape the grasp of the Russian bear. This all, however, required delicate and complicated diplomatic footwork and necessitated creative compromises in Lithuania’s diplomatic practices. In celebrating the start of the new year of 1940, for example, Smetona could not invite the diplomatic corps to a general gathering because the dean of the corps was the German minister. Instead he met the chiefs of all diplomatic missions in Kaunas in separate five to ten minute meetings. When it came time to observe Lithuanian independence day, February 16, he wanted to invite the foreign diplomats to Vilnius, but neither the French nor the British were willing to recognize Lithuanian rule in that city. In the words of an American diplomat, “the French Legation had intimated to high Lithuanian officials that it was quite willing to say nothing about Vilna in the presence of Lithuanians and that in return it expected that Lithuanians would refrain from mentioning Vilna in the presence of any of its members.” In the demonstrative absence of the British and the French representatives, a formal dinner in Vilnius could be a fiasco. Therefore the Lithuanian government chose to hold two separate dinners in Kaunas for the resident chiefs of missions.¹³¹

Privately, members of the Lithuanian government feared for the future. Smetona gave considerable thought to the possibility that he would have to flee the country, and he requested information on the problems of forming a government in exile. At the end of October, three Lithuanian ministers abroad—Stasys Lozoraitis (Rome), Kazys Balutis (London), and Petras Klimas (Paris)—met in Paris to consider the government’s diplomatic future. Beginning with the observation that the threat to Lithuanian independence came from an ostensibly neutral country, the Soviet Union, they considered the formation of government in exile problematic. The western powers, at war with Germany, would want to avoid conflict with the Soviet Union. They identified Italy as possibly accepting such a government-in-exile, but to win status similar to Poland’s government-in-exile, the Lithuanians too would have to be at war with Germany, and of course it could not advertise itself as hostile to a Polish state. In the event the Soviet Union should take over Lithuania, the leaders of government might not have time to escape. Therefore the three diplomats recommended that the government designate a diplomat abroad as its authoritative representative, and it should also immediately strengthen the financial resources of its missions to that they could continue to operate.¹³²

Rather typically, Smetona took no action on this report or on any plan to resist a large scale Soviet invasion. Early in 1940 government leaders agreed that if the Soviet Union should launch a massive invasion, the Lithuanian military should resist, offering the government the time to flee to Germany – the Lithuanians made several inquiries whether Germany would accept such refugees. Smetona and his Defense Minister, Kazys Musteikis, were to draw up the plans for such action, but they did nothing. Only at the end of May 1940, when the Soviet Union had suddenly intensified its pressure on Kaunas, did the Foreign Ministry send out a circular to its missions abroad, saying, “If a catastrophe occurs here, then consider [Stasys] Lozoraitis as the chief of the residual diplomatic representations abroad.” Although the Soviet Union at this time was not pressing Latvia and Estonia in the same way it was pressing Lithuania, on June 2 the Latvian government sent a similar note to its envoys abroad, designating Karlis Zarins, its representative in London, as the senior diplomat abroad.¹³³

Although the Soviet government had made clear that it had Germany’s acquiescence in its pressures on Lithuania, Smetona did not want to give up on Berlin as an alternative to Moscow. The Lithuanians still did not know all the details of the Soviet-Nazi division of Eastern Europe, and Smetona continued to hope that the German-Soviet alliance would disintegrate and that somehow the Germans might help the Lithuanians escape the Soviet grasp. The Germans nevertheless held back—they were of course interested in learning about Soviet activities and troop movements in Lithuania, but Ribbentrop had informed his diplomats in all the Baltic capitals that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland were not in the German “sphere of interest” and that the diplomats should avoid any discussion of such questions.

In February 1940 Smetona apparently thought that there might an opening in which Lithuania could maneuver. A German Gestapo officer invited the head of the Lithuanian Saugumas, State Security, Augustinas Povilaitis, to come to Germany for a business visit. Believing in the inevitability of a German-Soviet conflict, the cabinet and the president approved, and Povilaitis made the trip. The government gave him a specific agenda: the issues rotated around Lithuania’s place in Germany’s vision of Eastern Europe. According to the testimony of Kazys Skučas, the minister of the interior and Povilaitis’s superior, the Germans responded with advice that the Lithuanians avoid conflicts and provocations in their dealings with the Soviets, but should the Soviets move to take Lithuania over, Kaunas should protest and “demonstrate that the actions of the Soviet Union contradicted the interests of Lithuania.” They also indicated that they would accept Lithuanian refugees from Soviet occupation. For themselves the Germans requested systematic information concerning the Soviet garrisons in Lithuania. The Lithuanians agreed to this, and the government empowered Povilaitis to continue meeting with the Gestapo agent in Lithuania.¹³⁴

Povilaitis's own description of this mission, as given to Soviet investigators, is not altogether reliable because in the course of prolonged interrogation he showed an increasingly growing desire to satisfy his captors. On August 26, 1940, he spoke of Skučas's having sent him to Urbšys before allowing him to go to Berlin. The Germans, he declared, told him that they had no power to discuss Soviet policy in Lithuania. On September 27, he declared that Skučas had empowered him to go to Berlin, and that the Germans refused to discuss Soviet policies other than to insist that there was no secret agreement on Lithuania. On January 7, 1941, describing the futility of his work as security chief, he declared that no "barbaric" measures could help Smetona and his confederates "weaken the spirit of communism and the revolutionary movement of the masses." On March 13, he confessed to having "continued to conceal" his anti-Soviet work and promised now to "tell all the truth to the end." He spoke of taking orders from the Gestapo and helping the Germans send agents into the USSR. He declared that Smetona had chosen to send him to Germany, and, peculiarly enough, had communicated his secret orders through his adjutant Colonel Stepas Žukaitis, rather than giving the orders personally. Povilaitis spoke of himself as a Germanophile and "dedicated" to Smetona, who in turn could not even trust his cabinet in this crucial task. According to Povilaitis the Germans indicated that they could resolve the possibility of establishing a protectorate over Lithuania by September 1940, but they could do nothing at the moment.¹³⁵

Some Soviet historians, who of course denied the existence of the Nazi-Soviet division of Eastern Europe, later took this last statement as evidence that Germany was planning some action, thereby justifying the Soviet image of protecting Lithuania from the Nazis. Povilaitis's statement, however, suggests something very different when it is put together with a statement by Valters Munters, the former Latvian foreign minister, who told his Soviet interrogators that in April a German diplomat had predicted that the Soviet Union would annex Latvia by September 1, 1940. Annexation by the Soviet Union would indeed resolve the possibility of a German protectorate over Lithuania, but Povilaitis was ready to interpret everything the way his interrogators wanted. On April 28, 1941, he abjectly admitted that "as a supporter of the fascist regime and an intransigent enemy of the Soviet Union," he had opposed the showing of Soviet films in Lithuania. As the Lithuanian historian Gediminas Rudis later described Povilaitis's confession of March 11, "Povilaitis's interrogators just had to want it, and he would have confessed to having dug a tunnel from Kaunas to Vilnius." Povilaitis's experience in fact reemphasized the fact that whatever Smetona might have hoped for from the Germans, Berlin refused to offer any real sign that it would intervene to ease Lithuania's status as a Soviet protectorate.¹³⁶

Troubling as Lithuania's international situation was, Smetona could not draw any more comfort from his domestic position. The European war was wreaking increasing havoc on the Lithuanian economy, and there were

unsettling demands for economic and social reform. For ordinary workers, both urban and rural, life was difficult. Prices were rising. The war severely disrupted the economy. The Germans blocked the trade relations that Lithuania had enjoyed with Great Britain, and the German market proved much less profitable. The Soviets offered little in trade advantages, and the costs of housing and feeding the Red Army drained the country's resources. There had been no arrangements made for the costs of housing and feeding the Red Army soldiers—the Lithuanians complained that the Red Army did not pay its bills, and Soviet officials complained that the Lithuanians were trying to gouge them. In the last few years, the government had several times suppressed peasant demonstrations, and in February 1940 it had to deal with a new wave of workers' strikes. The Saugumas spoke of communist influences, but it recognized both that the economic problems were real and that the Communist Party itself was small. When added to the concerns about the intentions of the Red Army units stationed in Lithuania, together with the intrigues among the regime's political opponents, Lithuanian state security, the Saugumas, had a full program of concerns.

Soviet historians spoke of Smetona's increasing persecution of communists in the fall of 1939 out of fear for Soviet influences, but Smetona did not limit his concerns just to the communists. He resented the governmental coalition that he had accepted in March 1939 as an impingement on his authority. His *tautininkai* party, numbering some 14,000 members, was demanding a reassertion of authoritarianism in the name of national unity, and the Vilnius question, which he now wanted to consider a domestic rather than a foreign policy issue, was draining the resources and energies of his government. The death of his brother-in-law, Juozas Tūbelis, moreover, deprived him of the advisor whom he had most trusted. Normally cautious, Smetona at times seemed now almost paralyzed in making decisions, and many observers have suggested that he was increasingly nervous and irascible.

The domestic political struggles entered a new stage in November as Smetona decided to install a new government. In March 1939, after Lithuania's surrender of Klaipėda, foreign observers, including both American and Soviet commentators, saw the Lithuanian military as playing a major role in the formation of the coalition government, and an American diplomat even speculated that Stasys Raštikis, the head of the army, entertained thoughts of manipulating Smetona as a token leader. Raštikis, who was married to Smetona's niece, himself denied any such ambitions. In earlier times, Smetona had considered Raštikis a possible successor, but now he resented the general's popularity. (In October and November Raštikis, in turn, resented the fact that Smetona designated General Vitkauskas, and not him, to lead the Lithuanian army into Vilnius.) The *tautininkai* had nevertheless maintained control of the governmental bureaucracy, and now

they, with Smetona's approval, called for ending even the show of compromise in the government.

Even with or, as some speculated, because of the presence of Soviet troops in Lithuania, Smetona decided to dissolve the coalition cabinet. The fears that had first accompanied the advent of the Red Army faded. Gaining possession of Vilnius unquestionably helped his image in some circles, and Molotov's promise of non-interference encouraged him and his supporters to reassert his image as the supreme helmsman. As the new prime minister he chose Antanas Merkys, the government's plenipotentiary in Vilnius. When Raštikis, wielding the authority of the military, insisted that the cabinet maintain the principle of compromise, Smetona threatened to resign, but in the end he yielded. Urbšys remained on as Foreign Minister, and Kazys Bizauskas, formerly deputy foreign minister and a leading Christian Democrat, inherited the job of plenipotentiary in Vilnius. Also notable among the non-party ministers was Ernestas Galvanauskas, whom Nikolai Pozdniakov called "a well educated economist and finance specialist" and who was to play an important role in the events of June 1940.¹³⁷ No one seemed completely happy with the new government. The *tautininkai* resented being forced still to share power, and the opposition could only keep hoping for an end of the authoritarian order.

The *tautininkai* nevertheless made their party congress in January 1940 a celebration of their power and their ideology of *tautiškumas*. Domas Cesevičius, Tūbelis's successor as the party's new leader, set the tone for the gathering when he declared that the situation in 1940 required "the strengthening of the national-authoritarian regime." At this time, he asserted, "the need for order is greater and more important than the need for freedom." The 1926 coup that had brought Smetona to power had united all Lithuanians who stood between "the religious politics of the right and the dogmatically democratic politics of the left." The state, furthermore, belonged to the Lithuanian nation; the minorities of Lithuania had to accept the leadership of "the Lithuanian nation"; this leadership was not "a privilege but a right." The Lithuanians are not "chauvinists," but they must obey their own "self-preservation instinct." He acknowledged that the Lithuanian people had not fully developed these "national conceptions," and he looked to Smetona for forceful leadership.¹³⁸

Smetona himself told the gathering that the state needed steady leadership, and he called "coalitions" such as that ruling France, the weakest form of government. "If there are no common ideals, there can be no talk of a nation's unity." He declared that the "*Tautininkų sąjunga* was in fact not a party, because it represented not *pars*, a part of the nation, but total, the entire nation." Like Cesevičius, he too criticized the Catholic Church for allegedly intruding into matters of state. The American minister in Kaunas called Smetona's speech a "justification" of the regime and declared, "It reads more like the speech of a professor of political science lecturing favorably on the

authoritarian principle than like the speech of a dictator.” At the same time, he declared, his Lithuanian sources called this “the most positive and least abstract in content of any speech made by the President in years.”¹³⁹

In sum, the presentations by Smetona and Cesevičius reconfirmed the Smetona regime’s determination to rule in authoritarian fashion and to ignore opposition. The American minister in Kaunas expressed surprise at “the vigor” that the *tautininkai* showed in denouncing the other parties in Lithuania, parties that were in any case all illegal. The government’s refusal to recognize the concept of a “loyal opposition” of course blocked the development of a civil society that could in a crisis provide alternative leadership for the people of Lithuania. When the *tautininkai* party and the Smetona regime crumbled in June 1940, Lithuanian society lacked civic organizations that could resist the coordinated, expertly managed program of sovietization. In turn, Lithuania’s new rulers would in fact exploit the institutional structure created by the Smetona regime itself.

In addition to celebrating its domestic power, the *tautininkai* conference of January 1940 also heard Foreign Minister Juozas Urbšys credit the wise policies of the government for having protected the country from the destruction of war. Lithuania had proven its right to be an independent state. Recognizing that the government had been criticized for inactivity, he insisted that Lithuania was not large enough to pursue a forceful foreign policy; a small country had to be especially careful in international affairs. Lithuania’s action had to be not “superficial” or “visible,” accompanied by marches and radio addresses, “but rather reserved, devoting all its energy for the improvement of the country and the nation.” This, however, did not mean just surrendering to superior force. If the policy of caution, he declared, “should lead the nation and state to destruction, all honorable members of the nation will choose honorable death rather than consent to be destroyed without honor.” He called the Soviet Union “our ally,” and he criticized the “pessimists” who suggested that the country had lost its independence. Such interpretations, he declared, rested on “the conviction that the Soviet Union was not sincere in concluding the pact of October 10 with Lithuania.” Those pessimists, he declared, “were mistaken.” The American minister called Urbšys “one of the best and clearest speakers and writers in Lithuania.”¹⁴⁰

Even as Smetona wanted to reassert his authority, the *Tautininkų sąjunga* was experiencing considerable internal tension, focused on the enormous problems involved in Lithuanianizing or—as the Lithuanians themselves preferred to cast the problem—“relithuanianizing” Vilnius. In the words of the American chargé d’affaires in Kaunas, Bernard Gufler, “The real political dynamite in this country now seems to lie in Vilna and the principal difference between the activist and more conservative elements arises from a disagreement as to the handling of the newly acquired territory.” As observers saw it, the split lay between “older” and “younger” figures. The older faction, Smetona and his immediate entourage, claimed

credit for having restored Lithuania's historic capital "without the loss of a drop of blood," but they favored a go-slow approach, postponing any thought of moving the government in the near future and advocating in principle a gradual process in Lithuanianizing the region. The "younger" faction, many of them supporters of Voldemaras, advocated a stern, firm policy that would move the government into the city immediately. An American diplomat reported that some older party leaders seem "to feel privately that the acquisition of Vilnius may have been the first step toward the ruin of Lithuania." In April 1940, he wrote, "Actually, as has been stated in previous reports from this office, the disputes between the various traditional Lithuanian political groups are not now of vital importance. The really vital differences of opinion are between the older and experienced leaders, who wish to pursue their somewhat varying aims with caution, and the younger and less experienced groups, which want quick action. The latter groups are frequently called 'Activists.' They are almost all chauvinists."¹⁴¹

The disagreements over the administration of the Vilna region exploded to public notice in January as General Raštikis published an article in the army officers' journal *Kardas*, denouncing government policies in Vilnius and in relations with the Soviet Union. The Ministry of Internal Affairs immediately confiscated the issue, and the government forced Raštikis to take a leave of absence "for reasons of health." The American chargé d'affaires in Kaunas reported home that the reasons for the leave of absence were "probably more political than physical." Vitkauskas, who had led the march into Vilnius, replaced him as chief of the armed forces. The Lithuanian historian Liudas Truska has called Prime Minister Merkys, who was an opponent of Raštikis, Vitkauskas's patron, and he has called both Vitkauskas and Merkys "enigmatic" figures in the events of June 1940.¹⁴²

Moscow watched all these developments carefully; and it certainly could not welcome the thought that Smetona was reestablishing his authority in the protective shadow of the Mutual Assistance Pact. Already in October, the Soviet mission in Kaunas was complaining that the Smetona government was taking too much credit for itself in having received Vilnius from the Soviets. It also complained that the government was persecuting and arresting Lithuanians who wanted to express gratitude to Moscow and that the Lithuanian press was not publishing articles sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Soviet observers also complained that the Lithuanians had refused to stage any grand welcome for the Soviet troops who entered Lithuania in accordance with the terms of the Mutual-Assistance Pact. At the start of the Soviet-Finnish war, the Soviet mission complained that the Lithuanian press was favoring the Finnish side. Pozdniakov even complained to Moscow that the Soviet policy of non-interference in Lithuanian domestic affairs hindered his task of countering unfriendly articles in the press, but Molotov complained directly to Natkevičius about the pro-Finnish tone of the Lithuanian press. Nevertheless, Pozdniakov asserted, the Lithuanian

government realized the risks involved “if it takes a false step in its relationship with the USSR.”¹⁴³

In some cases, Soviet officials contributed significantly to the very developments in Lithuania that they subsequently held against the Lithuanians. In later years, they of course criticized the Lithuanians for even considering a defense pact with the Germans in September 1939, when the Germans were in fact acting with the tacit approval of the Soviet authorities. In December 1939, the Lithuanians looked to the Soviets for help when the Germans pressed a costly economic agreement on them, but Molotov urged the Lithuanians to yield. Later, Soviet commentators pointed to that economic agreement another sign that Lithuania was hoping for German help against Moscow.

Another question that the Soviets viewed suspiciously concerned the “repatriation” of Germans living in Lithuania. The Nazi-Soviet friendship pact of September 28 had provided for the evacuation of Germans from Latvia and Estonia, and the Soviet Union even asked the Lithuanians for permission for the evacuees to pass through western Lithuania on their way to East Prussia. As the Lithuanians saw the question, the departure of the Germans from their country would signify Germany’s disinterest in the land’s future and would thereby automatically intensify the threat of sovietization. Molotov himself urged the Lithuanians to agree to the repatriation of the Germans, and Soviet observers correctly interpreted the Lithuanians’ hesitance as a sign that the Lithuanians were trying to keep open a German alternative to an unconditional acceptance of Soviet domination.

Soviet observers considered the Lithuanian government a “bourgeois” construction that depended on foreign bourgeois imperialist support. The “progressive” elements in Lithuanian society, as well as the working class and the toiling masses supposedly favored the Soviets and even would welcome the sovietization of their lives. In the shadow of these basic views, what might have passed as ordinary disagreements in relations between governments became hostile ideological issues. As the Soviet military attaché reported in December, the Lithuanian officials were not being completely open and candid, they were not properly thanking the Soviet Union for the return of Vilnius, they were demanding too much money for servicing the Red Army units in Lithuania, the press was slandering the Soviet Union and the Red Army, and the press would not publish Soviet news reports on the Soviet-Finnish war.¹⁴⁴ The Soviet observers also took due note of rising economic problems in Lithuania: rising costs of food, factories closing, shortages of raw materials, etc. Ultimately, the Soviet officials wanted to make Lithuania completely dependent on Moscow, and they looked with suspicion on every move the Lithuanians made to avoid such a dependency. Since every move to sustain that “national bourgeois state independence” in one way or another interfered with the aims

of the Soviet government, all such moves automatically fell into the category of anti-Soviet intrigue.

The Soviet-Finnish war provided ample fodder for the Soviets to feed their distrust of the Lithuanian government. Pozdniakov, like other Soviet diplomats, noted that the longer the war lasted, the more damage it would create for the image of the Soviet Union. When the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian foreign ministers met in December, the Soviets noted that the meeting was later than originally planned, and they speculated that the ministers were plotting some secret action. The fact that the Lithuanians declared that they no longer had a dispute with Poland over the possession of Vilnius thereupon intensified Soviet suspicions that Lithuania was about to accede to the defense pact that Latvia and Estonia had signed in 1934.

For their part, the Baltic republics had little concrete to complain about in their relationship with the Soviet government. Meeting in Riga at the end of December, military representatives of the three states agreed "that in general the USSR units for the moment are behaving properly enough, they show no particular tendencies to interfere in the internal affairs of the Baltic and they are abstaining from contact with Baltic citizens." To be sure, there were disagreements over housing the families of Soviet military officers, but those types of economic agreements had little threatening political significance. The military representatives agreed to keep each other informed of their ongoing problems in dealing with the Soviet Union. Given the definition of "friendship" that Molotov offered in forcing the mutual assistance pacts on all three states, even this agreement to coordinate their responses could easily arouse Moscow's suspicions of hostile collusion.

Although the war with Finland ended with the peace treaty of March 12, the Soviet government's suspicions continued unabated, and on March 28 Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Dekanozov asked Pozdniakov to confirm reports that Lithuania had secretly joined the Latvian-Estonian military pact. Pozdniakov could not find evidence, but the Soviets nevertheless reacted strongly to the news that Estonia was adding a military attaché to its diplomatic mission in Kaunas. Although the "secret" protocols of the Foreign Ministers' meetings of December 1939 in Tallinn and of March 1940 in Riga give no indication of any discussion of intensifying military cooperation, the Soviet leadership could easily convince itself of something else.¹⁴⁵

At this point, Pozdniakov, perhaps influenced by the controversy surrounding the Soviet-Finnish war, was becoming more hostile toward the Lithuanian government. At the end of January he reported that the *tautininkai* would live up to the Soviet pact because they were profiting from it, but they still believed that the English and the French would win the war. The Lithuanian press, as witnessed by its reporting of the Finnish conflict, had a "not completely loyal tone." In March, Pozdniakov declared that the Lithuanians had accepted the Mutual Assistance Pact as a "lesser evil," but

they were trying to maneuver as they waited for “better times.” In all, the Lithuanians did not show proper appreciation for the peace that the Soviet Union had brought to the region.¹⁴⁶

The coming of spring carried threats with it, and not all of them could be visible to the naked eye. On March 29, Molotov told the USSR Supreme Soviet that Soviet relations with the three Baltic republics were “satisfactory.” Anxious officials in the Baltic immediately questioned why Molotov said only “satisfactory”¹⁴⁷ and not something more positive. The Soviets gave no explanation, leaving Baltic leaders rather concerned about the immediate future. Urbšys and Merkys nevertheless stated publicly that the Lithuanian government saw no threats, but the atmosphere was changing.

In their classic study of Soviet rule in the Baltic, Rein Taagepera and Romualdas Misiunas suggested that the Soviet Union began in February to plan its move into the Baltic: “A decision to occupy [the Baltic states] fully may have been made in early February 1940, at a Moscow meeting attended by Soviet envoys in the Baltics, since Baltic Communist underground activity increased sharply in March.”¹⁴⁸ The acting secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Icaikas Meskupas, was also in Moscow at this time. The presence in the Soviet capital of the Soviet *polpred* to Lithuania and the leader of the Lithuanian Communist Party at the same time was undoubtedly more than just a coincidence; both men were surely receiving new instructions, probably from the same sources.

In April 1940 World War II erupted into a new phase. After the German conquest of Poland in the fall of 1939, there had been a lull in hostilities through the winter. The Germans spoke of a desire to end hostilities; the western powers insisted they would fight on; the Soviets, engaged in their war with Finland, expressed sympathy for the German position. As the French dug into their fortifications on the Maginot Line and prepared for action in the spring, some western journalists complained of the “phoney war,” a state of war with no action. In April, however, the Germans acted, turning north and sweeping through Denmark and Norway. Then in May they broke into France, skirting the Maginot Line, rolling through Belgium and the Netherlands, and heading directly for Paris.

The Lithuanians were shocked and disappointed by the quick German success. Through the winter of 1939–1940 Lithuanian leaders had believed that the western powers would triumph in the end. An Allied victory would undoubtedly help the Poles in reestablishing their state, but even so an Allied victory had seemed preferable to a German victory. That prospect now dimmed. The German invasion of the neutral Scandinavian states also confirmed that the Germans were no more ready than the Soviets were to recognize assertions of neutrality, and for some people in Lithuania this probably made the Soviet alternative more acceptable. On May 24, Pozdniakov reported home that a majority of “Lithuania’s bourgeois camp” did not want a German victory but that German agents in Lithuania were

becoming more active. As the Lithuanian press reported the German victories, the Lithuanian public became ever more nervous.

In the middle of May Moscow decided to move on Lithuania. Western European observers seemed convinced that it was the German victories that aroused the Soviets, who now had to consider the possibility of a quick end to the war and to prepare their own position for any settlement. Max Beloff, in his study of Soviet foreign policy, spoke of signs of Soviet intentions to take over the Baltic as early as April. From Moscow's point of view, Pozdniakov's reports that the Smetona regime was taking advantage of the presence of the Red Army to strengthen its own position were disturbing. The ease with which the government had forced Raštikis's retirement was taken as a sign of Smetona's power. Then in May, Moscow decided to act, launching a diplomatic offensive against the Lithuanians on the charge that the Lithuanian government was tolerating and even abetting unfriendly acts against Soviet soldiers in that country.

From this point on, over the next several weeks, Soviet-Lithuanian relations hurtled toward the moment that additional Soviet troops moved into Lithuania and the Smetona government collapsed. The turn of the Estonians and the Latvians would come in the next few days after that. As opposed to the situation in September and October 1939 when the Soviet diplomatic offensive moved from north to south—first Estonia, then Latvia, then Lithuania—the military offensive would now go from south to north, with Lithuania first. Moving into Lithuania first would enable the Red Army to close the border with Germany and hinder flight from Latvia and Estonia. In the first days of June the Soviet military began massing on the Lithuanian border, while officials, anticipating resistance, made space in prisoner of war camps.

Soviet historians long insisted that this course of events followed upon the treacherous behavior of the Lithuanians in planning provocative actions against the Soviet forces. Lithuanian commentators have insisted that there were no such provocations, that the Soviets had trumped up the charges to open way for them to cash the blank check that the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreements of August and September 1939 had delivered to Moscow. The fact that the Red Army was preparing to move into all three Baltic republics suggests that the complaints of mistreatment of soldiers that the Soviets raised against the Lithuanians were indeed trumped-up.

The Baltic republics were virtually helpless. Soviet garrisons already sat within their borders. When the Soviet ultimata came, resistance could hardly be more than symbolic. At this point, there was no way they could follow the Finnish example. Their fates had been sealed eight to nine months earlier. In any case, the news of the German victories in Denmark and Norway and then the German sweep through France undoubtedly stimulated the Soviets to action.

Soviet historians argued that the massive entrance of the Red Army in June 1940, like the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, had no relationship to the social revolution that subsequently swept the three Baltic states other than the fact that the Soviet Union had cut off the western support that had propped up the authoritarian regimes then in power. Deprived of this support, they insisted, the regimes collapsed from their own inherent weaknesses, and the democratic masses could then act as they wanted. Pozdniakov's reports from Kaunas, as selected and published by the Russian Foreign Ministry in the early 1990s, put great emphasis on the economic problems burdening Lithuania. The land was seemingly ripe for revolution, and Pozdniakov described the "progressive intelligentsia" and the toiling masses as welcoming the possibility of sovietization. Soviet Lithuanian historians, responding to the imperatives of Socialist Realist controls, eventually produced statistics that suggested that, "objectively," Lithuania in 1939–1940 was even more ready for Marxist-Leninist revolution than Russia had been in 1917.¹⁴⁹

When the Red Army poured into Lithuania on June 15, the Smetona regime collapsed. It had only shallow roots in Lithuania; it had blocked the development of a civil society. The new order that ensued, however, arose not from the rebellion of the masses but under guidance from Moscow. Smetona left Lithuania vulnerable to the organizational expertise that Soviet agents, led by Vladimir Dekanozov, the USSR Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, would bring from Moscow.

V

The Soviet Invasion

“Article 2.

Accordingly, the aggressor in an international conflict shall, subject to the agreements in force between the parties to the dispute, be considered to be that State which is the first to commit any of the following actions:....

(2) Invasion by its armed forces, with or without a declaration of war, of the territory of another State....

Article 3.

No political, military, economic or other considerations may serve as an excuse or justification for the aggression referred to in Article 2.”

—From the Convention for the Definition of Aggression between Lithuania and the USSR, signed in London, July 5, 1933

“We are sure that disappearances of Soviet soldiers were brought about by persons under the protection of the Lithuanian authorities. These persons give them drink, involve them in criminal activities, and after that, prepare the way for their desertion or destroy them.”

—From the Soviet note to the Lithuanian government, May 25, 1940

“The Soviet Union considers it necessary and urgent:

... 3. That free entry into the territory of Lithuania be immediately assured for units of the army of the Soviet Union which will be stationed in the most important centers of Lithuania and which will be sufficiently numerous to assure the enforcement of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and Lithuania....

The Soviet Government will wait for the answer of the Lithuanian Government until 10 a.m. of June 15.”

—Soviet ultimatum of June 14

Just before midnight on June 14, 1940, Viacheslav Molotov delivered an ultimatum to the Lithuanian foreign minister, Juozas Urbšys, who was then in Moscow for talks. Charging that the Lithuanian government was conspiring against the USSR, the Soviet government posed three demands: 1. that the Minister of the Interior, Kazys Skučas, and the Director of the Saugumas, Augustinas Povilaitis, be arrested and tried as “guilty of acts of provocation committed against” Soviet troops in Lithuania; 2. that the Lithuanians form a government that would “assure the proper fulfillment of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and Lithuania”; and 3. that Lithuania afford free entry for Red Army units “which will be stationed in the most important centers of Lithuania.”¹⁵⁰ If the Lithuanian government did not agree by 10 a.m. on June 15, “this will be considered a refusal to satisfy the demands of the Soviet Union.” In any case, Soviet troops would enter Lithuania regardless of how the Lithuanians would respond. After an intense debate, the Lithuanian government agreed to the

Soviet demands, and at three p.m. when the Red Army crossed the frontier, the Smetona regime in Lithuania disintegrated. Seven weeks later Lithuania was a constituent republic in the USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

In an English-language publication in 1982, Antanas Barkauskas, a participant in the Soviet administration in 1940 and later chairman of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, summarized the fundamental Soviet interpretation of 1940. His account is more simplistic than a professional historian would produce in his or her own name, but we can presume that a historian prepared it for him:

The restoration of Lithuania of its old capital Vilnius and the obligation of the USSR in guaranteeing protection to Lithuania from Nazi aggression provided the progressive forces with a new impetus in the struggle for their vital interests. The [*Lithuanian*] state authorities, on the other hand, adhered to their clandestine policy directed against the Soviet Union. The intelligence agencies collected secret information about the Red Army regiments stationed on the territory of Lithuania and were initiators of various provocative actions. The military coalition of the Baltic states was gaining strength. Though Nazi Germany waged aggressive war on many countries, Lithuania concluded with it a new trade agreement.... To all evidence the President and his associates were linking their activities with the policy of Nazi Germany.

... The people realized that Lithuania was on the threshold of a new era, and the absolute majority of the population were anticipating changes in the country's life. The ruling clique was going through a deep crisis. President Antanas Smetona made one more move in his adventurist policy. He suggested the government provoked [*sic*] a military conflict with the Red Army...

... Quite a number of problems required a prompt solution but the old state institutions could not control the existing situation any longer. On June 17, 1940, the People's Government was formed.¹⁵¹

In this account the invasion by the Red Army and the political change in Lithuania constituted separate narratives. In addition, the reader might take note of the use of the passive voice—"the People's Government was formed"; the repeated use of the passive voice in such Soviet accounts avoided the problem of identifying the forces making and enforcing decisions.

Soviet spokespersons always insisted that the Lithuanians had deliberately provoked Moscow, that Lithuanian officials had systematically conspired to undermine the two country's mutual assistance pact.

Considering that the Lithuanians simply surrendered, that they were unready to meet any invasion, it is difficult to build a believable case that Smetona, a cautious person under the most favorable circumstances, would have followed the suicidal policy of deliberately provoking the Soviet Union.

It may well be a useless venture to try to make sense out of the morass all the Soviet public statements, threats, and complaints that circulated in late May and early June of 1940 together with the overgrowth of historical polemics justifying the Soviet move. Soviet complaints about the behavior of the Lithuanian of course quickly became standardized, but the interpretations of the causes of the Lithuanians' alleged behavior varied wildly. In 1940 the Soviets accused the Baltic states of hostility toward both the Germans and the Soviets: *Pravda* of May 28 complained that the Estonians had called the German move into Belgium and Holland "aggression" and that the Baltic leaders were pro-western and did not believe in the firmness of Soviet-German friendship. After June 1941, when the Soviet Union and the western powers became allies against Nazi Germany, Soviet commentators pictured the Baltic states as hotbeds of German intrigue, and they ignored their own previous complaints about French and British agents. With the beginning of the Cold War, Soviet commentators melded together their complaints about western and German intrigues. Some accounts even spoke of English and French intentions in 1940 to attack the Soviet Union, possibly in cooperation with Germany—this at the time of the allies' catastrophic withdrawal from Dunkirk.¹⁵²

An issue that Soviet Lithuanian historians tended to avoid was the Soviet government's own claims to the territory of the Lithuanian state. In August 1940 Molotov asserted that the western powers had torn the Baltic from the living body of Soviet Russia after World War I and that the Soviet Union had every right to recover the territory. He did not even mention the alleged Lithuanian "provocations" that had supposedly evoked the ultimatum of June. In later years, he insisted, "this territory was essential for us."¹⁵³ To put it mildly, in their time, Soviet historians would probably have never dared to produce a comprehensive history of *the Soviet interpretations* of the takeover of the Baltic states in the summer of 1940.

Lithuanian historians now denounce the Soviet move as an act of aggression.¹⁵⁴ As a word, "aggression" has such emotional and judgmental connotations that it seems justifiable to pause to consider it. *Webster's Third Unabridged Dictionary* defines it as "the act of a nation in violating the rights, esp. the territorial rights and another nation (as by unprovoked attack, invasion, or other unfriendly military action or sometimes by serious threat of or preparation of such action." Article 2 of the Lithuanian-Soviet non-aggression convention of 1933 specified, "Accordingly the aggressor in an international conflict shall ... be considered to be that state which is the first to commit any of the following actions: ... (2) Invasion by its armed forces, with or without a declaration of war, of the Territory of another State." The

Annex to the agreement stipulated that “no act of aggression within the meaning of Article 2 of that Convention can be justified on either of the following grounds, among others: A. The internal condition of a State: e.g., its political, economic or social structure...”¹⁵⁵ By those definitions, the Soviet ultimatum of June 14–15, 1940 can presumably be considered an act of aggression.

Under Josef Stalin’s leadership in the latter 1930s, however, Soviet views of international law underwent significant change. 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. Andrei Vyshinsky, who now emerged as an authoritative voice in Soviet legal thought, later told the United Nations, “Law in general is nothing but an instrument of politics.” In a citation printed above in chapter I, the Soviet historian Eugene Tarle noted Nazi Germany’s use of non-aggression pacts to disguise aggression. Although he had distinguished this as a tactic of “capitalist” diplomacy, he also declared that the Soviet government had to understand and master these tactics. By 1939 and 1940, all past international agreements by the Soviet Union were subject to significant reinterpretation.¹⁵⁶

In June 2000, when the Russian Foreign Ministry argued that the ultimatum of June 1940 had been “within the framework of international law as practiced at the time,” this was essentially correct. The Soviet move into the Baltic states was well within “the framework of international law” established by the German seizure of Klaipėda in January 1939 and the German incorporation of Bohemia in March 1939. Smetona was not altogether wrong when he asserted, “The Soviet conception of law is similar to that of the Axis. Only the principle ‘might is right’ has binding force for Stalin and Hitler. Law must bow before brute force.”¹⁵⁷ On March 18, 1939, commenting on the events in Bohemia, Maxim Litvinov, then still USSR People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, told the German ambassador in Moscow that “it is difficult to imagine that any nation would voluntarily resign its independence and join itself into another state.”¹⁵⁸ From this, one can tentatively conclude that the Soviet Union changed its understanding of “the framework of international law” in May 1939 when Molotov replaced Litvinov as commissar of foreign affairs.

Some key documents showing how the Soviet government and the party prepared and planned the invasion of Lithuania in 1940 have now become available to historians, and there was already considerable evidence on the Lithuanian side concerning this final crisis of the Smetona regime. Smetona’s critics on both the left and the right have spoken of a moral paralysis, even debilitating fear, in the ranks of the *tautininkai* and their supporters. When Lithuanian nationalists, in the wake of the Nazi invasion in June 1941, attempted to reestablish Lithuania’s independence, they

denounced the “cowardice” of the Smetona regime in June 1940. Smetona insisted that his government was followed a policy of strictest neutrality—having not seized Vilnius in September, having abstained in the League of Nations’ condemnation of the Soviet war against Finland, and having kept criticism of its giant neighbors out of the public press. For Moscow, this was not enough.

It is still unclear just when the Soviet Politburo decided on the actual incorporation of the three Baltic republics. The way in which some historians tie the Soviet move into Lithuania to the fall of Paris to the Germans on June 14 is dramatic but a bit misleading. Considerable planning went into this invasion; it was not the spontaneous response to the German triumphs. In the fall of 1939, German diplomats presumed that the Soviets would send the Red Army into the Baltic states, but massing 200,000 Soviet troops on the Lithuanian frontier, preparing marching orders, and clearing out prison camps for the possibility of incarcerating Lithuanian prisoners-of-war took considerable time, first in planning and then in actual commitment and logistics. It seems doubtful that the Soviets had such plans already in 1939. In any case, the conflict with Finland had to interfere with any plans that Moscow had had. The Soviet government signed a peace treaty with Finland on March 12; but although it gained considerable territory by this war, the conflict took a heavy toll for the USSR’s international prestige.

The Soviets wanted to consolidate their position in the Baltic, but since their effort to install a communist government on the Finns by force had been a fiasco, they had to follow a more subtle line in the other three Baltic states. On the other hand, they may well have decided that they must move with an overwhelming force from the first moment. In February the conflict with Finland was ending; Moscow summoned its *polpreds* in the three Baltic states to Moscow for consultation; in March the Comintern adopted a program for the formation of a Popular Front government in Lithuania. In April the Lithuanian minister in Moscow reported that “a black cat” would seem to have tracked across Lithuanian-Soviet relations. Nataliia Lebedeva, an authority on the Soviet documents, has suggested that Moscow made its final decision to move on Lithuania on May 24 or 25.¹⁵⁹

Revolutionary declarations had been airing in Lithuania for several months. In preparation for its celebration of May 1, the Lithuanian Communist Party, on April 10, issued a proclamation that carried some threats on the question of Lithuania’s independence, hailing the Soviet victory over Finland and noting that the Soviet Union had just formed another constituent republic, the “Karelo-Finnish SSR,” which it called “a new triumph of Leninist-Stalinist national policy”—this instead of recognizing the new republic as a defeat for the government Moscow had attempted to impose on Finland. It charged that the Lithuanian government was “sniffing around” with English and French agents and hindering the fulfillment of the terms of the Mutual Assistance pact. “Down with the

Merkys government of hunger and terror! Long live revolutionary people's democratic government! Freedom to political prisoners!" the proclamation concluded.

The keystone for the move into Lithuania was a Soviet campaign accusing the Lithuanians of abusing and seducing Red Army soldiers. The issue first arose on May 14, when Natkevičius informed Soviet officials of the suicide of a Soviet soldier in Lithuania. The Soviets were probably already drafting their plans, and Moscow decided that this was a useful issue upon which to mount an offensive. (Pozdniakov doubted the Lithuanians' story of the suicide.) In the next few days the Soviet press made several statements about the inability of small states to cope with current international problems, and a new image of "suicide" arose. On May 16, *Izvestiia*, the organ of the Soviet government, warned that it was naïve to think that a small country could remain neutral when the Great Powers were in conflict: think that a small country could remain neutral when the Great Powers were in conflict: "... the policy of neutrality of some small countries could not be called anything but suicide." Between May 18 and May 25, the Soviet military demonstratively moved about 100 tanks and 250 trucks from the Vilna region to Gaižūnai, a position much closer to Kaunas.

On May 25, Molotov dropped the first shoe. He summoned Natkevičius to the Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and handed him an angry note complaining that "persons enjoying the protection of organs of the Lithuanian government" were luring Soviet soldiers in Lithuania "into criminal activities." The Soviet government, he declared, "is sure that the Lithuanian government will take steps to satisfy its proposals and will not force it to take other measures." Although the Lithuanian government had been concerned about Soviet intentions at least since February, the charge stunned the Lithuanians; the next day, Skučas and the defense minister assured the Lithuanian government they knew nothing of this. Urbšys called in Pozdniakov and told him the Lithuanian government rejected the charge as unfounded, but promised to investigate the matter. On the 27th, the Lithuanians established a commission to investigate the charges. As Urbšys informed Natkevičius, "There is a clear impression that the Russians, for what reason we do not know, are looking for a quarrel."¹⁶⁰

When Urbšys asked Pozdniakov for more information and for permission to speak with the Soviet soldiers who had reportedly experienced the provocations, Pozdniakov answered curtly that he had no authorization to take any action in the matter and declared that the soldiers were under treatment and were not available.¹⁶¹ On the 28th when Natkevičius asked Molotov for information, the Russian responded that the Lithuanians could not expect the Soviets to do their work for them; they should know how to handle such a matter themselves. Molotov told Natkevičius that Pozdniakov had provided Moscow with the information, but Pozdniakov told Urbšys that Molotov had all the information and that he, Pozdniakov, could not comment.

Late in the night of May 29–30, the Narkomindel heightened the uncertainty and tension; TASS issued a news release that charged that “organs of the Lithuanian government” with having been involved in the nefarious acts against Soviet soldiers in that country. Their purpose was allegedly to extort information about Soviet units stationed there. Lithuanian explanations, the statement declared, were “self-contradictory.” The Soviet government had demanded immediate action, and its statement ended by repeating the warning, “The Soviet government expressed the hope that the Lithuanian government will accept its proposals and will not force it to take other measures.”¹⁶²

The Soviet move in publicizing their complaints frightened the Lithuanians. On the 30th, Urbšys informed Pozdniakov that the Lithuanian government had empowered him to travel to Moscow as soon as the Soviet foreign ministry indicated its readiness to receive him. Pozdniakov gave no response, and when Natkevičius, now in Kaunas, visited Pozdniakov later on the same day, the Soviet diplomat refused to speculate on what would yet happen, saying that he did not have all the information that the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs had at its disposal. The next day, May 31, the Lithuanian Communist Party followed up the Soviet warning with a new proclamation demanding an end to anti-Soviet provocations, “a purge of the state apparatus and the army of imperialist agents,” and freedom for political prisoners: “Down with the regime of terror.”¹⁶³ Icaikas Meskupas, the acting party secretary, had been in Moscow from the end of December until April 12. When he returned, he announced that the party was again in touch with the Comintern, and he was probably the author of the party’s proclamation of May 31.

For its part, the Lithuanian government issued a statement on the same day, saying that it had already responded to the Soviet charges and had formed an investigating commission. “The Lithuanian government,” it added, “is sure that the government of the Soviet Union will help it in its efforts to find the culprits. The government of Lithuania will punish the culprits with all severity.” On June 1, Natkevičius, now again in Moscow, tried to assure Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Dekanozov of his government’s “extremely good will” and asked for more information. In response, Dekanozov “expressed surprise that up to now Lithuanian organs continue to ask for all sorts of information from the Soviet side instead of having the necessary results of investigation.”

The Soviet government displayed no willingness to discuss its complaints with Lithuanian officials; it simply kept pressing its charges, to which the Lithuanians could not make any meaningful response. Between June 2 and June 5, Lithuanian police took 272 suspicious persons into custody but claimed to find no trace of any anti-Soviet acts. As the Lithuanians tightened security around the Soviet military bases, Soviet officials complained of harassment, saying not even washerwomen were able

to come serve the troops. Although the Lithuanian government protested that given the opportunity it could clear the matter up, at the same time it began to realize that its very existence now hung in the balance.

It is unclear just what the members of the Soviet mission in Kaunas knew about the direction of this crisis. Pozdniakov apparently understood that at the very least Moscow intended to intensify its military presence in Lithuania. On June 2, he wrote to Moscow, "Therefore the first condition in our discussions with the Lithuanians should be a demand for the introduction of forces into Kaunas."¹⁶⁴ Although the Russian publication of this statement would seem to suggest that Pozdniakov initiated the idea of sending in troops, a Soviet *polpred* in a small country hardly had the authority to initiate the mobilization and dispatch of 200,000 soldiers.

As for the attitude of the Lithuanian government, Pozdniakov reported to Moscow that Urbšys appeared "worried and even frightened." On June 3, Pozdniakov's deputy, Vladimir Semenov, submitted a report on Lithuanian foreign policy that pictured Kaunas as entirely too friendly to the British and the French, even to the point of hesitating to move the government's seat to Vilnius. On the other hand, the recent German successes in Denmark and Norway, together with fears of "sovietization," had pushed many "bourgeois" Lithuanians, led by the "young" *tautininkai* such as Cesevičius, to look to the Germans for help and support. "Germany's victory now appears more than likely." As for Lithuania's attitudes toward the Soviet Union, Semenov declared that the Merkys government had chosen a policy of "sabotage of the [mutual assistance] pact and flirting with the imperialistic powers, leading to the inevitable failure of Lithuania as an independent state and its conversion into a field of activity of dark anti-Soviet forces." Repeating all the regular complaints about Lithuanian ingratitude for the return of Vilnius, about the government's failure to openly welcome Soviet troops, and in general the Lithuanians' refusal to recognize the might of the Soviet Union, he declared that the Lithuanians, in short, were behaving "endlessly far from the fashion of an ally" (*beskonechno dalekim ot soiuznicheskogo*). In conclusion, he predicted that upon settlement of the current crisis, the Merkys government would move to establish better relations with the Germans.¹⁶⁵

On June 4 the Soviets opened the next act of the drama as Moscow demanded that the Lithuanian Prime Minister Antanas Merkys, rather than the foreign minister, come for talks. The Lithuanians quickly agreed, and on June 6 Merkys left by express train. Once he crossed the Soviet border, he reportedly saw evidence of new Soviet troop concentrations. In Moscow he met with Molotov on the 7th. The Russian rejected out of hand Merkys's efforts to explain the problems concerning Soviet soldiers. He insisted that the Lithuanian Minister of the Interior Kazys Skučas and the head of the Saugumas Augustinas Povilaitis were obviously behind the incidents, and he complained about harassment of Lithuanians who were working for the

Soviet garrisons. Molotov declared, "Instead of taking energetic measures to restore order, the Lithuanian government is trying to pass responsibility for the course of investigation to the Soviet Union."

As Natkevičius summarized his impressions, he believed that the Soviets were not really concerned about the investigation of the alleged kidnappings but rather wanted a hundred percent pro-Soviet policy "in our relations with them, and they demanded the replacement of the Minister of the Interior and the Director of the Security Department." In his own summary, Molotov declared, "In general the relationship of the Lithuanian government to the Soviet Union is rather disloyal." He noted that Merkys denied government responsibility for the kidnappings and that Merkys had avoided making any declaration as to how the Lithuanian government would prevent such incidents in the future. In conclusion Molotov told Merkys "to think seriously" about the matter and give him a satisfactory answer at their next meeting. Merkys, Molotov noted, "was obviously nervous."¹⁶⁶ Merkys notified Kaunas that Povilaitis and Skučas must be dismissed.

On the same day as Merkys's first meeting with Molotov, June 7, orders were going out to Soviet military commanders to begin preparations for the move into Lithuania. Soviet Commissar of Defense Marshall Semen Timoshenko had already issued an order on June 3 declaring that as of June 5, all Soviet forces in the Baltic were to be unified under his command. Soviet authorities followed this up by moving new forces into place on the Lithuanian frontier and preparing space in hospitals for the wounded and camps for 50,000 to 70,000 prisoners. The Soviet units in Gaižūnai were to move on Kaunas, and Soviet authorities expected to occupy all of Lithuania in the course of three or four days.¹⁶⁷

Skučas and Povilaitis were of interest to the Soviets for a number of reasons. First of all, of course, they represented the peak of the Lithuanian security services. Povilaitis, the head of the Saugumas, furthermore had placed his spies within the ranks of the Lithuanian Communist Party; Moscow obviously wanted to talk with him. Secondly, Skučas had served as Lithuania's military attaché in Moscow in the mid-1930s, and Soviet police had a number of questions they would like to ask him about his days in the Soviet capital.¹⁶⁸

On the 9th, Merkys and Molotov met again. Molotov demanded to know whether the Lithuanian government admitted its guilt concerning the soldiers, and Merkys again asked for Soviet cooperation in the investigation. Molotov thereupon repeated the statement that Lithuania should handle the matter itself. Saying that Lithuania was not being honest in this minor matter, Molotov then charged that the Lithuanians had secretly formed a military alliance with Estonia and Latvia. Merkys and Natkevičius tried to deny this, but Molotov rejected their explanations. The meeting ended with Molotov's declaration that Merkys must correspond with his government and produce an answer acceptable to Moscow. Merkys telegraphed home to ask Smetona

to send a friendly message to Mikhail Kalinin, the Soviet chief of state, and he asked that Urbšys come to Moscow to explain Lithuania's relations with Latvia and Estonia.

On the 11th, Merkys returned in the company of Urbšys, and they gave Molotov a copy of a letter from Smetona to Kalinin, declaring Lithuania's friendship for the Soviet Union. The Lithuanian prime minister promised that Minister of the Interior Skučas would be dismissed just as soon as Merkys returned to Kaunas. When the Lithuanians declared that the present crisis had arisen unexpectedly, Molotov responded that in the past the Soviet government had delivered such complaints quietly and the Lithuanians had ignored them. Now he declared that he considered Lithuanian actions inadequate and evasive. The meeting ended with Molotov's declaration that he would wait for the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet to respond to Smetona's letter. Merkys's excused himself from further meetings, saying that he would have to return to Kaunas but that Urbšys would remain in Moscow for further talks.¹⁶⁹

After Merkys's departure, Urbšys informed Kaunas that the Soviet officials disapproved of Merkys, and he strongly recommended that Smetona install a new government. General Raštikis would seem to be a desirable candidate to be prime minister, he suggested, but if this could not be arranged, the general should at least become deputy prime minister. On the other hand, several Lithuanians later quoted Merkys as saying, upon his arrival in Kaunas, that he believed that the talks in Moscow would come out all right for Lithuania.

Further talks in fact accomplished nothing. Urbšys and Natkevičius visited Dekanozov on the 14th and found that the Soviets objected to the thought that Merkys would now be acting Minister of Internal Affairs. When Natkevičius visited Kalinin, the Soviet chief of state spoke only of Lithuania's "disloyal signs." Summarizing the situation as of the 14th, Natkevičius was very pessimistic. In view of Merkys's failure, he recommended "radical conclusions," and he noted that Molotov had apparently considered Raštikis acceptable. (On the 7th, Molotov had declared that the Lithuanian government had sacked Raštikis in January because he had shown a certain sympathy for the Soviet position in the negotiations of the previous October.) The Soviet demands, Natkevičius declared, constituted "clear intervention into Lithuania's internal affairs," but in the present situation Lithuania had to make concessions to the "bad humor (*mauvaise humeur*)" of its large neighbor: "The gods are angry."

There was no way the Lithuanians could satisfy Molotov's complaints. Soviet troops were already moving into position. Whatever the Lithuanians did just raised more complaints. The Soviet government ignored Lithuanian proposals that a joint commission investigate the situation, and it simply dismissed Kaunas's efforts to discuss the matter. Molotov complained that "anti-Soviet action is apparent everywhere" in Lithuania, and he

criticized the Lithuanian government's responses as inadequate. This remained his basic position. When the Lithuanians tightened security around the Soviet bases, Soviet officials complained about harassment.¹⁷⁰

Merkys and Urbšys had rushed to Moscow on command; Merkys let go the chief officials of the Lithuanian security service. Natkevičius called the Soviet demands "a clear intervention into Lithuania's internal affairs," but the Lithuanians simply kept retreating. Molotov's statements that he did not believe the Lithuanians left no space for argument or even appeasement. In the wake of the breakdown of Soviet censorship in the late 1980s, Lithuanian historians investigated Molotov's charges and concluded that they had no basis in fact.¹⁷¹ In 1940, the Soviet government gave the Lithuanians no time or help in investigating the charges; it was now preparing the road to take over Lithuania as well as Latvia and Estonia.

Questions naturally arise: What was Molotov's motivation? Why had the Soviet Union launched this offensive at this time? Did Stalin and Molotov really believe that the three Baltic states posed a threat to Soviet security? Or were they simply cashing the blank check that the Germans had given them in the fall of 1939? The most obvious answer might be "yes" to both suggested answers, but one should go on to consider why.

At this point, the new factor in the mix was the military success of the Germans first in Scandinavia and then in sweeping around the Maginot Line in France. On June 12, the Wehrmacht occupied Paris; by this time the Soviet preparations for moving into the Lithuania were well underway. The German victories radically altered past predictions about the eventual outcome of the war. They not only shocked Baltic leaders, who had believed in the eventual victory of the western allies, but they also frightened the Soviets. On June 2, a member of the British embassy in Moscow, then in London, told a member of the Lithuanian mission in London, "The Russians, it would seem, trembling with fear of the Germans as a result of their unexpected success," were preparing to take over the Baltic. The British official went on to say that if the British had taken over Holland and Belgium before the German offensive into Scandinavia, they would have been better prepared—"closer to the German border"—to combat the Germans.¹⁷² Whether the Soviets were acting out of fear of the Germans' next move or in preparation for a possible peace conference, the British diplomat saw a rationale for the Soviet offensive in the Baltic.

In the thinking of the Soviet Politburo, there were probably several backgrounds against which they viewed the Baltic, and all of these bode ill for the Baltic states. In terms of their ideology, Soviet officials looked at both Germany and the western powers as bourgeois, imperialistic states, and in the long run the Soviets could anticipate conflict with the one camp or the other. Official Soviet propaganda at this time criticized the Baltic governments as pro-western, as not believing in the strength of German-Soviet friendship, but Pozdniakov and his mission in Kaunas were sending dire reports about the

suspicious intensification of German “fifth column” activities in Lithuania. An alliance of just the three Baltic republics of itself could hardly pose a threat to the Soviets, but such an entente as a tool of either the Germans or the British could be a serious problem. Yet the Soviet Union controlled the activities of all three Baltic republics. In the wake of German successes in northern and western Europe, Soviet officials took thoughts as threats and possibilities as facts, and they decided that they had to act forcefully to establish control of the situation.

From the moment of its publication, the Soviet public complaint of May 29–30 set off rumors and fears in Lithuania. Disturbing news poured into Kaunas from around the country. According to Lithuanian Saugumas, the Soviet statement made “an oppressive impression” on Lithuanian society. The LCP manifesto of May 30 denounced “unheard of provocations,” but few outside the party actually believed the charges leveled against the Lithuanian government, and rumors ran wild with possible explanations. On June 6 workers at a Soviet air base at Gaižūnai called for doubled wages and also the introduction of Soviet order, the release of political prisoners, and the expulsion of the present government of Lithuania.¹⁷³ The strike, to be sure, may well have been only a product of local initiative. According to a Saugumas report, Soviet officials intervened to help settle the strike, much to the disappointment of local communists. However reassuring Lithuanian officials might have found this, the Soviets obviously needed the work on their air base to continue.

According to Saugumas reports, Poles in Lithuania reportedly saw the story of kidnappings as a Soviet provocation; Germans considered it the work of Jews who favored Soviet intervention in Lithuania; government sources speculated that Poles might have done it at the urging of Allied agents, or perhaps “communists and Jews” had done it to compromise the government. In the wake of all such speculation, rumors and fears of Soviet military action swept the country. Povilaitis, as chief of the Saugumas, called national unity, above party strife, essential in order to maintain Lithuania’s independence.¹⁷⁴

The negative rumors had intensified with the news that government ministers were going to Moscow, but the controlled press in Kaunas attempted to calm public worries. Before the ultimatum, *Lietuvos aidas*, the organ of Smetona’s *tautininkai*, paid more attention to the German successes in France than it did to the feverish talks in Moscow. When Merkys and Urbšys hurried to the Soviet capital, the newspaper spoke of a quick resolution of all outstanding difficulties. Newspaper stories extolled the friendship that the Soviet Union had shown in the past. On June 7, *XX Amžius*, the organ of the Christian Democrats, described the issue as simply a misunderstanding: “In such circumstances Lithuanian society, with a clean conscience and with all confidence, sent off the prime minister on his trip to the capital of a friendly state.” On June 12, Smetona’s office announced that

the president would visit Vilnius on the 23rd, and on June 13 the government celebrated Smetona's name day, hailing him as "the leader, the supreme authority" of the nation. On June 15 the newspaper spoke of Lithuania's good fortune in having such a good neighbor as the Soviet Union.

Social unrest, however, ranged far beyond just speculation about Soviet intentions. On June 8, the Saugumas reported that Poles speaking over French radio talked of anti-Polish riots in Vilnius and called on Polish youth to remain in that city. The Allies would eventually reunite Vilnius to Poland, and local patriots should take note of any Poles who cooperated with Lithuanians. As tension grew, Soviet troops withdrew from contact with the Lithuanian population, reportedly "on orders," and some were reportedly saying "it will be all over for Lithuania." Lithuanians, some soldiers advised, should sell off their Lithuanian currency; it would soon be worthless. On June 12 the Saugumas reported a rumor that Moscow was demanding that the Lithuanian government move to Vilnius and leave Kaunas to the Red Army. Poles in Vilnius predicted that the Soviets would invade Lithuania on the 15th.

The Lithuanian government could not understand the Soviets' intentions. On June 7, Lithuanian intelligence reported that according to a source within the LCP word had come from Moscow: "The introduction of the Soviet order in Lithuania depends on the LCP's ability to prepare and carry out revolution." In a way, the report may have well encouraged Lithuanian leaders. On the one hand, it seemed to promise that the Red Army as such would not intervene in Lithuania's domestic affairs, and on the other, in view of the weakness of the Lithuanian Communist Party, an observer might be inclined to discount the party's "ability to prepare and carry out revolution" in the near future. The report, however, carried no suggestion of what was in fact to happen—namely that Moscow would be leading the LCP by the hand in preparing and carrying out revolution. Considering that several leading communists later insisted that they did not know in advance of the Soviet invasion, this report may well have been legitimate.

Just before midnight, June 14–15, Molotov finally dropped the second shoe, handing Urbšys the Soviet ultimatum. The Lithuanian government must arrest Skučas and Povilaitis; it must organize a new government friendly to the Soviet Union; and it must freely admit more Red Army units. The Lithuanians must respond by 10 a.m. As Natkevičius noted, Molotov "gave us to understand" that regardless of how the Lithuanians might respond, "the Soviet troops will enter Lithuania" at whatever time "they wished." When the Lithuanians declared that "it was not clear how Skučas and Povilaitis could be prosecuted," Molotov responded that the Lithuanians should first arrest the two men and then find appropriate laws to prosecute them—if Lithuanian jurists could not do this, Soviet jurists could help them.¹⁷⁵

At 2 a.m. the Lithuanian leaders anxiously gathered in Kaunas to debate their response. Skučas and Povilaitis had already left their posts. This had obviously not satisfied Moscow. Cabinet members at first sat in silence and then disagreed sharply as to what they should do. Smetona called for resistance, surrender would be shameful. Military leaders considered meaningful resistance impossible. In the end the cabinet decided to capitulate: Merkys submitted his resignation as prime minister; and Smetona asked Stasys Raštikis to form a new government. The Lithuanians still did not foresee the imminent collapse of their independent existence, and Smetona's opponents here saw the opportunity to rid themselves of the dictator.

At 10 a.m. (Moscow time) on June 15, Urbšys informed Molotov that the Lithuanians had accepted the ultimatum and that Raštikis would now form a new government. To his shock, the Soviet Foreign Minister objected to the thought that the Lithuanians could dare to make their own decisions. The Lithuanian surrender opened up new possibilities. Molotov called Raštikis unacceptable—to be sure, in the fall of 1939 he had favored a more friendly policy toward the Soviet Union, but now Moscow wanted someone “more visible.” The Soviet Union intended to watch over in the formation of the new government, but for the moment he could not say how. Early in the afternoon he informed Urbšys that Vladimir Dekanozov, the Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs, would now fly to Kaunas to direct the cleanup. The die was cast; Moscow was taking over.

The communications between German diplomats at this time indicated no great surprise at the Soviet actions. Schulenburg had already reported that the Soviet authorities were buying up Baltic currencies. Baltic leaders who were still ignorant of all the ramifications of the Nazi-Soviet pacts of 1939 hoped that the Germans might intercede on their behalf, but Berlin remained quiet. As a foreign office memorandum of June 17 put it, “in view of our unaltered friendly relations with the Soviet Union, there is no reason for nervousness on our part.” Another memorandum of the same day declared, “The Lithuanian Government, to be sure, has probably not been quite certain until the last few days whether or not we were completely disinterested in Lithuania, so that in many circles, as for instance in one case of the Lithuanian minister here, there was perhaps some hope that Germany would, in case of further Russian demands, put in a good word for Lithuania in Moscow, although there was never of course any occasion given on our part for such an assumption.” Molotov told the German ambassador in Moscow that “it had become necessary to put an end to all intrigues by which England and France had tried to sow discord and mistrust between Germany and the Soviet Union in the Baltic States. The Germans expressed some concern about their economic interests in the Baltic, but the foreign office, for example, refused to accept a note from Škirpa critical of the Soviet move

on the grounds that he did not represent the views of a recognized government.¹⁷⁶

The Soviet armed forces were ready to go. The fall of Paris had nothing directly to do with the Soviet decision, since as of June 10 over 220,000 men, 1140 military aircraft, and 1513 tanks stood ready to move into Lithuania. A Saugumas report of June 6 declared that Soviet forces in Marijampolė were constructing an air base and not allowing Lithuanian officials to examine it. On June 11, the Soviet commander Dmitri Pavlov received his final orders for occupying Lithuania, and the troops should be ready to march on June 15. The Lithuanian army at the time totaled some 26,000 active soldiers and 120,000 reserve soldiers.¹⁷⁷

At 3 in the afternoon of Sunday, June 15, Soviet troops began to move, and the Lithuanian government soon received the news that Soviet tanks were moving from Gaižūnai toward Kaunas. By 4 o'clock Soviet planes were flying over Lithuania's larger cities. (The Lithuanian air force was under orders to stay on the ground.) Within a few hours, the Soviet planes were landing. The Soviet forces came in overwhelming numbers, with the obvious aim of intimidating any possible resistance; ELTA issued a call for Lithuanians to remain calm. The troop movement through Lithuania continued for the next several days, clogging roads throughout the country. .

The Lithuanian writer Ignas Šeinius claimed to see fraud in the Soviet show of power. Standing on a hill outside of Vilnius the next day, June 16, he watched Soviet bombers pass overhead. He counted three squadrons of nine Soviet bombers each, totaling twenty-seven planes that flew westward from Vilnius towards Kaunas and then circled to the north, returning to make the flight over and over again. By Sunday evening, he declared, there were only seventeen planes making the circuit; the others had presumably needed repair. Traveling by car from Vilnius to Kaunas on the 17th, he saw the roads clogged with Soviet armored equipment, much of which had broken down. He called this "red deluge" in fact "red humbug."¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the invasion cowed the Lithuanians, and rumors spoke of only scattered and sporadic resistance to the Soviet influx.

In Kaunas noisy crowds came out to see and to greet the arrival of Soviet tanks on Laisvės alėja (Freedom Boulevard), the broad street at the heart of the city. Some memoirists later recounted their dreadful impressions; others testified that women and girls offered flowers and men cheered. Ever since that moment, to the present day, Lithuanians have declared that only Jews seemed enthusiastic; Jewish commentators have recognized that Jews received the Soviet army with more enthusiasm than did the Lithuanians. According to Solomonas Vaintraubas, a Lithuanian journalist, who graduated on this day from the Yiddish gymnasium in Kaunas, his teacher, Henrikas Zimanas, a member of the party, mobilized students to go greet the troops. Soviet soldiers, on the other hand, would remember that non-Jewish residents of Kaunas also gave them flowers.

There were indeed Lithuanians watching and greeting the Soviet forces. What did the spectators know or expect? A woman who had then just passed her eighth birthday told me that on the road from Kaunas to Raudondvaris she watched the Soviets troops passing on through the city—a communist activist described the same scene as an unending flow of soldiers who made crossing the road difficult. According to the woman’s account, she looked at the soldiers, dusty and tired, and decided that she too wanted to offer them flowers. It was too far for her to return to her home, and therefore she went to a neighbor’s house and asked for permission to take some flowers to the soldiers. The woman angrily scolded her and declared that she would tell the girl’s mother that she wanted to welcome the Red Army.¹⁷⁹

Rumors ranged from threatening to mildly hopeful and on occasion even joyous: the Soviets would help Lithuania regain Klaipėda from the Germans; the Soviets would force the Lithuanians to move their capital to Vilnius so that the Red Army could make Kaunas its garrison; war with Germany was imminent, and the Germans would surely win. Whatever the rumors might suggest, however, there was panic buying; stores closed. As a Saugumas agent reported, “The mood of the people of our country at this time is extremely strained and uneasy.”¹⁸⁰

At 7 in the evening of June 15, about the time Soviet tanks appeared in Kaunas, a special plane delivered Vladimir Dekanozov to the Kaunas airport. Dekanozov told Deputy Prime Minister Kazys Bizauskas, who met him at the airport, that he had come to negotiate the formation of a new government. The Soviet official immediately ensconced himself at the Soviet mission and prepared to start work the next day.

In succeeding days, the Soviet government delivered similar ultimatums to Estonia and Latvia, claiming that the Baltic states had formed an anti-Soviet military alliance and charging all three governments with being “pro-British” and with not believing in the solidity of German-Soviet friendship. (Moscow did not charge the Latvians and Estonians with kidnapping Soviet soldiers.) Paralleling Dekanozov’s mission in Kaunas Moscow sent Andrei Vyshinsky to Riga and Andrei Zhdanov to Tallinn to restructure the governments. Stalin’s political machine was now taking over the three Baltic republics.

The Soviet propaganda machinery abroad cast the events in the best possible light. As the Swiss newspaper *La Travail*, put it on June 22, “A solid alliance has been concluded between Lithuania and Russia. It will guarantee peace.” On June 21, however, another Swiss newspaper, *Das Luzerner Tagblatt*, predicted that Stalin would incorporate the Baltic states; he could, however, “give himself time to remove all the last beauty failures” in the system. Few western observers believed that the Baltic republics could somehow maintain their independence.

Soviet historians were never able to produce convincing evidence with details to justify the claim that the Baltic Entente had a structured anti-

Soviet military dimension linking the three states. When Soviet interrogators, the NKVD, had former Lithuanian leaders under its control and could question them, they gave their interrogators little satisfaction. Merkys flatly denied that Lithuania had joined in a military alliance and admitted only fear “of a common danger of being sovietized.” Urbšys conceded that the decision of the three Baltic republics to exchange information concerning their respective Soviet garrisons essentially became “a tripartite military union.”¹⁸¹ This, however, was now at best a problem for historians. Molotov had used the charge and there was no need for further discussion; Moscow’s agents in Kaunas now moved on to new tasks.

The Russian Foreign Ministry’s argument of June 2000 that the movement of the Red Army did not constitute an invasion because the Lithuanian government had agreed to it is dependent on a free and very narrow interpretation of the documents. More informative of the attitude of the Soviet government at just this point is the report of Marshall Timoshenko, who called for the immediate introduction of an NKVD regiment into each of the Baltic states “for the protection of internal order,” the disarmament of the armies of “the occupied republics,” and “decisively to proceed to the sovietization of the occupied republics.”¹⁸² The Soviet military chief considered his action to have been an occupation pure and simple.

VI

The Refugee

“We believe that the leader of the Lithuanian State will safeguard a free future for our country in this stormy time.”

—*Lietuvos aidas*, June 13, 1940

“With reference to the diplomatic visas which have been issued to my family and to myself, I am aware of the fact that the visas have been granted on the condition that while I am in the United States, I shall not be considered as the head or member of any government.”

—Antanas Smetona, in Berlin, upon receiving his American visa

“I am, was, and will be the president of Lithuania.”

—Antanas Smetona, in the United States

In the early hours of June 15, Smetona summoned his cabinet of ministers to consider the government's response to the Soviet ultimatum. According to one participant, the summons simply stated, “An unpleasant telegram has come from Moscow.” When Smetona entered the room after the ministers had gathered, “the muscles of the president's face and his hands were trembling a bit.” When he had “nervously finished smoking a cigarette,” he opened the meeting and explained that the Soviets had made new demands. He directed Merkys to read the ultimatum to the group. When Merkys finished, the men sat in stunned silence.¹⁸³

Smetona initiated the discussion by saying that he could agree to only the second point in the Soviet ultimatum, that Lithuania install a new cabinet of ministers more friendly to the Soviet Union. He opposed accepting the first condition—the arrest of Skučas and Povilaitis—and the third—the peaceful acceptance of new Soviet troops into the country. Referring to the defense council's past decisions, he called for resistance that could at best be only a token action, but it would give witness to the Soviet act of aggression and allow the government to seek haven abroad. “The time has come,” he declared. Pointing to the moral significance of resistance, he stated that at future peace talks “Norway will take a more respected position than Denmark because it resisted the attacker with arms.”

Some members of the cabinet did not see the issues in the same way as the president did. As Alfonsas Eidintas has put it, the issue was whether they were discussing the fate of the Lithuanian state or just the fate of the Smetona regime.¹⁸⁴ For Smetona, there was no such distinction to be made: his regime was the state, he was the president, and he embodied the state. As he had in the negotiations for a new government in November, he now threatened to resign, but as he wrote in his own memoir of this meeting, “All participants in the meeting declared that the president should not resign but

just take a vacation for a while.” For others the distinction between the state and Smetona was clearer, but much of the division of opinions rested on the evaluation of Soviet intentions: the Soviet troop units in Lithuania since the fall of 1939 had acted honorably; but what were the Soviet intentions now?

When Smetona called on the ministers to express their views, Merkys, who would seem to have been going through severe psychological problems since his return from Moscow on June 12, remained silent, and Kazys Bizauskas, deputy prime minister and a Christian Democrat, opened the discussion, calling for acceptance of the ultimatum. The Soviets would surely be reasonable; a Lithuanian court would treat Skučas and Povilaitis with respect; and the group should agree to form a new government. Smetona interrupted his presentation by objecting to Bizauskas’s readiness to sacrifice Skučas and Povilaitis; he stood up and declared, “When you sit in my place, then you can betray them; I will not do that.” Taken aback, Bizauskas quickly stopped, and another pall of silence fell over the group.

Finally other ministers began to speak, each raising questions of honor but also discussing the cost of resistance. Bizauskas forced the issue when he launched into an attack on Merkys’s stewardship as prime minister. Christian Democrats and Populists considered the Merkys government only “a fig leaf” to cover the *tautininkai* dictatorship, and the Christian Democrat and Populist ministers had formed an “axis” as opposition within the government. At a meeting of “axis” leaders on the 12th, Bizauskas had argued that “it was necessary quickly to create a cabinet crisis so that those persons who are odious to the Soviets would have to leave, that all policy now had to be even more turned to the Soviet side.” For this he received the approval of the other “axis” ministers.¹⁸⁵ As the Lithuanian Commission of Historians has written, “Totally disillusioned by the failure to consolidate all the political forces in the face of the threat, members of the opposition parties sought a government crisis in order to form a pro-Soviet government.”

Since Molotov had spoken sympathetically about Stasys Raštikis, Brazaitis now recommended that Raštikis, recently reactivated in the army, head a new government. The other members of the cabinet, perhaps relieved to take some sort of action, agreed to summon the general to the meeting to discuss the formation of a new cabinet. The meeting recessed to await Raštikis’s arrival, and during the break Bizauskas reportedly made clear his desire to seize the moment “to exploit the situation and get rid of the Smetona regime.”

Historians and commentators who believe that Moscow intended from the start to sovietize Lithuania have characterized Bizauskas’s assumptions and arguments as disastrous. (Merkys apparently supported Bizauskas’s proposal to accept the ultimatum.) Underlying his argument at least to some extent was a continuing hope and belief on the part of many Lithuanians that the western allies would yet defeat Germany. The collapse of France meant that the world would unite against the Germans, and in time

the Soviet-German alliance that had pushed Lithuania into this terrible corner would disintegrate. The coming of the Red Army therefore did not necessarily mean that it would long stay in Lithuania. In any case, Bizauskas and others did not believe that the Soviet Union would swallow Lithuania.

After Raštikis's arrival at 4 a.m., the cabinet reassembled to discuss the possibility of resisting the Red Army's movement. Both Raštikis and the current army chief Vincas Vitkauskas declared that given the fact that the Red Army already had some 20,000 men inside Lithuania, resistance would be futile. The meeting fell back on just one possible act of resistance—issuing a protest against the Soviet ultimatum and the coming of the Red Army. No draft text, however, came forward—Urbšys, calling from Moscow, urged the government to avoid any reference to the Soviet demands as an “ultimatum”—and the meeting adjourned at 7 a.m. Smetona told the group that “if there will be no resistance, then he, as an act of protest, will turn his constitutional duties over to the prime minister and himself will go abroad to rest. He cannot remain in the country since in that case the Russians would force him to sign all sorts of documents and thereby bolshevizize Lithuania.”¹⁸⁶

The telegram to Urbšys in Moscow stated simply, “The government agrees”; Urbšys was free to word the Lithuanian response as he saw fit. General Musteikis, the minister of defense, later argued that the Lithuanian government had not explicitly accepted the Soviet ultimatum: “There was no vote, but all participants had been asked to express their opinions.” According to Musteikis, the meeting had established three points: 1. The invitation to Raštikis to form a new government, 2. The president's disagreement with the view of the majority of the cabinet to accept the ultimatum and not to resist, and 3. The president's empowerment of the prime minister and his own departure abroad. Musteikis closed his memoir of the meeting with a rhetorical question: “The majority of the cabinet of ministers proposed to accept the ultimatum. The president does not agree. So is the ultimatum accepted or not?”¹⁸⁷ Musteikis proposed to make this an important theoretical question, but it had no practical effect—the government surrendered and issued no protest.

The hope that the Soviet Union would content itself with the Lithuanians' simple statement of acceptance quickly evaporated. At ten a.m. came the news that Molotov would not accept Raštikis's appointment. Merkys accordingly remained on as acting prime minister, and Smetona, declaring that he himself was leaving, empowered Merkys to act as Lithuania's president: “Since I am incapacitated, according to the constitution of Lithuania (article 71), I request that you substitute for me in the duties of President of the Republic.” He then departed for the German frontier. At first he had thought that he had a day or two to consider further action, but as news came that Soviet troops were spreading across Lithuania far faster than anyone had anticipated, he decided to cross the border that same evening. In the late afternoon of the 15th, when Soviets tanks from Gaižūnai were nearing

Kaunas, Defense Minister Musteikis followed the lead of his president and fled for the German border. Crossing the border proved to be more complicated than expected because on orders from Kaunas (from the minister of justice presumably with Merkys's direction), the Lithuanian border guard did not want to allow members of the old government to cross, and soldiers even raised their guns to block the president's passage. Smetona fled the scene and finally crossed the frontier by wading across a shallow brook; the Germans agreed to let him stay, not to force him to return to Lithuania. In Smetona's account of his flight, he wrote that as he crossed the frontier, he thought about Bizauskas's proposal to accept the Soviet ultimatum with the anticipation that having satisfied Moscow, it would be possible to soften the Soviet demands.

Skučas and Povilaitis were not so fortunate as their president. On the 15th they had withdrawn from Kaunas toward the border with Germany. Skučas, as a military officer, insisted that he had to receive clear orders to leave the country. He waited for Merkys's direction. Instead Lithuanian police, apparently on Merkys's orders, arrested them at the border and brought them back to Kaunas.

Smetona later wrote that the Soviets' rejection of Raštikis's appointment as prime minister and the news that Dekanozov was coming to Kaunas were the final blows that convinced him to leave the country. In fact, he had already spoken of this possibility to his wife on June 13 (his name day), and he had sent his wife to the country to pack for flight. In the wee hours of the morning of the 15th, when his cabinet decided to accept the Soviet ultimatum, he had declared that he would be leaving. He may well have reckoned that he could expect no better treatment than the Soviets were promising Skučas and Povilaitis. He obtained a German visa and took some \$10,500 from his personal bank account. The news of Dekanozov's coming perhaps motivated him to move more quickly, but it was not the key factor in his decision to flee the country. He also managed to take a considerable number of documents with him.

Soviet commentators subsequently raised a scandal about the money that Smetona had taken. Estimates of the amount ran to \$125,000, and when the new government decided to discredit Minister of Finance Ernestas Galvanauskas, it charged that he had helped Smetona abscond with these funds. From the first, Soviet propaganda had called the Smetona regime "plutocratic," and stories, obviously planted, in newspapers abroad spoke of his having accumulated considerable wealth that he could now enjoy. On June 19, for example, a Swiss newspaper, *Le Travail* (Geneva), carried a report that Smetona owned "a chateau in the environs of Bordeaux, some plantations in Palestine, and some coffee plantations in Brazil." If that had been true, of course, he would not have settled in the United States, complaining about the dole he was receiving, at first \$800 a month and then \$900, from the Lithuanian minister in the United States, Povilas Žadeikis.

(The money came from Lithuanian funds that the American government had frozen after the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania, and the government regulated what Žadeikis could give Smetona.) Later investigation apparently confirmed that the money Smetona received came from his private account, not from state funds; he had only limited resources when he fled.¹⁸⁸

He had thought about flight frequently since the signing of the mutual assistance pact in October 1939. Through intermediaries, including Povilaitis, he had several times inquired of the Germans whether they would grant asylum to Lithuanian officials fleeing the Soviets. Soviet commentators might call this a sign that he preferred the Germans; more reasonably, it testified to his fear of the Soviets.

The Soviet authorities were probably of two minds when they considered the consequences of Smetona's escape. On the one hand, they had apparently planned to use and manipulate him as they subsequently did Pats in Estonia and Ulmanis in Latvia. On the other hand, his flight allowed them freely to criticize and ridicule him immediately and thereby to exploit the sentiment against him that existed in Lithuania without contributing to a martyr's aura for him. The German minister in Kaunas, Erich Zechlin, thought that the Soviets welcomed Smetona's flight: "Politically Smetona's flight was bound to be extremely welcome to the Russians as it provided them with the best opportunities for propaganda against his Government. The last few days have fully borne this out."¹⁸⁹

Soviet historians insisted that Smetona fled because he feared the "people's" justice. Juozas Žiugžda, long the pathfinder for Soviet Lithuanian historiography, explained that the movement of the Red Army had demoralized the Smetona regime, depriving it of the support of foreign, bourgeois, imperialist governments. Soviet writers usually did not identify those governments, leaving readers to conclude that it could be the British or the Germans or even a combination of both. At any rate, according to Žiugžda, Smetona and his supporters, seeing the hopelessness of their situation, had panicked, and he had run to Hitler, his "tutor and protector." This latter characterization of Smetona's admiration for Hitler of course could only be written after June 22, 1941, when the German Wehrmacht marched against the Soviet Union. No Soviet commentator could say that publicly in 1940. By the time the Germans attacked in 1941, Smetona was in the United States, but this detail was unimportant in Žiugžda's picture.¹⁹⁰

Immediately after reaching Germany, Smetona wrote his own account of the last days of his regime. Entitled *Pro memoria*, it has been republished many times, and Antanas Sniečkus, the longtime head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, kept a copy in his own papers, bound together with the records of the interrogation of Povilaitis, Skučas, and others, including Karlis Ulmanis, the deposed authoritarian president of Latvia. In its various published forms, the texts of Smetona's memoir vary a little from

each other in occasional wording, but are identical in their fundamental presentation.

Beginning with the assertion that the Lithuanian cabinet of ministers, under successive premiers, had repeatedly expressed its determination not to surrender Lithuania's sovereignty to anyone voluntarily and to oppose violence by force of arms, Smetona complained that no one had ever provided a plan how to do this. In the meeting of June 15, Smetona had advocated resistance, but "What can the President of the Republic do when Prime Minister Merkys, General Raštikis that candidate to be the new prime minister, and the army chief Gen. Vitkauskas yield to Moscow's violence in all demands?" Under the circumstances, he argued—writing in the third person—"His departure was necessary, his departure was a small protest against Moscow's violence, such as was possible in the existing circumstances. Everyone agrees with this argument, even those who surrendered to the Soviets' demands." But in fact not "everyone" agreed with Smetona's self-justification.

Smetona's critics have responded that his self-serving memorandum tried to put the blame for governmental inaction on everyone but himself. Smetona criticized Raštikis's statement that the army could not resist: Raštikis "laconically and boldly advised to agree with all of Moscow's demands. He headed the army for five years; the influence of his training could not but leave a trail." Smetona's critics pointed out that in fact he and his defense minister were to have drawn up the plan for resistance, but they did nothing. Furthermore, the president's letter empowering Merkys to head the government spoke only of his being "incapacitated"; it contained no sign of protest to the Soviet invasion. Reportedly he chose that odd word "incapacitated" (*sunegalavus*) so as to confuse the Soviet authorities when they had his letter translated into Russian, but the fact remains that with this unique opportunity to declare his opposition to the march of the Red Army, he made no sign of a public protest. He spoke only of taking a vacation.

Early in the morning of the 16th, now in Germany, Smetona rejected efforts to persuade him to return. Merkys sent a delegation, headed by former Finance Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas, who insisted that Smetona had to return to sign documents legalizing the new situation in Kaunas. Smetona rejected all Galvanauskas's urging. Kazys Škirpa called from Berlin, saying that the foreign ministry in Kaunas wanted Smetona to return. "If the President of the Republic would return immediately," the foreign ministry official had reportedly said, "it would be possible to keep his departure abroad a secret from the public. More important, then the Soviets would not get wind of this." Škirpa spoke with both Smetona and Musteikis, and both men, emphasizing the personal danger they would face, refused to go back.¹⁹¹

Notified of the president's refusal to return, the Lithuanian government, on the morning of the 16th, declared that his flight constituted his abdication of the office of the presidency. Lithuanian historians have

usually declared that this decision came at the urging of the new Soviet proconsul in Kaunas, Vladimir Dekanozov, but Dekanozov himself claimed to have learned of the flight only on the morning of the 16th. This suggests that in arresting Skučas and Povilaitis, in trying to block Smetona's crossing the border, and in sending Galvanauskas to persuade Smetona to return, Merkys was acting on his own initiative.

Galvanauskas had no sympathy for Smetona's problems at this point. He had not attended the government meeting of June 15, and when he now returned to Kaunas, he accepted the post of Finance Minister in the new government now formed in Kaunas under Soviet domination. Although he himself fled Lithuania at the beginning of August, he remained critical of Smetona's flight on the first day of conflict. As he wrote immediately after his own flight, "It is infuriating that at the hardest, most tragic time the long time President of the Republic, as the leader of the army and the nation, withdrew from his duties and rode off, deserting the land and nation at this most dangerous moment."¹⁹²

Škirpa, on the other hand, helped Smetona. Merkys actually ordered Škirpa to ask the German foreign office, the *Auswartiges Amt*, to return Smetona to Lithuania, but Škirpa refused and instead urged the Germans to give Smetona asylum. The German government for its part displayed no interest in using either Smetona or for that matter Augustinas Voldemaras, who was in Berlin from June 13 to 17, planning to return to Lithuania.¹⁹³ Berlin painstakingly kept repeating that it had no vital interest in Lithuania. The German government did not return Smetona to Lithuania, but neither would it allow him to stay in Germany indefinitely. He had to find another home.

Once abroad, Smetona was shocked to discover that Lithuanian émigrés did not respect either him or the reasons for his flight. The adulation, the pomp, and the ceremony that had surrounded him for thirteen and a half years were now all gone. While Smetona was still in Lithuania, the controlled press heaped praise on him and devoted considerable attention to his name day, June 13, and to the news that he planned to visit Vilnius for the first time on June 23. On June 16, Smetona discovered that the political stage on which he had played the starring role no longer existed. Now he was a deposed dictator to whom many people, even ones he had put in positions of authority, showed little respect and even scorn. In the three and one-half years remaining to him, he repeatedly asserted that he symbolized independent Lithuania, but he had only a minuscule audience among the Lithuanian émigrés.

In Germany Smetona complained that the Germans showed him little respect. The authorities tolerated him and protected him from the Soviets, but they would not give him a permanent refuge. He grumbled that he was under strict control, he could not meet with other Lithuanian refugees

without permission, and he could not even take a walk by himself. Germany gave him only a temporary haven.

Probably the greatest shock for the deposed president was the discovery that Lithuania's diplomats in western Europe, men who had been working as his personal representatives to other chiefs of state, now did not care to associate too closely with him. He left Germany in September and settled temporarily in Bern, Switzerland. (Switzerland had no diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and therefore the Lithuanian mission in Bern was safe for the moment.) There he learned that the key Lithuanian diplomats in western Europe, wanting to keep alive the idea of Lithuanian statehood, were planning to organize a national committee, to be headed by Galvanauskas—this after Galvanauskas had fled to the west. The diplomats wanted Smetona to remain in Europe until the end of the war; but they also wanted him to eschew any public action. They did not want him to be the central figure in their shadow structure. As a compromise, Smetona signed a new declaration, known in Lithuanian history as the "Kybartai acts," naming Lozoraitis as prime minister and acting president. The acts bore the date of June 15 and supposedly superseded Smetona's naming Merkys as Lithuania's acting president. Lozoraitis apparently once or twice tried to use these acts to win recognition in Washington, but they in fact remained just an odd by-product of Smetona's flight, with no significance for Lithuania's fate under Soviet rule.¹⁹⁴

Smetona would have liked to remain in Europe, but he could find no home or, indeed, income. Germany had refused to shelter him, and the Swiss government now would not give him a residence permit. He stated that he might be willing to live in Italy or Spain if he could have a guaranteed income of \$2000 per month. This was impossible, and he finally decided to follow the desires of his family and to emigrate to the United States. This constituted a severe psychological setback.

He had obtained the requisite visa to enter the United States while still in Berlin, and he had agreed to rather humbling conditions. On September 13, 1940, Cordell Hull, the US Secretary of State, notified the American embassy in Berlin, "You are authorized to grant diplomatic visas to President Smetona and members of his family. You should make it clear to the President that these visas are being granted on condition that while he is in the United States he would not be considered as the head or member of any government." On September 14, Smetona repeated the formula, "With reference to the diplomatic visas which have been issued to my family and to myself, I am aware of the fact that the visas have been granted on the condition that while I am in the United States, I shall not be considered as the head or member of any government."¹⁹⁵ He nevertheless hoped to find a new base among the Lithuanian émigrés in North America.

In war conditions, the path for leaving Europe and traveling to the United States was complicated. Smetona first made his way to Lisbon, where

he had abortive talks with representatives of the Polish government-in-exile on the possibilities of Polish-Lithuanian cooperation.¹⁹⁶ In February 1940 he sailed from Lisbon to Brazil, and on March 10, 1941, he finally arrived in the United States. American customs officials treated him with respect, calling him “a distinguished visitor,” and a black tie reception and dinner given by émigrés in his honor on March 11 at the Hotel Pierre undoubtedly raised his spirits.

Despite his agreement to the conditions of his visa, Smetona refused to recognize the loss of his former honors. At his first press conference in Washington on March 25, he declared, “I am still the lawful President of the Republic of Lithuania, the first and the fourth but not the last, I hope, elected by the people under the existing Lithuanian constitutional law. I have not forfeited any of my rights.” As to his plans in the United States, he declared, “I intend to do some writing, to see more of America and to learn more about the functioning of American democratic system and its institutions.” On another occasion he said simply, “I was, I am, and I will be president of Lithuania.” He still considered himself “*tautos vadovas*,” the leader of the nation. *Tauta*, the nation, he liked to say, had called him to power in 1918, 1919, and 1926; it needed him. He considered himself a democratic leader, and he publicly objected to being called an authoritarian ruler, although he used the word in his personal correspondence.¹⁹⁷

In his first days in Washington, he feared possible assassination. On April 15, 1941, just a few days before United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was to see the former president, my father traveled to Washington to see Smetona, at Smetona’s request, and he later recorded some observations:

Since he does not do his own shaving, he has to depend on a barber. The Lithuanian envoy took him to his own barber. However, Smetona was afraid that somebody might plot against him and try to kill him. Therefore, he was looking for a barber shop where nobody would know him. He found a place where a barber happened to speak Russian. First he was glad of this because he could speak Russian which is easier for him than English. But then the new barber became too inquisitive for Smetona’s rest of mind. He was again seized with fear and at the time of my visit was looking for a new barber.

In Lithuania, Smetona had kept a strong bodyguard. He traveled in a car with bulletproof windows and body, with no running boards. He would never sit near a window. And he had a taster for all food and drink.¹⁹⁸

At this point Smetona apparently had some pro-German sympathies. Although he resented the continued criticism by commentators such as Škirpa in Berlin that he should have allied Lithuania with the German cause in

September 1939, in the event of a conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union, he seemed to favor Germany. After talking with him, my father noted, "The reestablishment of Lithuanian independence Smetona expects from a war between Germany and Soviet Russia. He is ready to adjust a revived Lithuania to the German Order."

Three days later, Smetona met with US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and, encouraged by FDR to rally Lithuanians to the Allied cause, Smetona seems then to have taken a firmer pro-western line. Apparently deciding to tie his image to that of the American president, who had just begun an unprecedented third term in office, Smetona liked to say that he had accepted President Roosevelt's "mandate" to support the principles of US foreign policy among American Lithuanians

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 had far-reaching consequences for the Lithuanians: Lithuanians in Kaunas declared the reestablishment of Lithuanian independence and welcomed the Germans as liberators. The Lithuanian minister in Washington, Povilas Žadeikis, considered the June rising in Kaunas a bold action that reestablished Lithuanian honor after the shame of the passive acceptance of Soviet forces a year earlier. Many Lithuanians considered German rule a relief to their Soviet experience, but now the USSR and the USA became wartime allies while Germany and the United States became belligerent enemies after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The situation of Lithuanians in the United States became much more complicated.

Smetona, influenced by his meeting with Roosevelt, reacted more cautiously to the news of the German invasion than did many other Lithuanians who welcomed the end of Soviet domination, and he rejected the idea of some that he should return to Lithuania under German occupation. (The Provisional Government that arose in Kaunas on June 23 denounced the Smetona regime's surrender to the Soviet invasion of a year earlier.) Nevertheless the image of being pro-German hung over Smetona's head in the views held by some US intelligence agents. In January 1942 US FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover inquired of the State Department as to whether the Lithuanian Provisional Government of June 1941, in its cooperation with the Germans, had declared war on the United States.¹⁹⁹ Germany and the United States of course were not yet at war in June 1941, but if Hoover and the American government had somehow conceived of Lithuania's being an ally of Germany, the government would have classified all Lithuanians in the United States as "enemy aliens."

Throughout the war, the American government kept a careful watch on all the immigrant communities in the United States, and Smetona fell into their purview. Hoover's FBI pursued this task as a natural part of its duties. The OSS, Office of Strategic Services, the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency, included a branch to observe foreign nationalities in the United States, and to some extent the section's work paralleled and competed

with the FBI. In watching the Lithuanians, both agencies focused first of all on immigrants' attitudes toward Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Both agencies received letters from American citizens concerning activities of émigré organizations, and both used sources within the Lithuanian community.

For Smetona and other Lithuanians, the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union were allies made it very difficult to find sympathetic hearing in the State Department. As a State Department representative told the Lithuanian minister in Washington, Povilas Žadeikis, "It is inconceivable to me that there could be a democratic victory which did not include victory for Russia as well." Both the FBI and the OSS at best saw only an indistinct line between pro-German and anti-Soviet statements, and the agencies continually received denunciations of Smetona and other prominent Lithuanians from one or another source, some Lithuanian, some not, some communist. To judge from the reports that the United States State Department received from the two agencies, the FBI seemed inclined to identify Smetona and his followers as pro-fascist and pro-German, while the OSS maintained a more balanced view of the Smetona camp. Both agencies nevertheless reported that Lithuanian Communists appeared to support the war against Germany much more enthusiastically than did the mainstream of the Lithuanian immigration. On December 14, 1942, a State Department memorandum declared that the department's policy "has consistently been to discourage alien political leaders from addressing foreign-born American citizens' groups on controversial questions dealing with the countries of their origins."²⁰⁰ For Smetona, this policy constituted essentially a "gag rule," sharply limiting what he could say in public. Nevertheless the United States government held to its established policy, proclaimed in July 1940, of not recognizing the Soviet incorporation of the three Baltic states.

The Lithuanian minister in Washington, Žadeikis, played a delicate role as the intermediary between Smetona and the United States government. While Smetona complained that the minister was not showing him proper respect, Žadeikis had to respond to State Department inquiries, prompted by letters from Hoover and others, concerning Smetona's views and actions. He resisted State Department officials' urging that the Lithuanians to adopt a softer line toward the Soviet Union; he defended Smetona against the various challenges that the State Department raised; but he responded sharply and critically to Smetona's complaints.

One of the sharpest exchanges between Žadeikis and Smetona concerned the president's explanation of his flight from Kaunas on June 15. The flight had become the subject of controversy. Some Lithuanians praised him for refusing to cooperate with the Soviet authorities; others criticized him, pointing to the many years that he declared himself *tautos vadas*, the leader of the nation, and accusing him of now having abandoned the nation at a moment of crisis and need. Some commentators, such as Aleksandras

Shtromas, have treated his departure sympathetically, saying that “he decided to leave the country, to thus assure from abroad the continuity of the constitutional order and the organization of resistance to the Soviet *diktat*.” A less sympathetic writer declared, “The Lithuanian nation was left without the leadership of government and parties.” In 1953 a United States congressional committee accepted the view that “the sudden departure of the President of Lithuania created legal obstacles for carrying out the Soviet plan.”²⁰¹

In the years Smetona had left—he died on January 9, 1944, in a house fire in Cleveland, Ohio—he explained his flight in various ways. In an effort to put the best possible “spin” on his action, he repeatedly declared that he refused to participate in the “bolshevization” of his country, and his sympathizers insisted that his flight had thrown a wrench into the Soviet plans to take over Lithuania. On occasion, he also declared that he knew the Soviets would arrest him and possibly torture and execute him. He was, he argued, entitled to be concerned about his own safety and the safety of his family. In any case, he would point out that he left behind a declaration empowering Antanas Merkys to serve as acting president.

Žadeikis challenged this picture. “The president went abroad so as to avoid the attacker’s pressure to sign acts contrary to the Lithuanian constitution and to the will of the Lithuanian people,” he wrote. “That assertion resonates. But such a reason did not figure in the meeting of June 15 but rather turned up on the road to Kybartai and especially in Eitkūnai [*the German side of the frontier—aes*]. Was it really that way?” Smetona responded angrily: “How do you know that this did not ‘figure’ (*nefigūravo*)? You have accused me of being a liar!” Speaking of himself in the third person, Smetona replied that the “Council of Ministers unanimously asked him to remain in office and approved his motives that he should immediately leave Lithuania.”²⁰² Smetona resented the fact that many Lithuanians considered him a coward in a moment of crisis, and Žadeikis was one of the few persons who dared to raise the issue to him directly. Nevertheless, Smetona had no choice but to continue to work with the minister.

Smetona found a unique, sympathetic outlet for his own interpretation of Lithuania’s affairs when Owen Norem, the United States Minister to Lithuania in 1940, requested that he critique the book that Norem was writing. Entitled *Timeless Lithuania*, the finished product offered a romantic look at Lithuania’s past and bitterly denounced the Soviet takeover. Smetona willingly helped Norem and publicized the book among Lithuanian émigrés in the United States. But upon receiving Norem’s draft manuscript, he complained to Žadeikis that there were “a great many big errors.” He produced an 85-page commentary that Norem used in completing his book.²⁰³

Explaining his flight from Kaunas, Smetona offered Norem a parable: “The situation of the president here resembles that of the host, asked to give a night’s lodging to guests who pretend to be his friends and have

promised to respect his home. When his family has gone to sleep for the night, the guests prove to be murderers, throw off their masks and using force and threats demand that he sign over to them all the property which has been entrusted to his care. If the host had arms, he could resist them, but having none, he has no choice but to flee from his home and the murderous trap laid for him." In more prosaic terms, he declared that the president, "with the approval of the entire cabinet of ministers," had "left his country with his family not only because his liberty and his life were threatened, but also because he did not wish to give his written approval of the acceptance of the ultimatum." The president, Smetona declared, had "resisted passively by escaping from aggression." He preferred the image of "escape" to the image of "flight." Depicting the campaign of the new government in Lithuania to discredit him, Smetona declared that had he remained, his "humiliation as the Head of State would only have wounded national pride still more deeply."

Smetona's flight in 1940 was in fact the second time that Smetona had left Lithuania as Soviet troops were moving into the region. He had made a similar escape at the end of 1918, and his explanations for the two episodes had a parallel ring. In his commentary for Norem, he wrote that in December 1918 he had just signed a loan agreement with Germany: "Being exhausted and of the opinion that both Parties had had about enough of him, the President of the Council A. Smetona decided to go abroad. Therefore, entrusting his duties to the other members of the Presidium of the National Council, A. Smetona went abroad for a vacation at the beginning of 1919." Describing this situation, Norem wrote that after Smetona had negotiated "an important loan from Germany," he had then undertaken "a very important assignment" traveling through Scandinavia to seek aid: "The Scandinavian sojourn was also a well deserved vacation."

Norem pictured Smetona's flight in 1940 in similar fashion, although he ignored the argument that in a moment of national crisis, the president needed to take a vacation. First he said simply that Smetona "fled from the Bolsheviks in 1940." A few pages later he offered a more elaborate statement: "He left the country with his family not only because his liberty and his life were threatened, but also because he did not wish to give his written approval of the acceptance of the ultimatum as he would have been forced to do if he had stayed." Smetona, moreover, had not fled in haste: "He directed final arrangements. He was well aware of the fact that his life was in danger and that, if apprehended, he would be required to sign over the country to Russia."

Although Smetona said, and Norem echoed, that the president had left order behind him, he of course left chaos behind himself. His own intention in leaving authority with Merkys was at best to create disorder, to paralyze the government, but the disorder only hastened the collapse of his regime. In his *Pro memoria*, Smetona demonstrated little confidence in Merkys: "I had misgivings about his inability in such difficult hours to

prepare a plan. He more or less was waiting for someone else to do something that he was supposed to do himself. He could not make a decision.” This was the man he left in charge in Kaunas. He insisted that his flight did not constitute abdication: “such an act of resignation did not and could not exist.” But he and his associates had built a political stage around him, and without him, it could not survive. With his departure, the *tautininkai* regime in Lithuania simply collapsed. Nevertheless Norem pictured Smetona’s departure as orderly.

In explaining his regime to Norem, Smetona pictured himself as the strong leader who understood what the people really needed. In the 1920s, he declared, Lithuania had been burdened by an “ultra-democratic” constitution. “Extreme democracy is a pathway to the proletarianization of the spirit of the people and dictatorship of the proletariat,” he wrote. Speaking again of himself in the third person, Smetona told Norem that having been “elected” president after the military coup of 1926, “the President had acted in the true spirit of democracy with all minorities alike, national as well as religious... on the whole the people did not regret the fall of the party-minded Seimas.” Smetona pictured himself as embodying the principle of Lithuanian independence and the state itself.

He also pictured himself as something of a father figure to the people. “A democratic order,” he wrote to Norem, “can be reached only by degrees through the long experience of generations, growing as in proportion the nations become more cultured and politically experienced. The newly-erected post-war states were progressive and full of good intentions. But their ultra-democratic constitutions may be compared to shoes which are several sizes too large for the children who would wear them, slipping from their feet and preventing them from walking properly. These shoes were too large to serve for the present and could only be used in the future. When they had rubbed blisters on the feet of their wearers, they were thrown aside and others found more suitable for young feet.” In another thought, he compared Lithuanian society to a baby in a cradle: “Thus the Soviet Russian communist like a python creeping out of his desolate lair in the east, slithered into free and peaceful Lithuania and enveloped her in his coils, as in that terrible story where the snake wound itself around the neck of the sleeping infant, sliding treacherously out of the dark into his cradle.” While justifying his style of governance, this imagery should have perhaps raised still more questions about his flight from Lithuania at a moment of peril.

Norem’s final product would seem to have had little success among the American public or among Lithuanian émigrés. It offered the name “Amerlith” as the publisher; as Norem explained the name, it “combines American and Lithuanian—Amerlith. If it arouses the curiosity of many people, such curiosity will be good publicity in itself, and the Americans will casually accept it as something that may have been in existence for some time.” Norem made no mention of Smetona’s help, probably to protect both

himself and Smetona. The book may well have caused the greatest stir in the State Department, which was deeply concerned that a former American diplomat should write an anti-Soviet tract. As a State Department official told Žadeikis, “It was not felt that it would be advisable at this time in the interests of Lithuania and the other Baltic states, to publish a controversial matter involving the Soviet Union.”²⁰⁴

The vast majority of Lithuanian émigrés in the United States did not share Smetona’s image of himself and his regime. An OSS report spoke of the American Lithuanians as being divided into three major camps: Communists; supporters of Smetona; and the coalition of Catholics, Nationalists, and Socialists organized as the American Lithuanian Council. The communists, although numerically “small,” had considerable resources: They maintained four newspapers and “fully supported” the American and Soviet war effort. The OSS called Smetona’s supporters “numerically the smallest of the Lithuanian groups.” According to the agency, “of the twenty-eight Lithuanian-language newspapers and periodicals published in the United States, nearly twenty support with varying degrees of conviction the American Lithuanian Council against the Communist position on the one hand and Smetona’s bid for unification under his leadership on the other.” Only four American-Lithuanian weekly publications supported Smetona. According to the OSS’s survey of gatherings marking the 25th anniversary of Lithuania’s declaration of independence on February 16, 1918, a communist dinner in Philadelphia drew 300 participants while a pro-Smetona dinner in Chicago drew only 200 participants. A pro-Smetona dinner in Cleveland, the heart of Smetona’s support, drew 350 participants.²⁰⁵

Smetona had expected the best elements of the emigration to follow his lead—just as his official propaganda in Lithuania had insisted the best elements there did. He was, after all, the living symbol of Lithuanian independence. This did not happen, and he could not adjust to this new situation. Žadeikis urged him to compromise: “The key to unity is understanding. But you stand on the principle of approval and leader, so how is understanding or compromise possible?”²⁰⁶ Smetona instead insisted that the Lithuanian people had looked to him for leadership in 1918–1919 and in 1926, and throughout the 1930s. He considered opposition to his personal role in Lithuanian history as the equivalent of opposition to Lithuanian independence, and he saw himself as the target of designs and intrigues of “Catholics, socialists, and communists” among the émigrés.

He was, however, careful in his public oratory. His most recent biographers, Liudas Truska and Alfonsas Eidintas, noted that Smetona publicly cast himself in a modest role. Truska pointed out that in June 1942 he disclaimed any authority to determine Lithuania’s future political order, saying, “We will not offer restored [Lithuania] any scheme for a system.” Eidintas called the same text “rather hazy.”²⁰⁷ Smetona’s tone in his letters nevertheless indicated that whatever he said in public, he believed that the

“real” and “true” will of Lithuanian democracy was to recognize him as “*tautos vadas*.” In turn his oratory had little effect on the views of the Lithuanian emigration.

Even though he frequently faced organized opposition, in a small group Smetona could nevertheless be a convincing orator. As an example, when he visited Philadelphia on November 27, 1942, there was considerable antagonism toward him on the part of the local Lithuanians. When the city’s mayor, Bernard Samuel, received him, and when he attended mass at the local cathedral, celebrated by Francis Cardinal Dougherty, Lithuanians were conspicuous by their absence. The three local Catholic parishes had decided to ignore his visit, and priests were not even to appear on a platform with him. He drew a crowd of some 1300 people to his public talk, but as it assembled, it was a far from friendly gathering. His speech, however, captured the audience. According to my father’s summary, “He spoke of the hope that Lithuania will again become independent and free. He expressed his conviction that Lithuanian independence can only be won through a victory of the United Nations. He accepted the United States and Great Britain as guarantors of Lithuanian independence. He stated emphatically that Lithuania would have a democratic government.” In the end, he drew warm applause, but a collection aimed at raising money to organize a local chapter of the Smetonist Union to Liberate Lithuania gathered only forty-nine dollars.

Smetona’s death in a house fire on January 9, 1944, put a sudden end to all the intrigue surrounding his position in the United States. The debates concerning the more controversial aspects of his rule in Lithuania became muted, and his image as a symbol of Lithuanian independence grew. The “Smetona period” became a sub-period of Lithuania’s history, the second half of the period of independence between the two World Wars, during which the Lithuanian national culture developed stronger forms. His regime had blocked the development of civil society in Lithuania and had made the country highly susceptible to foreign intervention and domination; and his flight, or escape, had aroused considerable controversy. But as the historical alternative to the Stalinist system, the “Smetona period” over time began to win considerably more sympathy than it had enjoyed during his lifetime. In 1954, a report by a US Congress subcommittee, the so-called “Kersten committee,” suggested that “the semi-authoritarian rule [*that Smetona*] directed from 1928 to 1938 might well go down in the history of Europe as more the government of enlightened statesmanship than the government of one-man rule.”²⁰⁸ While Smetona was still alive, few commentators would have seriously supported such an interpretation.

VII

Moscow's Proconsul

Proconsul: "an official in a modern colony, dependency, or occupied area who acts as an administrator usu. with extensive powers."

—*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*

"For a revolutionary, the main thing is revolutionary work and not reform; for him reform is a by-product of revolution. Therefore in revolutionary tactics under a bourgeois regime, reform becomes a weapon to break down this regime."

—J. V. Stalin

This revolution in Lithuania delivered political power into the hands of social forces directed by a foreign state.

—Mykolas Römeris

Smetona's flight left confusion in its wake. On the evening of the 15th the lights burned upstairs in the president's residence, and passers-by could believe that the president was still in Kaunas. On the morning of the 16th, however, the Lithuanian flag did not rise over the residence; Soviet soldiers stood guard at government buildings and directed traffic in Kaunas; Smetona was already in Germany. Smetona's critics denounced what they called his "cowardly abandonment of his people"; his supporters argued that he had boldly refused to surrender. Communists lamented their lost opportunity at taking vengeance, and Soviet officials were angry that he had escaped. The Smetona era had come to an abrupt end.

As frightening as the entry of new Soviet troops might have seemed, many Lithuanians welcomed Smetona's flight. German observers who compared events in Kaunas with those in Riga and Tallinn thought that the Lithuanians showed considerably more enthusiasm for the new order imposed by the Soviets than the Latvians or Estonians did. One possible factor, in their opinion, was Smetona's flight, which clearly brought an end to an unpopular dictatorship, while in Latvia and Estonia, the fact that the presidents, Karlis Ulmanis and Konstantin Pats, had remained may have constrained both Soviet maneuvers and popular enthusiasm.²⁰⁹ At any rate, Moscow's "special plenipotentiary in Lithuania," Vladimir Dekanozov, made great use of both the popular antipathy for Smetona and also the popular sentiment that Smetona had fled out of cowardice.

On June 18, in one of its last reports before succumbing to the Soviet regime, the Saugumas reported that the Lithuanian public was "endlessly tense and uneasy." The people feared an impending German-Soviet war, which Lithuania, as a border region would feel first, and they feared the imminent release of political prisoners, who would surely cause

considerable unrest. To be sure, the first units of the Red Army that had come in October had tolerated Smetona; and many Lithuanians now hoped that Moscow would encourage genuine political reform of the Lithuanian state, perhaps the restoration of the 1922 constitution. Ideas of reform swirled up through the air. First impressions of the behavior of the troops were favorable: the soldiers did not act like an occupying army, and they quickly withdrew from posts at government buildings. Government officials now spoke of reform, but in fact, control of the process would be out of the hands of the Lithuanians.

The mainstream media in Kaunas worked to put the most favorable spin possible on the Soviet intervention, indicating that the Red Army had come because of some shortcoming on the part of the Lithuanians. General Vitkauskas ordered Lithuanian troops to meet the Soviet forces in friendly fashion. In his radio talk to the people at 4 p.m. on June 16, Antanas Merkys declared that the enlargement of the Soviet force in Lithuania “at the present time is entirely understandable.” To this he added, “Our internal social, cultural, economic, and political affairs should not be affected by this.” In *Lietuvos aidas* of June 16, Vincas Rastenis, former secretary-general of the *Tautininkų sąjunga*, struck a note of sorrow, writing, “It is regrettable that despite the development of fine relations between the Soviet Union and Lithuania up to recent times the need has arisen to establish special measures to ensure the treaty.” Justas Paleckis’s newspaper *Laikas* on that same June 16 offered a more radical and forceful interpretation of events. “True, non-egoistic patriotism,” it declared, recognized the Soviet Union’s good will, but “pocket patriots,” seeking their own profit, had dominated the development of Lithuanian-Soviet relations to this point: “If, thanks to the recent shock, we have lost our ‘leader’ of sad memory and his ‘system’ has collapsed, we must determinedly struggle not to make such mistakes in the future.”²¹⁰

Such efforts to put a positive spin onto both Smetona’s flight and the coming of the Red Army have complicated efforts to understand the processes that now drove Lithuanian affairs. The first question: Was the Red Army an army of occupation? Soviet and now Russian historians, of course, denied this thought. As one Soviet Lithuanian historian argued, “Occupiers bring in their own administration, enforce a harsh economic and political dictatorship on the local residents, the land loses its national freedom and statehood, it is enslaved, and the residents are left with no rights, will, or initiative.”²¹¹ Didn’t the Lithuanian government itself say that the Red Army was no threat?

In fact, Vladimir Dekanozov, Moscow’s emissary, now took charge of Lithuanian affairs, and his administration in Kaunas met that Soviet historian’s criteria for use of the word “occupation.” As noted above, at 10 a.m. on the 15th, Molotov could not tell Urbšys who would travel from Moscow to guide the Lithuanians; at 12 he informed the Lithuanians that Dekanozov would come. Stalin received Dekanozov before he departed to

Lithuania, and his instructions probably included the Comintern's resolution of March 23 calling for the creation of a popular front government in Lithuania. Officially Dekanozov was the Soviet "special plenipotentiary," but his activity represented more the work of a "proconsul." Within 48 hours Dekanozov had organized a new government and seen it installed in Kaunas, but he did not leave. His job was to create a new order in this republic that Marshall Timoshenko had called "occupied."

The new order first established control of the old regime's forces of repression—the police and the military. It neutralized the army. It controlled the new government, forced a harsh political dictatorship on the local residents, sharply restricted expressions of Lithuanian nationality, and it certainly struck at any sign of popular resistance or independent initiative. When local administrators, "helped" by guardians sent in by Moscow, eventually took over those functions, the character of that "occupation" changed. A key element in Dekanozov's program, as we shall see in succeeding chapters, was to prepare a local administration that would then allow Soviet spokespersons to deny the fact of "occupation" and to insist on the image of "socialist revolution." Soviet leaders wanted no repetition of the damage that their Finnish adventure had inflicted on their image.

On June 15–16, the nominal head of government in Kaunas was Antanas Merkys, but he almost immediately surrendered factual power to Dekanozov. In Soviet circles, Dekanozov, a "candidate member" of the Communist Party's Central Committee and Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was known as "Berii's man" and as an NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) official. Lavrentii Berii, a Georgian like Stalin, had become USSR People's Commissar of Internal Affairs in 1938; Nikita Khrushchev later said of Berii that he had risen through the Soviet system "over an untold number of corpses." Dekanozov, also a Georgian but a native of Baku, had worked with Berii from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, from street fighting to purging pre-Stalinist remnants in the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in the late 1930s. After his duty in Lithuania in the summer of 1940, Dekanozov went on to serve as the Soviet *polpred* in Berlin until the German attack of June 1941. After Stalin's successors purged Berii in 1953, Dekanozov would share his chief's fate; in December 1953 the Soviet regime, Stalin's successors, executed him. The formal charges against him and Berii in 1953 called them "the worst enemies of the Soviet nation" and claimed that they had betrayed their country by working "as secret agents for international imperialism."²¹² The Soviet government, however, never repudiated his work in Lithuania.

Dekanozov's arrival in Kaunas on June 15 was followed within the next few days by the arrival of special agents from Moscow in the other two Baltic capitals: Andrei Zhdanov in Tallinn and Andrei Vyshinsky in Riga. In a biography of Vyshinsky, Arkady Vabsberg, a Russian journalist, called Vyshinsky the weakest of the three. Zhdanov, a member of the party's

Political Bureau, was a member of the Soviet elite, a favorite of Stalin. Dekanozov was “one of Beria’s closest associates.” Vyshinsky, known as the prosecutor in the great public trials in Moscow, had no such strong sponsor in Moscow, although he had past ties with the NKVD. In Vabsberg’s opinion, as in the opinion of many other writers, the NKVD now set the tone in the Baltic. Dekanozov, as a Georgian and “a professional NKVD operative,” had special qualifications for his job, and he obviously enjoyed Moscow’s confidence—or at least as much confidence as one could expect in the Soviet system of that day.²¹³

A few words seem here in order to describe the Soviet political system and to examine how it extended itself first into Eastern Poland and then into the Baltic. The fundamental novelty of the system lay in the fact that Stalin ruled the Soviet Union even though he held no post in government as defined by the Soviet constitution. Had Stalin been willing to travel abroad during his time in power, this might have created complications, since the Congress of Vienna in 1815 had not foreseen the need to establish a place in diplomatic protocol for the general secretary of a ruling Communist Party. When Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev began to travel abroad in the 1950s, protocol officers in other countries had to invent ways to fit the Soviet party leader into traditional diplomatic practice, and Khrushchev found it useful to take over the constitutional post of prime minister.²¹⁴ But Stalin, in his time, ignored the problem of foreign protocol and demanded that foreigners wanting to negotiate with him come to Moscow. The final negotiations for the two pacts with Germany in August and September 1939, for example, took place in Moscow, not Berlin.²¹⁵

Stalin’s power rested on the fact that the Soviet state, as created by Vladimir Lenin and further developed by Stalin, was a “party-state.” After the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, Lenin had created a new type of administration in which the Communist Party constituted the sovereign authority, higher than the constitutionally defined governmental administration. The party wielded absolute power; the state administration was only “an instrument” (*orudie*) in the hands of the party. In November 1917 Lenin himself took the post of chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, the equivalent of Prime Minister, only because his colleagues insisted; he would have preferred just to command the system as party leader. His colleagues, it would seem, did not immediately comprehend his model for the new state, which can be conceived of as two pyramids, one inside the other. The larger, outer pyramid represented the structure of the party; the smaller, inside pyramid represented the structure of government as defined by the constitution which the Soviet regime then drew up in 1918. The constitutional part was dispensable; the party was forever. In the late 1930s, under the so-called “Stalin Constitution” of 1936, Stalin ruled the Soviet Union as the First Secretary of the Party, at the apex of the greater pyramid of

power; in this system the constitutional posts of prime minister and even the formal chief of state were inferior to his authority as party secretary.

In practice, undefined by any constitutional document, Stalin's style bore a certain resemblance to a feudal system. His power was limited only by practical considerations, not by any constitutional provisions. Surrounding him in the center of party power was the Politburo, or Political Bureau, made up of a dozen men, each perhaps with a special role in the overall system. Molotov, the Soviet Union's Commissar of Foreign Affairs in 1939 as well as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, had come to this position not through the ranks of the commissariat but from his duties in the Politburo overseeing the work of the previous commissar, Maxim Litvinov, who had held a much lower position in the party hierarchy. Molotov had, so to speak, descended from on high, presumably to pave the way for the rapprochement with Nazi Germany.²¹⁶ Another major Politburo figure at the time was Lavrentii Beria who headed the Soviet security police system. Other Politburo figures, such as Nikita Khrushchev who after the war directed agriculture, Anastasii Mikoian who directed trade and industry or, after Stalin's time, Dmitri Ustinov who long headed armaments production, had distinct specializations. As Stalin directed the system, the members of the Politburo, so to speak, had their own "fiefs" which they ruled absolutely, while Stalin supervised their individual work and mediated their relationships with each other.

This was the structure and organization through which power and authority devolved into Dekanozov's hands upon his arrival in Kaunas on June 15, 1940, and he was to be the engine, the activator, of the Trojan Horse, "intended to undermine or subvert from within," as described above in chapter III. Ernestas Galvanauskas later declared that Dekanozov essentially took over the powers of the Lithuanian presidency.²¹⁷ As USSR Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs, he was subordinate to Molotov, but as an NKVD official he had his lines connecting him with Beria, and, of course, like Beria and Stalin, he was also a Georgian.²¹⁸ With the obvious support of the Red Army, he now dictated to Merkys the formation of a new government and sent Merkys into retirement. Within seven weeks, Dekanozov led Lithuania, arm in arm with Latvia and Estonia, into the fold of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Should, or could, Lithuanians, on June 15, have foreseen that they would soon become citizens of the Soviet Union? Was incorporation into the USSR inevitable? What should Lithuanians have expected when they saw the Soviet troops come into the streets of Kaunas? Could Lithuanians have prevented the Soviet takeover? What possibilities were there to resist?

For two generations of Soviet historians such questions did not exist. The historians pictured the establishment of Soviet power in Lithuania as resulting from a mass popular revolution led by the Communist Party, which had provided the elite, knowledgeable leadership that the revolutionary

situation demanded. They noted the presence of Soviet soldiers as enabling the spontaneous revolution in Lithuania and gave only minimal attention to Dekanozov's presence in Kaunas. Even in 1988, as the Soviet historiographic house of cards collapsed, Romas Šarmaitis, a historian who had played a role in the events of 1940, still insisted that Lithuania had experienced a "socialist revolution" in 1940.²¹⁹

Some historians have argued that in June when Moscow sent the Red Army into the three Baltic republics, it really did not intend to incorporate the Baltic states. On the basis of the considerable evidence indicating that Moscow planned the incorporation, from preparing the military invasion to forming "people's assemblies," it would seem that the burden of proof should be on these historians to prove that Moscow did not have such plans. The lockstep progression of simultaneous "revolution" in all three republics argues very strongly against any idea of "spontaneity," either on the part of the Baltic peoples or of Moscow. On the other hand, it would seem quite possible that Soviet authorities found it easier to carry through their plans than they had expected, especially in Lithuania; they had expected forceful opposition and resistance. The Red Army and the NKVD had already prepared for imprisoning enemy combatants.²²⁰

As the Soviet historians pictured it, the revolution allegedly arose from "objective political and socioeconomic conditions" within the country: "It is impossible to carry out a revolution either by order or by agreement." The Soviet troops in Lithuania changed the country's international situation so that the Smetona regime lost its support from abroad, and the Communist Party could carry out its historically determined role. The first step was to be a "people's government," "a transitional form on the road to a socialist state," which would represent the "non-Soviet anti-fascist Left" supported by the "petty bourgeoisie": "The theory of people's democracy, the anti-fascist revolution, at that time constituted the basis for a new strategic orientation of the communist movement."²²¹

An additional question that arises for the post-Soviet investigator is: To what degree did Lithuanians themselves, intellectuals as well as "the masses," facilitate the process of incorporation? According to an American observer, Anna Louise Strong, the Lithuanian people, given this opportunity, themselves demanded Soviet rule. The German intelligence report cited above took special note of the enthusiasm of the Lithuanians who participated in the pro-Soviet mass demonstrations that swept Lithuania. Although Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, now to become Lithuania's Foreign Minister, later wrote that when the Red Army moved in, "it became clear even to the most politically unsophisticated that the independence of the Lithuanian government was already nothing but a meaningless fiction,"²²² he himself accepted a post in the new government formed under Soviet aegis. What was happening?

The Red Army moved into the Baltic with an overwhelming show of force and at the same time with disguised motives. Given their high positions in the Soviet system, the three “special plenipotentiaries,” or proconsuls—Dekanozov, Vyshinsky, and Zhdanov—did not descend on the Baltic just to be passive supervisors. They had to carry out their tasks quickly; other work awaited them in Moscow. And the job involved more than simply directing the formation of a new cabinet of ministers. The pro-Moscow forces carried out identical programs in all three Baltic republics, and these programs, moreover, followed closely the plan of action that the Politburo drew up in September and October of 1939 for handling territories taken from Poland.

The new order disguised its goals, presenting itself as “reformist” rather than revolutionary. This eased its first steps, but one must also consider Josef Stalin’s dictum in his *Problems of Leninism*: “For a revolutionary the main thing is revolutionary work and not reform—for him reform is a by-product of revolution. Therefore in revolutionary tactics under a bourgeois regime, reform becomes a weapon to break down this regime.” Once the Soviet troops were moving, Dekanozov’s “reform” of Lithuania’s political structure aimed at breaking down the old regime, establishing a new order, and then directing the process of incorporation.

Somewhat more speculative might be the question just when Stalin and the Soviet government finally decided to incorporate the three Baltic republics. The Politburo declaration of September-October 1939 had only considered the incorporation of Belarusian and Ukrainian territories into the Soviet Union, and these had not had independent governments. A Soviet intelligence officer of this period, Pavel Sudoplatov, has suggested that at least in the case of Latvia, Soviet officials had considered establishing a government that equally considered Soviet and German interests, but, frightened by German successes in France, Moscow had then decided to introduce Soviet rule there. On the other hand, Valters Munters, the foreign minister of Latvia, later told his Soviet interrogators that according to German diplomats, with whom he had spoken in April 1940, Ribbentrop gave the Soviet Union ‘carte blanche’ in the Baltic states and the Baltic governments would be incorporated into the Soviet Union “by September 1, 1940.”²²³ The intention of incorporating the Baltic states may have existed for some time; the general plans would have taken months to prepare; and the Soviet military began to move into action at the beginning of June.

Once they had decided to move, the Soviet leaders surely looked back on their recent experience. They had the successful model of what they had done in the Polish eastern lands in 1939, and their effort to force a communist government on the Finns had failed. Now in Lithuania, they had expected resistance; Molotov’s first reaction to the Lithuanian surrender would suggest that they had not planned to send an envoy to Kaunas to take over the government. Given the available documentation, we can only guess

at how Timoshenko and the Red Army planned to administer Lithuania. Dispatching Dekanozov would seem to have been a sudden, quick decision; but he had the Comintern's program for forming a "popular front" government, a "people's government." The question of Soviet planning demands further investigation, but this does not disprove the interpretation that on June 15, 1940, when Dekanozov arrived in Kaunas, his task was to draw Lithuania into the Soviet party-state—and quickly.

Essentially, Dekanozov's arrival in Kaunas signaled the de facto incorporation of Lithuania into the larger Soviet party-state, and his overall task was to put the "de jure" constitutional details in order. In this paradigm, political power now flowed from Stalin, the Politburo, and the Central Committee in Moscow, through both party and government lines to Dekanozov, who represented both the Communist Party and the Soviet state. He officially came as the representative of the USSR People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, he undoubtedly also represented Beria's NKVD, and through both Molotov and Beria, he served the Soviet Politburo and Stalin. He in turn directed the minuscule Lithuanian Communist Party. His presence in Kaunas, it should be noted, was no secret. He appeared freely in public, visiting Lithuanian military and political officials. Subsequently both the acting president and the acting prime minister gave dinner parties in his honor.

Although Dekanozov's hierarchy may seem clear in retrospect, at the time there was considerable confusion on the part of Lithuanians as to just what was happening and who was in charge. When Kazys Škirpa came to Kaunas in late June, his first impression was that Pozdniakov was in charge, and he changed his mind only after Ernestas Galvanauskas had come to Berlin and explained the situation to him. In a wartime essay, Jonas Šliūpas, a veteran of the Lithuanian national movement, declared that Chaim Aizenas, a member of the Lithuanian Communist Party, was directing government policy. Many memoirs of Lithuanians repeat the observation that Pozdniakov, the Soviet *polpred* in Kaunas, delivered orders to leaders of the new government. Dekanozov, who was clearly Pozdniakov's superior in both the party and governmental hierarchy of the USSR, probably used the envoy for routine communications with government officials and himself concentrated on developing the party and working specifically with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In this system imposed by Dekanozov, the Lithuanian government, the most visible part of this structure, was to play only a decreasingly important role in the political developments that would now sweep Lithuania. The rising new power, nursed along by Moscow's emissaries, would be the Lithuanian Communist Party.

One other institution must here come into our picture, namely the Executive Committee of the Communist International, nominally a private international organization, centered in Moscow, uniting communist parties of

the world. When Lithuanian Soviet historians, in 1968, received copies of the communications between the head of the Comintern, Georgii Dimitrov, and Icakas Meskupas, the acting head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, they emphasized the Comintern's role in Lithuania. On June 17 Dimitrov ordered the Lithuanian communists to refrain from participating in the new Lithuanian government; on June 25 he demanded that the Lithuanian government recognize the Communist Party. These two citations served the purpose of drawing attention away from the work of Dekanozov and Pozdniakov, picturing the Lithuanian Communist Party as a significant, independent force in Lithuania's so-called "revolution," working in cooperation with the highest representatives of the world's "proletariat."

In the latter 1930s, however, Stalin had purged the Soviet Communist Party and many western parties, including the Lithuanians; the Comintern itself was reduced to a shell. This purge, in which the leaders of foreign parties, such as the Lithuanian or Polish parties, experienced arrest and even execution, was not the work of the Comintern but rather of the Soviet party-state. Most western analyses of the Comintern's work considered that by the mid-1930s the Comintern was only a tool of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet government, and therefore in this account of Lithuania's experience in 1940, it takes its place as just another agency supporting Dekanozov's program as directed by Moscow. In all, the role of the Comintern in the Lithuanian "revolution" was to endorse, facilitate, and disguise Dekanozov's actions and demands.²²⁴

The key element in Dekanozov's program—as indeed it was for Zhdanov in Estonia and Vyshinsky in Latvia—was to develop the image that the Lithuanians, like the Estonians and the Latvians, were carrying out a revolution themselves. This meant, first of all strengthening the Lithuanian Communist Party while at the same time setting up a pliable, sympathetic but non-communist government that would accept Moscow's directives and carry out the communist program as defined by the Politburo in its protocol for incorporating the Belarusian and Ukrainian territories taken from Poland. Soviet satraps in the Baltic states, to be sure, had to consider the existence of independent, already existing governments. This called for more subtlety and imagination in developing the image of voluntary incorporation than had been necessary in Belarus or Ukraine, which were absorbed by existing constituent republics of the USSR. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia would enter the Soviet Union as separate constituent republics.

In the 1990s, standing among the ruins of the collapsed Soviet system, some commentators argued that it had been a mistake for the Soviet government to encourage the particularism of constituent union republics, such as Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The structure of the Soviet Union, however, as created by Stalin in 1922–1923, evolved from the experience of the revolution rather than from any pure theory. As late as 1919 Lenin and the Soviet government had declared that the new state would be one great

republic, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, but faced by the strength of national feelings in various regions, the Soviet leadership had perforce retreated to the form of a union of national republics. In the 1920s, moreover, Soviet analysts had concluded that the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic had failed in 1919 because Lithuanians had rejected Soviet agrarian and national policies; in 1940 the Soviet government wanted to make no such error. At the same time, the Soviet leadership, following Lenin's teachings, believed in the success of the party's nationality policy that called for molding national cultures to be "national in form and socialist in content." Nationality, the Soviet leadership wanted to believe, was not the most important factor in the consciousness of the "toiling masses"; therefore they believed that they could make arrangements, seeming concessions to national identities, which would eventually eliminate the threat of separatist nationalist feelings. As the experience of 1988–1991 showed, however, the Soviet leadership failed to convince its population that "class consciousness" was superior to "national consciousness."

Dekanozov's program, as noted, called for the formation of a non-communist government, a "popular front," one cooperating with the local "progressive bourgeoisie," but one that fit into the Soviet party-state structure. This tactic apparently calmed the nerves of some who took hope in the fact that the Red Army did not immediately install a communist government. The men whom Dekanozov chose to head that government did not themselves at first understand their roles. The new Prime Minister, Justas Paleckis, for example later wrote that he came to understand what had happened only when Stalin himself explained the structure of the Soviet party-state. As Paleckis described this lesson, Stalin, smiling, told him: "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 [*the Lithuanian equivalent of the Politburo—aes*], into which come all the basic leading comrades. There you will discuss all basic questions. The *polpred* 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." Now Paleckis understood: "Having become a member of the Biuro of the CC, which decided all questions of principle," he wrote, "I understood the significance of this basic leading and unified center about which Stalin spoke during our conversations in the Kremlin."²²⁵ In short, Moscow's hand, however hidden behind Dekanozov, guided and directed the events, including the development of the Lithuanian Communist Party.

Paleckis's account, to be sure, contained some mystification. Why did he speak of Pozdniakov and not Dekanozov? After Dekanozov fell victim to the purge of Beria's supporters in the post-Stalin succession struggle, he became in George Orwell's classic term "an unperson." Therefore Paleckis

presumably could not mention him and had to interpose Pozdniakov's name into Stalin's explanation. On the other hand, at the time Paleckis had occasion to talk with Stalin, at the beginning of August, Dekanozov had already left Lithuania and was preparing to take up his next job as Soviet ambassador to Germany. Pozdniakov remained as Moscow's plenipotentiary to supervise the work of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. In the absence of clear documentation, Paleckis's account may also be evidence that Pozdniakov handled the details of directing the government while Dekanozov undertook the greater job of directing the party's takeover of the country. In any case, Paleckis's account of his conversation with Stalin also confirms the thought that the Lithuanian Communist Party was too weak and too inexperienced by itself to impose the Soviet model on the Lithuanian people. The initiative and the program came from Moscow, and Dekanozov, together with Pozdniakov, was the executive agent.

Dekanozov had expected to be dealing with Smetona, but to his surprise he learned that the president had fled the country. As Dekanozov reported to Moscow, he learned of Smetona's flight only at 10.40 a.m. on the 16th when he received a telephone call from Bizauskas. Soviet officials were of course angry that Smetona had escaped. Commentators have put forth completely conflicting interpretations arguing both that Smetona's flight made the work of Soviet officials easier and that it made the work more difficult. The German minister in Kaunas suggested that the Soviet welcomed Smetona's flight. Smetona himself argued that his escape had disrupted the Soviets' plan of action. While his flight of course necessitated some improvisation by the Soviets—Dekanozov had to seek new instructions from Moscow—at the same time it is by no means clear that his continued presence would have changed the situation. Ulmanis and Pats, the authoritarian rulers of Latvia and Estonia, had little influence on the course of the Sovietization of their republics, and even today some commentators there consider them "collaborators" for their failure to resist. At the cost of being labeled a coward by some critics, Smetona escaped the trap of being forced to "collaborate." On the other hand, Smetona's sudden and unexpected departure probably confused the Lithuanians themselves more than it confused the Soviets.

For the first two days, Dekanozov found it useful to accept Antanas Merkys as Smetona's successor and to manipulate him as his instrument to restructure the government. Merkys in turn was totally pliable, perhaps even in shock. In his memorandum, Smetona expressed doubts about Merkys's psychological condition at this point, and two years later he was to say that in just these days, Merkys was "terribly exhausted and almost an invalid." Nevertheless, when the Lithuanian government announced that Smetona had "abdicated," Merkys, in fact only Lithuania's acting prime minister, took over the post of acting president, and Kazys Bizauskas became acting prime minister. The government went on to dismiss Defense Minister Kazys

Musteikis, who had fled with Smetona, and named Vitkauskas in his place. It also announced the arrest of Skučas and Povilaitis. The commandant of Kaunas, Colonel Jurgis Bobelis, proclaimed a state of emergency, establishing a curfew, banning loitering on the streets, and giving police almost unlimited authority to act as they saw fit.²²⁶

Although Merkys became acting president, he evidenced no pretension to power. He quickly yielded to all Dekanozov's demands, and even helped the Soviet proconsul persuade various Lithuanian intellectuals to accept posts in the new "People's Government." Once that was done, he obligingly retired from government. He later admitted to having been completely surprised by the invasion; he reportedly had thought that the complaints of the Soviet government could actually have been settled through negotiations and concessions.²²⁷ Smetona had urged him to flee, but he had remained in place and even urged others to remain. Lithuanian historians have called him an "enigmatic figure," who behaved in "a dubious way" (*abejingai*),²²⁸ but ironically he later appears to have been stronger than others who enjoy more positive evaluations in post-Soviet Lithuanian historiography.

It appears that Merkys and Bizauskas, now the acting president and the acting prime minister of Lithuania played directly into Dekanozov's hands. If indeed Dekanozov only learned of Smetona's flight on the morning of June 16, Merkys and Bizauskas were responsible for issuing the order to stop Smetona at the border, sending the mission to persuade the president to return—the government had at the time spoken of keeping the president's flight a secret from the Soviets—and then, on the morning of the 16th, declaring that Smetona had "abdicated." Smetona had intended to leave chaos behind him, but Merkys and Bizauskas wanted to show their Soviet visitor that the government in Kaunas was competent and composed. Their actions were based on the belief, perhaps just the hope, that the Soviet Union had no intention to destroy the Lithuanian republic. But the situation in fact allowed Dekanozov to carry out his program as if Smetona, like Ulmanis in Latvia and Pats in Estonia, were in place executing president powers in accordance with the provisions of the Lithuanian constitution.

There have been arguments about the constitutionality of the changes in the leadership of the Lithuanian state in the wake of Smetona's flight: Was it constitutional or unconstitutional to declare that Smetona's flight constituted abdication? What powers could Merkys legitimately claim? Smetona claimed that he had left in orderly fashion, that he had not abdicated, that he was simply taking a vacation. For constitutional historians, he confused the constitutional issues, moreover, by signing the so-called Kybartai acts, designating the senior Lithuanian diplomat abroad, Stasys Lozoraitis, as "acting president." Could or should the Kybartai acts have been considered legal? For the two generations of Soviet historians who described the "revolution" in Lithuania, this was not a serious question. Probably most

Lithuanian commentators today would ignore the Kybartai acts and simply declare that Merkys's exercising of presidential powers was "unconstitutional."²²⁹

These arguments, however, are usually based on the presumption that Dekanozov was directed Merkys's decisions in the evening of the 15th and the morning of the 16th. In fact, it now appears that Merkys and Bizauskas carried out the changes in government themselves. They presented Dekanozov with a *fait accompli*, and as the Soviet proconsul reported to Moscow, "It is important to note that Merkys already resigned on the morning of June 15, that is a day before the president's flight, and Merkys's retirement had been accepted by Smetona. Thus today Lithuania does not have a president, and it has a government that has left office."²³⁰ The constitutional muddle was not Dekanozov's concern; if anything it made the Lithuanian government more vulnerable to his plans.

On the other hand, one might also argue that the Smetona regime, established by an armed coup in 1926, was itself "unconstitutional." Until 1926, Lithuania had lived under the constitution drawn up by the Constituent Assembly in 1922. The new authorities in 1926–1927 proceeded to change Lithuania's constitutional structure drastically without the benefit of a new document, although apologists insisted that the government "avoided a break in the legal order." In a sense, the Smetona regime from its start, as a challenge to the constitution of 1922, was illegitimate and therefore illegal. Smetona then went on to dissolve the parliament in 1927, and he made his presidency the seat of Lithuania's sovereignty, in sum a major, arbitrary revision of the legitimate constitution of 1922.

In May 1928, Smetona promulgated a new constitution that strengthened the powers of the presidency, but his government ignored the new constitution's provision that this document should be ratified by referendum within the next ten years—this constituted, according to Smetona's own "legislation," an illegal act of neglect that even defied what should probably be considered an illegitimate constitution. In 1938 his administration decreed yet another new constitution, reaffirming Smetona's authority and making no mention of Lithuania's being a "democratic" state; the president even had the right to proclaim constitutional amendments. As Liudas Truska has noted, in this respect the constitution of 1938 violated the principles of Lithuania's declaration of independence on February 16, 1918, and of the Constituent Assembly's declaration of May 15, 1920, that the Lithuanian state would be founded on "democratic foundations." Therefore one could raise further questions about the legality of the constitution in that it violated the provisions of the legitimate, though now eclipsed, constitution of 1922. To this, one could add the thought that various *tautininkai* spokespersons themselves discounted the constitution as a limitation on the powers of the regime.²³¹

Mykolas Römeris, a leading constitutional expert in Lithuania at this time, took both sides of the argument, considering the governmental changes of June 1940 both constitutional and unconstitutional, depending on whether one considered the spirit or the letter of the Smetona constitution. He declared that “the upheaval of the month of June ... was so strong that it immediately created a real revolution in the relationship of social forces, suppressing those social factors on which the government of Lithuania rested and bringing to power new factors basing themselves on by a foreign power.” The old constitution, he continued, “could not perform its former functions,” and the authorities would use it “for new purposes” and would, “if needs be,” interpret “otherwise than had been intended in the past.” This revolution in Lithuania “delivered power into the hands of social forces directed by a foreign state. And Lithuania’s state Constitution, together with the state itself, became a speculative toy in those hands for the purposes of these foreign factors.”²³²

The terms “foreign factors” and “foreign power” in Römeris’s analysis obviously represented the Soviet party-state. Dekanozov indeed manipulated the presidential powers of the authoritarian constitution of 1938, forcing Lithuanians to make the decisions that he demanded. Römeris accepted the thought that the process followed the formal provisions of the constitution—the new ministers even took an oath to support the constitution—but he argued that deeper investigation showed that a foreign power made the basic decisions in choosing the new ministers. This, he declared, was contrary to the fundamental spirit of the constitution. The debates over “constitutionality,” however, only serve to obfuscate the actual process of sovietization and draw attention from Dekanozov’s role as the satrap of the Soviet party-state.

Dekanozov’s political program represented a form of thimblery, or shell game. *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* describes “thimblery” as “a swindling trick in which a small ball or pea is quickly shifted from under one to another of three small cups to fool the spectator guessing its location.” As Dekanozov played his variation of thimblery that we can here call “party-state,” the regime pointed to the restrained behavior of the Red Army, which was entertaining the Lithuanian public with concerts; it worked to persuade spectators to think that the power pea was under the cup or shell designated as the Lithuanian “government”; then under the new cup designated as “People’s Seimas,” but all the while the “pea” was still in Dekanozov’s hand, waiting to be slipped under the Communist Party’s cup when he would decide that the party was ready. Many historians have followed the policies of the new government as being decisive in the course of events over the next seven weeks, but in fact, the decisive moves came from the Soviet mission. The government was to play only a supporting role in the process of Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union.

In the first two days of the new order, while Dekanozov adjusted his program to the political environment, the Lithuanian people had no public sign of the massive changes to come in their lives within the next seven weeks. On June 16 *Lietuvos aidas* reported that the government had accepted Molotov's "ultimatum." General Vincas Vitkauskas, on June 16 named Lithuanian Minister of Defense, called on the army not to resist, and government officials urged the people to go about their normal daily business. Reporting Dekanozov's arrival in Kaunas, *Lietuvos aidas* indicated that matters were proceeding in "friendly fashion" (*draugingai*). The only sign of possible dissent came in the newspaper's printing of a proclamation that the Soviets had come to maintain Lithuania's peace and security—at the end of the text the agency name "ELTA" (Lithuanian Telegraph Agency) was printed upside down.

The inversion of the ELTA slug may or may not have been intentional, but Dekanozov's camp, intent on proving that the institutions of the old government was trying to undermine the mutual assistance pact, looked at it with suspicion. Vincas Rastenis, who edited that issue of *Lietuvos aidas*, later insisted that it was indeed a typographical error, but he himself could not be absolutely sure. In any case, Dekanozov and others considered this newspaper to be the voice of the old regime; therefore, while he allowed the editors of other Lithuanian newspapers to remain at their jobs for the time being, he immediately ordered the replacement of the editorial staff of *Lietuvos aidas*, and the newspaper now essentially became the organ of the "People's Government."²³³

In accepting Dekanozov's leadership, the Lithuanian government called for calm. Speaking on radio at 4 p.m. on the afternoon of the 16th, Merkys told the citizens of Lithuania, "You have all been informed by announcement on radio and in the press of those fundamental events that have affected our land in these days." This of itself was an exaggeration, as the press had carried but little news about the crisis in Lithuania's relations with the Soviet Union. Merkys nevertheless went on to assure the citizens of Lithuania that the Soviet army had come in friendship, and he warned against "unfounded rumors which can raise panic and gloom. On the contrary, we must look at the future with confidence and listen to only responsible and authoritative sources offering information about the situation." Lithuanians now could only hope for the best and try to reassure themselves that everything would be all right. As a Catholic newspaper put it on the 17th, "The Soviet Union is a state friendly to us. It has promised to respect and protect our independence."²³⁴

On the evening of the 16th, Merkys seemed to be still heading the government, but outsiders who understood that Dekanozov was now directing the action watched anxiously. At 8 p.m. the American envoy, Owen Norem, reported home that there was still no news "although indications are that the results are to be bad for Lithuania."²³⁵

Dekanozov's program aside, there is no question that many non-Communist Lithuanians at first looked favorably at the Soviet invasion and the establishment of a new government just because it all meant the destruction of the Smetona regime. For those who wanted to believe that the Red Army had come with altruistic intentions, Smetona's flight meant release from fourteen years of authoritarian rule. Krėvė-Mickevičius, who later became a major spokesman of the idea that the Soviets had deceived Lithuanians, spoke at the same time of "rising opposition" to the Smetona regime and the regime's suppression of the Lithuanian press. Most of the political leaders in Kaunas, moreover, somehow thought they could yet return to the political system that had existed before the military coup of 1926. They may have feared Soviet intentions, but they did not want to believe that Lithuania's independence was doomed.

Dekanozov's task, of course, was to form and mold a new governmental system, a "popular front," dominated by the interests of the Soviet Communist Party but nevertheless at first appearing to be independent of the Lithuanian Communist Party. For the first few days, Dekanozov focused public discussion on Smetona's flight, denouncing the president's behavior as "cowardly" and "shameful," and declaring that the Soviet forces were helping to restore the democratic system that the Smetona regime had overthrown in 1926. He offered no hint of any intention of "reestablishing" the Soviet republic that had failed in 1919.

VIII

The People's Government

"I ask you to remember that the internal and international situation of Georgia demands from the Georgian Communists, not the application of the Russian pattern, but the skillful and flexible creation of a distinctive tactic based on the greatest compliance with all kinds of petty bourgeois elements."

—V. I. Lenin, concerning plans to take over Georgia in 1921

"The formation of the People's Government was the beginning of the historically mature socialist revolution in Lithuania."

—Juozas Žiugžda

"Today, the new government carried out a number of important tasks connected with the work of assuming power."

—from the protocol of the first meeting of the People's Government

When Vladimir Dekanozov began his talks with the Lithuanian government on June 16, he had already, informally, brought Lithuania into the web of the Soviet party-state. His program in Lithuania was to direct the process by which a non-communist, "popular front" government, representing cooperation with what Soviet commentators called "petty bourgeois elements," would carry out reforms aimed at undermining the independent Lithuanian state. At the same time he was to help the Lithuanian Communist Party develop the institutions and cadres that would allow it to take and exercise power. His ultimate goals were the establishment of a Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and then of course its formal incorporation into the Soviet system. He had to draw attention away from the presence of the Red Army and to create the image that the Lithuanian people welcomed the opportunity to become part of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Communist Party had considerable experience, both theoretical and practical, in the incubation and fostering of communist revolutions. In 1920, in a situation somewhat analogous to the situation in Lithuania, Soviet Russia signed a peace treaty with the Caucasian state of Georgia, and the following year, when efforts to subvert the government had failed, Soviet troops moved in to establish a Soviet Socialist Republic. As the situation unfolded in March 1921, Lenin advised, "Essential is a special policy of concessions toward the Georgian intelligentsia and small traders... I ask you to remember that the internal and international situation of Georgia demands from the Georgian Communists, not the application of the Russian pattern, but the skillful and flexible creation of a distinctive tactic based on the greatest compliance with all kinds of petty bourgeois elements." A month later, he went on to advocate "a slower, more careful, more systematic transition to socialism." In practice the Soviet occupation of Georgia

proceeded more harshly, but the model of working with “the national bourgeoisie” became a standard Soviet policy.²³⁶

The thought of comparing Soviet policy in Georgia in 1921–1922 with Soviet policy in Lithuania in 1940 arises from the fact that in 1920 Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, the foreign minister in the new government that Dekanozov now formed, had been a member of the city council in Baku, Azerbaidzhan, and he mentioned the Georgian experience in his first reminiscences of his work as Acting Prime Minister in 1940, published in 1942.²³⁷ He did not, however, bring it up in his later writings. Pozdniakov surely knew of Krėvė’s having been in Baku, and he would have told this to Dekanozov, who had also been in Baku at this time. Did Dekanozov and Krėvė discuss their experiences in Baku when Krėvė came to him at the Soviet mission? Why did Krėvė raise the subject of the Soviet takeover in Georgia in that first memoir and then drop it? The question emerges: Did Krėvė possibly know Dekanozov from those revolutionary days in the Caucasus? To be sure, Krėvė wrote that Pozdniakov “introduced” him to Dekanozov. Not having any reliable documentation one way or the other, we are left to speculate. Perhaps Krėvė thought of the Georgian example simply in reaction to seeing Georgian communists take control of Lithuania.

Another reference to Georgia appears in the memoirs of Aleksandr Slavinas, the head of counterintelligence in the new government’s police system. He recounted spending a day with a mysterious figure from Moscow, “comrade Petrov,” who instructed him on his work. This was probably Vsevolod Merkulov, USSR Deputy Commissar of Internal Affairs. Slavinas described him as a Russian from Georgia: “Comrade Petrov” had served with Beriia in the Caucasus and had come to Moscow as part of his entourage in the NKVD. Like “comrade Petrov,” a number of other NKVD specialists followed Dekanozov to Kaunas, but Slavinas’s story adds to the significance of the “Georgian model.”²³⁸

Yet another factor in Soviet policy making in 1940 was the conclusion of Soviet ideologists and historians, made in the latter 1920s, that the effort to establish a Soviet Republic in Lithuania in 1919 had failed because the communist government had alienated the Lithuanian peasantry by advocating large scale agricultural land holding and also because it had not paid proper attention to the Lithuanians’ national consciousness. Now, in 1939–1940, after twenty years of independence, Lithuanian culture and national consciousness were considerably stronger and Lithuania had a stronger peasant class than had been the case a generation earlier. Dekanozov, therefore, had to focus the Lithuanians’ attention and thoughts on a common, external enemy, while he established a political base for his program. As events developed, moreover, the revolutionary propaganda avoided references to any thought that the Lithuanians themselves had rejected Soviet rule in 1919 and instead spoke of “restoring” the Soviet system that western powers had allegedly undermined.

In his first days in Kaunas, using the Smetona regime as the common enemy of most Lithuanians, Dekanozov created a government that showed no sign of being controlled by the Lithuanian Communist Party. The party itself was in any case still too small and not ready for the job, and Moscow still had its own suspicions about the influence of “Trotskyism” in the party’s ranks. The first set of ministers that Dekanozov approved included no communists; party members began to join the cabinet only after he had offered the public this reassuring image. As Lenin had recommended in Georgia, Dekanozov had to demonstrate “the greatest compliance with all kinds of petty bourgeois elements.” The mantra that the first cabinet contained no communists became an essential part of the image that Soviet propagandists would build of Lithuania’s experiencing a “spontaneous, socialist revolution,” even though the historians who developed this could not show just how, when, or where the party, an essential element in “Leninist” models, actually directed the government’s first steps.

Dekanozov had a knowledgeable group of advisors helping him—a team of NKVD specialists from Moscow, the staff of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kaunas, Red Army officers, and a few select, trusted leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Party—but he recruited the new government’s first set of ministers from outside the party. The mission maintained files on Lithuanian intellectuals who could be useful for Soviet purposes. Dekanozov could look for recruits within the ranks of a variety of local organizations: the society for aiding prisoners (MOPR), the Society for Acquaintance with the Cultures of the Peoples of the USSR, intellectuals who had been associated with *Trečiasis frontas*, a short-lived radical publication of the early 1930s—or simply search the lists of visitors whom the mission had entertained. As the *polpred* in Kaunas, Pozdniakov’s expertise was vital in identifying Lithuanians who might be willing to accept positions in the new order.²³⁹

Soviet diplomats had long worked at winning sympathy among non-communists in other countries. Foreign observers in Kaunas had long reported that the Soviet Union enjoyed a positive image among some Lithuanian intellectuals and business people. In September 1935, an American diplomat had reported, “There are, however, a number of persons among the upper classes who, while distrustful of the economic theories of communism, believe that the only hope of preserving even some measure of Lithuanian nationality and ideals in the face of relentless pressure from Poland and Germany is by Lithuania’s inclusion in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.” In 1936, according to Arvydas Anušauskas, the Soviet “resident” in Kaunas described “local bourgeoisie, mostly Jews, whose representatives frequently travel to the USSR as tourists” were of the opinion that “the introduction of the Soviet order in Lithuania” was “inevitable.” The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, to be sure, shocked many leftist intellectuals, but even in 1940, before the mass invasion, Antanas Maceina, a Catholic philosopher, had denounced capitalism as destroying national and family

values and had praised Bolshevism as being “especially creative.” Somehow thinking in abstract terms, Smetona had reportedly once declared that Soviet domination would be preferable to Nazi domination. Soviet officials knew well what sympathies they could exploit.²⁴⁰

Nevertheless, like their counterparts in Estonia and Latvia, Dekanozov and his advisors had some trouble choosing appropriate individuals for the new government. In Latvia, several days later, Augusts Kirhensteins, Andrei Vyshinsky’s choice as premier, told an American diplomat that “several cabinet posts remained vacant because no candidate acceptable to the Soviet authorities could be found.”²⁴¹ Dekanozov had to balance the task of recruiting prominent Lithuanians with the simultaneous task of blocking the potential opposition to the Soviet program that such persons might raise.

Ironically, the Stalinist purges of Old Bolsheviks in Moscow now helped the Soviets to influence Lithuanian radicals. In the late 1920s and early 1930s hard-line CP ideologists in Moscow had bitterly attacked the non-Communist left everywhere, including in Lithuania, and in the mid-1930s, when the Soviets called for the formation of a United Front against fascism, many Lithuanian leftists still bore psychological scars from those literary slashes. Since many of them identified Zigmās Aleksa Angarietis, a Lithuanian Old Bolshevik, as the font of those attacks, Angarietis’s arrest by Soviet officials in 1938, which created enormous problems for the Lithuanian Communist Party, at the same time opened the way to gloss over past differences with the non-communist left in Lithuania. It was a simple matter to blame everything on Angarietis’s “deviations” and to insist that things were now different, and in turn a number of Lithuanian intellectuals accepted and even welcomed this argument. Communist party members, on the other hand, as we shall see in the next chapter, had to accept the purges and the new orders without questioning them.

On June 17, at Dekanozov’s direction, Merkys, as Lithuania’s acting president, asked Juozas Paleckis, a well-known leftist journalist, to take the post of prime minister and to form a new government. Paleckis, a journalist, was not a member of the Communist Party, but he had a reputation as a fellow-traveler. Under the leftist coalition government in 1926, he had headed the Lithuanian Telegraph Agency, ELTA. He had visited and written about the Soviet Union (his book, *SSSR—mūsu akimis* [“USSR—with our eyes”], was suppressed under Soviet rule), and in the fall of 1939 he had won note for challenging Smetona with his demand for the creation of a Lithuanian Labor Government. The Smetona government had then exiled him from Kaunas, and he could only now return to public life.

Paleckis later declared that he himself did not understand how he had come to be chosen as Lithuania’s prime minister. “When, who and how is the new government of Lithuania forming?” he rhetorically asked himself. “Early in the morning of June 17,” he wrote in his memoirs of these events,

“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.”

In Paleckis’s statement we might accept his assertion that this was a surprise to him, but his declaration of bowing to the will of the party is open to question. He was not at the time a member of the Lithuanian Communist Party, and there is no record showing that Paleckis met with the three members of the Central Committee who were free and active in Kaunas at this time. As we shall see in the next chapter, the party’s “Central Committee” did not consider him its candidate for the post. The “they” to whom Paleckis referred were undoubtedly Dekanozov and Pozdniakov, not the leadership of the Lithuanian Communist Party.²⁴²

As their choice for Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the number two position in the government, Dekanozov, Pozdniakov and Paleckis settled on Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, a well known writer who had served as Dean of the Humanities Faculty of the University of Lithuania. As Krėvė later recounted, Pozdniakov urgently asked him to come to the Soviet mission, and there, having introduced Krėvė to Dekanozov, the *polpred* withdrew, leaving Dekanozov in charge of the conversation. After some hesitation, at the urging of both Paleckis and Merkys, Krėvė accepted the post of foreign minister.

To a certain extent Krėvė shared Paleckis’s background as a leftist intellectual, both were prominent figures in the Society for Acquaintance with the Culture of the Peoples of the USSR, but Krėvė had held far more distinguished posts in independent Lithuania. One of Lithuania’s best known writers, in the 1920s he had been an ally of the Smetona camp—it should be remembered that the Smetona camp welcomed Soviet support in its dispute with Poland—but in the 1930s he was a radical critic of the regime, and he demonstrated considerable sympathy for leftist causes. In his capacity as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Lithuania, 1925–1937, he earned a reputation as a person always willing to help friends in trouble, whether for social or political reasons. He also displayed considerable sympathy for Soviet cultural life; in 1939–1940, he was chairman of the Lithuanian Society for Acquaintance with the Peoples of the USSR. Dekanozov had to be delighted to win his cooperation in the People’s Government; his participation was an important asset for the government’s image.

Krėvė eventually became the most controversial figure in the entire structure that Dekanozov put together. By early July, he was the first member of the government to criticize Soviet intentions of incorporating Lithuania, and he subsequently withdrew from politics. After the German invasion, he published a memoir on his role in the People’s Government, and living in the emigration after World War II he published several more accounts offering

details on the work of the government. These details, however, are frequently unreliable and even blatantly wrong, and in 1953, when he testified to members of the United States House of Representatives Select Committee on Communist Aggression, the so-called “Kersten” committee, studying the takeover of the three Baltic republics, his American interlocutors called him as a “fellow traveler,” a sympathizer of the Soviet regime. More recently a Lithuanian historian angrily called him the “greatest collaborator in the history of modern Lithuania.”²⁴³

The question of Krėvė’s motivation and behavior offers an occasion for considering the overall situation of Lithuanian intellectuals as the Soviet behemoth took over their lives. What should or could they do? Lithuanian communists typified one end of the spectrum of responses as they enthusiastically joined the new order and found places in it. Smetona typified the other end of the spectrum as he chose to flee the country in anticipation of Dekanozov’s arrival. A number of Saugumas agents did likewise. Others were neither so sure nor so fortunate. Former Prime Minister Antanas Merkys ignored Smetona’s advice to flee, at first thought he might serve as Comptroller in the new government, and then he unsuccessfully tried to flee—Soviet authorities caught up with him in Riga. Juozas Urbšys, the former foreign minister, asked for work in the new foreign ministry, but he was refused. An unfortunate activist example was Augustinas Voldemaras, who returned from abroad on June 17 apparently wanting to take a post in Lithuania, but the Soviet authorities simply arrested him. Perhaps the personification of an activist center would be Ernestas Galvanauskas, who first took the post of Finance Minister in Paleckis’s council of ministers and then fled the country. A number of Lithuanian intellectuals had to make quick, unexpected, but crucial decisions.²⁴⁴ Dekanozov’s tactic of forming a government without communist members in its first stage undoubtedly contributed to a favorable image among those intellectuals and political leaders who had opposed Smetona.

In the very first of his memoirs, Krėvė declared that even the most unsophisticated had to realize Lithuanian independence was doomed—“the independence of the Lithuanian government was a fiction that already meant nothing”—and yet he pictured himself as a Don Quixote, tilting against the Communist windmill. Did he join the government in an effort to save something for Lithuania, or did personal ambition motivate him? There are some intriguing clues to the process of his thinking. One is a fictional piece that he wrote about a French correspondent who becomes entwined in the Soviet propaganda network by the threads of money he has received in the past. In the 1920s, Krėvė had handled money given by the Soviet embassy to Lithuanian politicians, including Smetona’s own political party.²⁴⁵ Could he have felt trapped by something in his past? On the other hand, whatever his first motivation in accepting a post in the “People’s Government,” as he became more aware of Soviet intentions, he thought about the problems of

preserving Lithuanian culture and identity in the face of the flood of Muscovite demands and intentions.

The theme of “save what you can” runs through a number of memoirs of this first year of Soviet rule. Krėvė quoted a veteran Lithuanian politician, Stasys Šilingas, as saying “I don’t believe one word of Dekanozov’s... but we must save what can still be saved.” Vaclovas Sidzikauskas, a veteran Lithuanian diplomat, later wrote that at this time he had declared that “the task of all Lithuanians is to save what still can be saved.” Antanas Garmus, a member of the People’s Seimas in July, later quoted Krėvė as saying, on about July 20, “Now we must save what is yet possible, save the intelligentsia first of all. If you resist their plans, not only you with your families will perish, but vengeance will fall on all our intelligentsia. It will be destroyed.”²⁴⁶

Krėvė’s special concern for the intelligentsia was shared by others. Šilingas reportedly told him, “Perhaps we will suffer, but all we intellectuals of the older generation and the creators of Independent Lithuania are already doomed,” and he advocated trying to negotiate with Dekanozov directly. When Kazys Bizauskas had argued for the acceptance of the Soviet ultimatum in June, he shared both lines of Krėvė’s concerns; he had declared that to resist would bring Soviet wrath and vengeance on the entire Lithuanian nation. In July, when Lithuanian intellectuals considered whether they should try to escape to Germany, he told his colleague Zenonas Ivinskis that the intelligentsia must not desert the people: “If some are deported, that sacrifice will not remain without its impression.”²⁴⁷

In 1952, now living in the emigration, Krėvė said something of the same sort, writing to Ivinskis, who was also now an émigré, “I will admit that I do not consider political work important, since I do not think that it is possible in that area, in today’s conditions, to achieve any appreciable good for Lithuania.” Lithuania needs not the politicians but “our cultural workers.” The politicians will not be able to adjust to new conditions in “the Lithuania returning to life.” New leaders will arise in Lithuania, and “without a doubt, they will not want to share that work with those who were not in Lithuania in the heaviest days of their struggles. In addition, they will already think differently than we do, and perhaps those living in the emigration will not be able to find common words to talk with them.” Cultural workers, he declared will be “necessary and very necessary.” Krėvė clearly distinguished his own concerns for the future of Lithuanian culture as independent of whatever political system existed in Lithuania.²⁴⁸

In any case, Krėvė agreed to serve as Foreign Minister, and early in the morning of the 17th, Dekanozov notified Merkys that he had a list of ministers. Besides Paleckis and Krėvė, he had chosen Vincas Vitkauskas as Minister of Defense, Povilas Pakarklis as Minister of Justice, Matas Mickis as Minister of Agriculture, and Leonas Koganas as Minister of Health. (The

Ministry of Health was a new post; previously the Department of Health had been a part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.)

Dekanozov had not yet selected anyone for the post of Minister of Finance, although the Communist Party had its own candidate for this post, and he reportedly urged Paleckis to find someone quickly. Paleckis offered the post to Ernestas Galvanauskas, who had held the same portfolio in the Merkys government. Krèvè wrote that he had made Galvanauskas's participation in government a precondition for his own participation, but in his own memoirs, Galvanauskas made no mention of Krèvè's influence, even asserting that he did not talk to Krèvè until after they were both in the government. According to Galvanauskas, Paleckis talked Dekanozov into accepting him as Minister of Finance. Vaclovas Sidzikauskas, on the other hand, later recounted having participated in a meeting between the Krèvè and Galvanauskas at which they discussed this matter. Most histories consider Galvanauskas's appointment as coming at Paleckis's initiative. In any case, Galvanauskas justified his decision to join the government "to serve my country at the time of a hobbling occupation, to defend its economy."²⁴⁹

Galvanauskas's appointment had perhaps greater significance for the political legitimation of the new government than Krèvè's did. Krèvè's participation gave the government a desirable public image, but Galvanauskas, as an established political leader in the old regime, now received the approval of the leadership of the anti-Smetona "axis"—the Populists and the Christian Democrats. In these first hours, the new government could therefore claim to have the endorsement and support of the old Smetona opposition, and it had the image of a non-communist "popular front."

There were intellectuals who willingly, even eagerly, took posts in the new government. Kostas Korsakas, the new director of ELTA, the Lithuanian Telegraph Agency, was a poet and literary critic who had participated in leftist "antifascist" journals, cooperated in the Soviet-inspired United Front of the 1930s, and spent some time in Lithuanian prisons. From ELTA, he went on to direct state publishing, and finally became the head of the Language and Literature Section of the new Academy of Sciences. When the Soviet government fled Lithuania in the face of the German attack in June 1941, he withdrew with it and spent the war years in the Soviet Union. His wife, Halina Korsakienė, who had worked in the radio section of ELTA, remained in Lithuania during the war and could not understand why people might resent her and her husband's cooperation with the Soviets. In her memoirs she pictured herself and her husband as a type of victims, forced to serve this overwhelming invader and accept its privileges and favors, but somehow continuing to work for the good of the nation.²⁵⁰

Many of these figures, while unknown to the general public, knew each other from the past. Describing a dinner party hosted by Paleckis at the beginning of July, Korsakienė wrote: "This time there were people gathered

who had never before seen these walls. Among them I saw many old acquaintances. There were long time underground workers, recently having left the prisons, young people I knew, members of Red Aid who had often visited us. Most of them had now received new, meaningful assignments.”²⁵¹

Unexplained, perhaps unexplainable, in all this maneuvering is the role of acting president Merkys. With Paleckis’s installation, Merkys, as well as the acting premier Kazys Bizauskas, lost their places in government. Merkys now retired from politics and went off to vacation in Palanga, on Lithuania’s Baltic coast. Of all the Lithuanian leaders, he had most directly experienced Molotov’s wrath and pressure before the announcement of the ultimatum. Smetona had called him “almost an invalid” at this time but had entrusted to power to him. What were Merkys’s real thoughts? What could he have expected? Had Molotov completely intimidated him in Moscow? On the 15th, before leaving the country, Smetona had urged Merkys to flee. On the morning of the 16th, friends still urged him to flee. Yet he remained and seemed to be willing to do anything that Dekanozov ordered. Raštikis suggested that he was just “wanted to pass on his duties to someone and then leave Kaunas.”²⁵² When Krèvè and Galvanauskas later wrote of their own hesitation to take any post in the new government, they both declared that Merkys had insisted that they agree, arguing that it was most important to place non-communists high in the government. He seemed to accept the thought that this new government would be “non-communist,” and he apparently entertained thoughts that the new order might give him a place too. When he finally decided on flight, Soviet officials caught up with him at the airport in Riga. On July 22, after the proclamation of Soviet power in Lithuania, Minister of the Interior Mečys Gedvilas ordered him deported to Russia, but the Soviet authorities did not imprison him until after the German attack in 1941.

Commentators on all sides have treated Merkys rather harshly. As Smetona’s prime minister, he was the target of countless communist screeds. Many Lithuanians criticized Merkys as having mishandled the talks in Moscow as well as for his part in the Smetona government. *Smetonininkai* then criticized him for “disorienting” the Lithuanian public on the day after Dekanozov’s arrival and for cooperating with Dekanozov; he had failed to defend Smetona’s regime.²⁵³ He died in exile without leaving any testimony of his own. The best explanation for Merkys’s response to the Soviet invasion would seem to focus on the complete demoralization of the Smetona government. Under interrogation by Soviet NKVD on July 29, Povilaitis quoted Skučas as speaking of “complete confusion” among government officials on the morning of the 15th.²⁵⁴ The German minister, Erich Zechlin, spoke of “panic.” Upon hearing the news of the Soviet ultimatum, higher officials in the Lithuanian security service, for example, fled en masse to Germany. By the time Dekanozov began working, many security offices stood vacant. The officials of the Smetona regime who remained at their

posts after the president's flight acted like sacrificial lambs; the Merkys government fulfilled Dekanozov's every wish. There are no clear answers for his behavior.

In any case, by the afternoon of June 17, Dekanozov had his "starting team" in place. The government appeared to be basically a collection of leftist intellectuals and specialists who were not members of the Lithuanian Communist Party. The first public statements of the new order trumpeted the end of fourteen years of authoritarian rule, not a return to the work of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic on 1919. Therefore the first enemy was of course Smetona, who by his flight had made himself an easy target. The press carried a cartoon showing Smetona, with the cuffs of his pants rolled up, wading across a creek, and the new order's propaganda machine emphasized Smetona's fear of facing popular justice rather than his insecurity when facing the prospect of Soviet rule. The government promised the Lithuanian people a happier future.

On the evening of the 17th, six members of the new government—Paleckis, Krėvė, Galvanauskas, Vitkauskas, Mickis, and Koganas—took their oaths of office, pledging to preserve the constitution of Lithuania. The new government had no relationship to the old. As Krėvė later wrote, the new government "took power. I say 'took' rather than 'took over,' since there was no government which could have turned its duties over to us."²⁵⁵

In Dekanozov's "shell game," the new government's function was to prepare the way for a communist takeover, but few outsiders could perceive this. Paleckis himself seemed to have little idea of what the government should be doing. Galvanauskas later wrote that Paleckis "did not even know where to begin." The protocol of the council's first session in the evening of the 17th solemnly declared, "Today, the new government carried out a number of important tasks connected with the work of assuming power." The new government, the protocol concluded, would announce its program as soon as "it establishes its existing tasks."²⁵⁶ It did not know what its duties would be; its purpose was as unclear as was its popular mandate.

Paleckis announced his government's program the next day, June 18, reading a text that had presumably passed through Dekanozov's hands. Denouncing the "plutocratic" Smetona regime that was "rotten" from its roots, he declared that "new and untested forces" had been called to power to improve material and cultural life in Lithuania. In foreign policy the first job of his government was to "establish truly sincere and friendly relations with the Soviet Union." The government's domestic program called for radical political reform: dissolving the Smetonist legislature, the Seimas; freeing political prisoners, "the fighters for the freedom of the people"; complete equality between the nationalities of Lithuania; and reforms of health care and education. In conclusion he called for all possible cooperation in helping "the friendly Red Army of the Soviet Union."

Over the next several days, Paleckis, Krėvė, and Vitkauskas made the rounds of government institutions, establishing the orderly sequence of the passing of political power. One institution after another formally recognized the new government and thereby accepted its legitimacy. On the 18th, General Vitkauskas, now Minister of Defense and Commander of the Army, issued an order declaring that “Our army will continue to defend the fatherland and will firmly execute the government’s orders, both defending the freedom of the land and maintaining internal order as well as cooperating in friendly fashion with the army of the USSR.” The command of the army and of the Rifleman’s Union committed themselves to Paleckis as the new president. Continuing the routines that would indicate the full acceptance of the new regime, on June 19 Defense Minister Vitkauskas formally promised that the army would support the new government “for the general welfare and security of all our free people and our independent state.” To this Paleckis responded, “We all have to fulfill our duty which both history and the complete understanding of our international and domestic position dictate.” On the 26th members of the government laid a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier by the War Museum in Kaunas.²⁵⁷

Behind the scenes, the intrigues within the government were intense, but the existing documentation does not make clear just what was happening. Galvanauskas later declared that three major issues had come up at the first session of the council of ministers: a demand to annul the Concordat with the Vatican, an order to accept the Soviet ruble as a valid currency in Lithuania, and a “request” that Soviet troops take over the task of guarding the western border with Germany. According to Galvanauskas, he successfully blocked all three. In his testimony to the “Kersten committee,” Krėvė, on the other hand, denied that any of these three issues came up in the council’s “first meetings.” According to the Lithuanian Council of Ministers’ own protocols, on June 18, in its second meeting—now with two more members: Pakarklis and Minister of Education Antanas Venclova—the group decided to ask Soviet troops to take over the border with Germany, and it also discussed currency problems. In the case of the currency, however, it did not recognize the ruble; rather it decided that the Lithuanian Bank might give advances to the Soviet armed forces. On June 25, with Krėvė himself presiding, the cabinet decided to end the concordat with the papacy. Despite the confusion, it would seem that the new cabinet did not automatically accept the directives it might be receiving from Dekanozov and Pozdniakov.²⁵⁸

Galvanauskas and Krėvė claimed to have opposed turning the border guard over the Red Army because this would infringe on Lithuania’s sovereignty, but the Soviets had other motives that the Lithuanians had not yet perceived. This move marked another step in Stalin’s maneuvering to avoid giving Lithuanian territory to Berlin. According to the Nazi-Soviet agreements of the fall of 1939, the Soviet troops advancing into Lithuania were not to cross the Nemunas River; now, allegedly acquiescing to the wish

of the new Lithuanian government, the Red Army moved into southwestern Lithuania. As Anna Louise Strong wrote, "For the first two days the Red Army did not cross the Niemen, and rumors flew around among the people that Lithuania would be divided at the river and the Germans would get the other side. A panic started among the Jews over there... Later the Red Army crossed the Niemen and the panic stopped. That was where they got the biggest ovation!"²⁵⁹ The Soviet move of course also hindered mass flight of Lithuanians and Latvians to Germany, and it shocked the Germans:²⁶⁰

The move gave Moscow the upper hand in further negotiations with the Germans. At every step of Moscow's pressure on the Lithuanians, Molotov had assured the German ambassador that the Soviet government remembered and respected the agreement by which Germany was to receive a part of Lithuania. As Molotov informed Schulenburg on June 17, the Soviet action in the Baltic "had become necessary to put an end to all the intrigues by which England and France had tried to sow discord and mistrust between Germany and the Soviet Union." On the other hand, "the Lithuanian border was evidently inadequately guarded. The Soviet Government would, therefore, if requested, assist the Lithuanian Government in guarding its borders." Pozdniakov and Dekanozov had already urged the Lithuanians to ask for such help, and once the Red Army had moved into the region, Moscow was in a stronger position to find an arrangement modifying the agreement of September 38, 1939.

Molotov brought up the issue in Moscow on July 13, telling the German ambassador that Germany's claim to this "strip of Lithuanian territory" was "incontestable," but that the "cession" of it "would be extremely inconvenient and difficult for the Soviet Government." Would it not be possible to find an arrangement, "in conformity with the extraordinarily friendly relations between Germany and the Soviet," that would "leave this strip of territory permanently with Lithuania"? When Ribbentrop asked what the Soviet government would offer as compensation, the Soviets stipulated 3,860,000 gold dollars. In December, the German government, which had already decided to invade the Soviet Union in the next summer, proposed the "amount of 13 million gold dollars" as representing "the real estate value according to Lithuanian prices." Molotov objected to taking real estate value as the basis for the arrangement, and he offered to double the amount he had already proposed. Ribbentrop agreed on the condition that half be paid immediately in gold and the other half "delivered if possible entirely in the form of nonferrous metals." The two sides finally reached agreement on January 10, 1941, whereby the USSR would pay 7,500,000 gold dollars: one-eighth "in nonferrous metal deliveries" and seven-eighths "in gold by deduction from the German gold payments" due in February.²⁶¹ Ironically, Dekanozov, at this point the Soviet polpred in Berlin, participated in the final negotiations for this agreement.

In June 1940, however, Soviet designs on southwestern Lithuania still lay only hazily in the future; more important now was the work of Justas Paleckis at the head of what was now called “the People’s Government.” Paleckis, in accordance with the provisions of the constitution, became acting president. Galvanauskas and Krėvė forced Dekanozov to make the concession, so to speak, of kicking Paleckis upstairs. Arguing that Paleckis had too much to do as both Prime Minister and acting President, they urged Krėvė’s promotion to the post of acting Prime Minister. After some debate, Dekanozov and Paleckis yielded on this point, although Paleckis maintained the right to call important cabinet meetings if he considered it urgent. In formally accepting the post of acting Prime Minister, Krėvė declared that his “government will not disappoint the trust and will do everything possible to maintain the independence of the Lithuanian Republic.”²⁶²

Working now within the dictates of the Lithuanian constitution of 1938, Paleckis had all the powers that Smetona had enjoyed, but while playing Dekanozov’s “shell game,” he could exercise them only against those lower in the party-state hierarchy, namely the cabinet of ministers and not against the Lithuanian Communist Party and certainly not without agreement from Dekanozov. Although he at first apparently did not see this, Paleckis’s task was to preside over the government’s program to facilitate Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union and then itself to go out of existence.

In subsequent years, Soviet historians tended to picture the communist revolution in Lithuania as having succeeded with just this first step, the creation of the “people’s government.” They always insisted that the revolution came from below. This interpretation began with the statement that it was the “Lithuanian people” who called the Paleckis government “the People’s Government”—the name came at Dekanozov’s initiative. Here, as in many other points of the system’s propaganda work, statements frequently used the passive voice, thereby avoiding the necessity of identifying just who was directing one or another policy. Paleckis claimed that his authority—as well as the Lithuanian Communist Party’s authority—arose from the party’s self-proclaimed role as the vanguard of the Lithuanian toiling masses. But at this level, as we shall see in the next chapter, the party itself was as yet incapable of taking power and ruling according to Moscow’s standards.

In 1965 Juozas Žiugžda rapturously wrote, “With the creation of the people’s government, the popular masses of Lithuania, led by the Communist Party and fraternally aided by the Soviet Union, effected the first act of a social revolution—the conquest of political power.” He went on to put this in Marxist terminology: “The Soviet Union’s fraternal aid to the Lithuanian nation, having isolated Lithuania’s reactionary bourgeoisie from the Western imperialists, in this case from the aid of the Hitlerite aggressors, empowered the Lithuanian Communist Party and the working people of Lithuania to carry out a revolutionary upheaval through a mass (*bendra*) powerful revolutionary upheaval (*išstojimas*) without an armed rising.” A decade later,

in cooperation with Bronius Vaitkevičius, he declared, “The formation of the People’s Government was the beginning of the historically mature socialist revolution in Lithuania.” This was not, he explained, “a common change of cabinet, but a revolutionary act, the first and most important victory of the socialist revolution, laying the basis for proletarian dictatorship in Lithuania.”²⁶³

Žiugžda’s descriptions involved many levels of creative writing. First of all, since he would not, or could not, acknowledge the existence of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, according to which Germany and the Soviet Union divided East Central Europe, he felt free to argue that every step the Soviets took, including sending troops into Eastern Poland in September 1939, foiled and blocked German ambitions. In June 1940, he argued, the Red Army marched to block plans by fascist Germans to provoke incidents between Lithuanian residents and Soviet troops. In all, he pictured the Soviet invasion as having saved Lithuania from German designs. At the same time he paid no attention to the contemporary statements of the Soviet government proclaiming friendship between Berlin and Moscow.

Given Žiugžda’s fundamental interpretation of the events of 1939–1940, the Soviet action in appointing Dekanozov Soviet *polpred* in Berlin when he left Lithuania begins to take on bizarre qualities. If sending Dekanozov into Lithuania had constituted a move to block German action there, why had the Germans then accepted Dekanozov as the Soviet *polpred* in Berlin? The German government had of course expected that the Soviet Union would occupy and annex the three Baltic States, they openly declared their neutrality, and they showed no ill will toward Dekanozov—although of course, the Soviet move into southwest Lithuania displeased them. Soviet historians accordingly preferred not to discuss Dekanozov.

Žiugžda’s reference to “proletarian dictatorship,” moreover, pointed to the fact that in the first year of Soviet rule, 1940–1941, Lithuania did not fit the Soviet model of socialism and Soviet rule. Stalin, after all, had proclaimed in 1936 that the Soviet Union had reached the historical stage of “socialism”; the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was thereby a thing of the past in the Soviet Union. But the new regime in Lithuania did not have time even to set up a network of local soviets (councils) on the Soviet model, not to mention following the Soviet example of the collectivization of agriculture, before the German invasion of June 1941. It still had a capitalist economy. The Soviet government collectivized agriculture only after the war. Soviet Lithuanian historians, as a matter of fact, were rather hard put in trying to picture the developments as following the tenets of Marxist theory and practice as were being observed at the time in the Soviet Union.²⁶⁴

Žiugžda’s interpretation also did not make clear the relationship of the new People’s Government to either the Communist Party or the toiling masses of Lithuania. Despite its name, the “People’s Government,” the “people” of Lithuania had no recognizable role in choosing Paleckis as Prime

Minister, and for that matter, neither did the Communist Party of Lithuania. The party “Central Committee” met on the 16th and expressed some discontent with the persons whom Dekanozov was selecting for governmental posts. Significantly, Žiugžda wrote that on the 16th the party “discussed” the makeup of the new government, but he did not say that it “named” the new government. At most one should probably say that the party leaders “accepted” the proposed makeup of the new government but they were definitely unhappy with that first “people’s” cabinet.

As the Lithuanian “People’s Government” began its work, therefore, it had the appearance of being a non-Communist government, and its ministers, whatever their party allegiances, took pains to assure the people that nothing radical was planned, its actions would only expand democratic rights. There was no talk of far-reaching social and economic revolution—quite the contrary. They spoke of defending Lithuania’s independence. They talked of social and economic reform, calling for major reforms in health care and social welfare while proclaiming their respect for justly earned private property, whether in agriculture, industry, or personal affairs.

What did the members of the new Lithuanian government know about Moscow’s intentions in Lithuania? In 2003, honoring the centenary of Antanas Sniečkus, the long time party secretary, a number of former Communists argued that Lithuania’s incorporation into the USSR came as a shock to party leaders in 1940, that they had generally expected Lithuania to receive the status of a Soviet client state, such as the Mongolian People’s Republic. The protocol of the third meeting of the council of ministers recorded Krėvė’s strong statement by Krėvė about his determination to preserve “the independence of the Lithuanian Republic.” Even in 1942, Mykolas Römeris expressed the thought that the government’s members, both Communist and non-Communist, actually did not understand their position in the new Soviet order.²⁶⁵ It is quite possible that only very few Lithuanians knew anything about what Moscow had in store for their country.

IX

From Underground

“We are for a democratic people’s government, formed with honorable representatives of the people. Direct participation of communists, in our opinion, is not useful.”

—Georgii Dimitrov, instructions to Lithuanian communists

“In the new stage, in our opinion, the direct slogan ‘Soviet Lithuania’ is possible.”

—Icakas Meskupas, in a letter to Georgii Dimitrov

“There is no place in Lithuania for the other parties who have long struggled against the people and against Lithuania’s independence.”

—*Lietuvos aidas*, June 27, 1940

In their day, Soviet historians exalted and glorified the role and the work of the Lithuanian Communist Party in June 1940. They argued that the party was the strong vanguard of a highly conscious proletariat. Carefully separating the “socialist revolution” in Lithuania from the invasion of the Red Army, they gave the party pride of place at the head of the revolution. With some variations, they wrote that after the Red Army had stimulated the collapse of the Smetona regime, the masses were free to carry out a social revolution, and the party led the way. They spoke of the party’s “initiative” and its “leadership.” They insisted that the party “began to lead the movement of the popular masses”—and they also claimed that it was already “leading” the masses—and to guide “the working class and the poorest peasantry into the struggle against the bourgeoisie and to unite this movement with the movement of all progressive forces of the land against the fascist regime.” In their picture, “Power passed peacefully from the hands of the bourgeois class into the hands of the working class, of all laboring people, On June 17, 1940, the People’s government was formed on the initiative of the Lithuanian Communist Party.” A slightly different formulation declared, “On June 17, 1940, led by the Lithuanian Communist Party, the anti fascist forces put together the new People’s Government of Lithuania.”

In general, Soviet historians made almost no mention of Dekanozov and Pozdniakov and they made extensive use of the passive voice, thereby concealing the active forces behind the developments. Another version of the basic formula declared that popular demonstrations on June 15 to 17 opened Lithuania’s “non-violent” social revolution and that “led by the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, the Lithuanian People’s Government was formed.” This avoided saying that the LCP took the “initiative” in organizing the new government, but it still pictured the party as “leading” the revolutionary process. The result of this creative historiography

was a broad set of generalizations without many details; the historians did not define or illustrate the so-called “initiative” and “leadership.”²⁶⁶

A post-communist Lithuanian historian now would probably take an opposite position, choosing to emphasize Moscow’s role in the process rather than to investigate details of the party’s internal development. Vytautas Tininis has written, “Not the communist party but the NKVD then determined Lithuania’s fate.”²⁶⁷ The picture frequently becomes one of mass passive opposition to the Soviet invasion and the new totalitarian order, but an opposition confused if not compromised by the “collaboration” of some Lithuanians. In fact, the “totalitarian” model for characterizing the Soviet state, when added to assertions that Lithuania remained an occupied territory for 50 years, directed in every step by Moscow, misleads observers more than it enlightens.

Was the party simply *Moscow’s tool* in administering Lithuania or did Dekanozov *prepare* the Lithuanian Communist Party *to take power* and *to administer* the state? The Lithuanian party was of course in no position to take and hold power in June 1940, but under Dekanozov’s careful guidance and protection, together with help from Moscow and controls established by the NKVD and the Red Army, the party grew and developed. Eventually it took over the reins of government in Lithuania—of course backed by the Red Army and the Soviet NKVD—and, under Moscow’s watchful eye and control, it could develop its own role in the functioning of the Soviet system.

There can be no question that Dekanozov’s power in Lithuania in June and July 1940 was virtually absolute, but in the Soviet Union at this time regional and local party administrators could exercise some initiative in interpreting and enforcing Moscow’s directives.²⁶⁸ In Lithuania, the party at the start was definitely Moscow’s tool, but with time it would blend into the general pattern of party work in the Soviet Union and exercise a certain range of authority on its own. The totalitarian model suggests that there was no room for initiative and correspondingly for individual responsibility in the lower ranks; but there was room for both. In the Soviet pyramid of power, there was authority to be exercised by each level, from top to bottom; in 1940 the Lithuanian Communist Party started at the absolute bottom and slowly began to move up.

Although the Soviet model of the party-state dictated that the Lithuanian Communist Party was to control Lithuania and Soviet historians insisted that the party fulfilled that role with honor, in June 1940 the Lithuanian party was not ready to direct the sovietization of the country. It had to learn to walk before it could run. In the first months of 1940, the party even lacked clear leadership. Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas, the head of the party since its formation in 1918, died of tuberculosis in 1935, thereby avoiding the violence and bloodshed of the Stalinist purges in the next several years. In 1938 the traditional second figure in the Lithuanian communist hierarchy, Zigmas Aleksa-Angarietis, fell victim to Stalin’s Great

Purge. Communications between the Communist International, the Comintern, and the Lithuanian party broke off. The developments in Moscow left the Lithuanians in turmoil. Antanas Sniečkus, the leader of the party since 1934, later liked to joke that the fact that the Smetona government arrested him in December 1939 had probably saved him from falling victim to the party purge. But sitting in prison through the first five and one-half months of 1940, Sniečkus was out of touch, unable to direct daily party activities.

In early 1940, as a result of economic disruptions caused by the outbreak of war and by German and Soviet pressures on Lithuania, societal disturbances had been increasing. The demands of feeding and housing the Soviet troops in Lithuania imposed a new and heavy burden on the country, especially since the Soviet authorities were slow to pay their bills. (The Soviets claimed that the Lithuanians were trying to overcharge them.) Especially worrisome for the government was a wave of workers' strikes in February 1940. Soviet historians used these problems as evidence of the effectiveness and responsiveness of party work in an intensifying revolutionary situation, but again they usually presented their accounts without using any names. Their glowing accounts of the revolutionary atmosphere again used the passive voice: "The February strike in Kaunas was organized and carried out under the leadership of the Kaunas district committee of the Lithuanian CP."²⁶⁹ Who were the party leaders? What did the party leadership actually do besides issuing proclamations and manifestos?

The first demand of communist propaganda and agitation through the winter and spring of 1939–1940 was "release all political prisoners." Whatever humanitarian sentiments such a call might stir, it aimed at reestablishing party leadership. At least a third of its nominal membership—including Sniečkus—was sitting in prison, and in May and early June, only three members of the party's Central Committee were free to work in Kaunas. When, in early June, the Lithuanian Saugumas reported that Moscow had told the Lithuanian Communists that the introduction of the Soviet order in Lithuania will depend on "the ability of the Lithuanian Communist Party to prepare and carry out revolution," Smetona's officials presumably breathed a sigh of relief: the party lacked the leadership and cadres to take power, whatever the social problems in Lithuania might have been.²⁷⁰

The fundamental problem of party leadership of course had its roots not in Kaunas, but in the purges that had wracked Moscow in the last four years. Since 1936, Moscow had lived in the shadow of the public trials in Moscow that had led to the execution of well-known "Old Bolsheviks." Vyshinsky, Dekanozov's counterpart in Riga, had won world-wide attention as a prosecutor in the trials. (It is always worth remembering that the Soviet Union killed more members of the Communist Party than any other state in

the world did.) The purges in Moscow, the “Great Terror” as it has been called, seemed to come to an end in 1938, but their repercussions continued. Moscow feared that “Trotskyites” and other “deviationists” throughout the world had infiltrated the ranks of the Comintern. Stalin’s apparatus accordingly purged foreign communist parties, and it arranged the murder, on August 20, 1940, of the old Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky, who had taken refuge in Mexico.

The purges in Moscow had devastating consequences for the party in Lithuania. As of the end of 1939, with Soviet garrisons already in the country as a result of the Mutual Assistance Pact, the Lithuanian Communist Party had no official ties with the Comintern in Moscow. After Angarietis’s arrest on March 27, 1938, other Lithuanians in Moscow automatically became suspect, and party members in Lithuania were left uncertain about their own positions. Without Moscow’s clear support and guidance, the Lithuanian Communist Party organization in Kaunas stood as just one more small group criticizing the Smetona regime. And with Sniečkus’s arrest in December 1939, the party lacked local forceful and knowledgeable leadership. By itself the Lithuanian party could not have taken and held power in Lithuania; it needed first of all Moscow’s recognition and then Moscow’s aid.

At the end of 1939, the Comintern summoned Ickas Meskupas, the acting head of the Lithuanian party, to Moscow for consultations. There were obviously two major issues to be discussed: the party line of the Lithuanian communists and the special tasks of the party in the context of current Soviet-Lithuanian relations. As Sniečkus later put it, “It was necessary to establish whether the LKP had the right to sign itself as a section of the Comintern.” Meskupas worked in Moscow for three and a half-months; he returned only in April 1940. It is unclear whether he traveled legally or illegally. Commentators later liked to say he traveled illegally, but Sniečkus himself said that Meskupas had a legal passport.

Given the fact that Soviet authorities had arrested some 150 Lithuanians living in the USSR, including Lithuanian communists who had traveled to Moscow to find out what was happening, Meskupas could not be sure what awaited him in the Soviet capital. At Moscow’s Belarusian train station, which trains to and from Lithuania used, he met Romas Šarmaitis, a Lithuanian Comintern employee who had himself just been released from a Soviet prison. In recounting this meeting in later years, Šarmaitis declared that it had been accidental and that Meskupas was leery of talking with him because Šarmaitis had been arrested as one of Angarietis’s associates. It is, however, plausible that Šarmaitis had been released from prison just to meet Meskupas and to acquaint him with the situation in Moscow. Moscow needed to restore the Lithuanian party at least as much as the Lithuanian communists wanted Moscow’s cachet. In any case, Šarmaitis quickly summarized the Comintern’s current posture on Lithuania and especially Angarietis.

Meskus, whom Angarietis had criticized in 1937, undoubtedly made good use of this information. As Soviet Lithuanian historians liked to recount, Meskus reestablished the LCP's contacts with the Comintern. To do this, like other foreign communists, he surely had to support the Soviet alliance with Germany and also to deny any sympathy for Angarietis, who was at this time still in prison awaiting execution.²⁷¹

On March 23, 1940, the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern laid out Moscow's program for Lithuania, making clear that Lithuania's future was to be tied to the interests of the Soviet state. Declaring that independent Lithuania was "a toy in the hands of the imperialists," the document spoke of good things that the Soviet Union had done for Lithuania and stated that Lithuanian working people support Soviet foreign policy in all ways. The mass of the Lithuanian people allegedly supported Soviet foreign policy as against the English and French "war mongers." The main task of the party therefore was to mobilize the pro-Soviet forces against "the anti-Soviet elements." The party's immediate demands should include amnesty for political prisoners, the legalization of trade unions, and equal rights for all nationalities. The party "must call for a people's assembly," elected on the basis of universal suffrage.

After proposing economic goals for Lithuanian workers, the declaration went on to call for the creation of a "National Front" made up of persons, regardless of party, who call for "honest cooperation with the Soviet Union." To this end, the party must use "all legal means" and intensify its work among the peasantry; it must build "a single front from below with all social-democratically inclined workers." Because the party had little for women in the past, it must now pay special attention to the position of women as well as youth. In all, the party must work to create "a democratic people's government based on a mass movement."

The resolution concluded by calling for reform within the Lithuanian Communist Party. At the beginning of the war, the party had allegedly not understood "the imperialist and reactionary role of England and France"—presumably it had not come out strongly enough in support of Germany after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The party must now strengthen itself and must properly instruct its membership on the "party's political line." It must translate and publish the *Short Course* on the history of the Bolshevik Party,²⁷² and it must intensify its struggle against "Trotskyism and all other provocations." And to assure the unanimous support of the "party's political line," the party must hold a conference in the near future.²⁷³

When Meskus returned to Kaunas on April 12, he brought with him the endorsement of the Comintern and, of course, new instructions. In his luggage he carried two sets of the third edition of Lenin's works and Šarmaitis's Lithuanian translation of *The History of the Communist Party (Short Course)*. Sniečkus later recounted that when, sitting in prison, he received the message "Our political line has been recognized as correct," he

was beside himself with joy. A witness told of Sniečkus's being moved to tears

Meskupas now infused new life into the party. In terms of Marxist standards of "class background," both Meskupas and Sniečkus were representatives of the "petty bourgeoisie," not of "the proletariat." Meskupas said this of himself—his father was a self-employed tailor—and Sniečkus's father was a well to do peasant, a "kulak" in usual Soviet terminology. In contemporary Soviet usage, however, the approving term "working class representatives" and the negative term "enemies of the people" related more to a person's or a group's usefulness and attitude toward Stalin and Moscow than to any "objective" consideration of their backgrounds. Meskupas and Sniečkus suffered no serious handicaps as a result of their respective "petty bourgeois" backgrounds.

As of the beginning of June 1940 there were only three members of the LKP Central Committee living at large. Meskupas was the one with the best connections to leftist intellectuals, and he strongly advocated developing cadres of intellectuals to support the party. Since these were qualities that Dekanozov would especially value in his own task of finding "petty bourgeois" to staff Lithuania's People's Government, Meskupas became a key advisor to Dekanozov and Pozdniakov, and he played a major role in the new system in choosing officials for lesser positions in government and as provincial state officials. He was to die as a partisan leader in a battle against German troops in March 1942. It was said that Moscow had to choose between Sniečkus and Meskupas as the person to send to Lithuania to head the partisans, and it chose to dispatch Meskupas.

When the Soviet Union publicized its complaints about the treatment of Soviet soldiers, Meskupas was ready with a proclamation denouncing the Lithuanian government's "unheard of provocations" against the Soviet state that had given the Lithuanians people "such giant help." The Red Army, the party proclaimed, "is defending Lithuanian independence." The party thereupon demanded that the government apparatus be purged of all "imperialist agents," and it called for freeing political prisoners. On June 4, the party had an additional issue to exploit with the death, in prison, of Juozas Garelis, a member of the party's Central Committee. Communists organized demonstrations insisting that he had been tortured, and they demanded that the authorities turn over his body.²⁷⁴ The party charged that the government tortured those who struggle "for a free Lithuania, for peace, for observance of the pact thanks to which our country is not in the fire of war." The party, however, was reportedly confused when Soviet authorities intervened to help settle a workers' strike in the Gaižūnai polygon—the workers were involved in a Soviet project, and the Red Army did not approve of this particular strike.²⁷⁵

The party was small. It is difficult to establish the membership of an underground party, but when Meskupas went to Moscow at the end of 1939,

he estimated the membership at 1000. This was an admittedly generous estimate because he wanted to assure Comintern officials that the party had not lost many members in the aftermath of Angarietis's arrest. By Moscow's own estimate, in June 1940 the party had 1220 members, and these were concentrated in the cities and towns of Lithuania. A Lithuanian historian has recently put the membership then at 1261, of whom 54% were Lithuanians, 31% Jews, and 14% Russians. The party had accepted 224 new members in the fall of 1939 after the mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union, but only 64 members between January and June of 1940. These numbers apparently do not include party members who were in prison or in labor camps.²⁷⁶

There is an interesting confusion in Lithuanian historiography about the question of who was in charge of the party in June 1940. Writers frequently say that Antanas Sniečkus, the party's first secretary from 1936–1939, took control of the party again upon his release from prison on June 18.²⁷⁷ Chaim Aizenas, Meskupas's closest colleague in directing party affairs at the time of the Red Army's coming, later declared that when Sniečkus emerged from prison and took the post of chief of the Saugumas in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Meskupas acted as party chief, but party leaders of course consulted with Sniečkus. In fact, Sniečkus would seem to have concentrated on his governmental position and to have played a much lesser role in the party administration, although he certainly took part in its affairs.

In the first month of the People's Government, the new rulers of the republic played down Sniečkus's party status. In announcing Sniečkus's appointment as chief of the Saugumas, *Lietuvos aidas*, now firmly in the Soviet camp as the voice of Paleckis's government, did not mention his position in the party, and on July 14, it identified Meskupas as "party secretary" when it reported his talk on Lithuanian radio urging participation in the voting for a new parliament. Sniečkus's own autobiographical notes indicate that the party's Central Committee elected him first secretary in August 1940, after Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union.²⁷⁸

There may be several reasons behind the confusion. Meskupas was not widely known in Lithuanian society. On December 16, 1940, the party newspaper *Tiesa* declared that when Meskupas spoke on Lithuanian radio in July, "Most of the radio listeners did not know that name." Such a statement of course suggests that the public as a whole knew very little of party affairs. As the historiography developed in the postwar years, party officials may well have wanted to credit the living secretary with the successes of 1940. There may also have been an inclination to minimize Jewish leadership of the party wherever possible; indeed, this might be an explanation to a possible question as to why Sniečkus, rather than Meskupas, became first secretary in August. Anti-communist Lithuanian émigrés, in denouncing the Soviet takeover of the country, repeatedly insisted that individuals who used neutral or Lithuanian sounding revolutionary names were in fact Jews. (In June 1940

Meskupas took the *nom de guerre* of simply “Adomas.”) Soviet Lithuanian historians, who kept a close watch on the writing of the “bourgeois nationalist” émigrés, may well have wanted to deemphasize Meskupas’s position in the party in June and July, although on occasions of observing anniversaries of his death or his birth, they spoke rather freely of his work in 1940 as “second secretary.”

On the other hand, the delay in officially naming Sniečkus party secretary may actually have been a result of the Angarietis’s fall. From Moscow’s point of view, it remained to be seen whether Sniečkus was a supporter or an opponent of Angarietis; there was also the question of Sniečkus’s attitude toward the German-Soviet pact. At the end of July 1940, Sniečkus finally traveled to Moscow as “translator” with the Lithuanian delegation requesting the republic’s incorporation into the Soviet Union. On this occasion, Sniečkus surely had to deny Angarietis, just as Meskupas had done. Moscow then approved Sniečkus’s acceptance of the party line, as it had previously judged Meskupas, and the party’s Central Committee could elect him first secretary on the day of his return to Kaunas. Now restored, Sniečkus rejoiced, exclaiming, “I wanted to dance on one foot.”²⁷⁹

Dekanozov himself should probably be considered as performing the job of the party’s first secretary in June and July 1940, just as Galvanauskas described him as having exercised the powers of the presidency. Meskupas-Adomas in fact performed the usual jobs of a party unit’s second secretary, organizing cadres, handling assignments, and appointing officials. Dekanozov’s role in developing the party had to remain out of the public eye, and Sniečkus had the vital task of directing the security services, a full time occupation. In any case, Sniečkus’s party position remained unnoticed for the time being, although Sniečkus was a signer, just as Meskupas was, of the party’s appeal to the government to be legalized. That left Meskupas to represent the party in public in the radio broadcast of July 13, on the eve of the elections to the “People’s Seimas.” In many ways, whatever their titles, Sniečkus and Meskupas would seem to have been on a par under Dekanozov’s eye until Sniečkus emerged as the party secretary in August

There are no minutes of the first meetings of the party leadership after the Soviet invasion—the party was not well enough organized for that.²⁸⁰ But according to the memoirs of Chaim Aizenas, on the evening of June 15 party leaders, under Meskupas’s leadership, met in Viliampolė, a district of Kaunas, and drew up a three point program: to welcome the Red Army, to avoid provocative acts, and to protect factory property. In his autobiography, Aizenas claimed to have been surprised by the coming of the Red Army, and he indicated that the party leaders had as yet no special orders.²⁸¹ On the morning of June 16 they gathered again in Kulautuva, a suburb of Kaunas, to discuss the situation, but apparently only Meskupas had instructions from higher up. They did not discuss possible members of the

new government. When they met in the evening of the 16th, they discussed the list of ministers that Dekanozov had drawn up.

Some party members objected to the thought that there were no communists in the first People's Government, and they apparently tried to draw a parallel between the Paleckis government and the Russian government of Alexander Kerensky that Lenin had overthrown in 1917. Shouldn't Sniečkus, the Lithuanian equivalent of Lenin, be the prime minister in a new revolutionary government? Meskupas, however, insisted on supporting Paleckis and objected to any comparison of the Paleckis government to Kerensky's. According to Aizenas, party members also disapproved of accepting Galvanauskas as finance minister, but they nevertheless approved the list and reportedly declared that a communist must become Minister of the Interior. Most likely, Meskupas let his colleagues know that Dekanozov was reserving the post of Minister of Internal Affairs for a communist, and they accepted this.²⁸²

On June 17, the party received a message from Georgii Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, telling it that for the moment the goal was the establishment of a "people's democracy," and that communists should not participate in the new government. "Most important at this stage is the all round organization of the masses in the city and country under our leadership. Force the immediate release of political prisoners, the purge of the army and the state apparatus from anti-Soviet elements. Confiscation of the property of reactionaries who have fled. Set up a program of action that for the time being does not exceed the bounds of people's democracy. We are for a democratic people's government, former with honorable representatives of the people. Direct participation of communists, in our opinion, is not useful (*zweckmässig*)."²⁸³ Just before the Soviet invasion, the Lithuanian Saugumas reported that communists had orders to cooperate with other anti-Smetona forces. This was an early indication of Soviet plans for a "people's democracy."

Dimitrov's message may well have been just meant as an admonition to listen to Dekanozov and to obey his directions, because party members began to enter the government the very next day. Paleckis and his first appointees had given the government a non-communist image, and after Paleckis's cabinet had established this public image, Dekanozov was free to add party members to the cabinet of ministers.

The first was Mečys Gedvilas, a party member living in Telšiai in western Lithuania, who became Minister of Internal Affairs. On June 19, Meskupas and Sniečkus visited the Soviet mission, and the Soviets approved his appropriateness to the job.²⁸⁴ According to Gedvilas's memoirs, Paleckis had summoned him to Kaunas and then sent him to meet with Sniečkus. In what he called a conspiratorial meeting of the Central Committee, Gedvilas learned of his new post from Sniečkus, and not from Paleckis. He protested that he was unworthy of the post, but "in accordance with party discipline, I

was obliged to accept the proposal.” Gedvilas’s account supports the interpretation that Dekanozov and the party would develop the ministry independently of Paleckis’s government. He threw himself into the job. He later claimed that he spent four days in his office without leaving it; party writers praised his work. As one journalist wrote, “With a hard hand he rid the country of its savage enemies and executioners, from Smetonist provocateurs, spies and traitors of the fatherland.”²⁸⁵

Gedvilas’s appointment apparently raised some controversy among the communists in Kaunas. Why was this man from remote Telšiai chosen in place of a local communist who would better understand the situation in the capital? Arvydas Anušauskas, probably the most experienced investigator of police archives, has linked Gedvilas to the Soviet *rezidentūra* in Kaunas.²⁸⁶ That would seem reason enough for Gedvilas’s appointment to the key position of Minister of Internal Affairs in the new government.

Sniečkus took the post of Director of Department of State Security, the Saugumas. Sniečkus’s job was a difficult one, but vital for the new regime. According to Aizenas, at the party meeting on the evening of the 16th, “comrades decided” (*draugai nusprendė*) that Sniečkus should take this post. More likely, Dekanozov had already proposed his name. Whoever took this post obviously had to receive the approval of Lavrentii Beriia, the USSR People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs, with whom Dekanozov was always closely associated. A party commentary on Sniečkus, written some years later, emphasized the significance of this post: “Comrade Sniečkus, after leaving prison, was named [*again the passive voice!—aes*] to the most responsible area of work—director of the Department of State Security, where extremely high revolutionary vigilance and execution of the proper Leninist-Stalinist policy was necessary.”²⁸⁷

Gedvilas was nominally Sniečkus’s superior in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the two men together now held the posts that Skučas and Povilaitis had held under the Smetona regime. This was no coincidence. Povilaitis and Skučas were at the heart of the repressive system of the Smetona regime, and as such they were special targets of the Soviet demands that the Lithuanians restructure their government. Now the Soviet authorities used those same offices, even the same records and files, as well as the old authoritarian regime’s laws, in support of their new governmental system.

Control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs constituted perhaps the most important move for the development of the party’s political power and authority. The ministry quickly evolved into a government within the government. Gedvilas acted independently of Krėvė’s wishes, and Paleckis would yield to initiatives coming from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As testimony to the relationship of the ministry to the party and then to Dekanozov, we have the account of Aleksandr Slavinas, a key figure in the new order’s police system as head of counter-intelligence, who told in his memoirs of arresting an agent of the former police and taking her directly to

the party's central committee. The Ministry of the Interior served Dekanozov and the party first and only then the People's Government.

In August, when the Lithuanian government was reorganized as a Soviet Republic, Gedvilas became Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR. The former prime minister and acting president, Paleckis, fell back to the position of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, a position analogous to head of state in a non-communist parliamentary government, with largely ceremonial powers—definitely a lesser position in the new Lithuanian party-state. Sniečkus, as of August 14 the party's first secretary, became the real chief of the Soviet structure in Lithuania.

In the semi-feudal structure of the Leninist-Stalinist system, Sniečkus, who was to remain party secretary until his death in January 1974, became something like a "Duke of Lithuania." He always had to deal with advisers sent from the Center. During Stalin's lifetime he was dependent on Stalin's good will, and he had to defend his territory from intrusions by Stalin's other "dukes." Then under Stalin's successors he could develop considerably more space and power to assert his own will. He also of course built his own network of friends in Moscow and supporters in Lithuania, and he outmaneuvered at least one effort by Moscow to unseat him. Perhaps because he realized his own strengths and weaknesses, he refused invitations to work in Moscow; he preferred to remain in his position of strength as the "duke" of Lithuania. In 1940, however, at the age of 37, he was only beginning to administer his fiefdom; he depended heavily on Moscow's support and could only enforce orders from higher up, whether from Dekanozov in Kaunas or perhaps directly from Beria in Moscow. In his later years, it might be noted, he chose not to put his memories of Soviet rule to paper, however much he enjoyed talking about his accomplishments and cleverness. He openly admitted to one confidante that he did not care to look back at the past.²⁸⁸

In 1940, from their base in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, controlling the repressive forces of the new regime, Gedvilas and Sniečkus, working together, watched over not only the government but also the growth of the party. As the party emerged from underground and into the offices of power, it attracted new members, but just as Moscow searched for enemies within the ranks of the All-Union party, the Lithuanian party had to control its own growth. Quoting Lenin to the effect that "careerists and vagrants" would inevitably try to join a government party, one Lithuanian Soviet historian indignantly wrote, "there were people who tried to join the party wanting to obtain some benefit from belonging to it."²⁸⁹ The Ministry of the Interior had the obligation to guard against this possibility, even to the point of criticizing party organizations.

The party's work began in earnest when Paleckis, as acting president, ordered the release of Lithuanian political prisoners, some 800

members of the Communist Party. (Sniečkus regained his freedom a day earlier than the other party members.) The prisoners emerged on June 18, and on the 19th demonstrations around the country welcomed them back into society; Pozdniakov and Dekanozov, however, restrained the enthusiasm of the Kaunas party organization. In the capital city, under the supervision of Michalina Meškauskienė, a party member since 1935, the former prisoners gathered on the 19th in a disciplined orderly meeting, even electing a presidium, and they basked in praise offered by government ministers. Gedvilas, now Minister of Internal Affairs, rapturously declared that the “body of Lithuania” was recovering its “heart, conscience and mind.” The prisoners in turn, unnamed in the press, proclaimed, “We will fight to the last drop of blood, if necessary, for freedom and for Independent Lithuania.”²⁹⁰

According to a TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) report, published on June 19 in Moscow *Pravda*, the organ of the Soviet Communist Party, Sniečkus spoke with a more aggressive tone:

They arrested me three times. I sat in different jails. I landed in this jail after the signing of the Soviet-Lithuanian mutual assistance pact. I was arrested because I told the truth about the Soviet Union. In jail they did not permit us to read any literature including dictionaries. They beat us viciously, imprisoned us, left us without food, and deprived us of the right to see relatives.

Three days ago, sitting in prison, I and my comrades heard the thunder of Soviet tanks and the rumble of planes. It is difficult to express the feeling that overcame us. We understand that the final hour had struck for the bloody Smetonist prison regime.

Now I am free. I am happy for my people, for its fate and its future which the Soviet Union will guarantee for it.

After this, as chief of the new regime’s State Security, Sniečkus made very few public statements.

Despite the orderliness of this first demonstration, the party, which was still an illegal organization, showed no thought of carrying out a *bloodless* revolution. After years of prison and labor camps, party activists thought in terms of revenge. A party manifesto greeted the Paleckis government and called for purging the old government apparatus “of spies, provocateurs and villains,” arresting “enemies of the people,” closing “anti-state organizations,” seizing the property of persons who had fled the country, and legalizing both trade unions and the Communist Party.” The proclamation ended with the slogans “Long live the new democratic government!” and “Long live Stalin, the leader of the peoples of the USSR.” In its first issue, published on the 18th, the party’s newspaper, *Liaudies balsas*, for the moment still unofficial because the party was not yet legal,

said of Smetona, “He did not have the civil courage to stand facing the people’s court.” The new government, it continued, must “finish purging the apparatus of our country’s power.” On June 21, in reporting the meeting of the former prisoners, the newspaper spoke of “raised fists” and “thunderous applause.” In an undated letter to Dimitrov, presumably written after the demonstration by the freed prisoners, Meskupas declared—in broken German—“Demonstration in Kaunas and province under our leadership. Workers mature (the peasants are also being drawn in). For Soviet. In the new stage, in our opinion, the direct slogan ‘Soviet Lithuania’ is possible.”²⁹¹

Party members wanted action, but under Dekanozov’s restraining hand—Soviet historians usually spoke of Dimitrov’s letter of June 17 as the source of the party’s restraint—they had to wait. The Comintern, Aizenas later wrote, “for some reason, always warned that we should not organize mass demonstrations.”²⁹² The next step was to have the government legalize the Communist Party, but here the People’s Government balked. According to Krèvè, he and Galvanauskas managed to block the first efforts to do so.

The enthusiasm of the party and its public demands frightened many Lithuanians; rumors swept the country, predicting “sovietization,” the seizure of property, nationalization of land, incorporation into the Soviet Union, and even imminent armed conflict with Germany. The new authorities recognized that such stories, whatever their source, contradicted the image of orderliness that they wanted to project, and therefore the government went to great pains to separate its own program from that of the party. On June 21, Gedvilas, in a radio address, complained that “enemies of the government” were spreading rumors that the Red Army threatened Lithuania’s independence; the Soviets had come, he explained, “not to change the system of our life but just to defend us.” The citizenry, he declared, should believe only “reports officially confirmed by the government and its organs.”²⁹³ On the 22d, he called on workers not to organize “soviets.” Matas Mickis, the new Minister of Agriculture, delivered a radio address to the peasants on the 22nd, declaring that “we guarantee every peasant for whom land is the source of livelihood and not an object of speculation the complete inviolability of his land.”²⁹⁴ These government statements eschewing the radical proposals of the party apparently had a calming effect on the public.

On June 24, although the party was still technically an illegal organization, it began its public mission. Kaunas newspapers announced that there would be a mass meeting of “all working persons” at 4 p.m. that day in Petras Vileišis square. The Communist Party, not yet legal, invited “factory workers” to come in “organized and orderly fashion.” This was to be “the first demonstration of freedom,” and after the rally, participants would march en masse to the Soviet mission. In retrospect, this day marked the beginning of the campaign to mobilize the people of Lithuania in support of the “revolution from above.”

In the week since the Red Army's overwhelming advance, local party organizers and sympathizers in Kaunas had had time to rally and to mobilize the populace at their places of work. Trade unions were already an important weapon in organizing workers. Demonstrators marched to the meeting in columns from all parts of the city. At Vileišis square, organizers with red bands on their sleeves directed the groups to predesignated spots. The controlled press put the number of participants at 70,000—later authors used the figure 100,000—and declared that they had gathered “enthusiastically and in orderly fashion.” Besides red flags, demonstrators carried portraits of Soviet leaders—Stalin, Molotov, Timoshenko and Voroshilov. There were fewer portraits of Paleckis. The tribune featured pictures of Lenin and Stalin. Among the slogans on placards were “We demand the legalization of the Communist Party,” “Long live Soviet Socialist Lithuania,” and “Long live the heroic Red Army.”

Matas Šumauskas, a newly freed political prisoner and now the head of Lithuanian trade unions, opened the meeting with an impassioned speech declaring solidarity with the People's Government and expressing thanks to the Soviet Union and the Red Army for helping Lithuanian workers to overthrow the Smetona regime. Speaking in the name of the party leadership, Berelis Latvis-Fridmanis expressed thanks to Stalin, Molotov, and the Red Army for “liberating” Lithuania. In all some fifteen speakers addressed the crowd, denouncing Smetona and praising Stalin. The demonstrators approved a resolution calling for the legalization of the Communist Party, the confiscation of the property of “reactionaries who have fled,” land reform, and more vigorous action against unemployment and speculation. The meeting also approved a telegram to Stalin, expressing “deepest thanks for support in our struggle against the bloodstained Smetona regime. The people of Lithuania have been liberated. Long live Comrade Stalin, the liberator of nations.”

The meeting over, the demonstrators marched, in a procession reportedly eight kilometers long, to the government building where Gedvilas greeted them, telling them that the government's first task was to rid the “state apparatus of the Smetonists” and warning that “the enemies of the people do not sleep.” The people must stay at their jobs, now working twice as hard, and beware of misleading rumors. “Long live the new, beautiful Lithuania!” he proclaimed, to which the demonstrators, reportedly “unanimously,” responded, “Long live the People's Government.”²⁹⁵

The demonstrators extended their celebration into the evening, gathering again outside the Soviet mission in Kaunas. First came a truck carrying enthusiastic young people and then the marchers. Dekanozov and Pozdniakov came out onto the balcony to greet them all. A speaker expressed the demonstrators' thanks to Stalin, “the leader of the Soviet Union and the world's workers,” and to the Red Army. After Dekanozov had greeted “the free Lithuanian people,” the gathering sang the *Internationale*, the traditional

song of militant workers and now the state hymn of the Soviet Union. The demonstration finally ended about 11 p.m., but for some time yet groups went through the streets singing Russian, Yiddish, and Lithuanian songs.

Lithuanian media enthusiastically supported the demonstration. Lithuanian radio, which had broadcast the entire demonstration, played Soviet “music and revolutionary songs.” One newspaper reporter declared, “Scoundrels of the people, deceivers of the people, eternal liars, those who had not yet fled, trembled in their three and four storied houses, grew pale by the shades as they saw how great and powerful the labor army is, this strong, most honest and determined part of the nation.” By June 23 and 24, Sniečkus’s new Saugumas began work, filing reports on conditions and developments around the country, and the new order was ready to take the next step:

The government promised law and order, while the party loudly proclaimed its sympathies for the Soviet Union, calling the mutual assistance pact “the guarantee of our happiness and well being.” When the first calls arose for a Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, the party newspaper exclaimed, “What a great and powerful slogan!” It acknowledged, “We know that slogans about a Soviet Lithuania can also be exploited by our enemies,” but, it explained, the Paleckis government was still the government of “a capitalist system.” All communists, the writer declared, must work to establish the socialist order. The party, the writer concluded, can form temporary alliances, but it cannot surrender its goal of establishing socialism.²⁹⁶

Lithuanian citizens recognized the distinction between government and party, although they could not completely understand it. As a Saugumas bulletin from Marijampolė put it on June 28, people were saying “that the government talks prettily, it promises to protect independence, while at the same time various irresponsible people have to freedom to announce such slogans [*such as annexation to the USSR—aes*] and express such wishes.” As a number of agents of the restructured Saugumas reported, many people, Lithuanians and Jews alike, just hoped that the Paleckis government would be able to maintain its leftist, non-communist character and that the communists would not push it aside.

The entire process followed the lines that Lenin himself had developed in constructing his Bolshevik Party at the beginning of the century. He had conceived of the revolutionary movement as a series of concentric circles or rings, all focused on the goal of revolution. The outside fringe, “the toiling masses,” consisted of the followers, the ultimate target but certainly not leaders in the mobilization process. The next inner ring was the working class, the foundation of Marxist revolutionary thought as the basic revolutionary force. The producers of goods of value in capitalist society, the working class constituted the social foundation of the revolution, provided the experience of factory organization, and was nominally to be the power

behind “the dictatorship of the proletariat” that was to be established by the revolution. The “avant garde” of the workers, the Communist Party, the next inner ring, was a key part of Lenin’s modification of Marxism. The party had to lead the workers, who, as Lenin wrote in his tract on party organization, *Chto delat’* (*What is to be done?*), were of themselves incapable of developing beyond a trade union consciousness. But the party itself needed purposeful, clear leadership. In Stalin’s time the Politburo played this role, with of course Stalin ultimately at the center. In this system, orders went out from the center to the party, bidding it to lead, then to the workers, directing them to organize, and finally to the “toiling masses,” drawing them in to follow.²⁹⁷

In Lithuania in 1940, Dekanozov occupied the center of the local concentric rings, and his orders went through the party to the organizers of mass meetings. Butkutė offered a version of these circles: “The fundamental decisive force on which the Lithuania CP relied was the proletariat of Lithuania. Its next reserve was the poor peasantry. The task of the Lithuanian CP was to win the majority of the working class to its side and to strengthen the union of the working class and the peasantry.” Her image, of course, did not include the inner workings of the system, but even in this account the reader can see that the process left Paleckis and the Lithuanian government out of the picture, although Gedvilas as Minister of Internal Affairs played a prominent role in controlling public organizations.²⁹⁸

The party propaganda, it might be noted, was not only more exuberant in its vision of a Soviet Lithuania than government spokesmen could be at this point, but it also could use a more radical vocabulary. For example, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were still carefully observing their non-aggression and friendship pacts of 1939, and Soviet officials had even denounced the Smetona government for having doubted the durability and reality of Soviet-German friendship. Therefore the new Lithuanian government assiduously avoided using the word “fascist” as a derogatory term in their denunciations of the Smetona regime; on the governmental level, Germany was a friendly state. On the other hand, the party, as supposedly a non-governmental organization, could speak more derogatorily of the Germans. For their part, German officials stood back and watched the events, refraining from any intervention in the process.

German intelligence estimated that “an extraordinary large part of the population” of Kaunas had participated in the pro-Soviet rallies not only willingly but enthusiastically. The Lithuanians reportedly showed much more enthusiasm for the new regime than did the Estonians or Latvians. While not commenting on the skills of the party and its sympathizers in organizing the demonstrations, the Germans attributed the massiveness of the demonstrations to several factors: a/ the Communist Party was weaker in Lithuania and therefore the people feared it less; b/ delight at Smetona’s flight; and c/ perhaps it was in the character of the Lithuanians to make more

of a “Volksfest” out of such a meeting. A fourth factor, reflecting Nazi social and racial views, but bearing considerable import for the future, was the observation that the Jewish population, larger in Lithuania than in Latvia and Estonia, had contributed significantly to the size and enthusiasm of the demonstrations in Lithuania. This thought, shared by many nationalist Lithuanians, was to contribute to horrific developments in Lithuania a year later.²⁹⁹

On June 25 the party finally entered the public life of Lithuania as a legal participant, indeed the only legal participant. It was part and parcel of the general enthusiasm in denouncing the remnants of the Smetona regime. The leaders of parties banned by Smetona had looked forward to new life, perhaps the reestablishment of the democratic constitution of 1922. There were no protests when the new regime banned the *Tautininkų sąjunga*, driving agents of the political police into flight or hiding and beginning a purge of prominent officials. The hopes of a return to earlier democratic practices, however, were not to be. Krėvė and Galvanauskas managed to block the first attempts to legalize the party, saying that all the parties banned by Smetona should be legalized together. Gedvilas, however, registered the Lithuanian Communist Party on his own authority as Minister of Internal Affairs. Krėvė objected that this act had bypassed the council of ministers, but, wielding the powers of the Smetona constitution, Paleckis approved Gedvilas’s action. With the support of Sniečkus’s Saugumas, the party openly came onto the new political stage on which it was the only actor.

Gedvilas’s Ministry of the Interior had now established a new dictatorship. As of June 20 the government banned private telephone calls abroad. According to Kostas Korsakas, Dekanozov ordered ELTA to unhook all teletypes with other states, leaving only the connection with Moscow. Paleckis invoked the Smetonist system of “heightened state protection,” giving the Minister of Internal Affairs extensive powers to register organizations and close publications. On June 25, Gedvilas told a journalist, “Today, on the seventh day of the new era, we already understand our job.”³⁰⁰

Gedvilas refused to register the old political parties, and he essentially banned their supporting organizations by demanding that all social organizations officially reregister with the authorities. He then refused to register non-communist organizations. As *Lietuvos aidas* of June 27 declared, “There is no place in Lithuania for the other parties who have long struggled against the people and against Lithuania’s independence.” Gedvilas gradually closed down the non-communist publications; the government insisted that it was cleansing the press of “reactionary and pornographic trash.”³⁰¹ While Gedvilas saved his most startling blows until after the election of the People’s Seimas in July, the People’s Government tolerated no opposition.

The party statutes, as registered by the new government on June 25, 1940, called the group “the forward vanguard of the Lithuanian working class,” “the leader and organizer of the workers’ revolutionary movement.”

Its fundamental task, said the statute, was “to overthrow bourgeois rule, to introduce the dictatorship of the proletariat, rule of workers’ and peasants’ soviets, completely to abolish classes, in introduce socialism as the first stage of a communist society.” In short, the party was dedicated to the historically ordained task of carrying out the Marxist revolution in Lithuania, and Soviet historians declared that it had carried out its historic role with honor and glory. Among the signers of the request for recognition were Sniečkus and Meskupas, but not Gedvilas.³⁰²

On the 28th the Ministry of the Interior registered the Communist Youth League, the Komsomol (*Komjaunimas* in Lithuanian) as a legal organization. One major function of the Komsomol was to prepare new party members, but together with the trade unions and Sniečkus’s control of the state security apparatus, the Komsomol provided the new regime with powerful weapons for mobilizing the society. It remained yet to neutralize the remaining centers of possible opposition—the Smetonist bureaucracy, the police, the army, and the Catholic Church. Individual ministries were already working on this task.

The party emphasized the symbolic and physical significance of its emergence onto the public stage by taking over the headquarters of the *tautininkai*. It was openly replacing the former ruling party. When ELTA, the official government news agency, announced the party’s legalization, it made clear that the government was no longer worried about assuring people that its goal was only to end the Smetona dictatorship. Recounting the party’s role in the short-lived Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1919, ELTA declared that after having been reorganized in 1921, the party had led the struggle against the “reactionary” governments of 1921–1926 and then against the “reactionary” Smetona regime. (The announcement did not use the epithet “fascist” for the regime, although a party leader’s announcement was the party was taking over the *tautininkai* building used the term.) Forgotten was any official criticism of the old regime as representing just Smetonist authoritarianism; now the entire period of Lithuanian independence, since the failure of the Lithuanian Soviet republic in 1919, became the target of the new regime’s propaganda attacks.

X

“The Moor Can Go”

“Don’t talk about demands; speak only of concerns for security.”

—Urbšys’s advice to the Lithuanian government on the morning of June 15

“It would really be suicide to express any type of opposition.”

—Kazys Škirpa, July 1, 1940

“The Moor has done his work. The Moor can go.”

—Friedrich Schiller

As noted in Chapter VIII, Soviet Lithuanian historians liked to say that the establishment of the People’s Government, representing the seizure of state power, marked the beginning of Lithuania’s socialist revolution in 1940. In an authoritative history of “socialist revolutions” in the Baltic, published in 1978, the leading Baltic Soviet historians on this subject, under guidance from the Soviet historian I. I. Mints, declared, “The transition of power into the hands of the people’s governments, being the result of the revolutionary actions of the workers of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia under the leadership of the communists, not only meant the overthrow of the fascist regimes, but it also accompanied the fundamental change of state structure in the Baltic countries.”³⁰³

It is a fundamental thesis of this study that real power never actually passed into the hands of the “people’s” government in Lithuania. Dekanozov’s arrival brought Lithuania *de facto* into the structure of the Soviet party-state. The role of the People’s Government in Dekanozov’s scenario was to mislead, neutralize, and if needs be to crush real and potential opposition in the country and then to step aside when Lithuania was ready, with all the necessary legal accouterments usually expected in international practice, for incorporation into the Soviet Union. This was the essence of Dekanozov’s “shell game.” With such an interpretation in mind, this chapter focuses on the activity of the People’s Government until the beginning of July, when it formally called for elections to what was in effect a constituent assembly that would carry out the will of Moscow and the Communist Party.

This account of those first weeks of activity pays special attention to the role of Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, both because of his prominence in the government and also because of his later explanations of his activity. Krėvė wrote the first of his reminiscences in 1942, when Lithuania lay under German occupation; this was one of a number of revelations by Lithuanians who claimed that the Soviet invaders had forced them to collaborate. The German authorities, to be sure, censored Krėvė’s essay, and he later declared it could not be restored to its original text. Comparison of the original publication with the text as published in 1992 indicates that the censorship

had targeted statements either criticizing the Germans or expressing disappointment that the Germans had not blocked the Communists' activities. Krèvē's account of his participation in the government remained intact. He wrote the other reminiscences after the war, first in a Displaced Persons' camp in Austria and then later as an émigré in the United States. These were eventually collected together as a book some 40 years after his death.

As the historiography of this period has developed, he has come to play a central role in the conflict of interpretations—some consider him a patriot/hero, some a collaborator or even a traitor. His reminiscences are in many matters not reliable. He was obviously concerned with justifying his own behavior; various of his statements are misleading or even erroneous. But these reminiscences nevertheless provide a better starting point for understanding the work of the government than do, say, the protocols of the meetings of the council of ministers. The protocols provide no records of discussions, and they report the group's decisions as bare facts. Krèvē's reminiscences talk of people and discussions; even when criticized for their belletristic flourishes, they have served as key sources for the study of the Soviet takeover. His account of his meeting with Molotov at the beginning of July is a central feature of almost all the non-communist literature. Krèvē's experiences, moreover, epitomized the dilemmas that Lithuanian intellectuals faced in the months of June and July, 1940.³⁰⁴

Anti-communist Lithuanians have strongly criticized him both for his acceptance of a position in the People's Government and then for his subsequent explanations and descriptions of his activity. In July 1940, a veteran Lithuanian diplomat, Jurgis Šaulys, denounced Krèvē's participation in government: "You went off with Lithuania's enslavers; I have to turn against them with all my soul." Smetona, while living in the United States, heaped considerable scorn on Krèvē, suggesting that he had been a Soviet agent and comparing him to Juozas Gabrys, an enterprising Lithuanian émigré who at the end of the First World War had been ready to cooperate with Germans, Poles, French, or Communists in order to realize his own political ambitions in Lithuania. In more recent years, Liudas Truska criticized Lithuanian intellectuals in general for not having opposed Dekanozov, and he called Krèvē the biggest collaborator of all. As Zenonas Butkus characterized both Paleckis's and Krèvē's relationships to the Soviet regime, they worked in the People's Government "not so much as an act to salvage Lithuania's independence but as the result of both their earlier cooperation with the USSR."³⁰⁵

In the fall of 1953 Lithuanians who were preparing evidence for the so-called "Kersten committee" of the United States Congress, investigating the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic states, expressed great disappointment and even anger with Krèvē's contribution to this effort. They insisted that he was hiding his own pro-Soviet behavior in the past, and they charged him with whitewashing the work of the People's Government in which he

participated. Krèvè's account, as summarized by the Lithuanian who had served as his translator, was indeed misleading and confusing, not to say erroneous. Krèvè frustrated the émigrés and the committee staff by refusing to admit to receiving and obeying orders from Dekanozov. This despite the fact that in his memoirs he spoke extensively of Dekanozov's intrusions. At the hearings in Washington, he also insisted that no members of the Society for Acquaintance with the National Cultures of the USSR had entered the government; as one historian has pointed out, there were four ministers—Krèvè, Paleckis, Pakarklis, and Venclova—as well as several lesser officials in the new government who had belonged to that society. Krèvè's translator on this occasion, Anicetas Simutis, later declared that "a Bolshevik would not have been a worse witness." Committee staff members reportedly called him "still a fellow traveler." In the end, the commission published only his account of his meeting with Molotov in Moscow at the beginning of July.

Krèvè's testimony to the Kersten committee has drawn especially heavy criticism in recent years from the Lithuanian historian Mindaugas Tamošaitis. Tamošaitis pictured Krèvè as an enthusiastic participant in the People's Government, and he seemingly approved of Smetona's angry judgment that Krèvè was a Soviet agent. He criticized the commission itself for having concentrated on the role of Moscow's agents in Lithuania and thereby ignoring the responsibility of "collaborators" such as Krèvè. He also complained that by publishing Krèvè's account of his talk with Molotov, the committee had made a undeserving hero out of him. Tamošaitis and others have gone on to dismiss Krèvè's reminiscences as "fiction" and "myth."³⁰⁶ In considering Krèvè's reminiscences, the reader must in fact distinguish between his writings that appeared under his own name and his testimony to the Kersten committee, which has come down to us in the accounts of those who heard him. There is no simple explanation for all the contradictions between his writings and his testimony in 1953 in either his meeting with Lithuanian émigré diplomats on September 20 or on the next day with Kersten committee staff members. To the committee's representatives, he apparently denied facts and statements that he had already recounted in print, and after his interview with the Kersten committee, he wrote nothing more about the events of 1940. He died eight months later.

The levels of intrigue in trying to understand and analyze Krèvè's behavior run deep. In his concern to expose Krèvè as a "collaborator," Tamošaitis accepted no explanation for Krèvè's behavior other than, as Smetona had suggested, that he was a Soviet agent. Zenonas Butkus has shown that in the 1920s, Krèvè apparently took money from the Soviet mission in Kaunas to support Smetona's newspaper, and that he gave information to Soviet diplomats in the 1930s. In 1988, when I was invited to visit the Central Archive in Vilnius, my host showed me points in various files that he had preselected. Being curious by nature, I occasionally flipped the pages in front of me, and I remember seeing a note in a file on Krèvè that

at home he spoke Russian with his wife. Observers considered this suspicious enough to record it. I have, however, no written record of this file. In his youth, Krèvè had studied in Kazan and Kiev and he had, of course, taught Russian language and literature in Baku. It remains for a careful biographer to establish a balanced account of Krèvè's motivations and activity in 1939–1940.

As regards Krèvè's testimony to the Kersten committee, there might be a question about Krèvè's health and mental capacities in September 1953. He had some health problems at this time, and he had to have an operation in the fall. He complained to a friend about a feeling of apathy since his retirement from teaching at the University of Pennsylvania in June 1953. A Lithuanian writer, recalling his own memories of Krèvè in the 1930s, wrote that even then he sometimes simply forgot things, he could be absent minded.³⁰⁷ This should not, however, have been a factor in his discussing the events of 1940.

My own personal, speculative, and perhaps unscholarly opinion is that in 1953 Krèvè felt backed into a corner and he resented the criticisms that he had already received from the diplomats and other émigrés. In July 1940, as Foreign Minister in the Paleckis government, he ordered Lithuania's diplomats home. They refused to obey, and as events showed, had they come, they would probably have been arrested and exiled. Over the years, they remembered this, and they could not forgive him for his summons. This question surely contributed to personal tension and problems of communication in 1953.

I do not think Krèvè's memory failed him. As I recall, I last talked with him in June 1953—he was my Russian teacher for two years, 1951–1953—and I may well have seen him during the summer. I remember no sign that his memory was failing, although overall he did not seem physically strong. I do not remember seeing him again before his death. The diplomats preparing the testimony for the Kersten committee, he might well have told himself, had taken their posts as representatives of the Smetona government, which he still criticized, and he was critical generally of émigré politicians and undoubtedly resentful of their attacks on his work in the People's Government. A year earlier, in 1952, he wrote to the émigré historian Zenonas Ivinskis, "I do not consider political work important, because I do not think that it is possible to achieve anything of use to Lithuania in that area these days"³⁰⁸ He may well have believed that the work of the Kersten committee had little meaning for Lithuania and therefore have decided not to cooperate, even if this meant denying things that he himself had written earlier.³⁰⁹

Turning back to Krèvè's published reminiscences, we find that his account of affairs in Lithuania before Dekanozov invited him to join the new cabinet of ministers is reliable perhaps only in recording his own personal feelings. His account of the collapse of the Smetona regime is at best

unreliable, and often simply wrong. A Lithuanian émigré journalist compared Krėvė's reminiscences to the mental state of a driver in shock after an automobile accident.³¹⁰ In 1939–1940, Krėvė openly opposed Smetona's rule, he complained about censorship, and he objected to the government's efforts to present the transfer of Vilnius to Lithuanian rule as a great victory for its foreign policy. In his memoirs, he followed fashion in criticizing the stationing of Soviet troops in Lithuania—this although critics quoted him as saying, in October 1939, that it would be good if the Red Army occupied the whole of the country and ousted Smetona. He offered no account of his reactions to Paleckis's actions in October 1939. Turning to the Soviet invasion of June, he emphasized Smetona's flight: "At the most dangerous moment the country was left without a leader and without a government."³¹¹

Krėvė's memories of the formation of the People's Government are interesting but also not entirely reliable. He claimed, that when Dekanozov offered him the post of foreign minister, the proconsul indicated that Paleckis would take more or less an honorific position and the real job of government would fall to him, Krėvė. In discussing the work of the cabinet of ministers, Krėvė identified two camps: the "nationally inclined" ministers and the "communists." In the first camp he included himself, Galvanauskas, and Vitkauskas. He considered Matas Mickis, the minister of agriculture, and Antanas Venclova, whom Paleckis named Minister of Education on June 18, to be at first sympathetic to the "national cause," but they soon fell under communist influence. The communist camp consisted of Minister of Justice Pakarklis, Minister of Health Leonas Koganas, and Minister of Internal Affairs Mečys Gedvilas. Krėvė curiously displayed distinctive sympathy for Gedvilas, speaking of his acting "moderately" (*santūriai*) and noting that "he did not get involved in arguments." Krėvė even suggested that Gedvilas had misgivings in following the orders that he received from Dekanozov. It is unclear why Krėvė did not express any thoughts about Sniečkus's work in the Department of State Security, under Gedvilas's command.³¹²

As for Krėvė's depiction of the Soviet representatives in Kaunas, Pozdniakov emerged from Krėvė's texts as a more moderate advisor than Dekanozov, frequently apologizing for Dekanozov's rudeness and sharp nature. Dekanozov, Krėvė wrote, was from the Caucasus and therefore temperamental. Krėvė did not mention that he had surely developed a certain rapport with Pozdniakov in the four years that the Russian had been working in the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kaunas.

Krėvė's colleague Ernestas Galvanauskas, looked at the makeup of the council of ministers in a completely different fashion. He denied the existence of a "national group," although he said he spoke with Krėvė frequently and he considered Krėvė "a loyal son of his land." He declared that Paleckis wanted "to fly," but he "had no wings." Paleckis may have wanted to do Lithuania well, but he lacked "a clear political backbone." Vitkauskas made "a good external impression." Gedvilas was the most

important communist in the government, “loyal to Moscow.” Mickis had an old communist background; Venclova, Galvanauskas thought, took the post of Minister of Education because he considered this his best way to make a living in the new order.³¹³

According to Krèvè, the “national group” in the cabinet of ministers, probably consisting of just Krèvè and Galvanauskas, tried to slow down the campaign to disrupt the old order in Lithuania. Like many Lithuanians, these two men thought war between Germany and the Soviet Union was inevitable, and that Germany would then liberate Lithuania from the Soviet yoke. (Krèvè first recorded this thought while living in Lithuania under German occupation in 1942, but he repeated it in the postwar years when he was living in the United States.) In all, Krèvè declared, this group wanted to preserve the existing order in Lithuania, especially economic organizations, as long as possible. He claimed victories for the group in blocking an effort to introduce the ruble into the Lithuanian economy and in rejecting Gedvilas’s proposal to register the Communist Party as a legal organization. Pozdniakov complained that Krèvè seemed reluctant to act firmly and that his ideas would take years rather than months; this suggests that Krèvè was indeed attempting to slow Dekanozov’s program down.³¹⁴

In order to overcome the resistance of the “national group,” Krèvè declared, Dekanozov increased the number of ministries in the council, naming communists to the ministerial posts, and also giving ministerial status to special appointments, such as the government’s plenipotentiary for administering the Vilnius district, Karolis Didžiulis-Grosmanas, and the new state controller, Liudas Adamauskas. (In a message to Moscow on July 5, Dekanozov in fact spoke of “the party section of the Lithuanian cabinet.”) In turn, Krèvè declared, these men enjoyed the type of authority within their own ministries that Paleckis had given Gedvilas. Even as acting Prime Minister, Krèvè had no power to interfere in this purge of the old regime. Reading Krèvè’s writings, one could imagine that this happened in the first few days, but the last two of these new appointments, producing a communist majority in the council of ministers, took effect only on July 1, two weeks after the cabinet of ministers began to meet and while Krèvè was in Moscow meeting with Molotov and learning of the Soviets’ ultimate intentions.

In his first memoir of these events, written in 1942, Krèvè spoke of the general political and economic conditions in Lithuania as being chaotic and destructive, and he attributed this to the fact that there were four competing “governments” then driving Lithuanian affairs: the People’s Government of Lithuania, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Soviet mission in Kaunas, and the military command of the Red Army.³¹⁵ The People’s Government had no power, but it was the only one of these competitors responsible to the people as a whole. The military command, he declared, issued ultimatums even concerning the “permission and organization of demonstrations and parades.” The Ministry of Internal Affairs executed the

demands of the Communist Party and Dekanozov, not those of the People's Government.

In that first memoir, Krèvè went on to offer a far more graphic picture of Dekanozov's work than he subsequently offered to the Kersten committee. Dekanozov, he wrote, directed "the Communist Party, the newly created communist organizations, the press, Lithuania's radio stations, and ELTA," and he forced the dismissal of some officials and the appointment of others. He "was the master of all ministries run by communists," and "to other ministers and individual officials he sent demands in a harsh form, which G. Pozdniakov tried vainly to soften, often even coming to apologize for the rude tone of Dekanozov's statements."³¹⁶

In a memoir written after the war, he changed his definition of four governments, identifying: the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which terrorized government officials and directed demonstrations; the leadership of the occupying Bolshevik army which protected demonstrators and ordered the liquidation of the Riflemen's Union; the Soviet mission, which was "not so brutal as the Bolshevik military leadership but which directed the purge of government officials"; and "our Ministry of the Interior," an "independent government within a government," that exploited powers given it under the Smetona regime and served Paleckis rather than the council of ministers. This account did not repeat Krèvè's graphic image of Dekanozov's work offered in the memoir of 1942.³¹⁷

Galvanauskas shared Krèvè's concerns about the confusion of "governments" ruling Lithuania. In a memorandum written presumably in Berlin in the fall of 1940, he identified three competing governments in Lithuania at this time: the council of ministers, Moscow's commissar, and the Lithuanian Communist Party. He agreed that communist interests were disrupting the economy. In his view, Dekanozov had "in fact" taken over "the government's state apparatus," essentially acting as Lithuania's president. In contrast to Krèvè, he insisted that while Dekanozov had established his strongest control over the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, he had interfered less in the "economic ministries"—finance, agricultural, and communications.³¹⁸ (Galvanauskas was acting Minister of Communications until July 1.) In his memoirs, as edited by his brother, Galvanauskas offered yet another picture of the confusion, speaking of three centers of power: the Russian army, "the authority of the streets" acting under the leadership of the communist party, and "the most powerful," the Soviet mission.³¹⁹

The question arises what these two men did within the ministries that they headed. Galvanauskas's own statement about Dekanozov indicated that he, Galvanauskas, had some control over his ministry's work. Dekanozov at first gave most of his attention to the presidency and the ministries of justice and of internal affairs. State finances were in bad order, especially because of the costs of feeding and maintaining the Soviet troops

in Lithuania who seemed disinclined to pay their bills. Nevertheless, Galvanauskas was able to block the introduction of the Soviet ruble as Lithuania's currency—that monetary conversion took place only at the end of 1940, after Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union.

Over the years, Krėvė's role as Minister of Foreign Affairs has drawn considerably more attention from critics than has Galvanauskas's work. Krėvė, it has been charged, gave the People's Government a deceptive face, not just in its public image at home but also in Krėvė's instructions to Lithuania's diplomats abroad. Insisting that Lithuania still had an independent government, Krėvė formally received the foreign diplomats in Kaunas on Friday June 21. (Because some of the diplomats represented warring powers, he met them separately rather than as a group.) The next day he sent a telegram to Lithuanian missions abroad, declaring that the changes in government had proceeded in accordance with the constitution. "The basic principles of the state system remain unchanged." Private property remained inviolate; further change will be carried out by rule of law, and "life is proceeding normally." On the 26th, he wrote to the minister in Switzerland, "In truth Lithuania accepted Soviet proposals for its own protection. The former government could not loyally observe the treaty with the Soviets."³²⁰

The fact that foreign diplomats paid official visits to Krėvė and to Paleckis indicated that the foreign governments accepted the changes in the Lithuania and accordingly recognized the People's Government. Lithuanian writers later criticized foreign governments for not having taken any action, declaring that the foreign governments had tolerated the Soviet takeover, and some Lithuanians declared that western governments had a debt to pay Lithuania for this negligence. The Lithuanians, however, took care to show no resistance, no objection, to the new order. Writing from Moscow on June 15, Urbšys had urged care in notifying diplomats of the situation: "Do not talk about the demands but rather of certain needs for security." Most Lithuanian institutions, ranging from the military to the still outlawed opposition parties, however, accepted the first actions of the People's Government—the skeleton Christian Democratic and Populist party leaderships approved Galvanauskas's participation and thereby recognized the People's Government. There were no significant signs of resistance.³²¹

In fact, many foreign observers already considered that all three Baltic states were well along on the road to incorporation into the USSR. On June 22, the German minister in Kaunas reported, "Communist propaganda is developing with such speed and force that presumably already within the next few weeks elections to the Soviets will take place, which will then in all probability soon proclaim annexation by the Soviet Union." Lithuanian independence, he concluded, "will not last much longer." The First Secretary of the French embassy in Riga had already written in his journal of June 20, "Annexation to the Soviet Union is half done."³²² To the foreign diplomats,

the situation apparently looked rather hopeless, but the Lithuanians appeared to be accepting the process.

The Soviet plan of action was very different from what Moscow had tried to carry out in Finland. There the Soviets had created a communist government that they unsuccessfully tried to impose on the Finns. The new Lithuanian government, in contrast, at first had a non-communist face. The fact that the Lithuanians had offered no resistance to the influx of the Red Army and then to Dekanozov's guiding hand gave Lithuanian diplomats abroad no opportunity to object to the developments in Kaunas. The diplomats, whom the Smetona regime had appointed, could not denounce the Paleckis government without first resigning their posts. And none did. Foreign governments, of course, had reports from their own representatives in Kaunas, and therefore they were not necessarily ignorant of what was happening there. Nevertheless, seeing no clear evidence of Lithuanian resistance, they had no cause to which they could react. The German government, having given the Soviet Union *carte blanche* in the Baltic, only sat and watched.

One serious problem appeared in this drama as Dekanozov was directing it, and this was in the person of Kazys Škirpa, the Lithuanian envoy in Berlin. Škirpa had long argued that Lithuania should tie its fortunes to Berlin, and he had been the most forceful diplomatic advocate of a Lithuanian move into Vilnius in September 1939. Furthermore, Berlin, in 1940 as it had been for the previous two decades, was a key hub of communications among Lithuanian diplomats abroad. Dekanozov recognized Škirpa's potential as a problem, and therefore, on June 24, Krèvè, obviously at Dekanozov's direction, summoned Škirpa to Kaunas for consultations.

Škirpa later wrote that he debated whether to obey this summons or not. He did not believe in the independence of the government. Therefore to go would obviously put him in some danger; but to refuse to go would be to invite dismissal, thereby ending his access to the German Foreign Office and other German officials. He decided that he had to go. Armed with "two pistols" and "the determination not of a diplomat but of an officer and a warrior for the new liberation of Lithuania," he traveled to Kaunas on June 25. There he avoided any public appearances and chose to stay in the home of a friend rather than to register in a hotel. He wanted to minimize the chances of being arrested.³²³

In his three or four days in Lithuania, Škirpa was able to meet with a number of Lithuanian political leaders, including Galvanauskas as well as Krèvè and even Merkys, and he warned them all to have no illusions, urging them to consider the Soviet occupation "a temporary thing." A German-Soviet war, he insisted, was inevitable, and he advised Lithuanians to conceal weapons. When he went to Krèvè's office, he found that Krèvè had a deputy minister, Pijus Glovackas, who would participate in the meeting. Škirpa immediately distrusted Glovackas, whom he considered Krèvè's "political

commissar,” assigned by the party to control Krėvė’s actions, and he spoke carefully.

Glovackas indeed played the role that Škirpa suspected. He controlled Krėvė’s activity, and at the same time he was able to influence foreign diplomats. In a meeting with the French minister of July 2, for example, he tried to dispel his guest’s doubts about Soviet intentions: “I pointed out that the Lithuanian government, mindful of the good relations between the two countries... completely trusts the Soviet Union and does not believe that the government of the Soviet Union would exert any pressure on the Lithuanian government.”³²⁴

There were in fact several layers of advisors throughout the People’s Government. All the ministers in the government had assistants vetted by the Soviet mission and by the communist party, and a visitor to Glovackas’s office suggested that the deputy minister had his own “guardian angel.”³²⁵ Besides the reliable Lithuanian communists who took posts as deputies to non-communist ministry and department officials, individuals from the Soviet diplomatic mission took advisory roles, and new officials poured in from Moscow or elsewhere in the Soviet Union. This in fact represented the early development of the Soviet Lithuanian “nomenklatura,” a list of people eligible to take high posts in government.³²⁶ The ministry of the interior, for example, received vital guidance from Piotr Gladkov, a major in Soviet state security forces most recently employed in Belarus, who came to Lithuania to head local security arrangements. In August Gladkov became Deputy People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs, and in March 1941 he took the post of People’s Commissar of State Security. The historian Romas Šarmaitis, formerly a Comintern worker in Moscow, became Kostas Korsakas’s deputy in directing ELTA, the Lithuanian telegraph agency. Juozas Žiugžda, a local whose historical writing this study cites frequently, became Antanas Venclova’s deputy minister of education.

Žiugžda’s appointment to some degree exemplified the problems that the new regime had in finding and choosing Lithuanian candidates for governmental posts. The party’s organizational section, headed by Meskupas, had conflicting reports concerning Žiugžda’s reliability. To his credit, his dossier noted that he was competent in several languages, he was a teacher, and he had had some contact with the North Caucasus region. On the other hand, the dossier also contained negative comments, even suggesting that he feared that “Lithuanian independence would be lost.” In all, although perhaps not entirely reliable, he was adjudged to be ready to take orders. In post-war Soviet Lithuania, Šarmaitis and Žiugžda, working as historians, became the dominant figures in Soviet Lithuanian historiography, molding the official national memory in the forms proposed by Moscow.³²⁷

Glovackas, whom Anna Louise Strong called “a gentle human being,” also had a complicated background. In 1928, at that point a party member for some nine years, he had been excluded from the communist

party. (In 1940 he was 38 years old.) He claimed that the reason for that was that he had then opposed the party line that considered all socialists enemies; he had favored the formation of a united front of leftists against the fascist threat, and this had now been the party line at least since the Comintern congress of 1935. Now he had the best possible credentials: He had had bad relations with the veteran communist Angarietis, he had collected money for MOPR, and he had good character references from Sniečkus and Meskupas.³²⁸

With Glovackas present in Krèvé's office on June 28th, Škirpa told the foreign minister that he wanted to return to Berlin. Krèvé asked him to remain in Kaunas, and, after Glovackas had left the room, Krèvé revealed that Pozdniakov did not want Škirpa to return to Berlin. Škirpa took this as an "alarm signal." According to Škirpa's account, Krèvé insisted that the situation in Kaunas was not as bad as Škirpa thought and that there was no order for Škirpa's arrest. Nevertheless Škirpa decided that he had to leave immediately. He told Krèvé he would expose the new situation to other Lithuanian diplomats abroad, and he advised Krèvé to tell Pozdniakov nothing of this conversation and to act surprised when it became clear that he, Škirpa, had departed. Taking a roundabout route to travel to Klaipėda, he was back in Berlin on the 29th, and he immediately composed a description of the situation in Lithuania and, under the date July 1, sent it to his diplomatic colleagues in other European capitals.

The Lithuanian government, Škirpa declared in his memorandum, was the tool of the Soviet occupation authorities, but he identified Pozdniakov, not Dekanozov, as Moscow's "governor or protector of Lithuania." The Lithuanian government, he wrote, "can practically do only what the Soviet *polpred* Pozdniakov approves." Pozdniakov was allegedly interfering in all aspects of government, firing and hiring officials, preparing directions and edicts on which organizations to liquidate. Pozdniakov, he declared, had just ordered Vitkauskas to discharge a number of high military officers. Krèvé, as foreign minister, could do nothing without Glovackas's approval. "In a word," he declared, "they are quickly taking over all positions from which derives not just formal but the real administration of the country." Regretfully, he added, there are Lithuanians who are willingly participating in the process. The coming elections, as yet unannounced, will probably result in Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union. The people are passively accepting this: "It would really be suicide to express any type of opposition." Patriotic Lithuanians are naturally angry, he wrote, and anti-Semitism is growing by the day—all the more because the Jews "were turning against" Lithuanians, "especially former officials of the government."³²⁹

Even before Škirpa's departure, Krèvé, unhappy with Lithuania's decline into the "pit of anarchy" (*anarchijos bedugnė*), had decided that he wanted to make a direct appeal to Soviet Prime Minister Viacheslav Molotov,

or if possible to Stalin. His purpose, as he described it in 1942, was to demand an end to the interference of “the USSR mission in Kaunas and of the Red Army command” in Lithuania’s internal affairs. He asked Natkevičius, the Lithuanian minister in Moscow, to arrange an invitation for him to come to the Soviet capital. Molotov responded that he should deal with Dekanozov, and Dekanozov himself came to Krèvé to complain that Krèvé should not have tried to communicate directly with Moscow. Krèvé claimed to have responded that if he could not go to Moscow, he might resign. Upon repeating his request of Natkevičius, he now, on June 28, the day of his last meeting with Škirpa, received the answer that Molotov would meet with him on June 30 at 4 p.m.

Krèvé’s departure for Moscow at just this time had significant repercussions in the Lithuanian government, and although Dekanozov also traveled to Moscow, Krèvé’s absence from Kaunas may have actually facilitated Dekanozov’s program. Paleckis, whom many writers dismiss as a major figure in this drama, had been taken ill and now spent several days at the monastery in Pažaislis, outside of Kaunas, recuperating. The cause of his illness is not clear: Rumors spoke of overwork, a “persecution mania,” or nervous shock at learning of the Soviet Union’s true intentions in Lithuania.³³⁰ In Krèvé’s absence, Gedvilas chaired the meetings of the council of ministers.

Krèvé’s accounts of his meeting with Molotov in Moscow have drawn endless attention and comment; his major account, replete with extended “verbatim” quotation, covers some nine printed pages. Commentators have challenged its belletristic qualities—Krèvé was, after all, a novelist—but the lasting significance of the meeting lies in Molotov’s statement that there was no place in the New Europe for small states and that Lithuania would soon become a part of the Soviet Union.

Krèvé may actually have argued in favor of Lithuania’s being allowed the status of Mongolia, a “people’s democracy.” The Mongolian model was widely discussed in the Baltic at this time, and, according to one account, Krèvé proposed that the Lithuanian People’s Republic would maintain “close economic and cultural ties” with the Soviet Union but have its own currency, financial system, army and administration. Molotov reportedly rejected Krèvé’s argument, declaring that if Lithuania remained independent, Germany would surely take part of it and that the Lithuanians should have no fear of “russification” in the Soviet state. However anyone might want to argue the details of Krèvé’s experiences in Moscow, when Krèvé returned to Kaunas, he reported to others Molotov’s assertion that the Soviet Union would incorporate Lithuania, and there is ample contemporary commentary that Krèvé’s statement became common knowledge, at least among Kaunas’s intellectuals and among foreign agents.³³¹

Apparently shaken by his experience in Moscow, Krèvé faced new shocks when he arrived home on July 3. His account of the events of early

July in Kaunas, however, clashes with the available documentation. He claimed to have only now learned of the cancellation of the Concordat, but according to the council of ministers' protocols, he had chaired the council session that had made this decision. The decision was announced in his absence. He suggested that he now heard for the first time that the Smetona parliament had been dissolved, but that was also done at a cabinet meeting that he chaired. He claimed that Gedvilas was shocked when he learned that the Soviet Union intended to incorporate Lithuania; that seems unlikely. He asserted that Paleckis spoke of having been deceived, that he had learned earlier of the Soviet intentions and had "gone out of his mind" (*išėjo iš proto*). In Krėvė's absence, the council of ministers had also renamed the army the "People's Army of Lithuania," and it had introduced the Soviet institution of "political leaders" (*politruks*) to strengthen the political reliability of the army.

Krėvė now faced the last two crises of his term as Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the People's Government. One issue concerned the state's gold reserve and the other the order from above to hold elections to a People's Seimas. Both issues obviously would help pave the way for Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union. The question of the gold reserve was the less publicized of the two; it was a matter for bankers. The Soviet state bank, Gosbank, claimed Lithuania's assets abroad and demanded that Great Britain and the United States give it the gold that the Lithuanian state had deposited in those countries. As Owen Norem, the American minister in Kaunas, reported home, "A member of my staff has been confidentially informed by a director of the Lietuvos Bankas [*Bank of Lithuania—aes*] that the Soviet have forced the Lietuvos Bankas secretly to turn over all available gold reserves" to Gosbank. "For exchange they are giving American dollars at 35 per fine ounce for actual transfers. Total involved approximately \$10,000,000 of which 350,000 in Kaunas and from 2 to 3 million on deposit with the Federal Reserve Bank in the United States." Krėvė opposed this action, and on July 17, the chief of the British mission in Kaunas told Norem that Krėvė had urged the British "to disregard" Soviet demands for gold on deposit in Great Britain.³³² The United States, which refused to recognize the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania, froze Lithuanian assets, and subsequently allowed the Lithuanian minister in Washington, Povilas Žadeikis, to draw on this money to support various Lithuanian causes in the United States, including paying a monthly stipend to Smetona.

The issue that most frustrated Krėvė upon his return from Moscow would seem to have been the Communist plans to hold elections for a People's Seimas. The Seimas was to be the Soviet vehicle for incorporating Lithuania. Krėvė told Galvanauskas that he and Molotov had verbally battled over the question of whether the relationship between Lithuania and the Soviet Union should be determined by the People's Government or the

People's Seimas. Krėvė did not mention this specifically in his writing, although in his first memoir, written in 1942, he declared, "In view of all that, V. M. Molotov thought that Lithuania's people will greet the news of annexation with less discontent than I imagined. Anyway, the people will be consulted on this matter in the form which is established in the Soviet republics." This could have been a reference to the assemblies in Belarus and Ukraine in 1939. Galvanauskas in turn argued that he and Krėvė should try to put off the elections to the People's Seimas as long as possible, because Moscow will try to stage a "comedy such as it did in the fall of 1939" or "even earlier" in "annexing Georgia."³³³

Krėvė, however, could do nothing to stop the plans of the Soviet juggernaut to hold elections. Non-Communist political leaders had favored the dissolution of the Smetonist Seimas in the hope that the government would revive the electoral laws of the 1922 constitution, before the military coup of 1926, but now, upon Krėvė's return to Kaunas, Justice Minister Pakarklis presented him with the text of the rules for the election for the People's Seimas that anticipated offering only one candidate for each deputy's seat. Krėvė refused to bring the proposal to the council of ministers. Thereupon Dekanozov came to visit him, and a stormy meeting ensued. Krėvė stood firm on this issue, and as a result Paleckis, using the powers that the Smetona constitution gave the president, himself called the cabinet of ministers into session. The cabinet dutifully accepted the plans for electing a People's Seimas.

Krėvė ended his account of his efforts to block the election law with a dramatic image. Left alone with Paleckis after the meeting, he handed in two documents, his and Galvanauskas's letters of resignation from the cabinet. As he described the scene, he reproved the president: "'It is strange to hear from your lips talk about responsibility to the land and people,' I snapped, agitated and irritated. 'As I see, you fear responsibility only to Moscow. You showed that best today.' Having said that, I turned away and left the room without saying good by."³³⁴ Although Galvanauskas agreed that Krėvė handed in the two resignations, Krėvė's account was at best misleading. Paleckis accepted Galvanauskas's resignation, but he refused to accept Krėvė's. Galvanauskas retreated to an administrative post in Šiauliai and fled the country a month later. Soviet writers subsequently spoke of his having been a bad influence on Krėvė. In his memoirs, Krėvė claimed to have told Dekanozov that he did not need Galvanauskas's help: "I myself have enough sense and I do not have to borrow from Mr. Galvanauskas." But with Galvanauskas gone, Krėvė recorded no more struggles with Dekanozov or the Soviet government.³³⁵

In another account, Krėvė wrote that after several days Paleckis agreed to let him take a vacation. He then said he returned only to liquidate the work of the foreign ministry and to help his former associates find work elsewhere. Even that account, however, was misleading, because government

protocols show that he chaired cabinet meetings on July 9 and July 12. Then at the first session of the People's Seimas, on July 21, he delivered the government's resignation. The Seimas asked the government to remain in office for the time being, and the council of ministers agreed to do so. Krėvė at this point took his vacation, but in the month of August he still participated in meetings of the cabinet of ministers, even chairing meetings on August 13 and 21. Once the People's Government surrendered to the Soviet constitution at the end of August, Krėvė finally retired from politics. To be sure, his name surfaced as a candidate when it came time for the Lithuanian SSR to choose deputies for the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Soviet legislature, but that was not a leadership post. As *Tiesa* of January 10, 1941, put it, "When the opportunity just arose to withdraw from the steering wheel of government, Vincas Krėvė again returned to his beloved scholarly and literary work." In the first months of 1941, he played a major role in the founding of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, and he became its first president.

In reference to Krėvė's conflicting stories of his attempt to resign, Dekanozov's account of the problem tells the story in another way. The proconsul watched Krėvė carefully after their return from Moscow, and he swept away Krėvė's efforts to postpone the elections. Krėvė gave the cabinet of ministers no report on his talk with Molotov. He sat silently as the cabinet discussed the election law, but he voted in favor of it. After the meeting he handed in his resignation, pleading problems of health. Dekanozov did not want to accept Krėvė's resignation, but he declared that if Krėvė refused to withdraw it, Gedvilas would move into the post of Prime Minister and Glovackas would become Foreign Minister.³³⁶ As it was, Krėvė remained on.

Krėvė's participation in the government had undoubtedly helped Dekanozov to avoid the development of any open opposition, both at home and abroad, before the Soviets had created an adequate apparatus for controlling and, where considered necessary, intimidating the population. Judging Krėvė's motivation and his actions remains an open question. In evaluating the work of Paleckis and Krėvė, Mykolas Rėmeris pointed out that both were not "experienced statesmen and politicians," and he believed that they did not at first understand their function as "marionettes in Soviet hands." Eventually, he declared, persons like Paleckis "gave in to the communist current and became gramophones of the requirements and slogans of this current." In contrast, Krėvė chose to "resign and withdraw from active politics, settling for honored titles and passing on to purely cultural work."³³⁷ It remains yet for Lithuanian historians to establish a comprehensive picture of Krėvė's activities, failures, and accomplishments in the brief existence of the People's Government.

The People's Government itself was now doomed to pass from the scene. According to Ernest Satow's *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 4th ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 18, "The minister for foreign affairs is the regular intermediary between the state and foreign countries...

Under his orders are drawn up documents connected with foreign relations, drafts of treaties and conventions, statements of fact and law, manifestos and declarations.” Krèvé probably had not read Satow, but he had argued that the People’s Government should be the Lithuanian agent to negotiate with the Soviet government. Molotov and Dekanozov overruled him. Like Schiller’s Othello—“The Moor has done his work, the Moor can go”—the People’s Government had done its work, it could now go.

German intelligence observers declared that the People’s Government had no more political significance. Dekanozov had already brought Lithuania under Moscow’s rule, and it would be the job of the People’s Seimas, not the People’s Government, to arrange the Lithuania’s formal incorporation into the Soviet Union. A Soviet historian depicted the abdication of the People’s Government as an altruistic, noble act: “The People’s Government did not take itself the final decision on Lithuanian entry into the USSR. The Lithuanian nation, the working people of the country, had to decide through their democratically elected representatives.”³³⁸

XI

The Class Struggle

“When the Bolsheviks come, let none of my students be among those who come to arrest me.”

—Stasys Čiurlionis, as quoted by Solomonas Vaintraubas

“Anti-Semitism is growing extraordinarily. This is happening not just among the peasants, but also among the workers.”

—Saugumas report, July 21, 1940

“And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.”

—Matthew, 10.21 (King James)

The People’s Government in Lithuania spoke of “reform,” of eradicating the injustices of the “plutocratic,” “bourgeois” Smetona regime. In the sense of Stalin’s dictum that “in revolutionary tactics under a bourgeois regime, reform becomes a weapon to break down this regime,” this meant preparing Lithuanian society for the introduction of the Soviet social system. The People’s Government had to “break down” the old regime, that is, first to neutralize and then to destroy the “bourgeois” instruments of social control—such as the police and religious organizations—while at the same time it had to promote a new consciousness of Soviet style “internationalism.”

The government proclaimed unity and at the same time urged conflict. It professed the equality of nationalities and the monolithic brotherhood of the working class; it claimed to represent unprecedented harmony among the country’s inhabitants. It claimed to be able to structure the economy to avoid unemployment and exploitation. On the other hand, it called for vigorous action against institutions, traditions, practices, and individuals, “enemies of the people,” who represented any deviation from its ideals or, more importantly, its authority. (While shouting praises of the Soviet system, it denounced as “enemies of the people” those persons who predicted Soviet-style collectivization of agriculture.) It also imposed the Russian language as the lingua franca of the future. To the outsider, this process appears full of contradictions, but in Stalinist terms, out of this conflict would come a new synthesis, a Soviet society.

All of this quickly gave rise to a new culture of state enforced violence. The new regime’s social program exacerbated old tensions and introduced new tensions in the society. It contributed significantly to the escalation of national tensions in the society as it affected the relations not only between the nationalities of Lithuania and also within each national

group. On July 1 a writer in the party newspaper *Tiesa* piously declared “We are far from any desire to take revenge,” but the demands for exposing “enemies of the people” carried a very different message. As Saugumas reports repeatedly showed, the regime delighted in the thought that the “enemies of the people,” whoever they might be, feared “the people’s vengeance.” People, perhaps even more, feared being identified as “enemies of the people.”

Soviet historians insisted that the takeover in the Baltic states was peaceful. V. I. Lenin had once written that under certain circumstances the workers’ revolution could proceed without violence, but in practice such definitions depend heavily on the way in which the commentator chooses to define “violence.” In another place Lenin declared that for “the liberation of the oppressed class,” it was necessary to destroy “the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class.” Then the new state had to use force to keep “the strictest order” and to crush all attempts at “counterrevolution.” Stalin, moreover, later added his own fundamental thesis: “The abolition of classes is not achieved by the subsiding of the class struggle, but by its intensification.”³³⁹ Stalin did not believe in a revolution without violence; it remained for Soviet historians to romanticize the events of 1940.

In June and July 1940, at least before the elections of July 14 and 15, there were arrests but as yet no executions or deportations. But the new regime was preparing to wage the “class struggle” more vigorously. Along with thanks and praise to “the genius leader of all mankind” and “teacher of nations,” comrade Stalin, and replete with denunciations of “enemies of the people,” the so-called “class struggle” supplemented Moscow’s seizure of political power and aimed at destroying old institutions and terrorizing potential opponents. This involved psychological violence, if not immediate physical violence. The purpose was to create a social anomie that would allow Soviet leaders to create a new economic substructure to support a new political and social superstructure.

The purge of the old order concentrated first of all on undermining the old regime’s institutions of social control, immediately changing command personnel and then developing new repressive institutions. Gedvilas’s Ministry of Internal Affairs, with Dekanozov’s guidance, immediately received authority exceeding Paleckis’s. Under the terms of “heightened state security” proclaimed on June 22, Gedvilas, with the advice and guidance of a Soviet intelligence agent in the diplomatic mission, essentially became Lithuania’s unofficial dictator. When Sniečkus first met with what was left of the old regime’s Saugumas staff, he told them that they had to create a new institution analogous to “the Cheka or GPU,” the Soviet regime’s political police. For the moment, the regime still needed the criminal police, but it quickly changed all local police chiefs. By the end of June, it had established a “workers’ militia” that within a few weeks replaced

the criminal police. The new government also transformed the judicial system, removing “unreliable” judges, whom it denounced as the lackeys of the Smetona regime; to be sure, the regime had some trouble finding what it would consider competent judges who could use the Lithuanian language properly. By the count of Nijolė Maslauskienė, a specialist in studying party and government documents, by July, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had 380 new employees.³⁴⁰

With the cooperation of General Vitkauskas, the government neutralized the army. On June 15, at least one infantry regiment had been ready to cross into Germany. The government did not want to demobilize the troops because that might lead to the development of an armed opposition; instead it restricted them to their bases. In his order of the day on June 28, Vitkauskas noted that soldiers might be upset by the new government, and he assured the troops “that our army will remain as it was.” At the same time, Vitkauskas was removing a number of old line officers. On July 3, Paleckis and Gedvilas announced the reorganization of the army, renaming it “The People’s Army of Lithuania,” instituting the Soviet institution of political commissars, *politruki*. It also a new commander-in-chief sent in from Moscow, Feliksas Baltušis-Žemaitis, who had up to that point been a Red Army officer. (Vitkauskas gave up the post of commander-in-chief but remained Minister of Defense until the dissolution of the army at the end of August.) Within a few days, another transfer from the Red Army, Jonas Macijauskas, took over the job of directing the army’s political education. The regime proclaimed that the old order had prohibited soldiers from taking part in elections, but the Soviet regime gave them the right, indeed—given the functioning of the Soviet regime—the obligation to participate in the electoral campaign of July. By the time of the elections on July 14–15, the People’s Government completely controlled the forces of law and order.³⁴¹

Another institution commanding the immediate attention of the new government was the Catholic Church; the church could be a formidable opponent to the communists’ “militant atheism.” In the period before the elections of July 14–15, the authorities, to be sure, chose to move cautiously. Their first action, on June 25, was to call for the separation of church and state, an issue that had in fact been a subject of conflict between the Smetona regime and the Church. In January Cesevičius, the new leader of the *tautininkai*, had insisted that the Church must not challenge the authority of the state in secular matters; the People’s Government used much the same argumentation. More controversial was the unilateral abrogation of the Concordat with the Vatican and the demand that the papal nuncio leave Lithuania. On June 27, the government announced the expulsion of chaplains from the schools and a ban on prayers in the schools. On June 28, it curtailed the powers of military chaplains, and on July 2 dismissed them from the “People’s Army.”

During the first phase of the new order, that is until the elections, the regime refrained from attacking the church directly. The church hierarchy of course feared the Soviet regime's official atheism, but it found itself deserted by lay Catholic political leaders who shied away from opposing the government in religious matters. The major Catholic newspaper, *XX Amžius* (Twentieth Century), managed to continue publishing until the elections. The churches remained open, but of course Sniečkus's Saugumas agents listened to their sermons. The authorities seemed particularly displeased by the sermons of Pastor Vladas Didžiokas in Panevėžys who told parishioners that the Jews had tortured Christ and therefore God had punished them, that Lithuania was now like Sodom and Gomorrah, and that parishioners should not believe anti-church "slander" and should not participate in meetings denouncing the church. He also gave instructions on maintaining religious life without the participation of priests, including self-confession and individual baptism. After the elections, the government struck more directly at the church, breaking up its educational system and seizing its land holdings.³⁴²

The authorities considered establishing a sympathetic church structure, perhaps in the style of the Russian Orthodox "Living Church" of 1922–1923. They noted approvingly that Mykolas Krupavičius, a Catholic priest who had been a leader of the Christian Democratic Party, had called resistance to the Soviet rule something akin to "suicide," and when Krupavičius wrote to Gedvilas, Paleckis and Sniečkus, suggesting that the church could form a common front with the new regime against the evils of capitalism, the authorities sent agents to sound him out directly. Krupavičius told them that he viewed Stalin's writing "as the newest gospel" and that he considered it necessary to cooperate with the Soviets in order to serve faithful Catholics. Since Krupavičius demanded autonomy for the Catholic Church, however, there was no real possibility of cooperation. In any case, the regime held back on actions against the church until after the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union.³⁴³

Although contemporary Soviet propaganda insisted that public affairs were proceeding smoothly and that worker efficiency was improving, considerable disorder raged in the society and the economy. The government raised workers' wages, but prices soared more quickly. Privately government officials recognized problems of rising unemployment and decreasing productivity. Currency speculation was rampant; the Lithuanian currency, the lit, dropped quickly both in buying power and in its exchange value. Speculators insisted that the silver 10 lit piece with Smetona's portrait on it would soon be worthless and bought it for just 5 lits from worried citizens. Jewelry stores did a good business as people wanted to convert their money into small, stable, and valuable assets. Workers who obeyed commands to demonstrate their happiness discovered that they had to make up time lost on the job; they began to complain of fatigue. Persons paying mortgages on

property discovered that not only did they face the loss of their property, they still had to continue paying off the mortgages.

Even before the invasion of the Red Army, farmers had been complaining about the problems of keeping hired labor; after June 15 problems only increased. With the lit's drop in buying power, working in the fields seemed even more unattractive than it had been in the spring. In the midst of a drought that damaged crops, people flocked from the countryside to the city, where they hoped to receive benefits from the new regime. Better-off farmers, fearing the seizure of their assets, tried to sell off their production, inventory, and livestock, even their farms, perhaps breaking up their landholdings among relatives and friends. At the beginning of July the Saugumas first suspected sabotage as reports of fires poured in, but then it decided that the drought must be at fault. Local governments saw their revenues drop as many people stopped paying taxes while the influx of refugees from the countryside imposed growing costs. The Saugumas reported that there was no organized campaign not to pay taxes—amid rumors that taxes would be reduced, many people simply stopped paying them. Eventually, cities began to order people to return to the countryside.

On July 17, Owen Norem, the American minister in Kaunas, reported home on the problems that he saw in the Lithuanian economy. Worker efficiency was down as much as 70 percent: "Workmen were too tired to apply themselves since now they felt it necessary to engage in frequent demonstrations lasting late into the evening." Farm labor "is gradually becoming less efficient." Russian demands for housing were driving Lithuanians out of their residences. "Russian interference is slowly but surely progressing."³⁴⁴

The authorities even found problems within their own ranks. Party members clamored for good jobs in government, but party leaders had the obligation first of all to build party cadres. Applications for membership in the party grew rapidly, but party leaders had to be careful. The Ministry of Internal Affairs had to screen candidates to join the new workers' militia especially carefully—applicants included criminals claiming to have been political prisoners. Party practices and discipline were at times lax. In August, the Ministry of Internal Affairs called local party institutions to order for not following directives for keeping records and registering publications.³⁴⁵ Until Lithuania and its communist party were fully integrated into the Soviet party system, the line of authority ran from Dekanozov directly to Gedvilas and Sniečkus in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In June and July the government responded to the social disorder by calling for controls on speculation, supervision of farming assets, and at the same time, more enthusiastic signs of happiness. It launched a campaign to close taverns and bars, declaring that these "monuments of Smetona" wasted money, contributed to public disorder, and hampered worker productivity. As *Darbo Lietuva* wrote on July 16, "Everything that bears the mark of

Smetonism will vanish.” “We will storm the Lithuania of the old regime!” proclaimed *Lietuvos aidas* of July 7. (This was, of course, quite in contrast to Gedvilas’s assertion of June 21 that the Red Army had not come “to change the order of our life,” but only an “enemy of the people” might dare to point that out.) Authorities urged the people to expose the “Smetonists and their friends, the enemies of the people.”³⁴⁶

In place of the former adulation of Smetona came much more gushing adulation of Stalin. “Stalin has liberated us!” proclaimed *Lietuvos aidas* of July 8, and on July 12 it declared that the Lithuanian people “forcefully manifest their love and trust in the land of socialism and in Stalin, the father of the world’s working people.” *Darbo Lietuva* of July 25 quoted the Minister of Culture, Antanas Venclova, as exclaiming, “Our greatest and most sincere thanks belong to the leader and father of all working people, the genius architect of a new life, beloved comrade Stalin.”

The greatest controversy in the new regime’s social program came in its call for equality between the nationalities of Lithuania. In his time, V. I. Lenin had plotted revolution by adopting both causes: class struggle and national liberation. Other Marxists had protested that nationalism was a false doctrine, but Lenin had responded that while it was indeed a false doctrine, it was nevertheless a real force, and that therefore one had to calculate how to take advantage of it. He identified exploiting nations as well as exploiting classes, and at the same time he insisted on the party’s right to judge what was “progressive” national feeling and what was reactionary national chauvinism.³⁴⁷ This mixture of class struggle both within and between nationalities confused many, but this line of thought underlay the formation of the Soviet Union as a “federation” of national republics. In Lithuania, this process meant restrictions on the traditional rights and practices of Lithuanians and at the same time the social empowerment of the other nationalities.

The national makeup of the population of Lithuania in 1940 is rather uncertain. According to the 1923 census, Lithuanians made up about 84 percent of the population (1.7 million people), Jews 7.5 percent (154,000), Russians 2.7 percent, and Poles 3.2 percent (65,600). The events of 1939 had brought significant changes to these proportions. When Germany took Klaipėda, Jewish refugees came to Lithuania along with Lithuanians. When the Lithuanians took over Vilnius in 1939, the Jewish population of the city, augmented by refugees from Poland, raised the number of Jews in the country to perhaps as much as 250,000. In the fall of 1939, some 14,000 Polish troops also sought refuge in Vilnius, adding significantly to the number of Poles already living in the Vilnius region. (After the Red Army occupied Lithuania in 1940, Soviet authorities sent interned Polish soldiers on into the interior of the Soviet Union.) In view of the fact that the minority deputies in the Lithuanian parliament in 1926 had held the balance of power between the two major political groupings in the country and that this

situation had contributed to the coup of December 1926, this growth of the minority population in 1939 had posed new threats both to the nature of the Lithuanian state and to the Smetona regime even without the intervention of the Soviets.³⁴⁸

In the period of independence, 1920–1939, the Polish minority in Lithuania had shown considerable opposition to the existence of a Lithuanian national state. Polish nationalists, such as the National Democrats, considered Vilnius clearly Polish, and they spoke of Lithuania as only “Kaunas Lithuania” (*Litwa kowienska*). As such, Lithuania was allegedly too small to be independent because it would naturally be a tool of Germany or the Soviet Union; therefore it should be an autonomous unit in a great Polish national state.³⁴⁹ After the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1938, the situation changed a bit, but in 1939–1940, tension between Poles and Lithuanians intensified, as the Polish population of Vilnius, supplemented by the Polish refugees, displayed little sympathy for the new rulers in Kaunas. Many of them lived with the hope that an Allied victory in the war would restore the Polish state to its 1938 boundaries. Soviet and German observers alike had concerns that French intelligence in Lithuania was making great use of the Poles in its work. (Pozdniakov told the Lithuanians that they were being too easy on the Poles in Vilnius; the Lithuanian military intelligence chief later told Soviet interrogators that the French had forced him to deal gently with the Poles.³⁵⁰) Smetona’s security service in turn felt great concern about its Polish minority; it tended to regard Polish statements of loyalty as “artificial.” Sniečkus’s service, which feared that Polish militants had stockpiled guns, showed little more trust for them as a national community.³⁵¹

The situation of the Jewish minority in June and July of 1940 was quite different from that of the Poles; in the interwar period, the Jewish community as a whole had accepted Lithuanian statehood. Solomonas Atamukas and Liudas Truska have called them Lithuania’s most loyal minority. Atamukas has argued that in the last years of the Smetona regime, there were greater tensions between Lithuanians themselves than between Lithuanians and Jews. Ezra Mendelsohn has described Lithuania of the early 1920s as having the makings of a “nationalities state,” and he called Lithuania “a kind of paradise” for Jewish nationalism and Zionism. He pictured the Jews of this region, the “Litvaks,” as the core of the development of a Jewish “nationalism.” But much of the Jews’ favorable position in Lithuania immediately after the First World War was based, again to quote Mendelsohn, on the fact that they lived “in a classic multinational region dominated by ‘weak’ nationalities and far from the Polish and Russian capitals.” For most Jews who thought of a national state, the alternative was Zionism, the movement to establish a Jewish state in the Middle East.³⁵²

As Lithuanian society developed in the decades between the World Wars and Lithuanian national consciousness grew, the situation of the Jews in Lithuania changed. Their privileged position at the time of the creation of

the Lithuanian state was based heavily on the Lithuanians' hope that the Jews would support Lithuania's claim to Vilnius. When the hope of gaining Vilnius faded in the mid-1920s, the Lithuanian government revoked many of its concessions. As Lithuanians then matured into a modern nationality with an urban dimension, Jews complained of the new economic competition and of problems of national discrimination.

There was indeed a significant current of anti-Jewish feelings in independent Lithuania, and Jewish authors have at times seemed almost mystified as to why the Jews were not more hostile to the Lithuanian government. Zvi Gitelman declared "Jews in Lithuania had little hope of improving their lot," but Azreal Schochat spoke of the Jews as having "an interest in the independence of Lithuania," and Dov Levin wrote of the "patriotism and loyalty displayed by most Lithuanian Jews." Jewish commentators frequently characterized Lithuania as better than most other Eastern European states. Most authors focusing on the position of the Jews between the wars generally agreed that under Smetona there was no open persecution of the Jews, although in the late 1930s there were local anti-Jewish actions, such as breaking windows. As Atamukas saw it, "the majority of the Lithuanian people did not give in to the selfish, chauvinistic urging of the merchants."³⁵³

Lithuanian Jewish communists living under the Smetona regime had of course very different views on the Smetona regime and the capitalist order in general; ideology dictated scorn and denunciation. Smetona's Saugumas, as well as the general Lithuanian public, had long identified the Jews with the communist party. Jewish participation in public anti-government demonstrations drew the Saugumas's special attention. In the demonstrations of October 1939 following the signing of the mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian government, by the count of Soviet historians, arrested 67 persons, of whom 46 were listed as Jewish. Commentators might insist that the government made special efforts to identify the Jews as an anti-governmental group so as to heighten the "patriotism" of ethnic Lithuanians. And indeed police might have singled out Jews in any group of demonstrators. Nevertheless Jews made up a prominent part of the Lithuanian Communist Party in general and its central command in Kaunas in particular.³⁵⁴

Anti-Jewish propaganda characterized the Jews as everything from heartless capitalists to godless communists; without considering any contradictions in the images. While Jews made up a significant element in the minuscule communist party, at the same time, Jews were also prominent in Lithuania's developing capitalist structure. (According to Dov Levin, Jews owned 57 percent of the industrial plants nationalized by the new Soviet order in 1940 and 83 percent of the businesses.) In Smetona's time, Jewish businessmen resented the government's encouragement of Lithuanian business, but many also gratefully recognized Smetona's own efforts to

protect them. Some Jewish leaders considered the Smetona regime more benevolent toward them than the democratic governments of the 1920s, led by Christian Democrats, had been. On the other hand, there were Lithuanians who criticized Smetona for protecting Jews, and they saw Jewish businessmen as profiting through Smetona's protection.

In 1942 Smetona explained his own views on the position of the Jews in Lithuania in his commentary on Owen Norem's manuscript *Timeless Lithuania*. He wrote,

Chauvinism was more apparent from the Jewish side than from the Lithuanian. During several years Jews refused to acknowledge the Lithuanian language as the official language; their stores were advertised by Jewish and German signs, although their clientele consisted of Lithuanians; their schools did not teach Lithuanian; they used the Russian language among themselves and addressed Lithuanians in the same tongue. Such behavior very naturally angered the Lithuanians. Lithuanian volunteers fought against the Bolsheviks to whom the Jews showed sympathy. Economically the Jews did not suffer. After losing their property at the hands of the Bolsheviks, the Jews came to Lithuania and speedily regained their former riches. It is true that as regards trade and commerce, the Jews contributed much to the reconstruction of Lithuania. Since they had the opportunity thus to contribute to reconstruction, it is a proof that the laws of the land did not prevent them from having equal rights. This is proved also by the great number of Jewish organizations both economic and financial. Jews could and did institute schools wherever they found it necessary where lessons were conducted in their own German jargon.³⁵⁵

These comments of course reflect the general image that Lithuanians held: that the Jews had shown sympathy for the Bolsheviks, that the Jews had prospered in independent Lithuania, that they had enjoyed a free cultural life, but that they had resisted Lithuanian language and culture.

Much further on in his text, Smetona spoke to the question of Jewish-Lithuanian economic competition, noting that as Lithuanians pooled capital in collectives, "this could have affected the Jewish minority. They had previously had in their hands the initiative in trade and industry as well as other activities. Private initiative was forced to make room for collectivism. In the space of several years much of Lithuania's export and import was removed from Jewish hands. They had to cope now with Lithuanian competitors who had acquired experience in various branches of trade and industry." Significantly, he spoke mainly of Jews with businesses and property, the ones he presumably dealt with, and not to the image of the Jews as the *spiritus movens* of communism in Lithuania.

In comments written for Soviet interrogators, Augustinas Voldemaras described Smetona as pro-Jewish and especially pro-Zionist: “The Jews, without a doubt, like Smetona. They called him ‘our president,’ at celebrations the Jews almost alone would display his portrait; rabbis gathered and prayed that Smetona’s wife would get well.” Then he added, “not all Jews, just those who sympathized with Zionism.”³⁵⁶ In his exposition for Norem, Smetona declared that as Lithuanians moved into the cities, “the country seemed to have too little living-space” for the Jews. Therefore, he declared, “In some respects emigration is inevitable to them.” While Jews might not find Smetona’s words sympathetic, when put together with Voldemaras’s commentary, they indicate that Smetona, thinking in terms of national states, supported Zionism as a means of relieving Lithuania of its Jewish minority.

As a unique combination of national and religious identities, the Jews of Lithuania had deep internal divisions of their own: communists and capitalists, religious and secular, Zionists and assimilators, with these currents variously expressing themselves in the problem of language—Hebrew or Yiddish, not to mention Polish or Russian—and all this in addition to the common divisions of “left and right” in the politics and economics of any society. The divisions also crossed generational lines: Older, propertied Jews might be more conservative and orthodox; younger, increasingly frustrated Jews might be more radical and secular, even rebelling against their elders.

The major change that Soviet nationalities policy brought to Lithuania was to transform the Lithuanians, a clear majority of the population of independent Lithuania into a minority within the Soviet empire.³⁵⁷ The new regime aimed at undermining and liquidating the Lithuanians’ understanding of their state as a “national state,” a product of the doctrine of national self-determination. The new system demanded that Lithuanians redefine value words such as “independence” and “nationality” and accept new symbols and traditions. Starting by savaging Smetona’s image, a relatively easy task given the popular antipathy for the former ruler, pro-Soviet propagandists went on to dismiss the very existence of the independent Lithuanian national state as a falsehood, a lie, a chimera fabricated by the “bourgeoisie” and “plutocrats” to deceive and exploit the working people of all nationalities, Lithuanian or other. Eventually they called the new regime of 1940 the continuation of the work of Lithuanian communists in 1918–1919, ignoring the fact that the Lithuanians themselves had rejected that regime. Lithuanians, who had felt oppressed under the Smetona regime or who had been intrigued by the image of the Soviet workers’ state, may have welcomed Smetona’s flight, but as the new order developed, many, if not most, Lithuanians soon felt that in the new social order they had become the targets of discrimination.

In the name of the class struggle, Soviet nationalities policy stimulated and intensified generational conflict within each national group. Insofar as rebellious feelings of Lithuanian and Jewish youth corresponded to the standards that the new regime was imposing on the society, the regime encouraged generational conflict. This, however, could also involve physical conflict as the youth of different nationalities clashed for control of public areas, "turf." In such conflict the ones who could claim to be enforcing the standards of the new regime had the all-important advantage of governmental support.

Exploiting social and national conflict was a standard weapon in the arsenal of the ruling Soviet elite. In certain circumstances, it was even in Moscow's interest to stimulate conflict. Soviet spokespersons could claim that Moscow was a neutral mediator, the judge and the arbiter, who could maintain peace and order. In his latter days in power, Mikhail Gorbachev, for example, attempted to intimidate the Lithuanians by encouraging Belarusians to make claims against them; then he encouraged the Polish population in Lithuania to resist the Lithuanian "rebirth." The Soviet authorities posed as the arbiter, the judge, and the peace keeping apparatus. They won support by giving favors, and they suppressed opposition by mobilizing beneficiaries to turn against the selected targets, arguing that the "people" were doing this themselves.³⁵⁸

At the same time, Moscow's guidance and control meant the domination of Russian language in governmental and party affairs. Lithuanian communist activists and sympathizers, no matter how enthusiastic, did not have the necessary expertise and experience to build a Soviet order in Lithuania, and the centralized Soviet system was loath to leave significant initiative with locals anywhere. Soviet advisors came from other areas in the USSR in increasing numbers, and Russian became the standard medium of communication. Members of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kaunas supervised the work of individual ministries, trade unions, and even party institutions. With time, a system of "deputies" evolved whereby the person officially in charge of an agency would be a local, and the second in command would be a newcomer, someone sent to Lithuania by Moscow. (Newcomers seemed especially prominent in the repressive organs.) Whereas in the first days of the new regime, all 13 members of the LCP Central Committee were locals (7 Lithuanians, 2 Latvians, and 4 Jews), when a new Central Committee was elected at the party's fifth Congress in February 1941, there were 24 Lithuanians, 5 Jews, and 18 newcomers. In the Party Biuro, the equivalent of the Moscow Politburo, there were 6 Lithuanians, 1 Jew, and 4 Russians.³⁵⁹

Of particular interest here is the way in which the actions of the new government intensified conflict and antagonism within the population of Lithuania, particularly between Lithuanians and Jews. Writers focusing on the Jewish experience in World War II have, naturally enough, concentrated

on the Holocaust, the wartime massacre of Jews in Europe. By January 1942, when Hitler Germany adopted mass killing as the “final solution” for the “Jewish Question,” persecution, pogroms, and mass killings had already descended on the Jews of Eastern Europe. In Lithuania, these scourges came with the Nazi invasion of June 1941 and the flight of Soviet authorities. In reaction to the number of horrible, violent deaths in Lithuania, many Jewish survivors have ranked Lithuanians together with the Nazi authorities as the bane of their nation. In 1947 a gathering of Jewish survivors condemned the Lithuanian people as a whole. In the words of Lucy Davydowicz, “Almost to a man, the survivors regarded all *goyim*—non-Jews—as unmitigated anti-Semites.”³⁶⁰

It is beyond the scope of this study to become involved in studying the specific origins of the Holocaust in Lithuania, but the question of relations between Jews and Lithuanians in the first months of the Soviet regime in 1940, which is our concern here, is obviously relevant to understanding the violence that followed upon the collapse of Soviet rule in 1941. The point that particularly demands consideration here is the almost geometric intensification of hostility toward the Jews that quickly developed and infected Lithuanians in all walks of life during the two months of the People’s Government’s existence. While Jews saw the new opportunities in government as the opening of careers to talents, Lithuanians saw the mass dismissals of old employees as discrimination against Lithuanian nationals, and some even muttered that the Soviets were just the tools of the “Elders of Zion.”

First of all, of course, Jews and Lithuanians could naturally have sharply conflicting memories and historiographies of even minor issues in the events of 1940. To offer a small example: Jewish writers could welcome the thought that the minister of health in Paleckis’s cabinet, Leonas Koganas, gave government jobs to a number of Jewish doctors; Lithuanian writers, on the other hand, would complain that the new regime threw Lithuanians out of jobs and replaced them with Jews. Another example might be the satisfaction of Jewish observers when the new regime hired Jews as political commissars in its restructuring of the Lithuanian army. Most Lithuanians would not share such enthusiasm, objecting to the very institution of political commissars and thereby seeing Jewish *politruks* as special Soviet agents. In the zero-sum game that these commentators worked with, one group’s gain constituted another’s loss.

Jewish writers have by no means agreed on the significance of 1940–1941 on the explosion of the Holocaust in 1941. Many writers, to be sure, have felt no need to go beyond an exposition of the horrors of 1941 to 1944; as V. I. Lenin once wrote, to try to understand the enemy is to show sympathy for him. Some writers are satisfied with considering the Holocaust the natural product of the past history of Lithuanian-Jewish relations. According to Zvi Kolitz, “it was the bias of the Lithuanians, particularly the

educated Lithuanians, that was responsible for indiscriminate slaughter, unparalleled for savagery.” Dov Levin in one place declared that the Soviet invasion of Lithuania had delayed the Holocaust: “Soviet rule in Lithuania did defer the Holocaust there for twelve months and seven days, but ultimately it heightened the tragedy.” Yet two pages later he wrote, “Whereas in independent Lithuania there had been no mass anti-Semitism, other than a certain degree of hostility stemming from economic and professional rivalry, under Soviet rule, raw anti-Semitism came to the fore and tainted the relations between the Lithuanians and the Jews.” Others have clearly concluded that the experience of Soviet rule contributed to the violence of 1941. Azriel Schochat has argued that Lithuania’s historic “anti-Semitism” did not by itself explain the violence: “The special ferocity which the population demonstrated toward Lithuanian Jews during the Holocaust was undoubtedly the outcome of the very complex political situation created by the Soviet occupation in 1940 and 1941.”³⁶¹

The Soviet regime in Lithuania in fact encouraged and welcomed Jews into its ranks; but the regime’s policies and directives came from the Moscow party leadership, not from any local inspiration. The Soviet authorities aimed at weakening traditional Lithuanian nationalists, and therefore it looked for recruits from other nationalities. But it would not encourage Jewish nationalism or religious beliefs. Ironically, Stalin had once denied that Jews constituted a nationality, but the regime in Lithuania offered Lithuanian Jews more as a nationality than as a religious community. As the American envoy in Kaunas put it, Soviet policy was “tolerant of but not friendly to” the Jews.³⁶²

At the same time, the new leadership recognized that Lithuanians constituted the vast majority of the population of the republic, and Soviet officials did not want the party and government identified as “Jewish.” In a candid moment, one of Sniečkus’s Saugumas agents recognized that the Communist Party was not very popular as he declared that the identification of the Jews with the regime “is the most important reason for the unpopularity of the Communist party.”³⁶³ As the Soviet apparatus in Lithuania developed, it relied more and more on Lithuanians, who constituted the vast majority of the republic’s population, and it worked to establish the image of itself as Lithuanian, “representative” of the people of the republic—with, of course, close guidance and control from Moscow.

The Soviets considered propertied Jews and Zionists both to be enemies of the new order. As an editorial in *Lietuvos aidas* of July 6 stated, “During the Smetona period, Jewish reactionaries were trusting collaborators of the Lithuanian plutocrats. The Jewish bourgeoisie was an ally of Smetona.” In its list of enemies, the Soviet State Security listed “leadership personnel of all Zionist organizations and regular contributors to press organs” and “leadership personnel of the ‘Bund’ and regular contributors to their press.”³⁶⁴ In 1939–1940, however, Jews had to be concerned about the

ramifications of the Nazis' racist ideology that was penetrating Eastern Europe; faced by the exclusive alternatives of Nazi or Soviet domination, most would obviously choose Soviet. On the whole, the People's Government could count on more support from the Jews than from the Poles of Lithuania. .

Many Lithuanians nevertheless identified the Jewish people with the Soviet regime and eventually came to look at the Soviet regime as being Jewish. Even in early June, when the crisis in relations with Moscow had only begun to develop and rumors spread that the Soviet Red Army would be coming, reports of new attitudes and behavior among Lithuania's Jewish population multiplied. Povilaitis's security agents reported that Jews were become more assertive in public: "After the Soviet note, the Jews felt much freer." Jews were reportedly speculating in currency, buying up Russian rubles and predicting the disappearance of the lit. Ironically, the Soviet authorities were about to carry out mass deportations of Jews from the former Polish territory now included in the Belarusian SSR, but there was no sign that any civilians in Lithuania were aware of this. In all, in the first days of June, many Lithuanians saw Jews as favoring the coming of the Red Army.

Such feelings intensified when masses of spectators, including Lithuanians, watched the Red Army parade into towns on June 15 and after. These included people who resented the scene as well as those who might be welcoming it. Many Lithuanians concluded—and subsequently recalled over and over and over again—that the majority of enthusiastic spectators were Jews. "We stand on the sidewalks of the cities of Lithuania and shout 'hurrah,'" wrote Aleksandr Slavinas; "'Hurrah' shout all who believe in the red banner." There were also shocked spectators. As Vincas Krėvė later described the scene, "The crowd of disheartened Lithuanians cried; only the Jews rejoiced, and their women covered the Red Army men with flowers. In the evening Jewish young people moved in groups through the streets, singing Russian Soviet songs and the police were not bold enough to stop them." Another witness wrote that "on the sidewalk stood men and women mostly of the Jewish nationality, and threw flowers at them... It was painful and to see such behavior of our citizens. They rejoiced at the strangulation of Lithuania's freedom. They hailed Lithuania's conquerors." Smetona's defense minister, Kazys Musteikis, wrote, "The entire regime appeared to have crumbled and collapsed with one hurrah. The police did nothing. Along both sides of Laisvės alėja stretched long lines of curious. The Jews first began to greet the passing Red Army forces." Other Lithuanian accounts read much the same with only minor variations, and the essence of their accounts was that the Jews were scornful of the very idea of Lithuanian independence.³⁶⁵

Many commentators have emphasized that Lithuanian Jews welcomed the Red Army as the only alternative they could see to falling under German domination. As Ben-Cion Pinchuk put it, "pogroms and Nazi

terror, not enthusiasm for Communism, were the dominant forces that drove the Jews towards the Soviets.” According to Dov Levin, rumors circulated that “the Red Army had preceded the Wehrmacht into the country by only a few hours” and that the Germans had plans to occupy southwest Lithuania. “Thus it is no surprise that the entry of the Red Army came as a relief to a large section of the Jewish population, particularly when everyone agree that the alternative would have been Nazi occupation and all this entailed.”³⁶⁶ Although Soviet historians occasionally claim that the Germans were planning some sort of major provocation, most likely in connection with a planned German sports competition on June 16, there is no independent evidence that Berlin was planning a major action. On the other hand, the rumor of German designs on southwest Lithuania may well have been another step in Moscow’s plans somehow yet to block German designs in southwestern Lithuania.

There was, however, also genuine enthusiasm in the welcome for the Red Army. In Dov Levin’s words, “Local communist groups and sympathizers, who did not respect the nationalist sentiments of the majority population, staged enthusiastic demonstrations to welcome the infantry and armored corps of the Red Army.” Zvi Gitelman has written, “Despite misgivings about the Bolsheviks’ militant atheism, their persecution of Zionism, and nationalization of property, many Jews welcomed the Red Army as a liberator.”³⁶⁷ Although Lithuanians repeatedly spoke of the poor Soviet equipment, Jewish writers have described the troops sympathetically: Zvi Gitelman and Dov Levin both noted that young Jews were impressed by the fact that there were Jewish officers in the Red Army. Levin also observed, “Upon the establishment of Soviet rule the Jews felt much greater physical security than previously. They were also greatly relieved by the cancellation of all restrictions and discriminatory measures that had been in effect against the Jewish minority.” Writing in the United States almost a half-century later, another memoirist still proclaimed his enthusiasm for the Red Army and all it represented for the Jews of Lithuania: “Under Russia we were free.”³⁶⁸

Jewish writers have also recognized that the welcome given the Red Army had a stunning negative effect on Lithuanians. As Levin noted, “Non-Jewish Lithuanians in the crowd, many furious about the Soviet invasion and grieving for their lost national independence, noted the Jews’ behavior.” According to Zvi Gitelman, in the reactions of the Lithuanians, “Jews who welcomed the Red Army were seen as traitors”; Aba Gefen, a survivor, declared that Lithuanians viewed “the loss of independence as a national tragedy and they could not understand why their Jewish fellow citizens, who had lived well in Lithuania, rejoiced at the destruction of their state.”³⁶⁹

As noted in chapter VIII, the Red Army had first abstained from entering the southwestern part of Lithuania that Stalin had recognized as Hitler’s share of the country. When the Red Army moved across the

Nemunas River on June 19, Jews in this region, having had a genuine threat of German occupation hanging over their heads, greeted the Soviets perhaps even more enthusiastically than Jews in Kaunas had. In the city of Marijampolė, local Lithuanians, having heard of the demonstrations in Kaunas, responded with counter-demonstrations and broke windows in Jewish homes. When the local Jews requested and received protection from the Red Army, the social tension intensified. A few days later, Sniečkus's Saugumas reported that Lithuanians in Marijampolė were complaining that Smetona had protected the Jews, and now the Jews were claiming to have suffered the most under the Smetona regime.³⁷⁰

As hostility to the sovietization of Lithuania developed, Lithuanian popular opinion increasingly identified the new order with the emergence of Jews into prominent roles in daily life. The fact that the overwhelming power of the Red Army forced Lithuanians to keep their thoughts concealed probably contributed to the growing antagonism. For practical as well as political reasons, the Soviet authorities recruited personnel among Jews, and Lithuanians whom the new government dismissed from good jobs noted every Jew who succeeded into these positions. At the beginning of July, the Saugumas in Tauragė reported an effort to hold a meeting protesting the numbers of Jews taking government jobs. Jewish factory or enterprise owners might find work as managers or supervisors in their old enterprises as the authorities wanted the enterprises to run efficiently. Lithuanian workers complained that these Jewish supervisors had always been exploiters, not proletarians; and Lithuanian peasants could be even more hostile when Jewish agitators, who obviously knew little about farming, came from the cities to offer them the promises of the new regime. Sniečkus's Saugumas duly noted repeated complaints that Jews who had enriched themselves serving Smetona were now serving the Soviets.

Jewish authors have recognized the Jews' prominent public role in the new regime. Zvi Kolitz wrote of "the Jewish members of the NKVD, imbued with the self-hating spirit of the *evseksiiia* [*Jewish sections within the Soviet Communist Party—aes*]." Jan Gross argued that younger Jews may have seized the opportunity to integrate into the secular society. Dov Levin has written, "It was the Jews who particularly aroused the anger of the nationalist elements." Communist Jews "became prominent on various levels of the ruling establishment, including the military and internal security forces." In this regard, Levin emphasized practical concerns: "The appointing of Jewish functionaries at all levels of the state apparatus no doubt derived mainly from pragmatic considerations... [I]t was possible to use the services of members of the Jewish intelligentsia who were attached to pro-communist bodies such as MOPR and Kultur Lige." Levin also noted that what he called Jewish "chauvinism," scorn expressed by new Jewish bureaucrats for the abilities of their Lithuanian colleagues; this, he commented, also contributed to anti-Jewish feelings.³⁷¹

In recruiting administrators and agents among Lithuanian Jews, the Soviet authorities of course had two purposes: finding capable workers and at the same time weakening the power of ethnic Lithuanians in the republic. As a result, Lithuanians hostile to the new order came to view the Jews as not just Moscow's allies but also as the Soviets' specific and willing instruments for the systematic crippling of the Lithuanian majority in the population. Nazi propaganda spoke of an "international Jewish conspiracy" that was allegedly directing the Soviet Union itself. These images, intensified by the violence that the Soviet practices of arrests, deportations, and psychological terror brought to Lithuania, undoubtedly contributed heavily to the development of a culture of violence—even street fights late at night—that in turn fueled the anti-Jewish explosion after the German invasion of June 1941.

Under Soviet rule Jewish and Lithuanian youths clashed in the streets—young Jewish men who now felt new enfranchisement and Lithuanians, both young and old but perhaps especially the young, who now felt disenfranchised. Jewish men, empowered by membership in the Komsomol or the militia, could now give orders to Lithuanians. The story circulated that young Jews were forcing Lithuanians off of city sidewalks. Solomonas Atamukas has called such stories nonsense, but in June 1940 they in fact circulated in Lithuania. On June 24, a Saugumas report in Šiauliai declared, "When the USSR army marched into Lithuania, the Jews began to express their arrogance. It happened that an irresponsible element of Jewish society, mostly youth, walked the streets of the cities and would not even yield the sidewalks for walking Lithuanians to pass. Also, there are Lithuanian complaints that the Jews are declaring in threatening form: 'Now we are the lords.'" Škirpa echoed this story in his circular letter of July 1 to Lithuania's diplomats abroad. Whether the story was true or not, it was a part of contemporary urban folklore, the stories that people repeated to each other. What Lithuanians did not necessarily comprehend, of course, was the fact that in these street conflicts, the young Jews did not necessarily represent their ethnic brethren, but rather they were expressing their personal sentiments and resentments.

As anti-Jewish resentment grew among Lithuanians, anti-Jewish posters appeared in various places, usually the work of at most a few individuals, not of any organized action. A poster in Šiauliai called for driving the Jews out of the country; a poster in Alytus called for a "silent struggle," boycotting Jewish merchants but not for violence, Škirpa caught the tone of the anti-Jewish feelings in Lithuania when he declared, on July 1, 1940, that "only the Jews feel well in this system." Anti-Jewish feelings, he declared, were growing "from day to day." It was only a matter of time until Lithuanians hostile to the new order would identify the Jews as not just the ones profiting by it but as the directors of it. As an American diplomat who visited Lithuania in March 1941 wrote, "the new government is usually described as the 'Jewish government'."³⁷²

Similarly, stories circulated among Lithuanians that while the authorities were taking steps to weaken the Catholic Church, they were leaving Jewish synagogues untouched. In fact, under the new regime, Jews lost Saturday as their publicly recognized holy days; officials would not tolerate the Hebrew language, favoring instead the secular Yiddish speech; and the government closed a number of Jewish schools. As Israel Cohen summarized the impact of Soviet rule, “the characteristic traditions were abolished” and “the pillars of its sacred traditions were shattered. Its elaborate religious organization, which had flourished for centuries, was disrupted. All forms of expression of Jewish nationalism were banned and suppressed. All Zionist societies and kindred bodies were dissolved. The Palestine Immigration Office was closed. Even the Yiddish papers had to cease, though a successor was soon provided in the shape of a Communist daily.”³⁷³ Dov Levin has argued that the Jewish population lost more than it gained in the first year of Soviet rule

After World War II, some Lithuanian émigré writers tried to develop a “symmetrical” historical interpretation, juxtaposing the participation of Jews in the brutality of the Soviet regime to the participation of Lithuanians in the brutality of the Nazi regime. This has not won much support among historians. In recent years, Lithuanian historians have devoted considerable time and effort to studying the role of Jews in the Soviet administration of Lithuania. They have generally concluded that, contrary to traditional Lithuanian writings, Jews did not direct the policies of the People’s Government. Nor did Jews constitute an exceptionally large proportion of the administrative personnel of the regime, and they did not dominate the work of the Lithuanian Saugumas, the security agency headed by Sniečkus, or the Soviet NKVD.

With time, Moscow’s emissaries replaced many of the noncommunists who had taken top key posts in the People’s Government. One example would be the case of Mickis, the minister of agriculture. At the beginning of 1941, Moscow’s inspector general, Andrei Andreevich Andreev, singled out the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture for particular criticism because it had too few communists in it, and the party soon dismissed Mickis from his post. His successor, a man with experience working in Moscow, reportedly fired 92 persons in his first four days in office. In the spring of 1941 a complainant accused Minister of Justice Pakarklis of “Voldemarist chauvinism” and “national-socialist hatred for Jews” in having carried out “a genuine pogrom” in dismissing “Vilnius Jewish lawyers” from their jobs.³⁷⁴ By the spring of 1941, the Soviet regime in Lithuania was far from anything most Lithuanians had imagined when the Red Army had marched in on June 15.

The authorities—and the historians who subsequently undertook to praise their accomplishments—worked to create the image that the masses welcomed the new developments with joy and enthusiasm, starting with the

spontaneous, genuine outbursts approving the collapse of the Smetona regime and proceeding to programmed demonstrations praising Stalin and eventually welcoming the prospect of joining the Soviet Union. Behind this public “theater” Lithuanians individually had to find their own emotional balance, which experienced new strains almost every day. There were people who obviously saw advantage for themselves in the new situation; they welcomed the opportunities. But there were many for whom the new situation, with its obscure processes and goals, was only threatening. How would they survive? How could they earn their daily bread? Intellectuals and politicians had to find new work; many considered flight; most somehow hoped to remain unnoticed. Landowners and shopkeepers worried about their property and future. The new regime denied these questioning elements the space or opportunity to communicate with each other and to organize and to formulate responses; it also consolidated its own power by encouraging discontented elements to denounce others, using bellicose images such as “enemy of the people,” “Smetonist,” “fascist,” and even “plutocrat.”

Sniečkus’s intelligence service, while noticing some instances of resistance and protest and occasionally even incompetence on the part of government supporters, seemed intent on showing the results that the regime desired. The formula for characterizing society’s attitude toward the new order spoke of the government’s enjoying the enthusiastic support of the unemployed, the workers, and the poor peasants to whom the government promised higher wages and land. The intelligentsia seemed to accept the new order, although not with the enthusiasm that the new rulers would have liked. Land owners and rich farmers were disappearing from public view, fearing the loss of their land. Religious Catholics were unhappy with the regime, but they were also hiding. The Polish intelligentsia was untrustworthy, thinking that the present situation was only temporary and dreaming of the restoration of the prewar Polish state and even favoring war with the Soviet Union. (Soviet authorities ordered many Poles out of Vilnius.) The Jews of Lithuania were divided along lines of age: the older ones, wanting the non-communist government to stay in place, favored democracy and property; the younger generation favoring radical change.³⁷⁵

Amid the daily concerns and conflicts, Moscow’s program went ahead. The government and the Communist Party organized mass demonstrations of support, pushing Moscow’s program forward, and Sniečkus’s State Security agents repeatedly rejoiced that the potential enemies of the regime did not understand its goals, and therefore they could not organize themselves. The regime was now ready to proceed to structuring Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union.

XII

The Elections

“Honestly speaking, I cannot imagine how it is possible to organize elections under the conditions of occupation by foreign forces.”

—Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, December 7, 2004

“By choosing the very best, most reliable sons of labor, the Unified Labor Front comes to our aid so that all sorts of agents of chauvinism and capitalism do not get into the Seimas.”

—election oratory

“Whoever does not vote is voting for the enemy.”

—*Tiesa*, July 8, 1940

On July 5, the council of ministers, under the direction of Paleckis and Dekanozov, agreed to schedule elections for a new parliament, and the announcement appeared in the next day’s newspapers. The citizenry would vote on July 14, just nine days away, to elect a “People’s Seimas.” Although not announced as such, the People’s Seimas would have the power of a constituent assembly—it would proclaim a new form of government, establish a new definition of “national independence,” and approve the nationalization of banks, large industries and land. It would send a delegation to Moscow to apply for membership in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It would go on to adopt a constitution, all without resorting to any formal participation by the population of Lithuania or for that matter requiring any formal action by the People’s Government. Organized demonstrations would suffice. None of this, to be sure, was specifically mentioned in the campaign before the election; the process, however, closely followed the Politburo’s announced plan for the incorporation of the Belarusian and Ukrainian lands in the fall of 1939, as discussed above in chapter I. Announcing the coming election, ELTA director Kostas Korsakas announced that Lithuanians must “elect a Seimas that would be worthy of liberated reborn Lithuania and that would set our country’s path into a new, bright future.”³⁷⁶

With calling for elections the government essentially completed its part in introducing the Soviet system to Lithuania. Paleckis, as the head of government, signed the decree announcing the elections and also the decree establishing new election rules, and his role in public affairs dwindled sharply to that of giving inspiring speeches. He and his government still had a function in Dekanozov’s “shell game,” namely drawing attention away from the growing power of the Lithuanian Communist Party, but it was the party, with Dekanozov’s guidance, that now drove and directed the process of incorporating Lithuania into the Soviet Union.

Many foreign observers had long anticipated that the election and the meeting of the People's Seimas would probably lead to Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union, but the United States minister, Owen Norem, predicted the demise of the Paleckis government only on July 17, after the election: "Few observers believe that it will survive the ordeal of the Seimas election with the subsequent demand for inclusion into the USSR... Mr. Paleckis and others in his cabinet are known to have strong desires to safeguard the freedom of Lithuania. The Prime Minister and Acting President is reported to have had a fit in which he declared vehemently that he would not sell Lithuania." Norem praised the government's work in expanding health care, advocating land reform, and purging the educational system of denominational distinction, but he foresaw that it would have to yield to the Soviet *force majeure*.³⁷⁷

Lithuania's diplomats abroad, influenced by Škirpa's memorandum of July 1, also understood that Lithuania was heading toward annexation, but they could do nothing. Krėvė had informed them all that the new government was working normally, and Krėvė could publicly say nothing to the contrary even after his visit to Moscow. On July 4 Lozoraitis traveled to Berlin secretly to consult with Škirpa, and soon thereafter he sent a message to other Lithuanian diplomats that if the People's Seimas should vote for incorporation into the USSR, they should protest to their host governments. When Krėvė, on July 6, called the diplomats home for new instructions, they all expected that they would not be able to return to their posts; all pleaded illness and refused to travel.³⁷⁸ For the moment, the diplomats could only watch as the regime in Kaunas staged its campaign to show that the people approved not just of its past actions but also of its future direction.

The party was now taking over the reins of power, working through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Antanas Sniečkus's Saugumas apparatus. With Dekanozov's guidance, it had drawn up the rules for the elections. Forty years later, in a meeting in the Lithuanian Institute of Party History in Vilnius, Vladas Niunka, a member of the party's Central Committee, reminisced that in June 1940, several weeks before the election, the party's Central Committee had given him 12 hours to prepare the rules for voting. On July 4, LCP leaders met with their Soviet mentors at the Soviet embassy to finalize plans. At Dekanozov's insistence, they agreed to stamp passports at the polling booths so as to increase the pressure on the citizenry to come vote. Although Niunka argued that he needed three weeks to prepare for the elections, Dekanozov, in the words of one participant in the meeting, "categorically demanded" elections in 10 days in order to walk in lockstep with Latvia and Estonia. The Paleckis government dutifully approved the arrangements and appointed Niunka chairman of the Election Commission.³⁷⁹

The new election rules offer considerable material for consideration of "form and substance" in legislation as well as elections; the eventual election results that the regime announced ignored the rules that it had itself

laid out. The rules gave the vote to Lithuanian citizens age 21 or over – this would give the vote to soldiers. A more detailed definition of the right to vote published in the Vilnius district gave the ballot to persons who were applying for Lithuanian citizenship, to persons with identification from other countries, and to persons who lacked the aforementioned documents but who could show they had lived in Vilnius before 1939. These conditions gave the vote to more people than had been entitled to vote in Smetona's time, when the voter had to be 24 or over—in 1922 the vote was given to persons 21 or over, but such considerations had little to do with the official outcome of the voting process.

To be elected now a person had to be 21 or over—in 1922 the candidate had to be at least 24, in Smetona's time at least 30. There was at first some confusion as to who had the power to nominate candidates, and therefore on July 8, in response to reports that local suspect groups were trying to nominate their own candidates, Niunka's commission ruled that only recognized cultural-educational, professional and other social organizations, and unions of the working people had such a right. This meant that nominations could come only from organizations that Gedvilas's Ministry of the Interior had certified, such as the party, the Komsomol, and acceptable trade unions.

Article 19 of the election rules specifically established that there should be no more than one candidate for each of the 79 seats in the People's Seimas: "As many candidates for people's deputy can be offered as there are people's deputies to be elected in that district."³⁸⁰ Explaining the existence of only one list of candidates, one orator praised the wisdom of the Union of Lithuanian Working People: "By choosing the very best, most reliable sons of labor, the 'Unified Labor Front' comes to our aid so that all sorts of agents of chauvinism and capitalism do not get into the Seimas."³⁸¹ Gedvilas allegedly used the same explanation, in this case as interpreted by a hostile source, in talking to deputies before the Seimas's first meeting: "We are making it easy for the voters by presenting the best candidates, so that the citizens do not need to trouble their heads over whom to better vote for."³⁸²

It is common for critics to refer to the voting in Lithuania in July 1940, as in Estonia and Latvia, as a "sham" election, a "parody" of elections. In the Soviet system, however, operating with Lenin's conceptions of leadership, elections were not just "decoration," they had a very specific function in mobilizing the population to express support for the party's decisions and leadership in the past as well as to express confidence in the future. Elections constituted a form of "participation theater." A critic would say, "But there is only one candidate for each seat." The party ideologist would respond that that makes the voting more important, to show confidence.

In the Soviet system, the party had the obligation to report on its work, and the citizenry had the obligation to approve and to express its

confidence that the “good work” would continue. To complaints that voters had no more choice than they had had in Smetona’s day, party agitators could point out that in the new system, the voter would have the alternative of casting his or her ballot *against* the single candidate. The important statistic in the voting would not involve rival candidates but rather the percentage of eligible voters who supported the nominee. As we shall presently see, the provision allowing the voter essentially to declare his or her opposition to a candidate would have embarrassed the regime had the government in fact observed it.

The Lithuanians of 1940, on the other hand, had only limited experience with the ballot. After the military had seized power and had installed Smetona as president in 1926, the new government suppressed the democratically elected Seimas. The regime did not allow a new parliament to be elected until 1936, and in preparation for that vote it banned all opposition parties. Of the 49 deputies then elected, 42 belonged to the *tautininkai* party, and the other seven were “unregistered *tautininkai*.” Liudas Truska called those elections “a parody.”³⁸³ On February 11, 1938, the parliament, without debate, adopted a new constitution, and in the fall 120 “representatives of the nation” gathered to elect Lithuania’s president. Smetona was the only nominated candidate, censors banned a newspaper article that dared to suggest that there should be more candidates, and 118 of the “representatives” voted for him. The police summoned Kazys Pakštas, the one person mentioned as a rival candidate but not nominated, for questioning. With such experience behind them, Lithuanian voters may have seen nothing unusual in banning parties other than the one favored by the government, or even in press censorship and in presenting candidates for election without opponents;

The election campaign began with an appeal by the People’s Government to the “working people of Lithuania,” declaring that the new order had accomplished great things in “the short time of its existence” but that now the task ahead was “the further reorganization of the country’s life in all its aspects.” The government would provide an accounting for what it had accomplished and listen to the voice of the people. “The plutocratic *tautininkai* government” had feared “representation of the people.” To give the people full voice, the government would now hold elections.³⁸⁴

The election rules, announced the next day, appeared in the public press on July 9, just five days before the scheduled voting, but the Communist Party had a long head start in launching its campaign. Niunka, as head of the Electoral Commission, directed the entire process of naming and registering candidates, and on July 6 he informed officials around the country that they had to have their local lists of candidates complete by 6 p.m. on the 9th, and they had to have the list printed by 7 p.m. of that day. They had only three days to complete this first phase. There were to be 79 candidates. The Communist Party planned that up to 40 of them should be party members, 7

komsomol, 35–38 nonparty. By occupation 13–15 should be workers, 23–25 peasants, four soldiers, 21 intellectuals, and 18 employees. There should be 8 women, 65 Lithuanians, five Jews, two Russians, five Poles, and two Latvians.³⁸⁵

The week before the election consisted of almost continual mass meetings and rallies around the country; the most vivid picture of the process has come from the pen of Anna Louise Strong, an American radical who arrived in Lithuania on July 4 and stayed until the Lithuanian delegation left for Moscow at the end of the month to “request” incorporation into the Soviet Union. An enthusiast for the Soviet system, she uncritically accepted everything party leaders showed her and told her, and she wrote rapturously about the way in which the Lithuanian Communist Party directed the process. To her, the events constituted a workers’ revolution, driven by the newly forming trade unions, with organizers in Kaunas sending out agents to help establish local unions throughout the country and at the same time to identify satisfactory local candidates for the People’s Seimas. The election process was a festival celebrating the achievements of the Soviet Union and mobilizing the people of Lithuania for the road ahead. When it came to discussing the program of the newly proclaimed Union of Lithuanian Working People, an organization specially formed for the election, Strong eagerly accepted the thought that local meetings could modify and add to it. “It was not yet clear in what form the demands of the people would crystallize,” she wrote. Officials of the regime gave her special attention even though they thought she was a bit strange.³⁸⁶

Strong quickly produced a book recounting her experiences in Lithuania, but when Lithuanian communists received Strong’s manuscript in the fall of 1940, Henrikas Zimanas, editor of the party newspaper *Tiesa* and apparently the American’s most important guide in Lithuania, rejected the thought of translating it into Lithuanian. Strong’s work, Zimanas wrote on October 15, “does not distinguish itself by its sincerity, accuracy, or observations.” In Strong’s quoting of conversations “exactness was frequently sacrificed for a more ringing phrase.” He particularly objected to the way she quoted him, and he added, “I expect that with others it was no better.” In this respect, with Soviet Lithuania now in a different stage of its development, Zimanas may not have cared to have his statements of July formalized in black and white. Nevertheless, he concluded, the work was basically accurate, and it could perhaps be useful for propaganda among American Lithuanians.³⁸⁷

Although in the Soviet Union, blocs of “party and non party” candidates usually participated in elections, the Lithuanian Communist Party was apparently not ready to put its name on the list of candidates. This probably was a continuation of the policy of keeping the public image of the government separate from the party’s program. On July 8, when *Tiesa*, the party newspaper, announced Sniečkus’s campaign for a seat in the new

parliament, it spoke of his revolutionary activity, but it did not emphasize his membership in the party.

Sniečkus was a candidate of the “Union of Lithuanian Working People.” One might consider the union “*deus ex machina*”; one critic characterized its springing up “like a mushroom after a rain.” It was a name without an organization. Its birth consisted in the announcement of its existence; there was no mass meeting setting it up. At most its membership consisted of the chosen candidates plus the organizers of the Election Commission. Niunka, Liudas Gira, a well known Lithuanian writer; and Chaim Aizenas wrote the union’s electoral platform.³⁸⁸ Once the voting had taken place, the Union of Working People disappeared, to be revived for just two or three days in August in order to clean up a small parliamentary mess left by administrative carelessness in directing the electoral process.

The union’s platform was rich in promises. Claiming to represent “trade union workers, representatives of factory and enterprise committees, peasants, working intelligentsia, writers, artists, sports organizations, mothers of free Lithuania, Lithuania’s labor youth, and also the Communist Party,” the declaration called for voters to “show the true will of the people” and to support only those candidates who would work for the “demands of our program.” In foreign policy the program called for friendship of the peoples of the Republic of Lithuania and the Soviet Union and an “inviolable union” of the Lithuanian republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In domestic policy the union would forgive working peasant’s debts and taxes and relieve poor peasants of bank debts. It called for land reform, improvement of working conditions and wages, improvement of social security, pensions for older workers and incapacitated workers, expanded health care, comprehensive improvement of culture, art, science and education, complete national equality and freedom of religion, further democratization of the people’s army, freedom of speech, press, assembly and union for working people, civil registration, inviolability of person and property, an end to pensions for the wealthy and “enemies of the people,” lower rents, and an intensified struggle with speculation. “Not one vote for people who cannot or do not want to struggle for the platform of the union of working people!” Calling rumors that the government would close churches or force collectivization “provocative,” it called on voters “Do not believe these rumors and without mercy tear away the mask of slanderers and provocateurs.” Among the slogans was “Long live the fraternal friendship and inviolable union with the great and unconquerable Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”³⁸⁹

Many anti-communist commentators would later insist that the authorities kept the plan to incorporate Lithuania into the USSR a complete secret. This was not really true. The slogan of “Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic” had been bandied about informally but nevertheless publicly since at least June 20 or 21. The government had stolidly remained silent on the

topic, while the Lithuanian Communist Party had complete freedom to express its hopes. On July 1, *Tiesa* carried a headline on page 3 “Long live the 13th Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic,” and on the 3rd it reported that a soldier’s demonstration in Kaunas had proclaimed, “Long live the 13th Soviet Socialist Republic.” Anna Louise Strong wrote of seeing banners proclaiming “Lithuania the Thirteenth Soviet Republic,” and then added the thought “these banners steadily increased.” Saugumas officials noted that by late June when the call for a Lithuanian SSR had come up at some public meetings in the provinces, as often as not the citizenry had given signs of reservations, even fear, at the thought. The meetings usually had an organized core of participants, programmed in advance by party agitators; most important to Saugumas officials would be the reaction of the other participants in the meeting. As a report from Panevėžys on July 8 recounted, “It is characteristic that organized public reacted warmly and raised ovations to every speaker, while the unorganized public more warmly approved ovations for those speakers who spoke in favor of freedom and independent Lithuania.”

On July 12, Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul in Kaunas, asked Pijus Glovackas, the Deputy Foreign Minister, whether the People’s Seimas intended to ask for Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union. Glovackas blandly declared he knew nothing: “I answered that this question has not been considered by the government and therefore I cannot answer it.” Sugihara declared that he thought that there was a 99 percent probability the Seimas would vote for annexation, but Glovackas conjured up more smoke: “I responded that by my understanding the question of Lithuania’s attachment to the Soviets was raised by the communist party most probably as a propaganda tactic.”³⁹⁰ The government refrained from discussing annexation, the party enthusiastically endorsed it, and the Union of Lithuanian Working People gave broad hints.

The use of the phrase “inviolable union” [*nelaužoma sąjunga*] in the union’s platform actually was a sign of what was to come. In 1943 the Soviet Union adopted a new national anthem, replacing the *Internationale*, and the hymn opened with that same phrase “inviolable union” [*soiuz nerushimyi*]. Few in Lithuania, however, probably recognized this particular writing on the wall. On July 6, the Union of Lithuanian Working People gave another sign of its purposes when, in a grand meeting that packed the Kaunas Sports Hall, the gathering first elected its “presidium of honor,” choosing Soviet leaders—Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Kalinin—as well as Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, before naming the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party. After this symbolic ritual it announced its actual presidium, inviting Paleckis, Krėvė, Gedvilas, and other cabinet ministers and local dignitaries to come to the rostrum.

While the goals of the party were clear, the role of the party in the regime and even the party’s leadership still lay hidden from public view. The government had more or less kept the image of being non-party; Sniečkus

and Gedvilas, the two men directing the government's repressive forces, did not advertise their party membership. The general public was even unaware of who was in charge of the party, Party leaders later laughed about the fact that when Icaikas Meskupas, the acting party head, on July 13 broadcast an appeal to support the official slate of candidates, few of the public knew who he was. A large part of the public surely did not yet realize the lines of power that Dekanozov was directing into both the government and the party.

Speaking to the meeting in the Sports Hall in Kaunas on the evening of the 6th, Paleckis and Gedvilas opened the election campaign by speaking warmly of the accomplishments of their government and of the "clear and bright future" that lay ahead. They obliquely recognized that there were questions about the rush to hold elections by emphasizing that the people had to act quickly. Paleckis spoke about the urgency of the moment: "We do not have time to think long and consider—today just let us work." Gedvilas called for learning from the Soviet experience: "The example of the Soviet Union must push us to a new, unusual tempo of work. For that reason the Seimas elections have been announced in such a tempo. We will raise the whole land from its dozing." This, therefore, was not the time to discuss alternatives; the authorities demanded that Lithuanians trust their leadership. Subsequent speakers one after another praised the work of the People's Government in expanding health care, lowering rents, and generally improving living standards. When Meškauskienė read the list of candidates for the Kaunas region, nominated by the Union of Lithuanian Working People, the assembled crowd reportedly approved "with lively applause." In conclusion, the meeting approved the proposal of the chairman to send greetings to Stalin and Molotov, proclaiming "inviolable union and brotherhood with the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics."³⁹¹

The action in the Kaunas Sports Hall evoked similar responses throughout the country. Anna Louis Strong described what she saw when her hosts took her to Šiauliai:

Saturday noon meetings were being held in the smaller factories. By Saturday evening the larger ones were ready to meet. Saturday night and all day Sunday meetings of delegates began from many factories, organizing whole industries at once. By Sunday the Šiauliai workers were sending new organizers to hold meetings of workers, farm hands, and peasants in little towns and villages some fifteen miles away.

Thus the great wave of organization rolled out from Kaunas, first into the larger centers like Šiauliai, thence into smaller places, and before the week-end was over it was reaching the farms.

As an afterthought, she noted that the "young organizer," who had accompanied her to Šiauliai, "had a double function, and that out of the

scores of meetings he had held over that weekend in Šiauliai and the surrounding towns, and out of discussions with the new trade union leaders, candidates had been chosen who should lead the Working People's ticket to victory in Šiauliai district."³⁹² Strong saw only enthusiasm, and she described the process as a grand celebration marking the union of Lithuanian traditions with Soviet experience and inspiration:

On July 7 the Communist Party organization in Vilnius issued an election manifesto pointing out that the Red Army had now twice helped the Lithuanians establish the socialist order. Now the Communist Party invited the people of Lithuania to "the decisive battle for Soviet Lithuania the Thirteenth Soviet Republic!" It went on to offer 22 slogans, including "Long Live Soviet Lithuania, the Thirteenth Soviet Republic!... Long Live the Communist Party of Lithuania!... Long Live the Comintern!... Long Live Comrade Stalin, the Liberator of Nations!"³⁹³ The intentions of the Communist Party should have been clear to all.

In the first phase of the election campaign, July 7 to 9, the meetings around the country produced lists of local candidates and of course worked to build enthusiasm. The official line, repeated endlessly in the press, became: "Everywhere workers and peasants are expressing their complete confidence in the Working People's Union and the candidates that it has offered." This process was to insure local support as the citizens would be voting for at least some people they might know personally.³⁹⁴ Several such nominees later claimed that they had not expected or wanted to be nominated, but that when they objected, they were told that they had no right to refuse. Since these declarations became public only in 1942, under the sponsorship of the German occupation, such declarations could be suspect, and one of these people later assured Soviet officials that she had signed the statement denouncing the elections under duress. Under the circumstances, almost all such documents become suspect, but, as we shall see below, there were cases where, in the rush, the election officials did not bother to confirm even the nominee's identity.

The Lithuanian Saugumas watched the demonstrations with a much more careful eye than did Anna Louise Strong. While Saugumas officials usually filed reports that echoed the warm descriptions that appeared in the daily newspapers, on occasion the reports offered critical reviews of the work of rally organizers. A meeting on July 8 in Utena, for example, broke up without completing its purpose. The Saugumas complained that the party had organized the gathering poorly. The speaker from Kaunas was incompetent and only 2/5 of the meeting's participants reportedly were ready to approve the list of candidate.³⁹⁵ A few days later, a crowd in Trakai objected when the speaker from Kaunas began denouncing the Catholic Church; the trucks that had brought organizers from Kaunas quickly packed up and left. In some areas, groups of locals came to the meetings with the intention of nominating their own candidates. Niunka's ruling that only recognized organizations

could nominate candidates protected the organizers, but disgruntled locals on occasion walked out saying that they would not vote. Saugumas officials of course also watched for deviant behavior by individuals. In one meeting a woman was arrested for not standing for the singing of the *Internationale*. In another a man was arrested for complaining that there were no national symbols at the meeting. In Tauragė just the rumor that there would be trouble at a meeting brought Soviet soldiers to the site, but there was in fact no trouble.

On July 9, the Supreme Election Committee announced its acceptance of the Union of Lithuanian Working People's list of 79 candidates. It included four Jews, five Poles, two Russians, and one Latvian; the rest were Lithuanians. The vast majority of the names on the list were communists or recognized party sympathizers, and most of the others could be identified as "leftist," having at one time or another expressed sympathy for some organization endorsed by the communist party and 40 had even spent time in prison. A new round of meetings immediately began at which the citizenry were to proclaim their unanimous support of the list.³⁹⁶

On July 11, now armed with its official list of candidates, the union issued another manifesto, demanding popular support. It called for "indissoluble and firm union with the great Soviet Union," and spoke of Stalin and the Red Army as "the foundation and guarantee for our bright and peaceful tomorrow." It again called on peasants not to believe false rumors that the regime would force collectivization of the farms and persecute religious believers. It again promised debt relief and an end to problems of unemployment. But it also declared, "In Workers' Lithuania only he who works will have bread." In conclusion, it proclaimed, "Peasants, workers, soldiers, working intelligentsia! July 14 is your holiday! With the spirit of liberation in our hearts we will all go that day for the best sons and daughters of our fatherland, the candidates of the Workers' Union."³⁹⁷

The authorities supplemented these general appeals with specific appeals aimed at various sections of the population: an appeal for the support of Jewish voters, an appeal to teachers, an appeal to the military, agitation for the peasant vote, etc. Minister of Agriculture Mickis again promised there would be no collectivization; the new minister of finance, Juozas Vaišnoras, promised that Lithuania would keep the lit as its currency. The People's Government loudly proclaimed that it had given the right to vote to the Lithuanian military; in fact, the combination of military discipline and having the right to vote made the military a significant weapon in the election campaigning. On July 10, General Vitkauskas ordered soldiers to participate in the election. On the other end of its propaganda script, *Tiesa*, on July 8, warned "Whoever does not vote is voting for the enemy." The theme became, "They who do not vote, who do not participate in the elections, they do not care about the people's future, these are enemies of the people, there will be no space in workers' Lithuania for them." With slight variations, usually as

“Whoever does not vote for the Seimas is voting for the enemies of the people,” political leaders and publications repeated this slogan again and again in the election campaign.

The party newspaper now offered guidelines for election propaganda. On July 8, *Tiesa* explained that there were three types of voters who might not support the official candidates. The first, “our enemies,” were few in number, and while still dangerous to the society, the propagandist could ignore them. “We will settle with them sooner or later,” preferably “sooner.” The propagandist had to focus effort on the second type, people ready to vote but liable to be misled by the enemy’s intrigues, and the third, the apathetic who might not think that voting was of any importance. The agitator must realize that the enemy could spread false rumors and fall back on religion and chauvinism as emotional responses to propaganda; therefore the agitator must show tolerance and not treat religious believers as enemies. On July 10, the newspaper carried a lengthy set of points that the party agitators should bring out, including praise and thanks to the Red Army and the Stalin, a call for “close relations” with the Soviet Union, national equality, land reform but continued private land ownership, a demand to ignore hostile rumors, and an end to unemployment. The instructions carried the slogan, “Only he gets bread who works conscientiously.”

The second phase of the election campaign featured a mass meeting, described as 100,000 strong, in Kaunas, on July 11. Dekanozov took an active role in the planning; as he informed Moscow, “We are paying great attention to this matter.” Red Army concerts, he reported, could be easily turned into election rallies; he asked Moscow for a troupe of professional musicians; the Red Army gave him seventeen soldiers of Lithuanian origin whom he dressed up in civilian clothes and sent out to agitate; and for the grand demonstration on the 11th, he provided transportation for 1000–1500 peasants to come “for a meeting with workers and soldiers of Kaunas.” At the same time he recognized that the campaign rallies had occasional problems: In Vilnius, Poles had interfered with the structured enthusiasm, and he complained that lower level officials from the old regime were interfering with agitation among peasants and soldiers.³⁹⁸

Anna Louise Strong, who dated the meeting in Kaunas as having taken place on the 10th, described the scene:

The big “get together” of workers and peasants on July 10 in Kaunas climaxed the election campaign. All day the peasants poured into the city: groups of girls in colorful national costumes, clusters of youths on bicycles from distant farms. Trains, trucks and carts poured their human freight into the boulevards, and the newcomers formed in line to march. Hour after hour the streets were filled with singing; old Lithuanian folk-songs, sad with the darkness of peasant

life, mingling with new triumphant songs of the Red Army, sung by Kaunas workers.³⁹⁹

Speaking at this gathering, Paleckis gave a broad hint of the future when he praised the red flags that all around as having “always led the entire rebirth of Lithuanian life,” and he spoke of the restoration of not just the democracy of 1926 but rather the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic that had then briefly existed in 1918–1919. Mickis, the Minister of Agriculture, followed Paleckis by praising “Comrade Stalin the leader of all peoples.” He assured peasants that the government would not seize their land but rather give them land: “The land you love will be yours.” Speaking for the party’s Central Committee Kazys Petrauskas pointed out that the Red Army had made possible this moment, and he employed the magic formula, proclaiming that the “union of the Soviet Union and of the Lithuanian Republic” should be “inviolable.” The meeting adopted a message to Stalin, saying, “With deepest gratitude, we, 100,000 liberated Lithuanian peasants, workers, labor intellectuals and other working people, gathered on July 11 in Vileišis Square in Kaunas, joyfully greet You, dear Leader.” The resolution went on to refer to Stalin as “beloved Leader and Teacher.”⁴⁰⁰

That same day, speaking from the balcony of the Soviet mission in Kaunas, Dekanozov thanked the gathered crowd and declared that the Soviet people were happy with the progress that the Lithuanians were making. Lithuania, he said, was “basically a peasant land,” and the Union of Laboring People best expressed the desires of the “toiling people.” He made no mention of annexation, but he did speak of “strong friendship of peoples” and of “inviolable union of the countries.”⁴⁰¹

In efforts to intensify this enthusiasm, it was not enough just unanimously to declare that one would vote for the slate. The campaign required more passion, identifying possible enemies. Promising to vote only for candidates on the Union of Working People slate, gatherings had to go on to declare what they were rejecting: “We will not give one vote to those for whom the matters of the working people are not dear.” The slogan “Not one vote for the enemies of the people,” was a corollary to the “They who do not vote” theme, but it might have confused anyone who really thought about it. Mykolas Römeris playfully told his diary that he did not understand how anyone *could* vote for an “enemy of the people,” since the only candidates running for office were endorsed by the official “Union.” Could there be a hidden enemy somewhere in the list of candidates? But how could one know that this person or that was an enemy? The election propaganda for all the candidates was only positive. Römeris of course realized fully that one did not say such things aloud.⁴⁰²

At this point, Dekanozov and the Ministry of Internal Affairs struck to root out potential enemies. There had been some public indications of impending action. Speaking at a public gathering on June 29 in Kaunas,

Michalina Meškauskienė had complained that there were too many “enemies of the people” still at large and even holding posts in government. “Reaction received a fatal blow, but it is still not yet finally conquered.” The government and army must be purged of enemies of the people: “All enemies of the people and blood suckers must be arrested and their wealth confiscated.”⁴⁰³

On July 1, Leia Sausas, the editor of *Lietuvos aidas*, had warned that not all “enemies of the people” had been exposed, and he declared, “There can be no democracy where enemies of democracy walk freely.” Speaking in Vilnius on July 7, Gedvilas had declared that despite the popular enthusiasm “there are many enemies,” both Polish and Lithuanian “chauvinists”—remnants of the former ruling parties, landlords, priests, and high administrators still at large in the society. He guaranteed that the regime would “tear these enemies of the people by the roots from our midst.”⁴⁰⁴ On July 10, *Vilniaus Balsas* declared that people who only pretended to support the revolution were “more dangerous than open enemies.” Echoing the basic Stalinist argument that the enemy becomes more desperate and dangerous as ultimate defeat nears; it warned that enemies of the people were urging people not to vote. “He who, through laziness or neglect, does not vote is not worthy of the name of citizen of the People’s Republic. He who does not vote helps the enemy.” The danger of being labeled an enemy of the people and thereby being torn out “by the roots” became clear some 48 hours later when news spread that the Saugumas had carried out a series of arrests of leading figures of the Smetona regime as well as prominent Poles and Jews.

The government’s plan of action had been formulated several days earlier. On July 6, Sniečkus had written a secret order to “arrest the destructive anti-government element agitating against the People’s Government or disrupting the election procedure.” The next day he set up committees to identify such “enemies of the people” all through the republic and ordered that 200 prison cells in Kaunas be prepared for occupancy. (This required releasing several hundred criminals.) In an interview with *Tiesa*, announcing his candidacy for the People’s Seimas, Sniečkus called the Saugumas “a sharp weapon,” adding “We have not yet completely reorganized... but work is already proceeding.” On July 9, Soviet officials had stopped Antanas Merkys, who was in Riga attempting to board a plane to Sweden, and returned him to Kaunas. Many commentators estimate the total of persons arrested over the next week, including Poles as well as Lithuanians, at about 2000, but Arvydas Anušauskas has put the number at 504.⁴⁰⁵

There were no public statements about the arrests, but the news spread quickly. Many persons, who considered themselves in danger, left their homes for several days. Rumors reported all possibilities: that the authorities had just wanted to take these anti-loyal elements out of circulation before the elections and would then release them; that all of the arrested had

opposed communists since 1919; that the arrested Lithuanians would be sent into the depths of Siberia; and that once the old political leaders had been taken care of, the regime would turn on the younger ones. The story that the government intended only to isolate them temporarily seem to have originated from government-planted urban folklore; after the elections the authorities did release a few, but most of those arrested remained in custody.

Sniečkus's Saugumas agents professed themselves satisfied with the results of their action. They informed families that this was just a move to prevent active or passive resistance to the new order and to prevent flight abroad. No one would be deported, and they would return after the elections. At the same time Saugumas agents chortled that they had struck fear into their enemies, and they declared that the "opposition" had fallen into "depression." The threat of arrest could be as effective as actual arrest. The Christian Democrats, one Saugumas agent declared, had "panicked," and the remnants of the Smetona regime were "all trembling from fear and awaiting their turn to answer for their past deeds." The Saugumas also welcomed reports that Catholic priests were telling the faithful that resistance was futile and therefore they should vote in the election.⁴⁰⁶

Soviet historiography passed by the arrests in silence. In an oblique reference to them, one authoritative history noted, "It is necessary to note that the exploiting classes were not deprived of the right to vote. In July 1940 the correlation of class forces so favored the laboring people that the People's Government did not need to employ this form of struggle. Some reactionaries tried to exploit the pre-election campaign for their own purposes, but they could not act in organized fashion—the stormy revolutionary events and the fall of the fascist regime left them in confusion." When post-Soviet historiography first began to discuss this wave of arrests, it had some trouble breaking away from the old formulas. In a study published in 1991, Henrikas Šadžius declared that Sniečkus's agency had here followed the orders of Beria and other Muscovites rather than the directives of the Lithuanian Communist Party, and he suggested that the campaign of arrests had been unnecessary.⁴⁰⁷ In any case, the arrests drove possible opposition further underground.

On July 14, Election Day, the government urged stores and homes to put out festive fronts to celebrate the occasion, but rain came in torrents. Partly because of the bad weather, partly because of slow action at the polls in certain regions, Paleckis ordered the electoral process to continue one more day. Anna Louise Strong recounted the actual voting procedure:

A man at the first desk inspected each new arrival's passport, and then gave him the list of candidates, printed on a long strip with intervals between the names so that the voter could easily tear out any he did not desire. Each voter received also an envelope stamped with an official seal. Since many of the peasants and especially the

peasant women, had no passports, there was a special table where their names were registered and where they were given a temporary registration slip, good for this election only.⁴⁰⁸

As Strong noted, persons could participate even if they did not have passports. What she chose to omit was the requirement that the election official stamp the passports of those who had them. As Article 35 of the election rules specified, "The voter puts in the envelope as many cards as there are people's representatives being elected in the district. Having inserted the cards, the voter seals the envelope and gives it to the commission member by the box, who, in the sight of the voter, puts the envelope into the box, and for those who have passports, marks the passport that the voter has voted, and for those who have a special certificate showing the right to vote, takes away that certificate." People who had no passports could vote, but all Lithuanians with passports had to have the evidence of voting stamped in their passports.

When the polls closed on the 15th, the government immediately claimed an overwhelming victory, asserting that the people had come out in great numbers and had supported the slate of the Union of Working People. On July 16, *Darbo Lietuva*, which now replaced *Lietuvos aidas* as the organ of the People's Government, enthusiastically declared, "here are many places where up to 138 percent of those having the right to vote cast their ballots." In the Šakiai region, three of the six electoral districts reported that over 100% of the eligible voters had cast their ballots. The Panevėžys Saugumas reported a turnout of 106% in the city of Panevėžys and 123% in Biržai. In the Šiauliai region, where the Saugumas reported an influx of unregistered voters from Latvia, the turnout in Raseiniai was put at 105% and in Mažeikiai at 102%. In Vilnius the Saugumas reported turnouts of over 100% in some areas and blandly attributed this to the fact that some voters found it easier to vote in other districts. The exuberant figures bear some resemblance to the fantastic production figures published in Soviet reports of the First Five Year Plan in the early 1930s, but in Soviet elections not even Stalin would claim the vote of more than 100 percent of his constituents.

The percentages were all the more mystifying because there were in fact no lists of eligible voters. As the Saugumas in Marijampolė had earlier reported, "It appears that it will be difficult to establish the percentage of voters since the majority of residents over 21 perhaps do not have passports and in addition we do not know exactly how many have the right to vote." The authorities took population estimates produced by the government statistics bureau to estimate the number of eligible voters.

The first newspaper reports, while exulting at the news that more than 100 percent of the voters had cast ballots, also indicated that there were candidates, including high ranking party officials, who had not received the requisite majority of votes cast. Without interpreting their own numbers,

Darbo Lietuva's stories in fact suggested that Lithuanian voters had shown considerable resistance to the "bandwagon" of the Union of Lithuanian Working People. K. Didžiulis, the communist boss of Vilnius, for example, may have received the approval of less than half of the some 200,000 ballots cast in the city and the surrounding region; while another leading communist, Berelis Latvis-Fridmanas, received an approval rating of less than 20 percent.

An incomplete election report in the archive of the Communist Party Central Committee reveals that in the Trakai local district, seven of nine candidates had received less than half of the vote. Minister of Justice Pakarklis failed to win a majority in Trakai, but in the entire Trakai region he received about 56 percent approval. The strongest approval that candidates received, according to this particular record, ran to about 60 percent. Lithuanian voters had used the election to express considerable discontent with the regime. They had no right to choose a candidate, but they exploited the opportunity to show strong disapproval of the candidates presented to them.

In any case, the Supreme Election Commission recognized that something had gone wrong, and on the 17th the news agency ELTA reported that the earlier announced results "did not fit reality." It now officially declared that 95.51 percent of the eligible voters had gone to the polls, and of these 99.2 percent voted for the candidates of the Union of Working People. Anna Louise Strong enthusiastically called this "a figure unheard of in Lithuania, unbelievable in any election in the capitalist democracies. The Lithuanian Government ministers themselves were surprised at it; they had never dreamed there would be such a turnout." Soviet historians over the years dutifully repeated these numbers but without showing any signs of amazement. There is no available documentation by which a historian can reconstruct the entire process involved in counting the vote and then transforming the results. But Strong's note that her informants in the government "were surprised," suggests the possibility that once the actual results had been tabulated and recorded, with the signatures of the heads of local election commissions, persons higher up, possibly Dekanozov himself, decided that these figures were not acceptable. They had to be changed, and the new results, as Strong declared, were "unbelievable in any election in the capitalist democracies."⁴⁰⁹

Opponents of the Soviet regime vigorously denied the official results, usually saying that only 16–18 percent of the citizenry voted. Liudas Truska, who has examined the available data perhaps more closely than anyone else, worked with the estimates that 52 percent of the estimated population had the right to vote and concluded that 85 percent of the eligible voters had in fact cast ballots and that about 55 percent of these had supported the official candidates. In his first published study on the subject he declared "A significant number of the candidates did not receive half of the votes and according to the election law were not chosen for the Seimas."

In another work, written about the same time, he declared that “at least one-half of the candidates received less than half of the votes.”⁴¹⁰ For our purposes here, the exact percentage of eligible voters who cast ballots is not so vital; what is far more striking is the way in which the government and the Election Commission falsified the results. The Election Commission may not have falsified the percentage of eligible voters that cast ballots as much as it did the percentage of those ballots actually cast in favor of the nominees of the Union of Lithuanian Laboring People.

The official results, as announced and perpetuated in Soviet historiography, violated several articles in the election rules as drawn up by Niunka. There may well have been a high, even very high, percentage of voters going to the polls, but the announced results had no relationship to the way the public had voted. Article 21 of the election rules specified: “The voting ended, the chairman announces who many votes each received and who is the selected candidate for people’s representatives and closes the gathering.” In a clear violation of Article 21, Niunka’s commission ignored the fact that many voters did not vote for the entire list of candidates as presented to them. The voters had in fact used their right to walk off alone, and they made considerable use of the right to tear out names. Witnesses spoke of the floor in some voting centers being littered with discarded individual ballot tabs for specific candidates. Reports spoke of Lithuanians’ tearing out Jewish names and of Jewish voters’ tearing out all names but the Jewish ones. Pozdniakov reported to Moscow that Jewish names and Sniečkus were the primary targets of voter rejections. (Did Sniečkus, candidate number 8 in the Kaunas region, receive a majority of the votes cast?) Voters also wrote in comments on the ballots; some expressed strong anti-Jewish feelings: “Away with the Jews from Lithuania,” “Foreboding and conscience do not let me vote for those who lightheartedly, with the help of Jews, prepare to sell their homeland,” “Beat the Jews, save Lithuania,” “Down with the Jewish government.” A comment in Polish on one questioned, “There is a Jewish candidate in Kaunas, where is a Pole?” One envelope contained two imitation ballots with reproductions of Mickey Mouse—one bore the name “Paleckis,” the other “Stalin.”⁴¹¹

The official results as announced by Niunka’s commission gave no accounting of votes for or against individual candidates, instead recasting the vote count by declaring that a vote for any one of the candidates on the ballot constituted a vote for the entire slate offered by the Union of Lithuanian Working People, even though there had been no provision for such a count. In violation of Article 21, therefore, the commission did not publish the vote count by candidate; that would have revealed the Lithuanian voters’ opposition to the slate. Article 41 of the election law declared that the candidates who received the majority of the votes would be “the elected popular representatives.” The commission, having decided not to count individual votes, ignored this provision of the law altogether. It certified all

the candidates of the Union of Lithuanian Workers as a group, regardless of what percentage of the votes they had individually each received.

It could in fact be argued to the contrary that not one single vote for the whole list of the Union of Working People was cast in all of Lithuania, because voters could express support *only* for their regional candidates and even so only for individuals. The ballots carried no provision for voting for the slate as a whole. In conclusion, one can argue that the Election Commission's certification of all 79 candidates constituted a gross falsification of the actual results, and this challenges the legitimacy of the People's Seimas itself as well as its decisions.

In the shadow of the mass demonstrations that had preceded the elections and the enthusiasm that crowds supposedly showed, how could this have happened? What motivated Lithuanian voters? Despite the massive and ostentatiously enthusiastic demonstrations, there was growing opposition to the communist party's emergence and its agitation for joining the Soviet Union. Growing anti-Jewish sentiment also carried with it growing hostility toward the communist party and opposition to the government. (As noted in chapter XI, in August Saugumas report spoke of the party's unpopularity because the Lithuanian populace was identifying it as Jewish.) It is impossible on the basis of available evidence to provide any full explanation, but the resistance that Lithuanians showed to the communist electoral campaign was truly remarkable.

For enthusiasts of the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist revolution, challenges to the legitimacy of the People's Seimas are of course meaningless. This was a "revolutionary situation," a revolution from above. 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 arrests of former Lithuanian officials, which she did not mention in her book, she reportedly responded 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 added, "A people who have received the protection of the great Stalin cannot conceive of greater joy."⁴¹²

In fact, the elections in Lithuania on July 14–15, 1940, can serve as impressive evidence to support the statement of Vladimir Putin on December 7, 2004: "Honestly speaking, I cannot imagine how it is possible to organize elections under the conditions of occupation by foreign forces." Putin, to be sure, was speaking about elections then to be held in Iraq, but his comments

illustrate the booby traps awaiting politicians intent on giving history and political science lessons.

In July 1940 Dekanozov's administration gave a notable example on how to organize an election, "under the conditions of occupation by foreign forces." German observers reported that Kaunas had the heaviest concentration of Soviet troops in the Baltic, and they considered Kaunas virtually a Red Army garrison town.⁴¹³ With the backing of the Red Army, Vladimir Dekanozov, the Soviet proconsul in Vilnius, directed the Communist Party, with the support and advice of NKVD officers, in staging the electoral process. The LCP controlled the forces of repression and physically isolated and terrorized potential opposition; and of course, following the Soviet model, the party controlled the election apparatus and monopolized the announcement of the results of the voting. And yet it still failed to win the mandate of the Lithuanian electorate; therefore it had to falsify the results to claim victory.

Nevertheless, the Dekanozov machine rolled on, dominating the media and the new institutions. The image was everything. Paleckis's People's Government faded back into the shadows as the spotlight focused on Dekanozov's new creation, the People's Seimas. Dekanozov was undoubtedly displeased by the confusion in the voting result—a turnout of 138 percent of the registered voters had to arouse some suspicion—but then the regime soon destroyed or at least buried the evidence in archives, leaving Soviet historians to sing praises of the process.

XIII

Sovietization

“The procedure was imposingly correct.”

—Anna Louise Strong

“We are leaving to bring the sun back to Lithuania, the new Lithuania, the sun of the Stalin Constitution.”

—Justas Paleckis

“Really we lived on melting ice, and fast melting, because Stalin’s sun was heating it.”

—Liudas Dovydėnas

As soon as the polls had closed on the evening of July 15, the course of events was clear. The Lithuanian Communist Party declared that the vote showed that the Lithuanian public had endorsed the party’s program, the first point of which was to lead Lithuania into the Soviet Union. It was obviously irrelevant that such a goal was not mentioned in the program of the Union of Lithuanian Working People or that the votes had not been officially tabulated yet. The future was now. The next day a new newspaper appeared, *Darbo Lietuva*, which replaced *Lietuvos aidas* and took over all its subscriptions. *Lietuvos aidas* had to disappear, just as “everything marked by Smetonism will disappear,” the newspaper’s editorial explained. “In recent time *Lietuvos aidas* had an entirely new face and that face befit this moment; nevertheless it also had a past which was so oppressive and unpleasant that even the newspaper’s new face could not overcome that unpleasant mood.” The new order removed its mask of conciliation and brought the process of sovietizing the state into the open. The People’s Seimas was to meet on July 21, and it would prepare the way to join the Soviet Union. As a token of things to come, on the 16th Minister of the Interior Gedvilas and President Paleckis signed orders sending former Prime Minister Antanas Merkys and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Juozas Urbšys into the interior of the Soviet Union. Lithuania was still formally an independent state, but the government felt free to send people into the interior of the Soviet Union.

The media of course repeatedly asserted that the Lithuanian people were greeting this process with joy. Declaring that the elections had “passed as a festive holiday” and that “the people have now stated their word,” *Darbo Lietuva* celebrated the thought that “there are many places where even 138 percent of all the people having the right to vote voted.” This “first but decisive examination,” it declared, “was passed very well.” Lithuania would now “proceed in close friendship with the great Soviet Union, the true liberator of nations.” The next day, the 17th, Petras Cvirka, a well-known writer, called the election “a complete celebration of the people’s joy”; people

had gone to the Poles, he reported, singing “Lithuanian folk songs and the new Soviet songs.” He spoke of one woman’s holding her ballot to her breast, and when officials told her to vote, she exclaimed, “I want to hold it a moment by my heart!”

Just as *Lietuvos aidas* left the political scene, so too did the Union of Lithuanian Working People. The program of the Union of Lithuanian Working People was not to be on the agenda of the People’s Seimas. The organization ceased to exist, if it had indeed ever had anything more than a verbal existence. It became just another piece of historic ephemera. The union had fulfilled its mission as the bellwether leading the people into the election, and now it could go, perhaps best remembered for its call for “inviolable union” with the USSR. The Saugumas even picked up one rumor to the effect that the government, realizing that it could not live up to the lavish election promises of the Union of Working People, had decided that joining the Soviet Union was now its best alternative.

On July 17 Dekanozov, Vyshinsky, and Zhdanov, the three Soviet proconsuls in the Baltic republics, met in Riga, presumably to coordinate the final details for the incorporation of the three states. Latvia and Estonia had produced similar election results on July 14 and 15; Dekanozov could enjoy pride of place for having supervised the most impressive election results. In Estonia, only 84.1 percent of the eligible voters reportedly went to the polls, and 92.8 percent had endorsed the candidates of the Estonian Working People’s League. The Latvian Electoral Commission declared that 94.8% of the eligible voters had gone to the polls, with 97.8 percent supported the candidates of the “Latvian Working People’s Bloc.”

In subsequent years, Soviet historians would repeatedly speak of the fundamental demands of the Lithuanian people at this point as being that Lithuania become a Soviet Socialist Republic, join the USSR, nationalize land and large industry, and nationalize banks. These four goals were not a part of the program of the Union of Lithuanian Working People, but they would constitute the basic agenda of the People’s Seimas when it would meet on July 21–23. In October 1939 these had been the four fundamental points in the Politburo’s program for sovietizing the lands just taken from Poland. Soviet policy and intentions were now coming out into the open.

With the incorporation into the Soviet Union now a clear goal, *Darbo Lietuva* and other channels of public information called for intensified vigilance against the “enemies of the people.” According to the announced election results, no more than seven percent of the population could be called reluctant to endorse the new order, but it was part of Soviet doctrine that “enemies of the people” hid their thoughts and never slept. In accordance with Stalin’s dictum that the enemy became more desperate and dangerous as it neared its ultimate annihilation, the party, the government, and of course the people had to be more vigilant and active. On the 16th, *Darbo Lietuva* carried a vignette by the writer Vytautas Sirijos-Gira, warning that the new order had

enemies everywhere—those enemies, demoralized, now called themselves “democrats.” On July 19, *Darbo Lietuva* published a decree, adopted on the 13th before the elections and made public on the 17th, giving the Minister of Internal Affairs still greater powers, including the power to forbid and seize publications and to control the use of radios and forbid their use in ways dangerous “to state security or public order.” The minister, Gedvilas, also received the power to ban flags and insignia.

The symbols of independent Lithuania—the flag, the national hymn, the knight on horseback—were now illegal, and the red flag of which Paleckis had spoken on July 11 dominated the landscape. Names of streets and squares had to undergo change. Workers’ soviets began to form in Kaunas on the 16th. Lithuania joined Moscow’s time zone, and Vilnius radio aired special programs to teach people to sing the *Internationale* properly. Party and government officials organized rallies around the country calling for joining the Soviet Union and multiplying by the day. Joining the Soviet Union had been a part of the party’s program but not of the Union of Working People’s program. The authorities now proclaimed that the election results showed that the “people” heartily and fully endorsed the party’s program, and less than three weeks later, Lithuania became a constituent republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. To be sure, the slogan of “Lithuania the 13th Soviet republic” proved to be unrealizable when the USSR Supreme Soviet accepted Moldavia as the thirteenth Soviet Republic, so Lithuania was now to become the 14th Soviet republic.⁴¹⁴

In the week’s interval between the elections and the meeting of the People’s Seimas, the media continually spoke of the advantages, the beauty, and the joy of belonging to the Soviet Union. Articles in the press discussed health care, the privileges of the Soviet constitution, and the stimulating cultural life that presumably lay in the future. Dekanozov had requested Moscow to send performing artists to Vilnius, and on the 19th, reviewing a concert by visiting Soviet stage artists, including pianist Emil Gilels, *Darbo Lietuva* declared that this artistic cooperation “raised still greater sympathy for the great Soviet Union, which rescued our impoverished land from Smetonist oppression.” Anna Louise Strong lavished great praise on concerts by the Red Army: “The most applauded folk in all Lithuania during months of my visit were the Red Army boys.” This promised a joyful cultural future: “Never had they heard such music produced by ordinary soldiers. It was such good music that the foreign legations spread the gossip that these were Grand Opera artists dressed up in soldiers’ uniforms.”⁴¹⁵ Strong may, of course, have intentionally confused the visit of the Soviet artists with the performances of the Red army, but her aim was to help paint a glowing picture of Lithuania’s future as a part of the Soviet Union.

The programmed exultation at the prospect of joining the Soviet Union escalated throughout the week before the meeting of the People’s Seimas. Strong wrote, “The elections had marked not the end of the people’s

activity but the beginning,” and then she explained that “the tide of the people’s will set strongly towards union with the USSR.” On July 17th, *Darbo Lietuva* proclaimed, “Without Soviet rule it is inconceivable to create a better life.” The workers, it declared, “demand that Lithuania establish the constitution of the Soviet Union.” Calling Stalin “teacher, leader, friend, and father,” it repeatedly cited meetings demanding that Lithuania become a part of the Soviet Union. Even the peasantry reportedly demanded the fulfillment of its “dream to become a part of the Soviet Union.” On the 19th, the newspaper said flatly, “The people demand that Lithuania join the Soviet Union.” Petras Cvirka hailed the Soviet Union as the only state that had “eternally banished the national squabbles and bestial racial hatred that hamper the unity of working people.” On that same day, the newspaper’s leader called for immediately accepting “the Soviet order and the Stalin constitution,” and it carried articles on the Soviet constitution, Soviet health care, and Soviet farm machinery.

As the party leadership prepared for the meeting of the People’s Seimas, however, they came face to face with a potentially embarrassing situation. Niunka’s Electoral Commission had of course announced the election of the entire slate, the 79 names proposed by the Union of Working People, but only 78 successful candidates came to Kaunas to participate in the work of the Seimas. The problem lay with the candidate endorsed for seat 31 in the Ukmergė region, Jonas Abakonis, a non-party candidate, described as “30 years old, peasant.” Abakonis did not come to Kaunas. In reporting to the Seimas on the makeup of deputies, Antanas Sniečkus admitted that one deputy was missing, that there were only 78 deputies present. The one deputy, he declared, “for reasons not known to us did not come to the meeting.”⁴¹⁶

Sniečkus was lying: the party leadership certainly knew by this time why Abakonis would not show up. He in fact did not exist. The person originally nominated was A. Bakonis, but there was a misprint on the ballot. Party leaders surely knew this before the voting: *Tiesa* of July 13 did not carry his picture in its gallery of parliamentary candidates. Now the party had to cover up its mistake. Niunka, the head of the electoral commission, obviously would not want the public to know of this error; this could cast a bad shadow on the entire electoral process. Declarations that the Lithuanian public was well acquainted with the local candidates had held a prominent place in the election propaganda. Niunka and Sniečkus also probably did not want Moscow to know about this electoral slipup; reporting participation of more than 100 percent of the registered voters surely had already cost them some credit in the Soviet capital.

Eventually, however, the party was able to put the error to good use. As Niunka himself later recounted, in August, after the USSR Supreme Soviet had accepted Lithuania into the Soviet family, Lithuania was to adopt a Soviet style constitution, setting the party in power over the state and

making the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars the leading figure in the state structure. Sniečkus as head of the party would be the ruler of Lithuania; Gedvilas was to become Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. The formal chief of state in Lithuania, analogous to the position of Mikhail Kalinin in Moscow, would be the chairman of the presidium of the Lithuanian parliament. The obvious candidate for that honorific post would be Justas Paleckis, but Paleckis was not a Seimas deputy. As acting president of the Lithuanian Republic, he had not been a parliamentary candidate. Therefore, making a virtue out of necessity, on August 17 the Electoral Commission declared that since "the elected Seimas deputy Jonas Abakonis has not until now begun to assume his duties," his position "as People's Seimas deputy" was now "voided." To replace this non-existent miscreant, in a special election, on October 22, 91.82 percent of Ukmergė voters went to the polls and 99.24 percent of them voted for Paleckis, who ran as the single candidate proposed by the briefly resurrected Union of Lithuanian Working People.⁴¹⁷

The Saugumas would not seem to have been involved in resolving the "Abakonis case," but it had other worries in watching over the meetings that were calling for Lithuania to become a Soviet Republic. By now the Saugumas agents had set formulas for describing broad popular support for the regime, fear on the part of the remnants of the old order, and enthusiasm for the society's new goals. Nevertheless, it noted that there were occasions where assemblies proved to be unenthusiastic about annexation. In one case the authorities arrested three men who were trying to collect signatures against annexation. In a striking example of caution, the Ministry of Internal Affairs bulletin reported that peasants were satisfied with the new regime although "in general, the rural area is nevertheless remaining relatively very reserved."⁴¹⁸ Open resistance, however, was only a local phenomenon, not involving many people. The combined forces of the Red Army, the Saugumas, and the militia, aided by the compliant media, were able to keep such actions isolated and quiet.

On the other hand, there was growing anti-Jewish feeling built on the premise that Jews were profiting from the new order. A poster in Baisogala proclaimed, "The Jews are selling us," and it praised Hitler. Workers' assemblies on occasion objected to instructions to elect Jews as their leaders. On July 25 militia closed a meeting in Trakai when the group objected to the naming of a Jewish leader. Some anti-Jewish propaganda claimed to be supporting the new regime, such as one proclamation, "Long live communist Lithuania! Down with the Jews, exploiters of the people and parasites." In Kėdainiai, on August 16, the Saugumas reported a manifesto declaring: "The Jews bought estates for Smetona, exploited us, and drank our blood. Long live socialist Lithuania, down with Smetona's lackeys the Jews."

Jewish refugees from Poland were among the few in Lithuania who could openly struggle to escape Soviet rule. Although the image that Soviet

forces wanted to project in Lithuania had the Red Army serving as the stalwart protector against the possibility of being overrun by the Nazis, many of the refugees looked for ways of escaping from this situation altogether, and they found help through the bold action of a few foreign diplomats who now had to reckon that their work in Kaunas was essentially done. The foreign missions would soon have to leave the country. The two most prominent diplomats helping Jewish refugees were Jan Zwartendijk, the acting Dutch consul, and Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul.

After the Germans had invaded the Netherlands on May 10, the Dutch minister to the Baltic states, who resided in Riga, had relieved the Dutch consul-general in Lithuania of his post “because of the Nazi sympathies of his German wife.” The minister then asked Jan Zwartendijk, the director of the Philips enterprise in Lithuania, to serve as temporary consul in Kaunas. As the campaign to incorporate Lithuania into the Soviet Union developed, Zwartendijk agreed to a request by Jewish refugees with claims to Dutch citizenship that he note in their passports the fact that no special visa was necessary to enter into a Dutch possession such as Surinam and Curacao. He intentionally dropped mention of the fact that “to enter those colonies one had to have a permit from the local Governor in Curacao.” In the course of eight or nine days, July 24 to August 2, he issued at least 2,345 visas.

When Soviet officials agreed to recognize these so-called “Curacao visas” on the condition that the applicants also had visas for an intermediate stop, the next step in the process for Jewish refugees wanting to go to “Curacao” was to obtain transit visas for a stay in Japan. The Japanese consul, Chiune Sugihara, readily accepted the first applicants, the individuals who had claims to Dutch citizenship, and then he found himself flooded by other applicants, all showing that they possessed “Curacao visas.” As Zwartendijk’s son has characterized their cooperation:

Thus, Zwartendijk and Sugihara, who had not known each other and never met, found themselves working diligently as an unplanned, uncoordinated and certainly unofficial team, writing visas full-time and at top speed. Sugihara phoned Zwartendijk repeatedly to ask him to slow down. When Zwartendijk approached Curacao visa No. 2200 on August 1, Sugihara was well behind at about 700 Japanese transit visas, but he stayed on in Kaunas during August and continued writing transit visas. August 25 was the final deadline by which all remaining foreign consulates had to be closed by order of the government.⁴¹⁹

Legend has it that as Sugihara left Kaunas, he was throwing signed visas out the train window.

Both consuls worked at considerable risk for themselves; neither had the authority to grant such visas. Sugihara was acting against orders from Tokyo, and his subsequent diplomatic career suffered for it. Zwartendijk, who had no diplomatic immunity, actually had no authority to write visas, and when the Soviet authorities took over the offices of Philips, where he had been working, he had to work at home. He then had anxious moments before the Soviet authorities allowed him and his family to leave Lithuania. When he returned to the Netherlands, now under German occupation, he lived under the threat that the Nazi authorities could somehow learn of his actions in Kaunas as the representative of the government that the Germans had displaced. Israel eventually enrolled both men in the list of Righteous among Nations. In any case, over 2000 Jews were eventually able to make their way to Japan with the Curacao visas, reinforced by Sugihara's Japanese visas.

Here the question inevitably arises, "Why did the Soviets recognize these visas and allow the refugees to cross the Soviet Union?" We can only speculate. Natkevičius had first raised the question of allowing the refugees passage in a meeting with Dekanozov at the Soviet Foreign Ministry on April 17. He spoke of possibly 5000 such persons. The Politburo eventually agreed to accept such visas, in groups of 50 to 100 persons. This may have been a calculated step to remove traces of Polish rule in the lands seized in September 1939. Allowing these refugees to leave also reduced the need to tolerate the western aid groups that had been helping them. And of course, Soviet intelligence planted some of its own agents among the refugees.⁴²⁰

Amid all these lesser dramas, the major tactical question for the communist party in the days leading up to the People's Seimas session was the organization and mobilization of the deputies. They were sure that the overwhelming majority of the deputies would follow their lead, but the slate of the Union of Working People had included some ten persons—not counting "Abakonis"—about whom the party leadership could not be absolutely sure. The decisions to proclaim Lithuania a Soviet Socialist Republic and to request incorporation into the Soviet Union had to be unanimous, without any sign of doubt or hesitation.

Reconstruction of the events and of the mood of the moment is difficult because of the censorship and atmosphere of intimidation that the government cast over the society. Under the circumstances, all the written evidence, whether approving or condemning the campaign then sweeping Lithuania, can only raise suspicions. Critics of the Soviet regime frequently quote, for example, a memoir written by Antanas Garmus that declared that Dekanozov had sent out an order calling for mass resolutions in support of the idea of incorporation. This point must be judged against two reservations: one, the thought that Dekanozov usually avoided putting his orders in writing, and two, the fact that Garmus's memoir was written and published in 1942 when the German army ruled Lithuania. Nevertheless we know that

Dekanozov was actively involved in organizing public meetings both before and after the elections.

To judge such a memoir, it is necessary to look at the author more closely. Garmus was a doctor specializing in treating tuberculosis, and he had a long record as a Social Democrat. The communists considered him a sympathizer because, among other things, he had contributed to Red Aid, or MOPR, the communist front organization for providing help to political prisoners. On June 23, the Paleckis-Gedvilas regime installed him as mayor of Kaunas, a sign that he had the confidence of the new order. The Union of Lithuanian Working People had nominated him to be a deputy—he claimed without consulting him. The regime had to rush its preparation for the voting; it had move quickly in choosing candidates. Garmus had, of course, won his position as deputy no. 3 from the Kaunas district, and he carried out his assigned role in the People's Seimas.

In 1942, now living under the Nazi occupation, Garmus and Krèvè were perhaps the most prominent persons associated with the People's Government who gathered to discuss their experiences in July 1940. Together they signed a declaration, dated August 30, 1942, denouncing the election of the People's Seimas and asserting that Dekanozov had "openly threatened" them if they in any way resisted. Vladas Niunka had reportedly warned, "Where there is might, there is right." The individual statements by members of the group told of how party officials had ordered them to be candidates. Liudas Dovydėnas, deputy no. 43 from Panevėžys, explained his acceptance of the nomination by noting that since the army had not resisted, he did not see why he should. Obviously influenced by the Nazi occupation authorities, the accounts of the intrigues surrounding the meetings of the Seimas included denunciations of Jews who had taken positions in the Soviet regime.

One of the signatories of the deputies' declaration, Stasė Vaineikienė, deputy no. 63 from Telšiai and the former mayor of Palanga, declared of the People's Seimas that it was nothing more "than the usurpation of the will of the Lithuanian nation." After the return of Soviet forces at the end of the Second World War, Vaineikienė signed another statement, dated February 3, 1945, this time for Soviet officials, declaring that in 1942 she had been summoned to Kaunas to participate in the gathering of former deputies and that she had been forced to speak against her will. Gestapo censorship, she charged, had edited the texts before their being released.⁴²¹

The historian is left with the task of defining what is reliable in this type of documentation. In the fall of 1941, at the order of Theodor Renteln, the head of the Nazi occupation administration, the Lithuanians had formed a Bureau to study Soviet rule in Lithuania. The bureau eventually published four volumes of a series entitled *Lietuvos archyvas. Bolševizmo metai* (Lithuania Archive. The Years of Bolshevism); a fifth volume exists in manuscript. The administrators of this office naturally had to avoid conflict

with the occupation authorities, but they apparently pursued their task carefully. They rejected manuscripts that they considered just emotional outbursts and demanded documented “facts.” Under the circumstances, somewhat analogous to those of memoirs published under Soviet censorship, the published material would appear usable with normal caution.⁴²²

Of the statements offered in August 1942, Krèvė’s account of his experiences in the government and Garmus’s account of his experiences as a deputy have won the most attention from historians. The accounts of basic events, given the fallibility of undocumented memories, would seem to be more or less reliable. Quotations, while probably paraphrased and sharpened, fall in the gap between what one person thinks he or she has said and another remembers he or she has heard. The interpretations offered by all the deputies demand careful, cautious treatment. They use emotional terminology a historian might well avoid, such as “a disgusting parody of elections” and “a preposterous circus.” Vaineikienė’s testimonies to Nazi and Soviet authorities may well offset each other, but in all, the collection, held in the archive of the former Institute of Party History, demands attention.

As Garmus recounted his experience, on July 18 or 19 he visited Dekanozov to complain about the pressure being exerted on the newly elected deputies to the People’s Seimas. Dekanozov rejected his arguments against the Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union: “We liberated you from the brutal Smetona regime... Lithuania is now free.” When Garmus threatened to vote against the resolution for incorporation into the USSR, Dekanozov allegedly threatened him: “Just try. There are means to do what we want, and we have enough of them.” Garmus insisted that he tried to cooperate with like-minded deputies, but the work of the Seimas was too tightly controlled for them to be able to do anything.⁴²³

For Lithuanian intellectuals who opposed the course of the new regime, the latter half of July was an agonizing, frightening period. There had been some hope that the regime would release the prisoners it had arrested in the days before the election, but only a few returned. The Lithuanian government had now deported Merkys and Urbšys into Soviet territory. A number of intellectuals, even ones who had welcomed the collapse of the Soviet regime, had already fled across the border with Germany. Many more were considering the possibility with the understanding that the act of flight was becoming more dangerous and hazardous every day. Soviet border controls were tightening. Some Lithuanians suddenly discovered German ancestry and obtained permission to be “repatriated” to Germany.⁴²⁴ Galvanauskas managed to flee at the beginning of August. Those who chose to remain, whether for enthusiasm, fear, or any other reason, faced an uncertain future as they looked for places for themselves in the new system.

There were of course many intellectuals, Communists and non-Communists, who considered the new regime a font of opportunity, and they found satisfying work. Garmus quoted Meškauskienė as telling him, “We are

not occupied, but we will honorably join ourselves to the USSR.” In the post-Soviet period, after 1990, charges of “collaboration with occupiers” resounded in Lithuanian discourse, but the emotional content of the term “collaboration,” and also the term “resistance,” defies adequate rational definition. Such terms have become more a polemical weapon than a rational, scholarly designation. It is relatively easy to identify a “Quisling” or a “partisan fighter” as standing at opposite ends of the political spectrum in a society under occupation, but between these extremes, a critic may consider a given person in the system an opportunist/collaborator while that person may be convinced that he or she is making the best of a bad situation while maintaining his or her own integrity.

Two examples of such situations would seem in order here: one offered by Garmus, the memoirist just quoted above, written and in 1942 under the German occupation, the other taken from Zenonas Ivinskis’s diary, written on July 28, 1940, in the chill of uncertainty. Both deal with the decisions of controversial personalities to remain in Lithuania, and both focus on the question of the responsibilities of the national intelligentsia.

In his account of his dilemma in preparing for the meeting of the People’s Assembly, Garmus wrote of visiting Krèvè-Mickevičius, who was already known to have objected to the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union but who was still serving in the People’s Government. Krèvè reportedly used the same argument he used in his memoirs: “What could be saved?” As Garmus quoted him, Krèvè declared, “It is now necessary to save what one can, to save first of all the intelligentsia. If you oppose their plans, that not only you with your families will perish, but vengeance will fall on all our intelligentsia. It will be destroyed.”⁴²⁵

The other citation, already quoted in Chapter IX, summarizes the views of Kazys Bizauskas, whom many Lithuanians criticize for his having urged Smetona to yield unconditionally to all points in the Soviet ultimatum of June 15. It seems to be worth quoting at length.

He [Bizauskas] argued that our intelligentsia must not desert the people and separate from it. The flight of intellectuals makes a bad impression on the people. In the end those intellectuals are very necessary for the people even in difficult times... Now is such an unclear time, but later possibilities for action will become clear and the intellectual will have the possibility to show his worth. Just his presence and radiance [*spinduliavimas*] among the people will have its influence. And then there must be sacrifices. If someone is deported, that sacrifice will not pass without making an impression. We have as yet not made enough sacrifices to defend independence. The Poles have done so much! And won’t Urbšys’s deportation have an effect? Doesn’t that make us tougher? Therefore it is necessary to remain here and live with the masses. Émigrés cannot win large

matters. Of course it is good that there are people abroad who can carry on diplomatic action. There are diplomats, personnel of missions who, to be sure, were not strong. But there are enough for diplomatic activity.⁴²⁶

No one could be sure of survival. More than one Lithuanian writer, critical of Bizauskas's role in the acceptance of the Soviet ultimatum, has evidenced a certain *Schadenfreude* in noting that the Soviet authorities arrested him and in 1941, in the retreat from Lithuania, executed him.

When the People's Seimas deputies gathered in Kaunas's Metropolis Hotel on the day before the Seimas's meeting, it had become clear that their job would be to approve annexation to the Soviet Union, but the exact procedures remained unknown. The deputies seemed to realize that they themselves would initiate nothing; as yet they had no agenda, no draft resolutions to discuss—nor were they encouraged to take any initiative. According to Liudas Dovydėnas, Sniečkus and Gedvilas spoke to them, assuring them that everything was in order and explaining the urgency and necessity of full cooperation.⁴²⁷

Then on Sunday, July 21, the People's Seimas gathered in the state theater building. The morning edition of *Darbo Lietuva* carried the message "We want to join the Soviet Union." The area was festooned with decorations. There was no special seating for deputies in the crowded hall, and it would have been impossible to count votes had that been necessary. In 1940 the hall could seat about 730 people, and the 78 deputies were lost in the crowd. According to Arvydas Anušauskas, Dekanozov and the NKVD selected 500 party and Komsomol members to form "the image of a joyful public" participating in the meeting of the People's Seimas. Garmus wrote of being surrounded by police agents and soldiers, and he was probably right.⁴²⁸

Paleckis's opening speech to the Seimas set the tone of the gathering. Strong wrote of Paleckis's speaking "under great Lithuanian flags," but a common photograph of the assembly showed a giant portrait of Stalin above the slogan "Long Live Soviet Socialist Lithuania!" The president tied Lithuania's present political status and future to the Bolshevik Revolution and the short-lived Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic 1918–1919. In the first days of the new order, in the middle of June, government propaganda had spoken of rescuing Lithuania from fourteen years of Smetona's dictatorship; now Paleckis was speaking of twenty years of bourgeois rule and exploitation. As he put it, the struggle of "two Lithuanias" was now over. The independence of "bourgeois Lithuania" had been only imaginary. Lithuania had been "a toy in the hands of imperialistic politics." The text of the speech published later by Soviet historians eliminated his shouts of praise for Stalin, such as "the genius leader of the peoples of the USSR and all the world's proletariat" to which the deputies responded with "thunderous applause." When he declared that Lithuania needed Soviet

government—"May the sun of the Stalin constitution brighten our fatherland"—the deputies reportedly stood in an ovation. Paleckis's own text of his speech carried the notation that at one point someone in the hall shouted "Bravo Pozdniakov!" Paleckis's image of "the sun of the Stalin constitution" became a common propaganda slogan, which one anti-Soviet writer used in the opposite sense: "Really we lived on melting ice, and fast melting, because Stalin's sun was heating it."⁴²⁹

Paleckis closed his speech by essentially giving the Seimas the full power to determine Lithuania's future: "Now the People's Government passes Lithuania's fate into the hands of the People's Seimas and awaits its decision on our country's greatest issues." Krėvė spoke on behalf of the cabinet of ministers, reasserting the theme that the People's Government's "primary task" had been to convene the People's Seimas and offering the cabinet's resignation. After the Seimas had approved leaving the cabinet of ministers intact for the time being, the meeting had to approve its agenda. Following the format set up by the Politburo in October 1939, deputies proposed four questions: "the state system"; "Lithuania's entrance into the Soviet Union"; "the land question"; and "the nationalization of banks, large enterprises and factories." Each of the speakers declared he was representing the will of his fellow deputies and his constituents. In speaking to the question of joining the Soviet Union, Sniečkus declared, "It should be clear to us all that the Lithuanian people can have only one path if they want to live happy and free. That path is to join the Soviet Union. Any other path would be ruinous."⁴³⁰

The discussion of the question of declaring Lithuania a Soviet Republic lasted barely an hour. When the chairman asked deputies supporting the resolution to raise their mandates, the stenographic record notes "stormy applause." When he asked for negative votes, the record noted "the People's Seimas deputies laugh." The discussion of the question of requesting admission to the Soviet Union lasted nineteen minutes longer, one hour and twenty-four minutes. According to *Darbo Lietuva*, after the vote Pozdniakov shouted from his seat "Long live the Lithuanian Socialist Republic," to which the assembly responded with "uninterrupted ovations." The clapping and shouting lasted more than twelve minutes. The published stenographic record did not mention Pozdniakov's call. It again noted laughter at the thought of there being any negative votes, and stated that Gedvilas called on the deputies "to honor the representative of the Soviet Union, comrade Pozdniakov." The record added, "All stand and long greet him." Strong described the meeting with enthusiasm. This was the first sovereign state ever constitutionally entering the Soviet Union as a fully organized government. It was a moment of great historic importance.... The procedure was imposingly correct."⁴³¹

The authorities had planned mass meetings to celebrate the proclamation of Soviet rule in Lithuania, but torrential rain forced them to

call off these plans and restrict the celebration to an announcement on the radio. Many of those who opposed Soviet rule long treasured the memory of the heavy rain that interfered with the election process and now the rain that hampered the celebration of the Soviet system. In a summer of drought, didn't these rains reflect disapproval from On High?

The second day provided more declarations of solidarity. After representatives of intellectuals, of the youth of Lithuania, and of the army had greeted the Seimas, the assembly approved the proposal to nationalize the land, while assuring respect for the property of peasants, establishing 30 hectares (about 81 acres) as the norm for a peasant farm. Antanas Sniečkus opened the evening session with the report of the Mandate Commission, characterizing the deputies, whom, he said, "the entire Lithuanian working people elected not intimidated by any fear of repression." He delivered a long denunciation of the Smetona regime's election practices, saying that before Smetona's time, "no one had ever thought of such disgusting violence, falsehood, and deceit as the Smetona clique used against the Lithuanian people." As he reported the makeup of the Seimas membership, the Communist Party had essentially realized its goals. There were 70 men and eight women; 21 workers, 25 peasants, 27 intellectuals, a artisan, 3 soldiers, and one farm laborer; 67 Lithuanians, four Jews, three Poles, two Belarusians, one Russian, and one Latvian.⁴³²

On the third day, July 23rd, the Seimas adopted the law nationalizing banks and large industry in less than two hours. Among its last acts it agreed to name a commission to draw up a new state constitution for Lithuania using the constitution of the Soviet Union as a model. It also approved a list of 20 people to form the delegation that would travel to Moscow to request Lithuania's admission into the Soviet Union. (The list of course came already reviewed by the party.) At noon, the first session of the People's Seimas ended its work. In bidding the deputies farewell, the chairman, Liudas Adomuskas, urged them to inspire their friends "with the desire to produce a beautiful Lithuania."⁴³³

On the matter of choosing the delegation, it is of interest to note that the membership included Icaikas Meskupas-Adomas but not Antanas Sniečkus, who accompanied the delegation as a "translator." Moscow had vetted Meskupas in the winter of 1939–1940, and he was the acting head of the party in the summer of 1940. Sniečkus, who played a much more prominent role in the People's Seimas than Meskupas did, had not been in Moscow since the arrest and execution of Aleksa-Angarietis, and therefore the party leaders wanted to speak with him again before reinstalling him as party leader. In Moscow he surely had to disassociate himself from Angarietis. He officially took office as First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party on August 14, 1940, the day of his return from Moscow. In 1962, honoring what would have been Angarietis's 80th birthday, he spoke of the unjust actions of Stalin's Cult of Personality, and he declared that the

Lithuanian Communist Party hailed Angarietis's posthumous rehabilitation with joy.⁴³⁴

This study has frequently noted examples of the problems that the cult of personality that Sniečkus criticized caused later Soviet historians. Liudas Dovydėnas, a Seimas deputy who spoke in support of the law nationalizing banks and under the Nazi occupation was one of the deputies criticizing the work of the Seimas, subsequently recounted some interesting details of his own problems with the cult. In his memoirs he commented, "An abundance of praises for Stalin never bothered any editor, but a shortage—many." In his case, he drew criticism because he had not closed his speech to the People's Seimas with a slogan praising the "great leader of the working people," as recommended in the "general line" provided by the Soviet mission. In order to have the speech published, he had to agree to add some praise for Stalin. The stenographic record, as published in *Darbo Lietuva*, obligingly added a reference to the "great and noble ideas of Lenin and Stalin." The stenographic record published in 1985 altered that phrase into "great and noble ideas, the ideas of the Communist Party."⁴³⁵

After the Seimas had completed its work, the Sovietization of Lithuania proceeded with new vigor. Guards protected agricultural and industrial capital from former owners; businessmen had to deposit daily receipts in the banks, which had long been under government watch to prevent them from dissipating their capital in the form of "loans" to "bourgeois" customers. The workers' militia completely replaced the police, and the Lithuanian army was soon incorporated into the Red Army.

The state now officially assumed the name the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, but both the forms and the ideals of Soviet rule remained to be realized. There were many problems, both major and minor. The leaders could not identify reliable supporters in all parts of the country, and therefore the government could not extend the structure of "soviets" to the entire country before the German Wehrmacht began its march into Soviet Lithuania on June 22, 1941. The economic well being that propagandists had promised remained unrealized. Wages were rising but not keeping pace with prices; worker productivity lagged. Continued drought interfered with the agricultural crop. Workers were fleeing the countryside for the city, but the cities, pressed by the housing demands of Russian soldiers and civilians and wanting to reduce their unemployment rolls, soon began ordering Lithuanians to move into rural areas.

Saugumas agents noted signs of unrest developing in the month of August, but the population as a whole remained quiet. It is difficult to reconstruct the popular moods. Dovydėnas offered one interesting interpretation: "Few residents of Lithuania believed those promises, but the great majority were determined to cooperate in deed and word, tolerating a temporary occupation."⁴³⁶ Many Lithuanians, indeed, expected war between Germany and the Soviet Union to break out soon—Lithuanian political and

administrative figures interrogated by Soviet officials freely expressed such thoughts—and they wanted to believe that the Germans would rescue them. In any case, there was still no organized resistance to Soviet rule.

The last stage of Lithuania's annexation proceeded on schedule as the appointed delegation, headed by Paleckis, left Kaunas on July 30. In his departing address, as reported in *Darbo Lietuva* of July 31, Paleckis rapturously declaimed, "We are leaving to bring the sun back to Lithuania, the new Lithuania, the sun of the Stalin Constitution." The delegation experienced a festive and ceremonious reception in Moscow, and they delivered their request for admission to the Soviet Union to the USSR Supreme Soviet on August 3.

In his speech to the Supreme Soviet, Paleckis followed the fashion of the day in praising Stalin, calling him in sequence "the symbol and banner of the working class," "the leader of the working people of the world," "the leader of the peoples of the Great Soviet Union," and "the continuer of Lenin's work." His concluding slogans included, "Long live the Stalinist friendship of nations" and "Long live the wise leader, the inspirer and liberator of working people, our Great Comrade Stalin!" To this the Supreme Soviet naturally responded with "stormy, very long ovations."⁴³⁷ As was fully expected, the Soviet authorities agreed to grant the delegation its wish—Lithuania became the fourteenth republic in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The published texts of Paleckis's speech to the USSR Supreme Soviet offer more examples of the editing and falsification of texts. Paleckis's request that the Supreme Soviet accept the Lithuanians' request to be joined to the Soviet Union naturally survived all text emendations. Post-Stalinist Soviet historians, however, were apparently uncomfortable with his unstinting praise of Stalin in 1940. In the early part of the speech, Paleckis spoke of the struggle of the Lithuanian people that had now "ended with a great victory." A basic collection of documents of the events of 1940, published in 1985, chose to drop the next sentence in the speech as printed in *Darbo Lietuva* no. 35, on August 4, 1940: "For all who struggled in that battle, one name rallied spirit, that name—the symbol and banner of the working class; that name of the leader of working people of all the world; that name of the leader of the nations of the Great Soviet Union, of the continuer of Lenin's work—the NAME OF STALIN. (Ovations. Slogans are heard: Long live the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic! Hooray!)" Historians even altered his closing slogans: "Long live the Stalinist friendship of nations!" became "Long live the friendship of Soviet nations," and "Long live the wise leader, the inspiration and liberator of working people, our Great Comrade Stalin! (Stormy, very long ovations)" disappeared altogether. Other changes included: adding the adjective "bourgeois" to characterize "so-called" independent Lithuania; changing the statement "Lithuania was in the hands of the cruel imperialist states" to "Lithuania was only a toy in the

hands of imperialist states”; and correcting Paleckis’s error of speaking of the “Soviet Union” in 1920 by changing the name to “Soviet Russia.” They dropped another slogan wishing Viacheslav Molotov a long life—Molotov’s name was not in vogue in the Soviet Union of the mid-1980s—and they corrected Paleckis’s cheer for the “All-Union Communist Bolshevik Party! (Ovations)” to “the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks).”⁴³⁸

One of the ceremonial highlights of Lithuania’s ritual incorporation into the Soviet Union was the reading of a poem dedicated to Stalin and written by the popular Lithuanian poetess Salomėja Nėris. First published in *Darbo Lietuva* and *Tiesa* on July 23, it exalted Stalin’s significance for the Lithuanians: “For us the name of Stalin is radiant/ as that of a true father, a friend...” And “Stalin’s powerful shoulders/ break open the gates to the sun.” According to Kostas Korsakas, the director of ELTA, Dekanozov had ordered him to find someone to write a poem to Stalin, to be read in Moscow, and had then suggested that Korsakas ask Nėris. Korsakas had not expected her to agree, but to his surprise she immediately acquiesced. Quite possibly, Dekanozov had already spoken with Nėris; she herself declared of her opus, “When it was born in my heart, I really cannot say, but I wrote it in one night.” She traveled to Moscow ahead of the formal delegation, carrying along a special copy of the poem, printed in gold letters and decorated with red ribbons. In Moscow, she created an unexpected problem for Dekanozov when she insisted on wearing her Lithuanian national costume rather than an evening dress as he ordered.

When Soviet historians were bowdlerizing their historical documents concerning the events of 1940, they apparently decided that they could do little with Nėris’ statement, but they essentially buried her poem. In reprinting the stenograms and other documents of the People’s Seimas and Lithuania’s formal incorporation in Moscow, they reproduced her introductory words: “To our leader, teacher, friend, the Great Stalin, I dedicate my poetic word, a poem about Stalin,” but then the text referred readers to Nėris’s collected poetry, published in 1946 while Stalin was still alive. Upon completion of her reading, according to the published record, “the entire hall applauded.”⁴³⁹

After the USSR Supreme Soviet, as expected, had accepted the Lithuanian petition to be allowed to join the Soviet Union, the People’s Seimas had to reassemble for its second and last session on August 24. There were now five items on the agenda: the announcement of the USSR Supreme Soviet’s decision to accept the Lithuanian SSR, the report of the Mandates commission, the report of the constitutional commission, the task of renaming the People’s Seimas the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the establishment of the organs of government for the Lithuanian SSR. As chairman of the delegation that went to Moscow, Paleckis initiated the discussion of the USSR Supreme Soviet’s decision. Now, he declared, Lithuanians had to work with great will and energy, and he

criticized Lithuania's intellectuals: "The intelligentsia's passiveness is particularly unacceptable." Liudas Dovydėnas gave the official response, saying that he "lacks words" to express his joy at Lithuania's new achievements—"Today we still cannot express the thankfulness which those efforts have been worth."

Rising to give the report on mandates, Sniečkus soberly declared that "deputy Jonas Abakonis did not take up his duties as deputy. The Supreme Electoral Commission had therefore decided to consider Jonas Abakonis as having relinquished the rights of a people's deputy" and had ordered a new election. The voters, "unanimously, with great enthusiasm, elected Justas Paleckis, acting president of the republic and acting prime minister." The assembly accepted Sniečkus's report without discussion and applauded.

Discussion of the proposed constitution, consisting mainly of enthusiasm and explanations, ran into the evening and resumed on the morning of August 25. The deputies listened to a reading of the text, and speakers repeatedly talked of how life would now be better than under the Smetona and bourgeois dictatorship. Sniečkus proclaimed, "Our decisions today, acceptance of the new constitution has a deep revolutionary significance, since it changes the essence of class relations in our land, it overthrows the class of exploiters, takes power from them and gives it to the classes that have up to now been exploited—the working class, laboring peasants, and all laboring people. Who was nothing now becomes everything." Once the deputies had unanimously accepted the constitution, they quickly agreed to rename their assembly "the provisional Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic," and the People's Seimas formally passed out of existence.⁴⁴⁰

After a short recess, the Seimas resumed its work now under the name of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, meeting in its first session. Paleckis opened the discussion by calling for the government to speed up the process of moving Lithuania's capital to from Kaunas to Vilnius. Stalin, he pointed out, had shown special interest in Vilnius's being Lithuania's capital. The Supreme Soviet obligingly decreed that the move to Vilnius should be completed by May 1. (The government did not realize this goal.) When it came time to choose new rulers, Matas Mickis, the Minister of Agriculture, offered a list of names to fill the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and he nominated Paleckis to be the chairman of the Presidium. Gedvilas, the chairman of the session, quickly put each of Mickis's nominations for the presidium to a vote, and the deputies unanimously accepted all with applause. After filling other posts, the deputies voted on Gedvilas's nomination as the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, the group to replace the Smetona constitution's cabinet of minister. In this case, there was one abstention but of course no sign of opposition: Gedvilas was the abstainer.

The next day, August 26th, the Supreme Soviet accepted Gedvilas's nominations for the council of People's Commissars. Mickis, Pakarklis, and Venclova remained at the old posts, now receiving new titles as People's Commissars. Replacing Gedvilas as the head of internal affairs was Aleksandras Guzevičius. There was of course no need for a Commissar of Foreign Affairs, and Krèvè's former deputy, Pijus Glovackas now became chairman of the State Planning Commission and also Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. The process of naming the Council of People's Commissars took 50 minutes. The Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic was now constitutionally a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.⁴⁴¹

XIV

The Balance Sheet

“We will not aim at sovietizing them... There will come a time when they will do this themselves.”

—Joseph Stalin to Georgii Dimitrov, October 25, 1939

“Everything was done with dizzying speed.”

—Liudas Truska

“It is necessary... to rid Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia of this hostile scum [*svolochi*].”

—Andrei Andreevich Andreev

In the course of just seven weeks, Lithuanians experienced a dizzying transition, from an independent state to a constituent republic of the USSR. The pro-Soviet regime swept them along in a populist-style campaign of meetings, denouncing the old regime and promising an exciting future. There was no organized resistance to the sovietizing juggernaut. The campaign called itself “democratic,” but its declaration that democracy cannot tolerate opposition, backed up by arrests of possible opponents, “enemies of the people,” points up the perils of presuming that certain international words carry the same meaning in every society. The Soviet camp was enforcing its own definitions of such words as “democratic,” “independent,” and even “international.” For fifty years, Soviet writers would call this process “progress.” But given the opportunity to rid themselves of Soviet rule at the end of the 1980s, the vast majority of Lithuanians, in a new series of neo-populist meetings, opted for the reestablishment of an independent state.⁴⁴² It remains here to summarize that process of incorporation in 1940.

The Soviet takeover of Lithuania in 1940 was “a revolution from above.” Although Lithuanian communist leaders, together with Soviet historians, insisted that the Lithuanian people had voluntarily, enthusiastically, demanded the establishment of the Soviet order in Lithuania, the direction for the changes in Lithuania came from Moscow, communicated through the person of Vladimir Dekanozov, Deputy People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, a longtime associate and colleague of Lavrentii Beria, the USSR People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs. Dekanozov’s arrival in Kaunas effectively brought Lithuania under the roof of the Soviet party-state, and his task was to restructure Lithuania’s political system to fit into the Soviet model. The Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party had established the basic political and economic lines of this program in its decision of October 1939 outlining the procedure to be followed in incorporating Belarusian and Ukrainian territories taken from Poland. This program offered

to outsiders the image that the Lithuanians were doing this themselves. As Joseph Stalin declared to Georgii Dimitrov in October 1939, “We will not aim at sovietizing them... There will come a time when they will do this themselves.”⁴⁴³

The first step in Dekanozov’s program was to set up a “people’s government,” originally with no communist members, and then quickly to establish control of the repressive forces—the police and the military—and to limit public discussion while staging multitudinous shows of enthusiasm and support. The Lithuanian Ministry of Internal Affairs, headed by Mečislovas Gedvilas, directed the new forces of repression, and Dekanozov trained Lithuanian Communist Party leaders to administer a Soviet-style party-state. The last step involved replacing the authority of the People’s Government with the formation of a popular assembly, a People’s Seimas that would go on to request Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union.

The inhabitants of Lithuania, despite the popular demonstrations and even without strong leadership, in fact displayed significant passive resistance to the imposition of Soviet rule in their participation in the voting for the People’s Seimas. Lithuanian voters refused to endorse some of the new regime’s major figures. The regime found that in order to claim victory it had to violate its own election rules. The Election Commission did not have the time to forge individual voting returns, and in order to claim a communist victory it had to invent a new way of counting votes. The authorities went on to suppress the evidence of resistance, and when Lithuania elected deputies to the USSR Supreme Soviet in January 1941, the regime was more ready to deal with the voting.

To carry out his mission, Dekanozov had to act quickly. As Liudas Truska has written “Everything was done with dizzying speed.”⁴⁴⁴ First the Germans told the Lithuanians “*rasch, rasch*”; then Moscow said “*bystro, bystro*”; and at the beginning of July Dekanozov insisted on elections in just 10 days. Like Andrei Zhdanov in Estonia and Andrei Vyshinsky in Riga, he could not stay long in Lithuania; Moscow had more important work for all three. Dekanozov left Lithuania at the end of July, and he soon went on to his new job as Soviet diplomatic representative in Berlin. Nikolai Pozdniakov succeeded him as Moscow’s “plenipotentiary” in Lithuania.

In later years, Lithuanians who participated willingly in the processes of June and July spoke of having been deceived. “Deception” in fact lay deeply embedded in Lithuania’s fate in 1940—from the pronouncements of the Smetona regime and the Dekanozov regime to the self-deception on the part of individuals, whether in government or out. The Smetona regime had built a house of cards glorifying the wise “Leader of the Nation”; it had trained the society to remain passive and accept directives. Then Dekanozov had created the illusion of mass participation while playing his “shell game,” encouraging people to watch the government while he used other channels to arrange Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union.

Should, could, the Lithuanians have resisted the Red Army march into Lithuania? Could they have resisted the communist takeover after the Red Army had established its control of the country? Did the Lithuanians who worked in the Soviet administration betray their country or did they help the nation to survive? Judging the possibilities of resistance and the actions of individuals who participated in the People's Government and in the People's Seimas is still today a heated subject among Lithuanian historians. Writing during the Second World War, the noted Lithuanian legal scholar Mykolas Römeris spoke of the confusion and helplessness on the part of the so-called "collaborators." He considered the non-communist intellectuals who joined the People's Government "democrats," who "believed in resounding phrases and slogans" but who had no firm program of their own. As Dekanozov brought the communists to power, these men had "to surrender to the communist-driven current" and become loudspeakers for the system, or else to resign from politics, settle for "honorable titles" and devote themselves to "purely cultural work." "One way or another, the helm quickly slipped out of their hands."⁴⁴⁵ This study has focused on the Soviet takeover, and speculation about possible resistance lies beyond its purview.

After Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR, the Lithuanian Communist Party regularized its structure as a ruling communist party. On September 11, it approved the establishment of the state publishing office, to be headed by Kostas Korsakas, approved the publication of a literary weekly for writers, and changed the name of the newspaper *Darbo Lietuva* to *Tarybų Lietuva* (Soviet Lithuania), which would now be the organ of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. It approved the establishment of the state censorship agency *Glavnoe upravlenie literatury (Glavlit)*, under the Council of People's Commissars, and it declared that all newspapers must use only materials distributed by TASS, the telegraph agency of the Soviet Union. The protocol of the meeting specified that each decision had to be approved by the All-Union party in Moscow. On the 18th, the Central Committee set up rules for recruiting NKVD staff, declaring that employees must have no less than an elementary education and where possible know the Russian language; NKVD workers could be members of the Communist Party, the Komsomol, or be reliable non-party people. On October 8, the LCP formally joined the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks).⁴⁴⁶

In November 1940, both Mečys Gedvilas, now the head of the Soviet Lithuanian government, and Antanas Sniečkus, the first secretary of the party, publicly reviewed the events of the summer and spoke of both achievements and problems. Both men claimed the unanimous support of the people, and at the same time they noted opposition and demanded greater vigilance against enemies lurking within that same population. As Stalin had declared, the enemy would become more dangerous as it neared its ultimate, complete defeat, and therefore the search for enemies must intensify. In February 1941 Sniečkus explained, "The class enemies is beaten and

destroyed, but the remains of the exploiting classes are resisting still more determinedly not because they have become stronger than we are, but because socialism is growing.”⁴⁴⁷

Gedvilas admitted that prices of consumer goods were rising, but he insisted wages were also rising. Noting the shortage of consumer goods, he called lines in a store a positive sign of increased buying power—under Smetona, there were goods available, but people had no money to buy them. (Stalin had used the same argument in Moscow some years earlier to explain shortages.) For those complaining about high prices, he pointed out that the money was now going not to private entrepreneurs but to the state, and therefore he assured people they would somehow get it all back. He discounted complaints that “the Bolsheviks will destroy Lithuanianness,” declaring that the flag and national hymn were just “symbols of the old regime,” and “Lithuania” remained. He insisted that the regime had not persecuted the church but rather had furthered real “freedom of conscience.” He noted some members of the intelligentsia were not very enthusiastic: “So do they lack courage or is this something else?” He called on workers to develop “stakhonovite” attitudes and methods—a reference to the Soviet model of an efficient piece worker—and he closed with a standard slogan: “Long live the liberator of oppressed peoples, the leader and teacher of the working people of all the world, Comrade Stalin!”⁴⁴⁸

Sniečkus declared that in the elections for the People’s Seimas, the “class enemy” had been confused “and did not believe that events would pass so quickly to the proclamation of Soviet power.” The enemy had “illusions” and therefore they had not seriously resisted. In Stalinist fashion, he warned that while the regime had now crushed the enemy, that enemy “is beginning to stir” and trying to raise doubts about Soviet rule. Rumors that war would yet come and that the Soviet government would fall represented efforts to undermine confidence in the government; the people must expose such enemies. According to the press reports, shouts of “Hooray” and strong applause greeted his assertion, “There will not be and there cannot be any turning back from the Soviet system. No enemies can frighten our working people.” The audience stood to cheer his concluding praise of Stalin.⁴⁴⁹

Sniečkus used Soviet and Stalinist rhetoric, claiming that the Lithuanians had established the Soviet system, and Anna Louise Strong rhapsodized, “Thus the narrow frontiers gave place to the limitless horizons. There are no boundaries any more from the Baltic to Vladivostok, from western to eastern sea.” But Lithuania was in fact an underdeveloped region in terms of its socialization and sovietization. The Soviet Union, moreover, maintained an internal border control on the eastern frontier of the three new republics, and in June 1941 Soviet border guards prevented the first Jewish refugees from crossing the Lithuanian or Latvian borders, calling them traitors and telling them to return to fight the Germans. As one Soviet source later noted, after the work of the People’s Seimas there began “a transitional

period from capitalism to socialism"; for Moscow, Lithuania was an underdeveloped region.⁴⁵⁰

Party leaders in Moscow looked at Lithuania in 1940 in ways completely different from the revolutionary enthusiasm and bravado of the Lithuanian communists. Dekanozov had treated Lithuania as an underdeveloped region. He brought in new values and personnel. Besides NKVD agents, he called for economic specialists, experienced agitators, experienced administrators, and even performers. On July 12, he requested 100 party members who could speak Belarusian and Polish for work in Vilnius region. In turn, it should be noted, the Politburo of the All Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), not the USSR Council of People's Commissars, approved sending specialists and even the movement of NKVD regiments.⁴⁵¹

In a report addressed to Stalin and Molotov covering the first six months of Soviet rule in the Baltic, Andrei Andreevich Andreev, a member of the Politburo and Chairman of the Party Control Commission, wrote at length about problems of bringing the new structures in the Baltic up to Moscow's standards. Andreev was the member of the Politburo to whom Sniečkus and the other two Baltic first secretaries reported, and he had chaired the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet that had accepted Lithuania into the Soviet Union. His review appears to have been a draft for the Politburo's discussion in January 1941 of plans for industrialization in the Baltic region. On the other hand, it obviously influenced Sniečkus's report as first secretary to the Vth Congress of the Lithuanian Communist Party in February 1941.⁴⁵²

Andreev's first concern was the status of Baltic Communist Party organizations both in number and in quality. The Lithuanian party, he noted, had grown from 1220 members to 2321 members, and 565 candidates, but it had only 880 members of three or more years' standing, i.e., members had enough seniority to recommend new members. Most party members, moreover, were working in the government, and therefore there was a severe shortage of rural party members. To correct these shortcomings, Andreev had already approved reducing from one year to five or six months the period during which the party member had to know the candidate for membership. This, he noted, would allow party members coming from other regions to recommend locals with whom they were working. He also approved appointing persons with less than one year's party experience as chairmen of party cells and persons with less than three years' experience as city party chiefs. The party, he emphasized, must send organizers into the country and into large enterprises and public administration, especially in Lithuania where some parts of the governing apparatus had "no communists at all."

Andreev devoted over one-third of his report to agriculture, making clear that he saw collective farms in the future, but that for the time being the Soviet order had to respect its promise not to force the process of

collectivization. The immediate problem was to strip the stronger peasants and landlords of control over crops, livestock, machinery, and the land itself. A poor harvest in 1940 had necessitated the importation of 15–30,000 tons of concentrated fodder. Incompetent pricing policies had moreover facilitated “kulak sabotage” as peasants refused to deliver grain to the state and instead milled it and sold it as flour on the open market. In Lithuania, agricultural deliveries amounted to just 17,733 tons, against 123,851 in 1939. The shortage of grain made it impossible for poor peasants to buy and keep livestock. The regime, he declared, had to enforce land reform, to force wealthier farmers to surrender their livestock, and to encourage the development of machine-tractor stations that would service the small holdings. The regime could then encourage the formation of milk cooperatives, collective farms, and *sovkhozy* (state farms) especially for animal husbandry “but strongly respecting the principle of voluntary cooperation [*dobrovol’nost’*].” He criticized the People’s Commissar of Agriculture, Mickis, for harboring too many non-Communists in his ministry, and he came out in favor of deporting “richer” peasants: “The CC and CPC [*i.e. the party’s Central Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars—aes*] of Lithuania and Estonia ask to transfer landlords beyond the borders of the republic. It seems to me that their request should be satisfied.”

Considering the status of industry in the Baltic Andreev declared that in the period of independence large enterprises had been broken up into smaller units; he called this “a policy of the least concentration of workers in enterprises.” As a result, many factories were working at less than half of their capacity. Lithuania had only eight enterprises employing more than 1000 persons, while 13,600 small enterprises employed four or less workers. He recommended the development of a ship-building industry (this would take Moscow’s guidance and help) and, although he could not yet say exactly how, he urged tying the Baltic economies to supplies of raw materials from other parts of the USSR. Soviet specialists would yet have to define how to use Soviet replacement parts on industrial machinery that the Baltic states had imported from the west. Overall, the quality of Baltic industrial production had dropped since the introduction of the Soviet order. (Among themselves, Soviet Lithuanian authorities admitted that they had concentrated on meeting goals of quantity rather than quality.) Andreev estimated that industry could draw 25,000 to 35,000 workers from agriculture.

Workers’ wages, he declared, had risen by as much as 50 to 80 percent: “These decisions evoked great approval by the workers in plants and factories.” At the same time, he admitted that the “real wages of workers” had “increased insignificantly.” Prices for consumer goods in high demand had risen by as much as 400 percent: “Prices for some ready-made clothes were raised by 300 percent.” This all, he declared, allowed hostile provocation by “anti-Soviet elements,” who had exploited these “errors” in

pricing to arouse some discontent, but he insisted that this problem had been corrected. He recommended that the government establish stronger controls over consumer cooperatives.

He was particularly critical of the situation in schools and in the regime's religious policies. Students had not shown proper respect for the first lectures on the foundations of Marxism-Leninism. Andreev urged the republican Central Committees to appoint "the most progressive teachers" as school administrators, and he called for institutions of higher learning to admit more workers and peasants in the fall of 1941. In Lithuania he considered the Catholic clergy to be the heart of "hostile counterrevolutionary work." The repressive organs should cease their "liberalizing" with these people, and he called for the deportation of "the most reactionary" clergy. The government should similarly act against landlords, capitalists, and the leaders of "bourgeois parties." The NKVD should become more forceful: "It is necessary... to rid Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia of this hostile scum [*svolochi*]."

In his concluding section, Andreev considered the central governments in all three republics capable, but he also criticized local administrations and the court systems. Lithuania, he complained, lagged in the appointment of judges because of requirements to know the Lithuanian language and to have a legal education. "The CC and the CPC" in Lithuania had agreed to set new standards for people's judges "capable of deciding questions in the spirit of Soviet justice." To help the local administrations, Andreev called for some 50–60 party workers and specialists to be sent to each of the Baltic republics. In conclusion, he declared that it was time for Moscow to end the institution of "plenipotentiaries of the CC AUCP{b} and the USSR CPC" (such as Pozdniakov in Lithuania) and instead set up a Central Committee group of six or seven members in Moscow who would remain in constant contact with the CC and the CPC in each republic. "The local comrades will feel greater responsibility for work."

In painting their picture of the events of 1940, it remained for Soviet historians to fit process that had taken place in as a natural evolution in Lithuania's history. This required distinguishing two paths in Lithuania's past, praising historic ties with Moscow and scorning Lithuania's connections with the West. Before Lithuania's incorporation, Soviet spokespersons had not made such clear distinctions. Marking Lithuanian independence day on February 16, 1940, *Pravda*, the organ of the Soviet communist party, declared, "Lithuania, like the other Baltic lands, received its national political independence as a result of the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution." Speaking to the People's Seimas on July 21, Paleckis brought up the image of "two Lithuanias"—on the one side stood the supporters of the "ideas of the struggles" of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia on the other "bourgeois Lithuania."⁴⁵³

This process led to the development of two concepts of Lithuania's statehood, "bourgeois statehood" and "socialist statehood," of which the socialist form was to be considered the superior. The traditions and history of "bourgeois statehood" involved tales of deception, oppression, and suffering. Smetona, moreover, had identified the Lithuanian state with his own person, and Soviet historians always seemed happy to continue that imagery. The concept of "socialist statehood" required that the historians extol the resistance to the evils of bourgeois rule and also explain that good relations with Moscow had always brought Lithuanians progress in their historical development. Lithuania had twice received Vilnius from the hands of the Red Army, and therefore Lithuanians had to understand that their happiness depended on ties with Moscow. Eventually Vladas Niunka, as a party official and a member of the Academy of Sciences, lay down the rule that historians should view the events of 1940 as completing the work of Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas's work in 1918–1919. Lithuania's "socialist statehood" began with the declaration of the Workers and Peasant Government of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic on December 16, 1918, and the work of the People's Government constituted its continuation. Lithuanians were not to observe February 16 as having any national historical significance.⁴⁵⁴

At this point it would seem in order to return to the Russian declaration of 2000 justifying the incorporation of Lithuania in 1940; we can consider the four sentences in order:

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 time.

The Soviet note of June 14, 1940, perhaps did not fully merit the name "ultimatum." An "ultimatum" suggests a choice that might actually avoid the use of force. The Soviet informed the Lithuanians that the Red Army was coming and advised them not to resist. The Lithuanians agreed not to resist. The Soviet note indeed fit the contemporary "framework of international law" as established by the Nazi pressures on Czechoslovakia in 1938 that culminated in the occupation of the Sudetenland and eventually Nazi occupation of Bohemia. Russian President Vladimir Putin later insisted that the Munich agreement was more a factor in the coming of World War II than was the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. This may well be true—historians can only argue the question, not decide it—but in June 2000, by emphasizing the contemporary "framework of international law," the Russian Foreign Ministry was admitting the close relations that existed at that particular time between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Underlying the foreign ministry's statement was the argument that the movement of the Red Army constituted preparation for countering Nazi aggression. According to this line of thought, the Soviet government may not have had the formal right to force its troops on Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but it did have the right to prepare its defense against Hitler. In such argumentation, the Baltic republics had the misfortune to be lying underfoot. The supporters of this line of thought point to the exemplary behavior of the Red Army units sent into the Baltic in the fall of 1939 and the fact that the governments there remained in place through the winter of 1939–1940. Even preparing 400,000 soldiers to move into the Baltic, in the face of expected resistance and with the passive acceptance of Berlin, allegedly constituted a defensive move, although the USSR Commissar of Defense Marshall Semen Timoshenko referred to the Baltic republics as having been “occupied” (“*zaniatykh respublik*”).⁴⁵⁵

This first sentence, moreover, ignored the prehistory of the “agreement” of June 15. It is formally correct in speaking of “agreement,” but it omitted any reference to the nature of Soviet-Nazi relations in the winter of 1939–1940. Nazi Germany had recognized that the Baltic states lay within the Soviet “sphere of interest.” Russian authors have made the argument that the Red Army marched in June 1940 because the German army was reinforcing its contingents in East Prussia, but German archives show no evidence of preparation to challenge the Soviets at this point. The Germans had considerable evidence that the Red Army was preparing to move, but they in fact thought that, in accordance with the agreement of September 28, 1939, they would now be able to take southwestern Lithuania. Stalin, as we have seen, eventually bought out the German claims to this part of Lithuania. The balance of the evidence indicates that the Germans did not plan to block or challenge the Soviet move into the Baltic, and the opening sentence of the Russian Foreign Ministry's declaration expects the reader to ignore the prehistory of the “agreement” and to accept the right of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to divide Eastern Europe between themselves in 1939 and 1940.

The second and third sentences form a complete thought:

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.

First of all, this study has repeatedly noted the persistence of the use of the passive voice in order to conceal the active forces in various developments; the Russian note continued this tradition. The People's Government enjoyed

the recognition of Lithuanians and of foreign governments, but it was not the People's Government that formulated the "request" to join the Soviet Union. This was the work of the People's Seimas, and as we have seen, the Lithuanian Communist Party did not abide by its own rules in the seating of the Seimas deputies. Perhaps as many as half of the members of the Seimas were seated illegally, and therefore, even by the standards of the communist party, the Seimas cannot be *legitimately* considered "the highest representative organ" of Lithuania, only a construction of the party. In turn, the delegation that traveled to Moscow to request incorporation into the Soviet Union had even less of a claim to be a "legitimate representation" of the will of the Lithuanian people. One might consider the thought that the author of the foreign ministry's statement harbored the mental reservation that Dekanozov's administrative staff was the de facto "organ of authority" in Lithuania in June and July 1940, but in terms of usual historiography, the second and third sentences grossly misrepresent the events of June and July 1940 in Lithuania.

Then the fourth sentence:

In this way, it is unjust/not objective [nepravomerno] to qualify the entrance of Lithuania into the make-up of the USSR as the result of unilateral actions of the latter.

If one refuses to accept the arguments of the first three sentences at their face value, the fourth sentence, beginning with "in this way," fails to convince. This is the only one of the four sentences not to use the passive voice, but the phrase "it is" still remains short of a clear statement explaining actors and actions. In some ways, this sentence completes the thought offered by Stalin to Dimitrov in October 1939 to the effect that the Lithuanians would sovietize themselves. The foreign ministry's statement presents "Lithuania" as an organic conception, taking action and making decisions obviously according to the will of the Communist Party. This is a rather different thought from what would have been Stalin's image of "the toiling masses" of Lithuania as guided by the Communist Party.

The initiatives for bringing Lithuania into the Soviet Union clearly originated in Moscow, carried to Lithuania by Vladimir Dekanozov, and the Lithuanian Communist Party became the agent of sovietization. The entire process followed the plan first laid out by the Politburo in October 1939. Without the Politburo's guidance, the three Baltic republics would not have marched lockstep into the Soviet Union. Dekanozov's camp determined and supervised the course of events. Overall, the Soviet arguments that the Lithuanian people themselves had requested incorporation through the elections of July 14–15 and the decisions of the People's Seimas constituted a house of cards that collapses the moment that one looks more closely at the events of June and July, and especially at the nature of the elections of the

People's Seimas. In all, the Russian Foreign Ministry's statement of June 2000 does not stand up to historical scrutiny.

A Russian historian has raised a new question in examining Soviet foreign policy in 1939–1940, namely was it *wise* to incorporate the Baltic states into the USSR? A. D. Orlov accepted the interpretation that the Soviet Union sent troops into the Baltic as a defensive measure; he argued that “not a few” (*nemalo*) Lithuanians supported the idea of joining the Soviet Union, but he questioned whether the incorporation of these states had been wise in view of the opposition that the western powers demonstrated against this action.⁴⁵⁶ For one, the American government refused to recognize the incorporation of the three Baltic states, and this remained a sore point in Soviet-American relations to the collapse of the Soviet Union. One can argue larger and smaller points in Orlov's picture, but the question of whether incorporating the three Baltic republics was really in the best interest of the Soviet state is intriguing, albeit moot.

In 1989 and 1990, recognizing that the Baltic republics were playing a prominent role in the Soviet Union's internal problems, some Soviet commentators expressed the thought that the Soviet Union should not have annexed them, while others argued that it was a mistake to admit them as constituent republics. It was of course too late at that point to change history, but a fundamental factor in the disruption caused by the Baltic republics would seem to have lain in the fact that when the Soviet Union annexed this region, Stalin was firmly in power of a highly centralized system. When Mikhail Gorbachev's ideas of perestroika dreamed of “restoring” an ideal communism that could live up to the ideals of the October Revolution, they looked to idealized images of experiences that predated Stalin's abnormalities. The Lithuanians had no such experience—their life before Stalin forced himself on them had been an independent state. In 1988–1991 the Soviets attempted to drag the Lithuanians along with them—there were Lithuanians who tried to keep their Moscow connection—but on the whole this was unsuccessful. As Lithuanians cleared their minds of a half-century of indoctrination, the rationale for remaining a part of the Soviet Union appeared less and less substantial. The Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991, but most world states recognized the restoration of Lithuanian independence in September 1991.

The arguments and discussions as to whether the Soviet Union had acted wisely in taking over the Baltic region are endless, but this question too lies outside the purview of this study, which has focused on what was said and done at the time and then on how this was all remembered and recorded. It would nevertheless seem relevant to close by quoting Arthur Coleman, the United States minister to the Baltic states, who, on November 21, 1929, wrote to Washington, “It is generally understood in all border states and, one hears, in Russia itself, that once the Red Army steps over the frontier the knell of the Bolshevik regime will sound to all listening ears.”⁴⁵⁷ An argument

can be made that the incorporation of the three Baltic states in 1940 constituted a step in the direction of the disintegration of the Soviet Union a half-century later.

Notes

Abbreviations used in the citations:

- AA** Auswartiges Amt, Bonn, Germany.
- DBFP** *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, ed. By E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, Third Series, Volume IV (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951).
- DGFP** *Documents on German foreign policy, 1918–1945*, Series D (Washington, D.C: U.S. Gov. Printing Office, 1949–64).
- IHC** International Historical Commission to Evaluate the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, Vilnius.
- IIA** Išeivijos Institutas, Kaunas, Archyvas.
- Kersten committee** —*Baltic States: A Study of their origin and national development; their seizure and incorporation into the USSR*. Third reprint edition, eds. Igor I. Kavass, Adolph Sprudz, Buffalo NY: Willim S. Hein & Co. 1972, pp. 341–44.
- LCVA** Lithuanian Central State Archive.
- LGGRTC** Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras
- LIS** *Lietuvos istorijos šaltiniai*, vol. IV (Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1061).
- LKA** Laisvės Kovotojų Archyvas, Kaunas.
- LLS** *Lietuvos Liaudies Seimas. Stenogramos ir medžiaga* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1985).
- LOA** *Lietuvos okupacija ir aneksija 1939/1940. Dokumentų rinkinys* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1993).
- LTE** *Lietuviškoji Tarybinė Enciklopedija* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1976–1984).
- LVVA** Latvian State Historical Archive. Riga.
- LYA** Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas, Vilnius.
- MB RS** Mažvydo Biblioteka, Lithuanian National Library, Manuscript Section.
- Poland MSZ** Poland, Ministerstwo Spraw Zewnetrznych, Archive, Hoover Institution, Stanford CA.
- SBW** Alfred Erich Senn, *A Seminar in Black and White* (Kaunas: VDU, 2004).
- SSSR/Litva** *SSSR i Litva v gody Vtoroi Mirovoi Voyny*, (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian History, 2006), volume I (1939–1940). Compiled by A. Kasparavičius, Č. Laurinavičius, N. Lebedeva, A. Nikžentaitis, and A. O. Chubarian.

TVA	<i>Tarybų valdžios atkūrimas Lietuvoje 1940 metais. Dokumentų rinkinys</i> (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1985).
USNA	United States National Archives, State Department Decimal File.
USSR DVP	Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, <i>Dokumenty vneshnei politiki 1939 god</i> (Moscow, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1992).
VDU	Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto leidykla, Kaunas, Lithuania.
VUB RS	Vilnius University Library Manuscript Section.

1. See Halina Korsakienė *Namas, kuriame gyvenome* (Vilnius: VAGA, 1991), pp. 105–6. Cf. Ignas Šeinius’s statement that “it would not be so bad, so hopeless, if Lithuanian communists would themselves run the country. They could still have some humanity. But over their heads hung the Asian Stalin, with the Red Army at his back.” Ignas Šeinius, *Raudonasis tvanas* (Vilnius: VAGA, 1990), p. 113.
2. Lietuvos komunistų partijos istorijos apybraiža, v. 2 (Vilnius: Mintis, 1978), pp. 571–79.
3. For an earlier evaluation of this statement, see Alfred Erich Senn, “What Happened in Lithuania in 1940?” *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 2000/2 (6): 179–95. For a balanced interpretation of the events of 1939–1940 by a Russian scholar, see Nataliia Lebedeva’s introduction to *SSSR/Litva*, pp. 23–64.
4. Mykolas Römeris, *Lietuvos sovietizacija 1940–1941* (Vilnius: Lituanus, 1989), p. 67. A version in manuscript can be found in LKA, under the title “Istorinė Lietuvos sovietizacijos apžvalga ir konstitucinis jos įvertinimas,” p. 28.
5. Max Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University, 1952), 2: 70–71.
6. E. V. Tarle, „Über die Arbeitsweise der burgerlichen Diplomatie,” in *Geschichte der Diplomatie* (Berlin: SWA–Verlag, 1948), vol. 3 part 2, p. 383.
7. *USSR DVP*, 22/1: 632. There is extensive documentation on the background of the pact in *SSSR/Litva*.
8. See Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, Expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

9. For a concise background of the protocol, see note 178, *USSR DVP*, 22/2: 590–591. Throughout 1939, in the aftermath of the German seizure of Memel/Klaipeda, Soviet diplomats in Lithuania had reported aggressive campaigns by the Germans to strengthen their political and economic influence there. See especially the report from Klaipeda, *ibid.*, 22/1: 478–82. “Vilnius” is the Lithuanian name of the city, “Wilno” the Polish, “Vilna” the Russian, and “Vilne” the Yiddish.
10. See Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania, the Great Powers, and the Vilna Question, 1920–1928* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).
11. Bronius J. Kaslas, *The USSR-German Aggression against Lithuania* (New York: Robert Speller, 1973), pp. 108–16. German documents on German-Soviet relations, 1939–1940, are available in a number of publications. The Kaslas collection was particularly useful for this study for its specific interest in Lithuania’s fate. For other useful collections, see *SSSR-Germaniia 1939–1941*, J. Felstinskis, ed. (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1989), 2 vols; also *SSSR/Litva*.
12. Kaslas, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 121.
14. *LOA*, p. 65.
15. *Polpredy soobshchaiut* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1990), pp. 55–56.
16. David M. Crowe, *The Baltic States and the Great Powers: Foreign Relations 1938–1940* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 88–104; Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 2d edition (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution, 1991), pp. 139–42; M. Duhanovs, I. Feldmanis, A. Stranga, *1939. Latvia and the Year of Fateful Decisions* (Riga: University of Latvia, 1994).
17. *USSR DVP*, 22/2: 136. See also the documentation in *SSSR/Litva*.
18. See Aleksandras Shtromas, *The Soviet Method of Conquest of the Baltic States: Lessons for the West*, (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Value in Public Policy, 1986), pp. 1–7.
19. N. Lebedeva, “VKP(b) CK Politbiuras ir 1939–1941 m. prijungtų prie SSRS teritorijų sovietizavimas,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2000/1(7): 89.
20. *LOA*, pp. 67–70. The insistence that the Lithuanians must act quickly had already become a major consideration in Lithuania’s decision making. Some three weeks earlier, Ribbentrop had warned the Lithuanians must take Vilnius quickly: “Litauen muss rasch handeln, rasch marschieren—rasch, rasch, rasch!” E. J. Harrison, *Lithuania’s Fight for Freedom*, 3d European edition (NY: Lithuanian-American Information Center, 1948), p. 20. In 1940 the need for speed was a prominent feature of election propaganda in voting for the People’s Seimas; see Chapter XII below. USSR Foreign Ministry’s archivists

- have declared that they cannot find any documentation of these talks between Molotov and the Lithuanians. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, p. 7. *SSSR/Litva* published only the Lithuanian documents.
21. Edvardas Turauskas, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės netenkant* (Chicago: Lietuviškos knygos klubas, n. d.), pp. 74–77. The interested researcher should also consult the rich Turauskas archive at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.
 22. Robertas Žiugžda, *Lithuania and Western Powers 1917–1940* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1987), p. 228.
 23. Juozas Urbšys, *Lietuva lemtingaisiais 1939–1940 metais* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1988), p. 26. There are several editions of Urbšys’s memoir. When this edition appeared in October 1988, the text had already been circulating in an unofficial edition, a sort of *samizdat*. This was a highly desirable item; I witnessed one historian’s buying a copy of the bootlegged publication and saying “I will gladly pay five rubles for this book.” The published version cost just one ruble 50. At the same time an American edition was published in Chicago. The American edition was then republished in Vilnius as Urbšys, *Atsiminimai* (Spindulys, 1990), costing two rubles 80.
 24. *LOA*, Natkevičius’s memorandum on October 3, pp. 70–80.
 25. Urbšys, “Pro memoria. Lietuvos derybos su Sovietu Sąjunga,” December 4, 1939, Turauskas archive; Juozas Urbšys, *Lietuva lemtingaisiais 1939–1940 metais*, p. 30; *LOA*, p. 88.
 26. Urbšys, “Pro memoria,” p. 7.
 27. According to an American historian, Timothy Snyder, the Belarusian communists were convinced that they had Moscow’s support for including Vilnius in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1989* (New Haven: Yale, 2003), pp. 80–81,
 28. See Natkevičius’s memoranda on the negotiations in *LOA*, pp. 67–98. See also the account in Stasys Raštikis, *Kovose dėl Lietuvos* (Los Angeles: Lithuanian Days, 1956–1957), 1: 605–24.
 29. *Izvestiia*, November 1, 1939.
 30. See Sto sorok besed s Molotovym. Iz dnevnika F. Chueva (Moskva: Terra, 1991), p. 20.
 31. As reported in *Darbo Lietuva*, August 25, 1940.
 32. Cf. Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1992), pp. 118, 192–93, 307, 350, 590, 555.
 33. See Vladimir Petrov’s compilation of materials concerning Alexander Nekrich’s work on this topic, “June 22, 1941”: *Soviet Historians and the German Invasion* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1968);
 34. Cf. *TVA*, p. 54.

35. *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, p. 20.
36. *Atgimimas* September 16, 1988.
37. Geoffrey Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 19. On the controversies of 1988–1989 concerning the existence of the protocol, see Alfred Erich Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). See also Nerijus Šepetys, *Molotovo-Ribbentropo paktas ir Lietuva* (Vilnius: Aidai, 2006.)
38. *USSR MVD*, 22/2: 19–22. The Politburo's protocol bears the date "September 4 to October 3, 1919."
39. George Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (London: Hutchinson, 1961) p. 172.
40. A. G. Doncharov and G. N. Peskova, "SSSR i strany Pribaltiki," *Voprosy istorii*, 1991/1: 39.
41. Liudas Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais* (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1995), pp. 38–41.
42. See Pozdniakov's reports in *SSSR/Litva*.
43. See Jan Gross's account, op. cit., p. 30, of the Soviet concern for preparing festive welcomes in Ukraine and Belarus.
44. There are three major Lithuanian biographies of Smetona: Aleksandras Merkelis, *Antanas Smetona* (New York: Amerikos Lietuvių Tautinė Sąjunga, 1964; Alfonsas Eidintas *Antanas Smetona: Politinės biografijos bruožai* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1990); and Liudas Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai* (Vilnius: Valstybinis leidybos centras, 1996).
45. A report on seventeen political revolts in the period of Lithuanian independence, written in 1939, named Voldemaras as a prominent figure in six of them. A. Povilaitis, *Neramios dienos* (Kaunas: Atmintis, 1996).
46. Augustinas Voldemaras, *Pastabos saulėlydžio valandą*, Gediminas Rudis, ed. (Vilnius: Mintis, 1992), p. 57.
47. Smetona's comments to Owen Norem, Smetona papers, IIA.
48. Liudas Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 23.
49. See Merkelis, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 46. On pp. 273–274, Merkelis wrote of Smetona's having been appointed in 1926 "when the University of Lithuania lacked scholarly personnel." In a document dated January 12, 1923, Mykolas Biržiška, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities of the university, announced the appointments of my father as Docent for Greek Language and Literature, Smetona as Docent of Art Theory and History, and Augustinas Voldemaras as Professor of General History. According to Voldemaras, *Pastabos*, p. 116, Smetona had wanted to be a free practicing lawyer.
50. Several authors speculated on this. See Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, pp. 25–27; Vincas Trumpa in *Metmenys* 14/1967, and Zenonas

- Ivinskis, unpublished memoirs, p. 41, written before the Soviet invasion of 1940. On the authoritarian system, see Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, pp. 23–25.
51. See USNA, 860m.00/335, 339, 346; LVVA, 2574/3/3291, 242, 296.
 52. See USNA 860m.00/339; John Gunther, *Inside Europe Again*, Completely revised war edition (New York: Harper, 1940), p. 493. The American minister to the Baltic states in the 1920s, F. W. Coleman, enjoyed playing bridge with Mrs. Smetona and the German minister in Kaunas. See Alfred Erich Senn, “F. W. Colemanas—JAV pasiuntinys Pabaltijo valstybėse, 1922–1931 metais,” *Lituanistica* (Vilnius), 1992/1: 143–47. Voldemaras called Mrs. Smetona Lithuania’s “Messalina.” Interestingly enough, the brother of the two women, Tadas Chodakauskas, was an NKGB agent after the war. See Liūtas Mockūnas, *Pavargęs herojus* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1997).
 53. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 25. But see also the positive evaluation of Smetona in Algirdas Julius Greimas, *Iš arti ir iš toli* (Vilnius: VAGA, 1991), pp. 266–260.
 54. Merkelis, op. cit., pp. 500–501.
 55. Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, pp. 278–79.
 56. Antanas Smetona, *Pasakyta parašyta* (Boston: Lietuvių Enciklopedijos leidykla, 1974), 2: 84.
 57. USNA, 860m.00/424.
 58. *Antano Smetonos korespondencija (1940–1944)*, Daiva Dapkutė, ed. (Kaunas: VDU, 1999), pp. 21–22. See also Bernaras Ivanovas, *Tautiškumo beieškant Antano Smetonos Lietuvoje: Tautinių įvaizdžių klausimas* (Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2005).
 59. Report by the consul R. W. Heingartner, enclosed in Coleman to Washington, D.C., December 28, 1926, USNA. On the diplomatic preparations for the seizure of Memel/Klaipėda in 1923, see Alfred Erich Senn, “Die Besetzung Memels im Januar 1923,” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 10 (1965): 334–52.
 60. See Alfred Erich Senn, “Vaclovas Sidzikauskas on Lithuanian Diplomacy in the 1920s,” *Lituanus*, 22/1: 54–64.
 61. AA, 1465/3015H/ 595572.
 62. On Lithuanian foreign policy in the 1930s, see Alfonsas Eidintas, Vytautas Žalys, Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918–1940* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997, reissued in paperback, 1999). See also Alfred Erich Senn, “The Polish Ultimatum to Lithuania, March 1938,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 13: 144–56.
 63. Merkelis, op. cit., p. 512.
 64. Leonas Sabaliūnas, *Lithuania in Crisis: Nationalism to Communism 1939–1940* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 114, 117–120.

65. Ibid., pp. 124–130. In the midst of this tension, it is easy to understand why Lithuanians celebrated so when their men’s national basketball team won the European championship for the second time with the tournament’s being held in Kaunas in May 1939. See Alfred Erich Senn, “American Lithuanians and the Politics of Basketball in Lithuania, 1933–1939,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 29/1: 46–56; *SBW*, pp. 144–49.
66. *DBFP*, 4: 443–444.
67. USNA, 860m.00/410. Cf. Merkelis’s complaints about Raštikis in his op. cit., pp. 520, 537–44.
68. See Pozdniakov’s report of April 28, 1939, in *USSR DVP*, 22/1:317–19.
69. *Polpredy soobschchaiut*. p. 27. Upon hearing of the pact, the Foreign Ministry had immediately summoned both Pozdniakov, the Soviet *polpred*, and Erich Zechlin, the German minister, to ask for explanations, but neither of them dared offer any opinion or any information without the specific approval of their own governments. For sympathetic characterizations of Pozdniakov, see *Lietuvos aidas*, October 21, 1939, *Tarybų Lietuva*, December 17, 1940; and *Tiesa*, December 31, 1940.
70. Ibid., p. 54. For examples of Voldemaras’s thinking at this time, see his letters to my father, published in Alfred Erich Senn, “Augustinas Voldemaras in France, 1938–1940,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 10: 228–40.
71. Crowe, op. cit., p. 85; Sabaliunas, op. cit., pp. 148–49. Ironically, Poland had participated, with Germany and Hungary, in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Merkelis characterized the German pressure in September 1939 as part of a campaign to picture the war against Poland as an uprising of nations oppressed by the Polish government—op. cit., p. 532.
72. Turauskas, op. cit., pp. 68–69; see also Pozdniakov’s version of the Lithuanians’ dilemma in *Polpredy soobschchaiut*, p. 27.
73. *Lietuvos aidas*, September 22, 1939.
74. Turauskas, op. cit., pp. 74–77.
75. Vaclovas Šliogeris, *Antanas Smetona. Žmogus ir valstybininkas*. (Cleveland: Viltis, 1966), p. 137; E. J. Harrison, *Lithuania’s Fight for Freedom* (New York: Lithuanian American Information Center, 1948), p. 22.
76. See Alfred Erich Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
77. Turauskas, op. cit., p. 98.
78. Ibid., pp. 118–31.
79. Ibid., p. 140. Merkelis, to the contrary, insisted that Smetona considered the disruption of no political significance, op. cit., p. 551.

80. Text of both speeches in LYA, 2287/58/381; See also *SSSR/Litva*, pp. 280–281.
81. According to the Polish minister, Bizauskas had assured him that Lithuania would “accept no present either from Germany or Russia.” Report November 20, 1939, from Stockholm, Poland MSZ. Box 5.
82. Soviet land reform officials seized 160 acres from “Chodakauskas/Smetonienė” in Biržai and 89.6 from Jadvyga Tubilienė in the Kaunas region. *Lietuvos TSR valstybinės žemės ūkio komisijos protokolai 1940 m.* (Vilnius: LTSR Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, 1976), pp. 40,119.
83. Škirpa wrote two extensive memoirs, one published and one not: “Kovok! Pastangos gelbėti Lietuvą, 1939–1941” (apparently written during the war), MS in VUB RS, F 155–310; and *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos* (Chicago: Vilspa, 1996).
84. Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, pp. 360–361, called Smetona’s behavior a policy of “total inaction” rather than neutrality.
85. Škirpa, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 235.
86. Turauskas, op. cit., pp. 60–63.
87. Škirpa, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, pp. 192–197. On August 26, Natkevičius advised Kaunas that the Germans would soon attack Poland and that Lithuania would then have the opportunity to take Vilnius. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 138.
88. On Polish resistance to the Soviets in the Vilna region in 1939, see Tomasz Strzembosz, “Armed Resistance in the north-eastern Provinces of the Polish Republic, 1939–1941,” in *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–1941*, Keith Sword, ed. (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), pp. 155–161. On the clashes in 1920, see Alfred Erich Senn, “The Polish Evacuation of Vilnius, July 1920,” *The Baltic Review*, 23 (1961): 32–39.
89. Škirpa, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 222.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
92. Škirpa, “Kovok!” pp. 11–12.
93. Škirpa laid out this interpretation to me in a conversation at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, in 1961.
94. Turauskas, op. cit., p. 73.
95. See Mindaugas Tamošiūnas’s statement in *Pilietinis pasipriešinimas Lietuvoje ir Lenkijoje: sąsajos ir ypatumai 1939–1956* (V: LGGRC. 2005), p. 179.
96. Snyder, op. cit., p. 91.
97. Sabaliūnas, op. cit., p. 153.
98. *Ibid.*
99. *LOA*, 99–100.

100. USNA, 860m.00/424. Kazys Skučas later told his NKVD interrogators that Smetona had called Urbšys “a great optimist” (*bol’shoi optimist*) for thinking that the Soviet Union would observe the terms of its treaty with Lithuania. LYA, 3377/58/806, p. 156.
101. LCVA, 387/10/187.
102. “The Wilno territory to which Lithuania considered she was entitled was, and remains, 70% Polish with a Lithuanian population not exceeding 2½ % in some parts, the rest of the population being composed of Jews and White Ruthenians. Any Lithuanian claims are, therefore, quite unsupported by any serious proofs.” “The Polish Territory Occupied by the Lithuanians,” mimeographed press release in English, issued by the Information Department of the Polish Government, Angers-Paris, March 1940.
103. *USSR DVP*, 22/2:19–22. In Mikhail Gorbachev’s time, his associate Egor Ligachev called the Politburo “the highest political organ of the country,” and Vladimir Kriuchkov, the KGB chief, called it “the highest leading organ in the country. Egor Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva* (Novosibirsk: Interbuk, 1992), p. 6; Vladimir Kriuchkov, *Lichnoe delo* (Moscow: Olimp, 1996.)
104. Raštikis, op. cit., 1; 617–30. Raštikis used the image of a “Trojan horse” in the epigraph to this section of his memoirs. The negotiations were intense: The Lithuanians wanted to restrict the Red Army to the Vilnius region, while the Soviet military wanted to spread across as much of Lithuania as possible. See *LOA*, pp. 125–47; also *SSSR/Litva*. Besides the Red Army units in the Vilna region, the Lithuanians agreed to three Soviet bases to the south and east of Kaunas, in Alytus, Prienai, and the Gaižūnai proving ground near Kaunas. On the negotiations over the dislocation of Soviet troops, on the Lithuanian protests concerning the looting of Vilnius, and on the general problems raised by the presence of Soviet troops in Lithuania after October 1939, see *SSSR/Litva*, passim.
105. Order no. 2 to the Vilnius troops, October 17; *Klasta ir smurtu* (Vilnius: Kardas, 1995), p. 46. Turauskas, op. cit., p. 159, spoke proudly of the appearance of the police.
106. See Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 42; Valstybės Saugumo Policijos Vilniaus Apygardos biuletėnis, LCVA, 401/4/2.
107. Full account in Regina Žepkaitė, *Vilniaus istorijos atkarpa 1939–1940* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1990), 67–68.
108. A number of commentators have declared that Soviet troops and tanks “had” to intervene to put down the disturbances. Žepkaitė credits the tanks with having stopped the rioting, *ibid.*, p. 68. The Latvian minister in Kaunas reported home that the Lithuanians had asked the Soviet military for help. LVVA, 5969/1/132, pp. 5–6. In February 1940 Urbšys filed a complaint with the Soviet Foreign Ministry about

- the movement of Soviet tanks during the disturbances. *LOA*, pp. 161–62.
109. LCVA, 496/2/22.
 110. Piotr Lossowski, *Litwa a sprawy polskie 1939–1940* (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo naukowe, 1982), p. 67. *The New York Times*, November 2 and 3, reported the disturbances as conflict between Poles and Jews.
 111. Henri Minczeles, *Vilna, Wilno, Vilnius. La Jerusalem de Lituanie*. (Paris: La Decouverte, 1993), p. 376. Dov Levin, *Fighting Back* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), p. 12; N. N. Schneidman, *Jerusalem of Lithuania* (Oakville ON: Mosaic, 1998), 18. Anna Louise Strong, *The New Lithuania* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1941), p. 26.
 112. Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), p. 199.
 113. Levin, *Fighting Back*, p. 11, see also the endnote on p. 248; Dov Levin, *Baltic Jews Under the Soviets, 1940–1946* (Jerusalem: Avraham Harman Institute, 1994), p. 128.
 114. See Eidintas, “A Jew-Communist Stereotype in Lithuania, 1940–1941,” available on the Internet through the homepage of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, University of Vilnius, tspmi.vu.lt.
 115. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 43. Information Department of the Polish Government, “The Polish Territory Occupied by the Lithuanians,” p. 10.
 116. Crowe, op. cit., p. 143.
 117. See *LOA*, p. 161–62; *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, p. 169. Soviet officials came to fear that Polish soldiers interned in Lithuania might manage to go to Finland as volunteers, but they rejected the Lithuanians’ request for a joint communiqué declaring that there would be no repression of individuals repatriated to Soviet territory under this program. See *SSSR/Litva*.
 118. Henri Minczeles, op. cit., p. 377, but this statement came in a chapter entitled “L’extermination methodique”; Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1943), pp. 469–73; USNA, 860m.00/432.
 119. The diplomat was an American-Lithuanian, who spoke Lithuanian and had previously served in Lithuania. He therefore had a circle of acquaintances in Kaunas from whom he could obtain first-hand information. Reprinted in *SBW*, pp. 208–211.
 120. Ilya Ehrenburg, *Memoirs: 1921–1941* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1964), p. 498.
 121. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 158–59.

122. Ibid., p. 140.
123. Aleksandras Shtromas argued that the Soviet Union signed its agreements with Hitler as a part of its own plan to profit from war between Germany and the western powers. Shtromas, op. cit., pp. 1–8.
124. See *The Finnish Blue Book: The Development of Finnish-Soviet Relations* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1940), which itself is an example of pro-Finnish propaganda in the United States.
125. Documents in *USSR DVP*, 22/2, passim. The Soviets eventually created a new union republic, the Karelo-Finnish SSR.
126. For extensive documentation of the impact of the Soviet-Finnish war on Lithuanian-Soviet relations, see *SSSR/Litva*; also *Žiemos karas ir Lietuva* (Vilnius: Embassy of Finland, Vilnius Pedagogical University, 1997), pp. 93–104.
127. Crowe, op. cit., pp. 141–142; British note to Zaleski, October 26, 1939, in Poland MSZ, box 6.
128. Cf. Alfred Bilmanis's letter to *The New York Times*, December 27, 1939.
129. Cf. David Kirby, "Incorporation: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact," in *The Baltic States*, Graham Smith ed., (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 69–85.
130. Merkys to Seimas, *Lietuvos aidas*, October 28, 1939; *SSR/Litva*, p. 354; Urbšys quoted in USNA, 860m.00/424. See also Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 50.
131. USNA 860m.461/7.
132. Laurynas Jonušauskas, *Likimo Vedami: Lietuvos diplomatinis tarnybos egzilyje veikla 1940–1991* (Vilnius: LGGRC, 2003) pp. 38–42; Kazys Skučas's testimony to NKVD interrogators, LYA 3377/58/806, p. 40; "Trijų pasiuntinių 1939 lapkričio 2 d. memorandumas užsienio reikalų ministeriui," *Metmenys*, 1979/ 37: 156–70; *SSSR/Litva*, pp. 323–345. On the reactions within the foreign ministry, see "Neišgirsti pavojaus varpai," *Kultūros barai*, 2006/6:80–83.
133. Kaslas, op. cit., p. 180, dated Urbšys's note May 30; Jonušauskas, op. cit., pp. 44–54, discussed the confusion in dates and also the problem of gaining foreign recognition of the action. Jonušauskas considered the Latvian instructions more clear and substantial than Urbšys's. Interestingly enough, a member of Smetona's last cabinet, Juozas Audėnas, claimed that he knew nothing about this action; he learned of it only after the war.
134. Skučas testimony, LYA, 3377/58/806, pp. 85–90.
135. LYA, 3377/58/483, pp. 113–158. Povilaitis's reference to Žukaitis possibly represented an effort to discredit this testimony.
136. J. Žiugžda, in *Lietuvos TSR istorija* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1965), 3: 356; Robertas Žiugžda, op. cit., pp. 237–38; LYA, 3377/58/483/59–60; *Atgimimas* no. 1.

137. Raštikis, op. cit., 1: 631–36. Pozdniakov reported home that Merkys had significant support in the military, that Bizauskas would not be able to handle all of Vilnius's problems, and that therefore this would essentially neutralize him as a threat to the *Tautininkų sąjunga*. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 186–187. Cf. Pozdniakov's analysis of how Smetona used the Lithuanian-Soviet pact to enhance his own position in *USSR/Litva*, p. 434.
138. Speech in *Lietuvos aidas*, January 11, 1940.
139. USNA, 860m.00/424.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid., also 860m.00/431.
142. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 44. Edvardas Turauskas spoke of Vitkauskas's playing "a very sad role in the life of the independent Lithuanian state." "Bolševizmas ir imperializmas," Turauskas papers, Stanford University, box 4.
143. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 136, 188, 205.
144. Ibid., pp. 207–9.
145. Ibid., p. 287. Copies of the protocols can be found in the Edvardas Turauskas archive, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.
146. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 228–29, 269–286.
147. Ibid., 301.
148. Romualdas Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence 1940–1990*, expanded and updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 18.
149. See "'Objektyvi' istorija," *Akiračiai*, 1987/6: 14. For a more balanced account of Baltic economies in the late 1930s, see Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Baltic States. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).
150. *Lithuania in 1939–1940. The Historic Turn to Socialism*, Vytautas Kancevičius, ed. (Vilnius: Mintis, 1976), pp. 85–86.
151. Antanas Barkauskas, *Lithuania. Years and Deeds* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1982), pp. 15–16.
152. For a very useful day by day summary of events, declarations, meetings, and newspaper articles, see Liudas Truska and Vytautas Kancevičius, eds. *Lietuva Stalino ir Hitlerio sanderio verpetuose* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1990).
153. Sto sorok besed, p. 18.
154. "Crimes against Humanity in Lithuania during Soviet Occupation 1940–1941: Findings of the International Historical Commission," MS, Vilnius, n.d. I want to express my gratitude to Ronaldas Račinskas for letting me read the as yet unpublished research papers of Lithuania's International Historical Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania.
155. Kaslas, op. cit., pp. 101–2.

156. Percy E. Corbett, *Law in Diplomacy* (Princeton, 1959), pp. 101. Vyshinsky's statement appeared in *Pravda*, November 25, 1948. Vyshinsky, it might be noted, directed the simultaneous Soviet takeover of Latvia. See also E. W. Tarle, op. cit., 3: 373–442.
157. Smetona's comments on a manuscript by Owen Norem, Smetona papers, IIA, 1/1–1/119–21.
158. Truska and Kancevičius, op. cit., 7.
159. See Lebedeva's introduction to *SSSR/Litva*, p. 49. On the activity surrounding May Day, see *LIS*, 4: 755–56. The Lithuanian Saugumas had already ordered its agents to interfere with communist preparations for May Day. *Lithuania 1939–1940*, p. 121. Although Pozdniakov reported that British agents were preparing some sort of provocation for that day, May 1 passed without any major incidents.
160. The basic Lithuanian documents on the crisis leading to the Soviet invasion have published in many works, and therefore I will not cite all of them here. See especially *SSSR/Litva*, *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, *LOA*, Kaslas, op. cit., and Kersten committee.
161. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 332–34.
162. *Ibid.*, pp. 334–35.
163. See *Lithuania 1939–1940*, pp. 122–23; *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 334–36.
164. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 337–38.
165. *Ibid.*, pp. 341–52.
166. *Ibid.*, pp. 353–55.
167. See *SSSR/Litva*; also A. I. Eremenko, "God 1940–i: Kaunas vstretil tsvetami," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1994/3: 38–44. The troops from Gaižūnai were to take all bridges, the airport, and all exit roads around Kaunas, and to secure the Soviet mission. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 609.
168. See the texts of their interrogations by NKVD officials, LYA, 3377/58/806.
169. Kersten committee, pp. 326–29; *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, pp. 364–68.
170. *Ibid.*
171. See Vytautas Žalys, "Sobiralis' li Pribaltiiskie gosudarstva voevat' s SSSR?" and Gediminas Rudis, "Imelo li mesto pokhishchenie krasnoarmeitsev v Litve v 1940 godu," in *Novyi vzgliad na istoriu Litvy*, ed. Alfonsas Eidintas and Gediminas Rudis (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1991), pp. 118–135. Also: *SSSR/Litva*, passim; Crowe, op. cit., p. 150.
172. *LOA*, pp. 197–198.
173. Saugumas bulletin, No. 186, June 10, 1940.
174. Saugumas Bulletin 180, June 5, 1940.
175. *Polpredy soobshchaiut*, p. 374; Kersten committee, pp. 332–34. The Soviet memorandum has the more picturesque account of Molotov's words.
176. *DGFP*, 9:596 10:286. Kaslas, op. cit., p. 221.

177. Liudas Truska, "Sovietų okupacija ir aneksija," in *Lietuva 1940–1990: Okupuotos Lietuvos istorija* (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2005), pp. 56–61.
178. Ignas Šeinius, *Raudonasis tvanas* (Vilnius: VAGA, 1990), pp. 66–80. This book first appeared in Swedish in 1940, in Lithuanian in 1953. The Soviets killed one Lithuanian border guard, and on July 2, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry raised the question of compensation. *LOA* 322–23.
179. This impression of course differs sharply from Ermolenko's assertion that the foreign military attaches in Kaunas were impressed by the Soviets' "horses, discipline, and organization." Ermolenko, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
180. Jonas Dainauskas, in Saugumas bulletin no. 190, June 18, 1940.
181. *LYA*, 3377/58/806, 26–48.
182. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 624.
183. For details of the meeting, see Smetona's own account, *Pro Memoria*, various editions; Alfonsas Eidintas, "The Meeting of the Lithuanian Cabinet, 15 June 1940," in *The Baltic and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, John Hiden, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 165–173. See also the accounts of two major participants: K. Musteikis, *Prisiminimų fragmentai* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1989), and J. Audėnas, *Paskutinis posėdis* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1990). See also Raštikis, *op. cit.* Also the accounts by Smetona's biographers: Merkelis, Eidintas, and Truska.
184. Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 179.
185. Petras Karvelis, "Paskutinės nepriklausomos Lietuvos dienos," in *Lietuvos aneksija. 1940 metų metų dokumentai*, Leonas Gudaitis, ed. (Vilnius: Periodika, 1990), p. 52.
186. Musteikis, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
187. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.
188. See Matas Krygeris, "Nutarimas dėl bylos už A. Smetonos paimtą valiutą," *Lietuvos aneksija*, pp. 105–6; *Antano Smetonos korespondencija*, pp. 440–445; also Alfred Erich Senn, "Antanas Smetona Amerikoje," *Kultūros barai*, 1999/10: 71–77.
189. Kaslas, *op. cit.*, 225–26 Zechlin also claimed to have been the source of the news agency ELTA's story that Smetona had to take off his shoes and socks to wade across the border.
190. Cf. Juozas Žiugžda, "Buržuazinės santvarkos krizė ir fašistinės diktatūros nuvertimas," in *Lietuvos TSR istorija*, 3: 359. On Žiugžda's role in Soviet Lithuanian historiography, see Henrikas Šadzius, "Juozas Žiugžda—Lietuvos marksistinės-lenininės istoriografijos kūrėjas," in Juozas Žiugžda, *Rinktiniai raštai*, 2 vols. (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1986), 1: 4–38.
191. Škirpa, "Įvykių santrauka," in *Lietuvos aneksija*, p. 62.
192. Appendix viii to Škirpa, "Kovok!" VUB RS, F 155–310.

193. Škirpa told a courier from Kaunas that Germany would want a more dynamic leader to head a pro-German movement in Lithuania. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 681. Škirpa urged Voldemaras not to go but rather to wait until Germany showed more interest in supporting the Lithuanians, but Voldemaras, even against his wife's wishes, traveled on, only to be arrested immediately and deported to the Soviet Union. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
194. On his relations with the diplomats, see Jonušauskas, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–98.
195. USNA, 860m.001 SM 3/21, 860m.001 SM/23.
196. See Alfred Erich Senn, "Smetona ir lenkai 1941 metais," *Akiračiai*, 1990/3.
197. Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 392; his statement to the Washington press, appeared in the *Latvian Information Bulletin*, see USNA, 860m.00/472.
198. A. Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona*, pp. 156–57.
199. USNA, 860m.01/259.
200. *Ibid.*, also 860m.01/274.
201. Shtromas, *op. cit.*, p. 20; "Sovietų Rusijos okupacija," LKA, F2, A3, B1, D2, *pusl. 19*; Kersten committee, p. 336.
202. Antano Smetonos korespondencija, pp. 437, 442.
203. Owen Norem, *Timeless Lithuania* (Chicago: Amerlith Press, 1943); Smetona commentary in Smetona papers, IIA. See also Alfred Erich Senn, "Smetona Amerikoje," *Kultūros barai*, 1999/10: 71–77.
204. Elbridge Durbrow, letter, August 28, 1942, USNA, 860m.001 SM/8–2842.
205. On the February 16th celebrations, see Alfred Erich Senn, "OSS 1943 metų pranešimas apie lietuvius Amerikoje," *Kultūros barai*, 2004/7.
206. Antano Smetonos korespondencija, p. 587.
207. Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 393; Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 226.
208. Kersten committee, p. 129.
209. Taken from German intelligence report, July 30, 1940, LYA 33/77/58/810, p. 9. The LCP received this collection of German intelligence reports from East Germany in 1974.
210. See V. Vaitekūnas, *Vidurnakčio dokumentai* (Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulis, 1996), pp. 13, 17–24.
211. Konstantinas Navickas, Nacionalistinių koncepcijų kritika 1940 metų socialistinės revoliucijos Lietuvoje klausimu," *Istorijos klastotojai* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1976), p. 58.
212. See Valentin Berezhkov, *At Stalin's Side* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1994), p. 152; Thaddeus Wittlin, *Commissar* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); and Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Thaddeus Wittlin.

- Commissar. The Life and Death of Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria.* (New York: Macmillan, 1972, p. 400.
213. Arkady Vabsberg, *Stalin's Prosecutor. The Life of Andrei Vyshinsky* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), pp. 212–13.
 214. Part of Mikhail Gorbachev's program to establish a "state ruled by law" involved the process of subordinating the party to the constitutional order, but in practice he still considered the party superior to the government. Cf. Alfred Erich Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
 215. Stalin's wartime trips to Teheran and to Potsdam did not carry him outside of territory controlled by the Red Army.
 216. Under Gorbachev, Nikolai Ryzhkov considered it a demotion to move from the Politburo to the post of prime minister. See his memoirs, *Perestroika: Istorii predatel'stv* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992).
 217. Annex to Škirpa's MS, VUB MS F155–310.
 218. Some authors say he was of Armenian ancestry. Molotov once declared of Dekanozov, "He was apparently an Armenian, although he called himself a Georgian. Stalin said to him, 'You are no Georgian!'" *Sto sorok besed*, p. 29. Given what we know of Stalin's sense of humor, his statement to Dekanozov could be considered joking. Dekanozov's son reportedly went by the Georgian name Dekanozishvili. See information on the Internet under Dekanozov Vladimir Georgevich, Khronos CD-Rom.
 219. Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania Awakening*, 2d printing (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 2002), p. 159.
 220. The preparations for the move into the Baltic may have motivated the decision to kill Polish officers at Katyn, thereby freeing the camps for new prisoners. See Nataliia Lebedeva's introduction to *SSSR/Litva*, p. 44.
 221. *Lietuvos komunistų partijos istorijos apybraiža*, v. 2 (Vilnius: Mintis, 1978), pp. 571–79.
Lithuania in turn was allegedly ready for "peaceful" revolution in 1940. "Conditions in Lithuania in 1940 opened the real possibility for power to pass to the hands of the working people in peaceful fashion." A. Butkutė-Rameliėnė, *Lietuvos KP kova už tarybų valdžios įtvirtinimą* (Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1958), p. 28.
 222. Vincas Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija ir liaudies vyriausybė (Atsiminimai)*, Albertas Zalatorius, ed. (Vilnius: Mintis, 1992), p. 10.
 223. Pavel Sudoplatov, *Spetsoperatsii. Lubianka i Kreml' 1930–1850 gody* (Moscow: Ol'mapress, 1998), pp. 151–155; LYA, 2277/58/806.
 224. Soviet publications emphasized Dimitrov's letters to the Lithuanians on June 17 and 25, but party archives contain in all only four letters

- from him between June 17 and July 10, and two of these were concerned with publications. LYA, 3377/58/714.
225. Justas Paleckis, *V dvukh mirakh* (Moscow: Izd.polit.lit., 1974), pp. 344, 353.
 226. Decrees reprinted in Vaitiekūnas, op. cit., pp. 14–17. See also Liudas Truska's comment on this constitutional maneuvering in *Lietuva 1940–1990: Okupuotos Lietuvos istorija* (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2005), p. 62.
 227. Kazys Škirpa, “Kovok!” VUB RS, F155–310, pp. 11–12.
 228. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, pp. 31–32, 44.
 229. This argument is forcefully stated in Kersten committee, pp. 336–37.
 230. *USSR/Litva*, p. 622.
 231. See Liudas Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 23; also, Alfred Erich Senn, “Historia de la teoria y practica constitucional de Lituania,” in Carlos Flores Juberias, ed., *Las nuevas instituciones politicas de la Europa Oriental* (Madrid-Valencia: CEC-IVEI, 1997); English version in *SBW*, pp.174–82. As one official statement of the *tautininkai* put it, “The fate of the nation is more important than a pair of lines in the constitution.” See *Lietuvių Enciklopedija* (So. Boston: Lietuvių Enciklopedijos leidykla, 1964), 30: 443.
 232. Mykolas Römeris, *Lietuvos sovietizacija 1940–1941* (Vilnius: LITUANUS, 1989), pp. 20–21.
 233. Vincas Rastenis, *Tarp kairės ir dešinės, tarp Lietuvos ir Amerikos*, Daiva Dapkutė, ed. (Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2004), pp. 51–52.
 234. Public statements are reproduced in Vaitiekūnas, op. cit., pp. 12–14, 21.
 235. Kaslas, op. cit., 216.
 236. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols. (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1958–1965), 42: 367; 43: 199; Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 210–11.
 237. Krėvė, Bolševikų invazija, p. 19.
 238. See Aleksandr Slavinas, *Gibel' Pompeii* (Tel-Aviv: Ibrus, 1997), pp. 102–108.
 239. On the work of the Soviet mission in Kaunas, see Asta Petraitytė. “Politika per kultūrą,” *Darbai ir dienos*, 2002: 30, 31–32; on the society, see S. Noreikienė, *Lietuvių draugija TSRS tautų kultūrai pažinti (1929–1940)* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1978). On the “Third Front,” see Bronius Vaškėlis, *Žvilgsnis iš atokiau* (Vilnius: Versus Aureus. 2004), pp. 148–91.
 240. USNA 860M.00/339; Arvydas Anušauskas, *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas 1940–1958* (Vilnius: Vilnius: Mintis, 1996), p. 16; Antanas Maceina, *Buržuazijos žlugimas* (Kaunas: Sakalas, 1940), pp. 103–128.

- See also Liudas Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio* (Vilnius: VPU, 2005), pp. 198–199.
241. USNA, 860p.00/283.
 242. Justas Paleckis, op. cit., pp. 314–315. In government circles, Paleckis had a reputation as a “café politician, a salon communist.” Turauskas, “Bolševizmas ir imperializmas,” MS, Turauskas Archive, Hoover Institution, Box 4.
 243. Liudas Truska, “Kolaboravimo ypatumai pirmuoju sovietmečiu,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2001/1 (9): 80; Mindaugas Tamošaitis, “Dokumentai apie V. Krėvės 1953 m. liudijimą JAV komisijai,” *Akiračiai*, 2004/9: 7–8; Kersten committee, pp. 341–44. Krėvė had insisted that under his leadership, the Lithuanian government acted independently of Dekanozov.
 244. For examples of later escapes to Germany, see Vaclovas Sidzikauskas, *Lietuvos diplomatinės paraštėje* (Vilnius: VAGA 1994), pp. 196–98; Gediminas Galva, *Ernestas Galvanauskas. Politinė biografija* (Chicago: Akademines skautijos leidykla, 1982), pp. 425–28. Ignas Šeinius, op. cit., pp. 172 ff.
 245. Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, *The Temptation*, translated by Raphael Sealey (New York: Manyland Books, 1965). See also Zenonas Butkus, *SSRS intrigos Baltijos šalyse 1920–1940*, offprint from *Darbai ir dienos*, 7/16 (Kaunas: VDU leidykla, 1998).
 246. Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija*, p. 47; Sidzikauskas, op. cit., p. 175; A. Garmus, “Lietuvos įjungimas į SSSR—Maskvos diktatas,” *Lietuvių archyvas. Bolševizmo metai* (Brooklyn: Pranciškonai, 1952), p. 17.
 247. Ivinskis’s unpublished diary, p. 564/580.
 248. VUB RSS, F198–349. The two men were not acquainted, but Ivinskis had sent Krėvė a letter of congratulations on the occasion of his 70th birthday.
 249. Galva, op. cit., pp. 414–415; Sidzikauskas, op. cit., p. 177.
 250. Korsakienė, op. cit.
 251. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
 252. Raštikis, op. cit., 2: 68; Truska and Kancevičius, op. cit., p. 137.
 253. Merkeliš, op. cit., p. 595.
 254. From his testimony to NKVD interrogators, LYA 2272/58/483. p. 54.
 255. Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija*, p. 52.
 256. See Galva, op. cit., p. 415; LYA. 3377/58/591.
 257. TVA, p. 81; LYA, 8277/58/427; Vaitekūnas, op. cit., pp. 27–29. Vaitekūnas’s book is particularly useful for its reprinting of major articles from the contemporary Lithuanian press. Lithuanians have criticized the visit to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier as being particularly hypocritical.
 258. Protocols of the cabinet of ministers, LYA, 3377/58/591.
 259. Strong, op. cit., p. 19

260. On June 16 Ribbentrop had ordered: "It is again pointed out that border crossings are to be permitted only upon request of the Lithuanians and that we, for our part, must not do anything to encourage such requests." Kaslas, op. cit., p. 217.
261. Ibid., pp. 255–288.
262. Truska and Kanevičius, op. cit., p. 144; cabinet of minister protocols, LYA 3377/58/591.
263. Juozas Žiugžda, in *Lietuvos TSR istorija*, 3: 360; Juozas Žiugžda, "Tarybų valdžios atkūrimas," *LTSR istorija*, 4: 10.
264. See the interesting discussion of Soviet historiography in Nijolė Maslauskienė, "Nusikalstamos okupacinės politikos sistema—okupacinių politinių ir visuomeninių struktūrų vaidmuo ir kolaboravimas su jomis 1940–1941 m.," unpublished MS, IHC.
265. Römeris, op. cit., p. 22.
266. *Lietuvos Komunistų partijos istorijos apybraiža* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1978), 2: 9; *Istoriia Litovskoi SSR* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1978), p. 419; Konstantinas Navickas, op. cit.
267. Vytautas Tininis, *Sniečkus: 33 metai valdžioje* (Vilnius: self-published, 2000), p. 37.
268. See J. Arch Getty, *Pragmatists and Puritans: The Rise and Fall of the Party Control Commission*, The Carl Beck papers in Russian & East European studies, no. 120 (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Center for Russian & East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1997).
269. See Butkutė-Rameliene, op. cit., pp. 22–23. Butkutė-Rameliene presented her study as a response to the "provocation" of the US Congress Kersten Committee's report, p. 4.
270. Saugumas Bulletin 183, June 7, 1940. German intelligence later suggested that the weakness of the Communist Party might actually have stimulated the popular enthusiasm in response to the fall of the Smetona regime.
271. For documentation of Meskupas's activities in 1940, see his personal file in the party archive, LYA, 77/28/7201 and 7202, especially Judita Komodaitė's account of his career, first published in *Tiesa*, May 21, 1957, and then expanded and reprinted as a small pamphlet. Soviet historians emphasized the party's isolation from the Comintern, but it was the Soviet party-state, not the Comintern, who arrested and executed Lithuanian communists. *LTE*, 10:537, chose not to mention Šarmaitis's imprisonment, but in 1988, when Lithuanians called for the filling in of "blank spots" in Lithuania's history, he insisted that his time in Soviet jail was one of those "spots." On the impact of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact on Comintern members, see "Reminiscences of Wolfgang Leonhard," *Baltic Forum*, 6(1989)/2: 1–16.
272. The Lithuanians published the *Short Course* in the summer of 1940, and they serialized it in *Tiesa*, the party newspaper, in the fall.

Historians have credited several different people as having translated the work.

273. *SSSR/Litva*, pp. 453–459.
274. The *LTE* 3:628, published in 1978, declared he had been denied medical assistance. Lithuanian historians have raised the same charges against Soviet-operated prisons.
275. Saugumas Bulletins 185 and 187, June 10 and 11, 1940.
276. Nijolė Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų partijos tautinė ir socialinė sudėtis 1939 m. pabaigoje–1940 m. rugsėjo mėn.,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 1999: 1(5): 77–103.
277. *LTE* 10:272 says that upon his release from prison, Sniečkus “led the party.”
278. Sniečkus, Antanas, LYA, 16895/2/4.
279. Tininis, op. cit., pp. 32–33 describes Sniečkus’s dilemma, 1938–1939.
280. Mečislovas Gedvilas, *Gody velikogo pereloma* (1940–1945) (Vilnius: Mintis, 1979), p. 24.
281. Chaimas Izraelio Aizenas, “Avtobiografija,” LYA, 3377/46/1091, p. 92.
282. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–94; *Lietuvos balsas*, June 25, 1940.
283. LYA, 3377/58/714. Dimitrov wrote in German. In fact, the Soviet historiography never fully cleared up the character of this government in the Marxist historical dialectic. Was it a “popular front government” (Meškauskienė), a “people’s democracy” (Dimitrov), or a “dictatorship of the proletariat” (Šarmaitis)?
284. Nijolė Maslauskienė, “Nusikalstamos okupacinės politikos sistema,” p. 35.
285. Gedvilas, op. cit., p. 24; *Tiesa*, December 24, 1940.
286. Arvydas Anušauskas, op. cit., p. 28.
287. LYA, 16895/2/4.
288. See Lionginas Šepetys, in *Sniečkaus fenomenas* (Vilnius: Gairės, 2003), p. 173. Tininis, op. cit., offers the most useful biography of Sniečkus.
289. Butkutė-Ramelienė, op. cit., p. 151.
290. *Liaudies balsas*, June 21, 1940.
291. LYA, 1171/1/134. It is significant that Meskupas, not Sniečkus, wrote this letter. Sniečkus was already out of prison, but Meskupas was the party member who had the confidence and certification of Moscow and the Comintern.
292. Aizenas, op. cit., p. 95.
293. The party newspaper published Gedvilas’s statement under the headline, “not to change our conditions of life but just to preserve them.” *Lietuvos balsas*, June 23, 1940. An American diplomat in Riga reported, “At mass meetings of labor youth, speakers warn against premature demands which will obstruct the cause and insist that all

- activities contrary to the directives of the new government and the Communist party are harmful.” USNA, 860p.00/283.
294. *Lietuvos aidas*, June 23, 1940.
 295. *XX amžius*, June 25, 1940.
 296. *Liaudies balsas*, June 25, 1940.
 297. Interestingly enough, one can see the same organizational principles in the way in which Pierre de Coubertin, a contemporary of Lenin, constructed the power apparatus of the International Olympic Committee. See Alfred Erich Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games* (Champaign IL: Human Kinetics, 1999).
 298. Butkutė-Ramelienė, op. cit., p. 10. Butkutė’s imagery had a certain socialist realist tone: The party presumably already had the support of the working class and yet it had to win the support of the working class.
 299. LYA, 3377/58/910, p. 9.
 300. Korsakienė, op. cit., p. 95; *Vilniaus balsas*, June 26, 1940.
 301. *Lietuvos aidas*, June 30, 1940.
 302. LYA, 3377/58/846.
 303. *Sotsialisticheskie revoliutsii 1940 g. v Litve, Latvii i Estonii* (Moskva: Nauka, 1978), p. 316.
 304. Vincas Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija*. Protocols of the council of ministers are to be found in LYA 3377/58/591.
 305. See “Tamsta nuėjai su Lietuvos pavergėjais” *Kultūros barai*, 2006/1: 76–78; *Antano Smetonos laišakai*, passim.; Liudas Truska, “Kolaboravimo ypatumai pirmuoju sovietmečiu,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2001/1 (9): 79–80; Zenonas Butkus, *SSRS intrigos Baltijos šalyse 1920–1940*, pp. 17–19.
 306. Mindaugas Tamošaitis, “Apie Vinco Krėvės-Mickevičiaus politinę veiklą liaudies vyriausybėje 1940 m.,” *Akiračiai*, 2004/7: 5–7; Tamošaitis, “Kontroversiški V. Krėvės-Mickevičiaus parodymai apie 1940 m. Lietuvos okupaciją JAV Ch. J. Kerstono komitetui po Antrojo pasaulinio karo,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2004/2(16): 55–69; also Ričardas Čekutis and Dalius Žygelis, “Krėvė prieš Kerstena,” Internet: Bernardinai.lt, *Laisvės kryžkelės* (XVIII), May 29, 2006.
 307. Vincas Mačiūnas, *Vincas Krėvė savo laiškuose* (Chicago: Lietuvių Knygos Klubas, 1970), p. 15; Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas, “Krėvė: Keli dienraščio puslapiai,” *Metmenys*, 38: 134.
 308. Undated letter to Ivinskis, VUB, F198–349.
 309. I should probably note that in 1955, when I wrote a research paper for a graduate seminar at Columbia University, I myself was very critical of what I then understood to have been Krėvė’s role in the events of 1940. At this point I should also note that Krėvė, besides being my Russian language teacher, was a good friend of my parents. As dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Lithuania, he helped

- them in their departure from Lithuania in 1930–1931; my father arranged for him to come to the United States after the war. See Alfred Erich Senn, “Vincas Krėvė’s Journey to America,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 7 (1976): 255–63.
310. Rastenis, op. cit., p. 465.
 311. Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija* p. 36.
 312. Krėvė indicated that Dekanozov told him on June 16–17 that Gedvilas was to be the Minister of Internal Affairs, but party memoirists assert that Dekanozov accepted Gedvilas’s nomination only after talking with Sniečkus and Meskupas on the 18th. Gedvilas took office on the 19th, after the first ministers had collectively taken their oath to support the constitution.
 313. Galva, op. cit., pp. 421–425.
 314. Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija*, p. 11; A. G. Doncharov and G. N. Peskova, “SSSR i strany Pribaltiki,” *Voprosy istorii*, 1991/1: 46.
 315. Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija*, p. 13.
 316. Ibid.
 317. Ibid., p. 53. Zalatorius, the book’s editor, speculated that this memoir, first published in 1950, was written between 1946 and 1949. *ibid.*, p. 126.
 318. Appendix viii to Škirpa’s “Kovok! Pastangos gelbėti Lietuvą 1939–1941 m.” VUB, F155–310.
 319. Galva, op. cit., p. 419.
 320. LOA, pp. 198, 304–5; *SSSR/Litva*, p. 640. The collection of documents published by Vytautas Kancevičius, *Lithuania in 1939–1940*, pp. 159–151, inserted additional text into Krėvė’s communiqué of June 22: “In the field of foreign policy, good relations will be maintained with all the states as before, whereas the cultivation of friendly relations with the Soviet Union will be regarded as a matter of special concern of the new Government. The increase in the number of Soviet garrisons does not prejudice the country’s independence or economy, their sole purpose being to ensure security. The Mutual Assistance Treaty concluded in Moscow on October 10, 1939, remains the basis of the Lithuanian-Soviet relations.” Kancevičius apparently took his text from a newspaper rather than an archival copy of the document, and the added text would seem to constitute an adaptation from Krėvė’s communiqué of June 26 to Bern. See also *TVA*, p. 84.
 321. Soviet historians regularly noted his statement to the diplomats abroad and his meeting with foreign diplomats in Kaunas as representing foreign recognition of the People’s Government. On Urbšys’s statement, see Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 70. Now back in Kaunas, Urbšys may well have influenced Krėvė’s behavior in office. Urbšys had a reputation as a gentle person who wanted to avoid

- conflict, and in December 1939 he reportedly declared that Finland should have yielded to Soviet demands. See *SSSR/Litva*, p. 419.
322. Kaslas, op. cit., p. 226; Jean de Beausse, *Carnets d'un diplomate français en Lettonie 1939–1940* (Text in both Latvian and French; Riga: Liesma, 1997), p. 160.
323. This account is based mainly on Škirpa's manuscript, "Kovok!" VUB RS, F155–310. He also told of this journey in his memoir *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*.
324. *LOA*, p. 325.
325. Vincentas Brizgys, *Katalikų bažnyčia Lietuvoje 1940–1944 metais* (Chicago: Draugas, 1977), p. 14.
326. See Kastytis Antanaitis, *Lietuviškoji sovietinė nomenklatūra*, reprint from *Darbai ir dienos*, 7/16 (Kaunas: VDU, 1998); also Albertas Garliauskas, *Inteligentija 1940–1941 metais* (Vilnius: Academia 1991), 18–19.
327. See "Spiski s biograficheskimi dannymi I kratkimi kharakteristikami lits, rekomendovannykh na rabotu v vedomstva, organizatsii Litovskoi SSR," LYA, 1771/1/32.
328. Ibid., For an interesting commentary on Glovackas, who died fleeing the German advance in 1941, see A. Gudaitis-Guzevičius, *Didvyriškumo estafetė* (Vilnius: VAGA, 1981), pp. 497–504; also Škirpa, *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 391.
329. Škirpa's letter has been widely published in Lithuanian works. See *Lietuvos nepriklausomybės sutemos*, p. 384–386. His communications with other diplomats undoubtedly helped them when they formulated their objections to the changes in Kaunas after the election of the People's Seimas. In turn, Škirpa was the first of Lithuania's diplomats to lose his citizenship by decree of the council of ministers in Kaunas.
330. Cf. the reminiscences of Paleckis's daughter, Geruta Paleckytė, "Pirmasis tarybinis prezidentas," *Mūsų balsas*, February 20, 2004, p. 7.
331. According to Juozas Vaišnoras, Galvanauskas's successor as finance minister, in September 1940, Andrei Vyshinsky told Vaišnoras about Molotov's meeting with Krèvè. Vaišnoras, "Atsiminimai," a collection of reminiscences in LYA, 3377/51/251. Reprinted in Lithuanian and Russian, *SSSR/ Litva*, pp. 719–721. Krèvè's account in *Bolševikų invazija*, pp. 57–66; in all his account of his stay in Moscow extends to p. 71; see also pp. 14–18.
332. Norem's dispatches in July 13, 1940, 860m.51/169 and 172. On the government's discussion of the disposition of Lithuania's gold, see Krèvè, *Bolševikų invazija*, pp. 80–84. See also Dietrich Loeber, "The Problem of the Baltic Gold in Great Britain," *Internationales Recht und Diplomatie* 13 (1968).
333. Krèvè, *Bolševikų invazija*, pp. 17, 19; Römeris, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

334. Krèvè, *Bolševikų invazija*, p. 93.
335. Several writers have interpreted Galvanauskas's resignation as resulting from his opposition specifically to the government's financial policies. As government income declined, Galvanauskas objected to the demands of money for political prisoners, the expansion of the Communist Party, and the support of the communist press.
336. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 662.
337. Römeris, op. cit., p. 22.
338. Kostas Navickas, *The Struggle of the Lithuanian People for Statehood* (Vilnius: Gintaras, 1971), p. 149. Cf. Römeris's comment that the Seimas had replaced the People's Government as the decider of [Lithuania's] fate. *Lietuvos sovietizacija*, 34–35.
339. See V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1943), 7: 10 and 6: 74; *Pravda*, February 6, 1947.
340. Maslauskienė, op. cit. At the same time there were some 400 communist party members now employed in the government, all of course recommended by Meskupas's office. On Sniečkus's Saugumas, see *Politika*, 1990/6.
341. LYA 3277/58/427; LOA, pp. 314–15; TVA, pp. 86–87; Raštikis, op. cit., vol. 2; Sabaliunas, op. cit., p. 70; *USSR/Litva*, p. 710.
342. Vytautas Stanley Vardys, *The Catholic Church, Dissent and Nationality in Soviet Lithuania* (New York: East European Quarterly, 1978), pp. 46–51; Brizgys, op. cit.
343. LYA, FK–1/10/3; Vincas Trumpa, *Apie žmones ir laiką* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2001), pp. 335–345; Vardys, op. cit.; Antanas Trakiškis, “Anti-Religious Activities of the Soviet Regime in Lithuania,” MS in LKA F2/A3/B1/D1, also in USNA. Cf. the effort to recruit the help of Aleksandras Stulginskis, a Christian Democrat who had served as President of Lithuania from 1920 to 1926; Alfonsas Eidintas, *Aleksandras Stulginskis* (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1995), pp. 261–264.
344. USNA, 860m.00/464.
345. LYA, 1771/1/118/4.
346. Cf. *Lietuvos aidas*, June 27, and *Darbo Lietuva*, July 18, 1940.
347. See the discussions of this subject in Alfred Erich Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971).
348. For a brief account of nationalities and social conditions before the war, see Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Baltic States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 30–33.
349. See Alfred Erich Senn, “Lithuania Through Polish Eyes, 1919–1924,” *Lituanus*, 26/1: 13–18.
350. Kostas Dulksnis, August 7, 1940, LYA, 3377/58/806.

351. According to Anna Louise Strong, Didžiulis, the People's Government's administrator of Vilnius, was critical of the Poles: "Poles creep in everywhere. Into the police, the trade unions, the Communist Party. Wherever there is a Polish majority it will fight for the Greater Poland." The Poles allegedly issued false leaflets, purporting to come from the Communist Party. Strong, op. cit., p. 29.
352. Solomonas Atamukas, *Žydų kelias Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 1998), pp. 142, 185, 193; Liudas Truska, "Ar 1940 m. žydai nusikalto Lietuvai?" *Akiračiai*, 1997/7; Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) pp. 216–20; Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 41–43.
353. Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945–1991," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 4; Asrael Schochat "Jews, Lithuanians and Russians, 1939–1941," in *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe 1918–1941* (NY and Jerusalem: John Wiley and Sons, Israel Universities Press, 1974), pp. 304–6; Dov Levin, *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941–1945* (NY: Holmes & Meier, 1984), p. 8; Atamukas, op. cit., p.188. See also Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai* (Vilnius; VPO, 2005) pp. 199–200.
354. Slavinas, op. cit., pp. 15–16; Slavinas believed that the action of the Lithuanian government in releasing him from arrest one time was also an anti-Jewish action, but in turn party leaders, looking at their obligations to Moscow, did not want to be identified as a Jewish party. See Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai*, pp. 202–203, 213–230; Nijolė Maslauskienė's comments in "Lithuanian-Jewish Relations," Shorthand record of a conference (Vilnius: Seimas, 1999), pp. 14–15.
355. Original in English, IIA, F 1, Ap. 1–1, B119–2.
356. Voldemaras, op. cit., pp. 72–73.
357. "Empire" might be considered a pejorative word, but *Webster's Third International Dictionary* defines "empire" as "an extended territory, usu. comprising a group of nations, states, or peoples under the control or domination of a single sovereign power."
358. Cf. Françoise Thom, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A History of Perestroika* (London: Pinter, 19889), p. 77; Alfred Erich Senn, "National Questions in the Baltic: The Lithuanian Example," in *Global Convulsions: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Winston A. van Horne, ed. (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997), pp. 247–260.
359. Liudas Truska gives the most complete account, naming names rather than relying just on numbers. See his "Lietuvos valdžios įstaiigų rusifikavimas," *LGGRTI Darbai*, 1 (1996): 3–28. An estimated 40 % of the party membership in June 1941 came from outside the republic.

- Protocols of the party's *Biuro* were written in Russian; protocols of the People's Government in Lithuanian.
360. Lucy Dawydowicz, *From That Place and Time: A Memoir, 1938–1947* (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 302. See also the vengeful thoughts in Aba Gefen, *Defying the Holocaust* (Santa Barbara CA: Borge Press, 1993); Aleksandr Slavinas, op. cit.; Rich Cohen, *The Avengers* (New York: Knopf, 2000).
 361. Levin, *Fighting Back*, pp. 21, 23; Zvi Kolitz, "The Physical and Metaphysical Dimensions of the Extermination of the Jews in Lithuania," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, p. 199; Schochat, op. cit., p. 310.
 362. USNA, 861m.00/464.
 363. Saugumas bulletin, Marijampolė, no. 11, August 13, 1940.
 364. Kersten committee, p. 499. The Bund, a Jewish workers' organization that had been founded in 1895. It had been the first mass socialist organization in Imperial Russia.
 365. Slavinas, op. cit., p. 98; Krėvė, *Bolševikų invazija*, p. 36; Musteikis, in appendix VI to Škirpa's manuscript "Kovok!"; Povilas Gaučys, *Tarp dviejų pasaulių* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1992).
 366. Ben Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 22; Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 36.
 367. Levin, *Baltic Jews under the Soviets, 1940–1946* (Jerusalem: Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry, 1994); Gitelman, op. cit., pp. 4–5.
 368. William W. Mishell, *Kaddish for Kovno* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1988), p. 8. Cf. *Lietuvos aidas*, July 8, 1940: "Stalin has liberated us!" Dov Levin wrote of similar receptions when Soviet troops moved into Belarus in September 1939: "It is hard to describe the emotion that swept me as I saw in the street, across from our gate, a Russian tank bearing grinning young men with a blazing red star on their berets... everyone cheered... You could hardly find a Gentile in that crowd." Levin, *Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 33.
 369. Gitelman, op. cit., p. 5; Gefen in *Lietuvos rytas*, March 23, 1996.
 370. LCVA, 378/10/611.
 371. Kolitz, op. cit., p. 201; Gross, op. cit., p. 272; Levin, *Baltic Jews*, p. 27. Kolitz wrote that the Jews were culturally superior to the Lithuanians; Levin wrote in *Baltic Jews*, p. 27: "The fact was that most Lithuanian party members were unfit to fill state functions which demanded a certain level of education and expertise." Menahem Begin, in his memoir *White Nights* (London: Macdonald, 1957), expressed surprised at the erudition of his NKVD interrogator.
 372. USNA, 860m.00/471; reprinted in SBW. For a more detailed account of public confrontations between Lithuanians and Jews, see Alfonsas Eidintas, "A Jew-Communist Stereotype in Lithuania, 1940–1941."

373. Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1943), p. 475.
374. Complaint by Ovseijus Levitanas, April 11, 1041, LYA, 1771/2/469, pp. 155–58.
375. Sniečkus reports, Saugumas bulletins 101–193, June 25–28, 1940. Even before the Soviet invasion of June 15, the Latvian minister in Kaunas had identified two groups as particularly sympathetic to the communists: poor peasants who wanted land reform and Jews. LVVA, 2574/3/3291, pp. 27 and 85. An American diplomat wrote in February 1940, “A great many of the party leaders would have much to lose from further land reforms or from a too great attention to the redistribution downward of the wealth of the county.” USNA, 860m.00/424.
376. *Tiesa*, July 7, 1940.
377. USNA, 860m.00/464.
378. Jonušauskas, op. cit., pp. 59–60.
379. Lithuanians usually date the meeting at the Soviet mission as July 1, but according to Dekanozov’s own account, it seems to have taken place on the 4th. See *SSSR/Litva*, pp. 59, 658–659. See also the Lithuanian reminiscences at the meeting in the Institute of Party History, June 13, 1980, in LYA, 3377/53/88.
380. English translation of the rules in Kersten committee, pp. 445–449.
381. Vaitekūnas, op. cit., p. 341.
382. LYA, 3374/58/275, p. 68.
383. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, pp. 22–23.
384. *TVA*, pp. 87–88.
385. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 665.
386. See Strong, op. cit., p. 30; see also Halina Korsakienė’s description of Strong’s visit to Korsakas’s office, op. cit., pp. 91–94.
387. LYA, 1771/13/24. Zimanas had read a typescript of the brochure, which he had received from a publishing house in Moscow. Strong had made no mention of either Dekanozov or Sniečkus in her sixty-four page text, and she mentioned Meskupas only once, calling him simply “Adomas” and quoting him on the problems of the party’s shifting from underground status to the position of directing the reorganization of government and police. Strong, op. cit., pp. 19–20
388. Aizenas, op. cit., p. 96. Since the organization existed only in name and was forgotten nine days later, once the voting had taken place, it is perhaps natural that writers have presented its name in various forms. I have chosen to use “Union of Lithuanian Working People,” *Lietuvos Darbo Liaudies Sąjunga*.
389. See Vaitekūnas, op. cit., 316–29; *TVA*, pp. 89–91.
390. *LOA*, p. 347.
391. Vaitekūnas, op. cit. pp. 335–40.

392. Anna Louise Strong, op. cit., pp. 10, 15.
393. Vaitekūnas, op. cit. pp. 351–353.
394. A Saugumas report from Marijampolė on July 12 declared that “the people are satisfied that candidates to the seimas are being offered from their midst since this seimas will be a seimas of working people that will act on their needs.”
395. Cf. the positive report on this meeting in Vaitekūnas, op. cit., p. 381. “Various dark elements attempted to speak out; the participants in the meeting called them to order and exposed them.”
396. Vaitekūnas, op. cit., pp. 471–501, reviewed the known biographies; Butkutė-Ramelienė, op. cit., p. 37; Strong, op. cit., p. 47.
397. Vaitekūnas, op. cit., pp. 323–29.
398. *USSR/Litva*, pp. 667–672.
399. Strong, op. cit., p. 31.
400. See Vaitekūnas, op. cit., pp. 406–419; *Lietuvos aidas*, July 12, 1940. The resolution would indicate that the authorities had decided in advance to claim that 100,000 persons had attended the meeting.
401. *Lietuvos aidas*, July 12, 1940.
402. See Vaitekūnas, p. 385; excerpt from Römeris’s diary in *Kultūros barai*, 1991/9: 76.
403. Text, LYA, 1771/1/155. The Lithuanian text of Meškauskienė’s speech says that the People’s Government “has as yet not done much” in this regard, while the Russian text says that the government “has done little.” On June 22, commenting on Sniečkus’s appointment as chief of the Saugumas, the German minister in Kaunas, Erich Zechlin, had predicted that “300–400” political leaders would be arrested. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 626.
404. Vaitekūnas, op. cit., pp. 360–361.
405. Arvydas Anušauskas, “Areštai ir kitos privartos formos,” paper in the files of the International Commission, p. 4; LOA 333–37 1940–77; Anušauskas, *Naikinimas*, 34; *Lietuva 1940–1990* (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2005), p. 134. See also Šeinius, op. cit., pp. 120 ff., who describes the care he took to avoid being arrested at his own residence. At the same time, the USSR NKVD arrested and deported over 4000 interned Polish soldiers and police.
406. See Saugumas Bulletins, Numbers 207 and 209, July 16 and 20, 1940, and Ministry of Internal Affairs Bulletin, number 7, July 30.
407. *Istorija litovskoi SSR*, Bronius Vaitkevičius ed. (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1978), p. 424; Henrikas Šadžius, “Litva v 1940–1941 gg.,” in *Novyi vzgliad na istoriiu Litvy*, pp. 160–161.
408. Strong, op. cit., p. 35.
409. *Ibid.*, p. 40. On the election results, see LYA, 1771/1/110; Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 67; Saliamonas Vaintraubas, *Akredituotas savo kartai* (Vilnius: Tandemas, 2002), pp. 142–143.

410. Truska, “1940 metų ‘Liaudies’ Seimo rinkimai. 2. Rinkimu rezultatai,” *Lituanistica*, 1995/1 (21): 36–37. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 67.
411. Justas Paleckis donated this collection to the Institute of Party History in 1955. LYA, 3377/58/593. That Lithuania’s acting president had such a collection while the Election Commission kept no records of the voting offers a striking commentary on the entire election process.
412. Šeinius, op. cit., p. 18.
413. LYA, 3377/58/810.
414. In accordance with the provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the Soviet Union had issued an ultimatum to Romania to surrender the region of Bessarabia, which the Romanians had occupied in 1919. This now became the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. In all, in the course of 1940, the Soviet Union annexed most of the territory—with some 19 to 20 million inhabitants—that had separated from the ruins of the Russian empire in 1918–1920.
415. Strong, op. cit., pp. 15, 22–23. Strong was in Lithuania for four weeks, not “months.”
416. See *Darbo Lietuva*, July 15, 17, and 24, 1940. See also *LLS*, pp. 32, 110.
417. *Darbo Lietuva*, August 20 and 24, 1940. The election commission could void any candidate’s mandate. Article 51 of the election law states: “The Supreme Election Commission had the power to decide whether a people’s representative has ceased being a people’s representative.” Vaitekūnas, op. cit., p. 257 Presumably the commission could have voided the vote before the meeting of the People’s Seimas on July 21, but it apparently preferred not to do so. See Niunka’s reminiscences, LYA, 3377/53/88. Niunka was for many years the Social Sciences secretary of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.
418. Bulletin of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, no. 1, July 22, 1940.
419. Jan Zwartendijk, *Jan Zwartendijk: His Activities as Dutch Consul in Lithuania, 1940* (Tucson AZ: privately reproduced, 2003). I want to thank Zwartendijk’s sons for sharing this document with me.
420. See SSSR/Litva, pp. 492, 711; Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, pp. 204–207.
421. See LYA, 3377/58/274. Strong, op. cit., p. 45, mentioned meeting Vaineikienė, p. 45. On the involvement of Vaineikienė’s family in the book smuggling, see *SBW*, 196–199.
422. See the Bureau’s letter rejecting a contribution by Jonas Šliūpas, one of the legendary figures of the Lithuanian national movement before the First World War. MB RS, F1–341.
423. A. Garmus, op. cit., pp. 5–21.

424. See the memoir by Gotthold Rhode, "Als Ortsbevollmächtigter in Neustadt (Kudirkos Naumiestis) in Litauen," in *Alte und neue Themen der Bevölkerungswissenschaft* (Boppard: Hermann Schubnell, 1981), pp. 151–166.
425. Garmus, op. cit., p. 17.
426. Ivinskis's unpublished diary, p. 564/580.
427. Dovydenas's testimony in YSL 3377/584/274. Strong, who was also staying in the Metropolis, called the deputies "an informal lot, fully aware of the great importance of the occasion, but totally unspoiled by the formalities of government." Op. cit., p. 53.
428. Anušauskas, op. cit., p. 29. Writing about the proceedings of all three Baltic Peoples' assemblages, David Kirby declared, "The ridiculously high vote for the workers' blocs in the July elections and the dutiful proceedings of the assemblies (described by one eye-witness as 'a theatrical affair... the deputies voted like sheep in unanimity') reveal nothing other than the neuroses and intellectual bankruptcy of Stalinism." David Kirby, "Incorporation: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact," in *The Baltic States*, Graham Smith, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 80.
429. MB RS, F29–1560; *Darbo Lietuva*, July 22, 1940; Liudas Dovydenas, *Užrašai* (Kaunas: Dr. Baunoro leidykla, 1943), p. 24.
430. *LLS*, p. 51.
431. *LLS*, pp. 62, 76; MB RS F29–1560; Strong, op. cit., p. 48.
432. *LLS*, 105–115. In his diary, Zenonas Ivinskis noted that his name was on the list of intellectuals supporting the regime as ready by Kostas Korsakas, and he wrote that he had not signed it.
433. *LLS*, p. 130. The authorities had planned to hold a massive demonstration after the closing of the People's Seimas, but torrential rain that day forced cancellation of this plan. In anticipation of a new life, a Saugumas report from Šiauliai on July 23 proclaimed, "The constitution of the bloodsucker Smetona, which helped some to accumulate millions and brought to others, poverty, misery, hunger and death, is replaced by the Stalin constitution, a constitution which assure a full, happy and cultured life for all workers."
434. See *Zigmas Angarietis*, R. Šarmaitis ed., Vilnius: Mintis, 1982), p. 12. Angarietis's entry in *LTE*, 1:225, did not mention that the Soviet government had executed him.
435. Dovydenas, *Užrašai*, pp. 7, 67. Dovydenas published his memoir under the Nazi occupation, but his account seems to fit the text of his speech as published in *Darbo Lietuva*, July 24, 1940 and in *LLS*, pp. 124–25.
436. Dovydenas, *Užrašai*, p. 24.
437. *Darbo Lietuva*, August 4, 1940.

438. See *TVA*, pp. 107–8; *Darbo Lietuva*, August 4, 1940; *LLS*, pp. 131–36. The phrase “toy in the hands” was of course used in the Comintern’s directive of March 23.
439. Korsakienė, op. cit., pp. 107–112; *Darbo Lietuva*, August 4, 1940; *LLS*, p. 139.
440. *LLS*, pp. 149–154, 178, 198. The Lithuanian constitution closely followed the structure of the USSR constitution, on questions such as the rights of citizens quoting the Soviet text directly. Certain changes necessarily distinguished the administrative organs of the Lithuanian SSR from those of the USSR and the RSFSR. Most significant perhaps was the avoidance of mentioning collective farms. Articles 5 to 9 of the Soviet constitution, for example, spoke of collective farm property; the Lithuanian constitution juggled articles 5 to 9 to avoid mentioning collective farms while still filling the space between the identical Articles 4 and 10. Lithuania was only beginning the transition from capitalism to socialism, and therefore it was not yet ready for socialist definitions of property. See James H. Meisel and Edward S. Kozera, eds., *Materials for the Study of the Soviet System* (Ann Arbor: George Wahr, 1953), 242–266; *Lietuvos liaudies seimas*, p. 184–97. See also Mykolas Römeris’s constitutional analysis in his *Lietuvos sovietizacija 1940–1942*, pp. 42–67.
441. *Ibid.*, pp. 205–15.
442. See Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania Awakening* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990); Alfred Erich Senn, *Gorbachev’s Failure in Lithuania*.
443. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 305.
444. Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953 metais*, p. 24.
445. Mykolas Römeris, op. cit., pp. 21–22. On Krėvė and the Academy of Sciences, see *Lietuvos mokslų akademija 1941–2001* (Vilnius: MA leidykla, 2001); *Lietuvos Mokslų akademijos archyvas*, 1/1.
446. Protocol #1, September 11, and #2, September 18, 1940. LYA, 1771/1/1 and 3. Central Committee protocols were written in Russian. After the LCP had joined the A–UCP(b), the party carried out a purge of its new membership in the process of issuing new membership cards. See Maslauskienė, “Lietuvos komunistų partijos tautinė ir socialinė sudėtis,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 1999/1(5), 77–103; Maslauskienė, “Valdininkijos šalinimas iš okupuotos Lietuvos administracijos ir jos keitimas okupantų talkininkais 1940 m. birželio-gruodžio mėn.” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2000/2(8): 7–41.
447. Proceedings of the Vth Congress of the Lithuanian Communist Party, LYA, 1771/2/20, p. 83.
448. *Tiesa*, November 12, 1940.
449. *Tiesa*, November 26, 1940; the newspaper reprinted the speech the next day to fix errors in the text and to add mentions of applause.

450. Strong, op. cit., p. 64; *Lithuania: An Encyclopedic Survey* (Vilnius: Encyclopedia Publ., 1986), p. 129.
451. See *SSSR/Litva*, pp. 676, 695–96, 703.
452. N. Lebedeva, “VKP(b) CK Politbiuras ir 1939–1941 m. prijungtų prie SSRS teritorijų sovietizavimas,” *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2000/1: 89–100. Sniečkus quoted Andreev extensively in his report to the LCP’s Fifth Congress in February 1941. LYA, 1771/2/20. I am indebted to Professor Irena Sneiderė, in Riga, who provided me with a copy of Andreev’s report, which she found in Andreev’s archive in Moscow.
453. *LLS*, p. 36.
454. See Alfred Erich Senn, “Apie žodį ‘valstybingumas’,” *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 1996/3:148–59. See also “Apie valstybingumą,” *Akiračiai*, 1995/5: 12–13 (reprinted in English in *BSW*, pp. 30–35).
455. *SSSR/Litva*, p. 624.
456. A. S. Orlov, “SSSR i Pribaltika 1939–1940,” in *Voina i politika 1939–1941*, A. O. Chubarian, ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 1999), p. 204.
457. USNA, 860i.00/182.

Index

A

- Aba, Gefen, 199
Abakonis, Jonas, 228–229, 231, 241
Adamauskas, Liudas, 174
Aizenas, Chaim, 158, 163, 210
Aleksa-Angarietis, Zigmas, 138, 237–238
Andreev, Andrei Andreevich, 243 247–249
Anna, Louise, 57–58, 124, 146, 178, 209, 211, 213, 215, 218, 220, 222, 225, 227, 246
Anušauskas, Arvydas, 217
Atamukas, Solomonas, 57, 191–192, 201

B

- Bakonis, A., 228
Baltušis-Žemaitis, Feliksas, 187
Balutis, Kazys, 72
Barkauskas, Antanas, 86
Bizauskas, Kazys, 39–40, 104–105, 130–131, 141

C

- Cardinal, Dougherty, Francis, 118
Cesevičius, Domas, 77,
Chodakauskaitė-Smetonienė, Sofija, 31,
Chodakauskaitė-Tübelienė, Jadwiga, 31
Čiurlionis, Stasys, 185
Cohen, Israel, 202
Coleman, Arthur, 253
Crowe, David, 71
Cvirka, Petras, 228

D

- Davydowicz, Lucy, 196
Dekanozov, Vladimir, 80, 83, 91, 94, 98, 100, 106, 109, 119–149, 151–153, 156, 158–164, 166–167, 169–175, 177, 179–180, 182–184, 186, 189, 205–206, 212, 215–261, 220, 223, 226–227, 231–233, 235, 240, 243–245, 247, 252
Didžiokas, Vladas, 188
Didžiulis-Grosmanas, Karolis, 174, 220
Dimitrov, Georgii, 14, 127, 151, 159, 163, 211, 243–244, 252
Dovydėnas, Liudas, 225, 232
Dridzo-Lozovsky, Solomon, 66

E

- Ehrenburg, Ilya, 66
Eidintas, Alfonsas, 58, 103, 117

G

- Galvanauskas, Ernestas, 76, 106, 108, 123, 126, 140, 142, 173
Garmus, Antanas, 231–235
Gedvilas, Mečys (Mečislovas), 146, 159–160–161, 164, 166–167, 173, 180–181, 183, 187, 189, 207, 212, 217, 225, 229, 232, 235–236, 242, 246
Gilels, Emil, 227
Gira, Liudas, 210,
Gitelman, Zvi, 192, 199
Gladkov, Piotr, 178
Glovackas, Pijus, 177, 211, 242
Gorbachev, Mikhail, 2, 23, 195, 253

Grinius, Kazys, 49, 61
 Gufler, Bernard, 77
 Gunther, John, 31
 Guzevičius (Gudaitis-
 Guzevičius), Aleksandras, 242

H

Hitler, Adolf, 8, 14, 22–2, 31, 34,
 43, 65–66, 68–69, 88, 107,
 196, 200, 229, 250
 Hoover, J. Edgar, 112–113

I

Ivinskis Zenonas, 141, 172, 234

K

Kalinin, Mikhail, 16, 94, 211, 229
 Kennan, George, 24
 Khrushchev, Nikita, 121–123
 Klimas, Petras, 72
 Koganas, Leonas, 141, 173, 196
 Korsakas, Kostas, 205, 240
 Korsakienė, Halina, 142
 Krėvė-Mickevičius, Vincas, 124,
 134, 136, 139–145, 147, 149,
 126, 160, 163, 167, 169–184,
 198, 206, 211, 232–234, 236,
 242
 Krupavičius, Mykolas, 188
 Kviklys, Mečys, 49

L

Latvis-Fridmanas, Berelis, 164,
 220
 Lavrentii, Beriia, 14, 121–123,
 126, 128, 136, 160–161, 218,
 243
 Lenin, I. Vladimir, 122, 127, 135,
 137, 159, 161, 164–166, 186,
 190, 196, 238

Levin Dov, 45, 57–58, 192, 197,
 199–200, 202
 Litvinov, Maxim, 33, 88, 123
 Lozoraitis, Stasys, 72–73, 110,
 206

M

Maceina, Antanas, 137
 Macijauskas, Jonas, 187
 Marcinkevičius, Justinas, 23
 Maslauskienė, Nijolė, 187
 Mendelsohn, Ezra, 191
 Merkelis, Aleksandras, 30, 47
 Merkys, Antanas, 45, 54, 56, 59,
 65, 71–72, 76, 78, 81, 90, 92–
 96, 98, 101, 103–106, 108–
 110, 114–116, 120–121, 123,
 129–131, 133, 138–144, 177,
 217, 225, 233
 Meškauskienė, Michalina, 212,
 217, 234
 Meskupas-Adomas, Icaikas, 81,
 91, 127, 151, 154–159, 163,
 168, 178–179, 212, 237
 Mickevičius-Kapsukas, Vincas,
 152, 250
 Mickis, Matas, 141, 174, 202, 214
 Minczeles, Henri, 56, 60
 Mirsky, Ivan, 60
 Misiunas (Misiūnas), Romualdas,
 81
 Molotov, Viacheslav, 7, 12–13,
 15–23, 41, 46, 54, 67, 69, 78–
 81, 85, 87–88, 90, 92–95, 97–
 98, 101, 104–105, 120, 123,
 126, 143, 146, 170–171, 174,
 180–182, 184, 240, 247
 Munters, Valters, 74, 125
 Musteikis, Kazys, 38–39, 105–
 106

N

- Natkevičius, Ladas, 15–16, 18–20, 38, 43, 54, 78, 90–91, 93–95, 97, 180, 231
 Nėris, Salomėja, 240
 Niunka, Vladas, 206, 228, 232
 Norem, Owen, 114–116, 133, 181, 189, 193–194, 206

O

- Orlov, A. D., 253
 Orwell, George, 128

P

- Pakarklis, Povilas, 141, 145, 171, 173, 182, 202, 220, 242
 Pakštas, Kazys, 208
 Paleckis, Justas, 41, 128–129, 138–139, 141–142, 144–145, 147–148, 159–160, 162, 165–167, 172–177, 181–183, 187–188, 205–206, 212, 216, 218, 225, 227, 229, 235–236, 239, 241, 249
 Pashukanis, E. B., 88
 Pats, Konstantin, 107, 119, 129–130
 Petrauskas, Kazys, 216
 Pinchuk, Ben-Cion, 199
 Potemkin, Vladimir, 20
 Povilaitis, Augustinas, 73–74, 92–93, 98, 104, 106, 143, 160
 Pozdniakov, Nikolai, 21, 36–38, 54, 67, 71, 76, 78–83, 90–92, 95, 126–129, 136–137, 139, 145–146, 151, 156, 162, 164, 173–175, 179, 191, 221, 236, 244, 249
 Putin, Vladimir, 68, 205, 222, 250

R

- Rastenis, Vincas, 120, 133
 Raštikis, Stasys, 34, 39–40, 75, 78, 94, 98, 104–105, 108, 143
 Renteln, Theodor, 232
 Ribbentrop, Joachim von, 7, 11, 13, 16, 38, 73, 125, 146
 Rudis, Gediminas, 5, 74
 Römeris, Mykolas, 132, 149, 183, 216, 245

S

- Sabaliunas (Sabaliūnas), Leonas, 34–35
 Samuel, Bernard, 118
 Šarmaitis, Romas, 154, 178
 Sausas, Leia, 217
 Schneidman, N. N., 57
 Schochat, Azriel, 192, 197
 Schulenburg, Graf Friedrich von der 12, 16–17, 19, 25, 98, 146
 Selter, Karl, 13
 Shtromas, Aleksandras, 14, 114
 Sidzikauskas, Vaclovas, 141–142
 Sirijos-Gira, Vytautas, 226
 Škirpa, Kazys, 39, 42–45, 47, 98, 108–109, 111, 126, 177–179, 201
 Skučas, Kazys, 58, 74, 90, 92–94, 97–98, 103–104, 106, 109, 130, 143, 160
 Slavinas, Aleksandr, 136
 Šliogeris, Vaclovas, 27
 Smetona, Antanas, 11, 16, 27, 29–44, 46, 50, 54, 57, 65, 71–78, 82–83, 86, 88–89, 94, 98, 103–119, 124, 129–132, 134, 137, 142–144, 147, 151, 153–154, 159–160, 163–164, 166–168, 170–173, 175, 177, 181–182, 185, 187–194, 197–198, 200, 203, 207–208, 217–218,

- 229, 233–235, 237, 241–242,
244, 246, 250
- Sniečkus, Antanas, 107, 149,
153–162, 165, 167–168, 173,
179, 186, 188–189, 191, 197,
200, 202–203, 206, 209–210,
212, 217–218, 221, 228–229,
235–238, 241
- Stalin, Joseph, 2, 8, 10, 14, 16–
22, 24–25, 37, 39–41, 45–47,
53, 61–62, 65, 68, 88, 95, 100,
120, 122–123, 125, 127–129,
156, 166, 186, 190, 197, 200,
203, 212, 214, 216, 219, 222,
225, 228, 235–236, 238–240,
243–247, 252–253
- Stresemann, Gustav, 33
- Sudoplatov, Pavel, 125
- Sugihara, Chiune, 211, 230–231
- T**
- Taagepera, Rein, 81
- Tarle, Eugene, 9, 88
- Timoshenko, Semen, 93, 101,
121, 126, 164, 251
- Truska, Liudas, 28, 30, 32, 78,
117, 131, 170, 191, 208, 244
- Tūbelis, Juozas, 31, 75
- Turauskas, Edvardas, 39, 40, 43,
46
- U**
- Ulmanis, Karlis, 107, 119, 129–
130
- Urbšys, Juozas, 13, 15–21, 28, 35,
38–41, 43–45, 49, 54, 59, 70–
71, 74, 76–77, 81, 90–92, 94–
98, 101, 105, 120, 176, 225,
233

V

- Vabsberg, Arkady, 121
- Vaineikienė, Stasė, 232
- Vaintraubas, Solomonas, 99, 185
- Vaišnoras, Juozas, 214,
- Venclova, Antanas, 145, 242
- Vitkauskas, Vincas, 78, 105, 108,
120, 130, 141, 145, 173, 179,
187, 214
- Voldemaras, Augustinas, 29, 37,
42, 47, 51, 194
- Voroshilov, Kliment, 164, 211,
- Vyshinsky, Andrei, 100, 121,
127, 244

Z

- Žadeikis, Povilas, 107, 113–114,
117
- Zarins, Karlis, 73
- Zhdanov, Andrei, 100, 121, 127,
244
- Zimanas, Henrikas, 99, 209
- Žukaitis, Stepas, 74
- Zwartendijk, Jan, 230