

"LITUANIA MILITANS"

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It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain..."

Abraham Lincoln (Gettysburg, November 19, 1863).

*"The struggle for freedom when once begun,
With the father's blood is bequeathed to the son.
Though broken a hundredfold by the power of the foe —
ends in victory."*

Adomas Mickevičius

THE LITHUANIAN nation is an ancient and a proud one. More than 700 years ago, the Lithuanian people dwelling on the shores of the Baltic Sea felt themselves ripe for an independent life and so founded their own state. In 1253 Mindaugas the first ruler of a united Lithuania, was crowned as King of Lithuania by Bishop Henry of Kulm who was delegated to perform that office by Pope Innocent IV. The papal diploma was dated July 17, 1251, but the coronation did not take place until some time in 1253.

The Lithuanians were from the early days renowned as a nation of warriors. Not for nothing did Henry, the Livonian chronicler, writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century, describe the Lithuanians as the most powerful and warlike nation of the Baltic lands — a nation that had fought against the Russians and had overcome forces considerably greater than its own.

Under the rule of Vytautas the Great, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Lithuania ranked as one of the most powerful countries in Europe with territories extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea. When he died on October 27, 1430, Francis de Comitibus and Aeneas Silvius di Piccolo-mini, who later became Pope Pius II, compared him with Alexander of Macedon and called him the greatest personality of that epoch, the sole hope of Europe "which faced the menace of the Turks and the Tartars."

For centuries Lithuania had to fight against the German Teutonic Order in the West and the strengthening Muscovite states in the East. German expansion was checked when, on July 15, 1410, at the crucial and historic battle of Tannenberg, the Teutonic Order was completely routed with heavy loss of life. In the East, Lithuania and Poland, which had retained their independence until almost the end of the eighteenth century, fell victim to the machinations of Tsarist Russia, Prussia, and Austria and were partitioned among those three Powers.

However, the Lithuanians were not disposed to submit tamely to this fate. Thus, both in Lithuania and in Poland, insurrections broke out in 1831, 1863, and 1904, which were savagely suppressed by the Russians. Notwithstanding the occupation of the country by Tsarist Russia, the Lithuanian people — nationally reborn, nationally conscious, and nationally

united at the end of the nineteenth century — possessed their own secret underground press, exemplified in such publications as "Ausra" (Dawn), "Varpas" (The Bell) and "Sviesa" (Light). The Great National Lithuanian Diet or Seimas convened in Vilnius on December 4, 1905, and demanded for Lithuania self-government. And Lithuania, on February 16, 1918, also in Vilnius, proclaimed her independence which later had to be defended with arms in a war on three fronts.

It should be emphasized that no new Lithuanian State was created in 1918 but rather that there was then restored on new democratic national foundations the State of Lithuania first created nearly 700 years before. The century-old State traditions were deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Lithuanian People, and today also they are still alive and cherished therein.

In 1940, much, as almost 150 years ago, as the result of the plot concocted between Stalinist Russia and Hitlerite Germany, by force and fraud, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were occupied by Russia while Poland was divided between Russia and Germany.

Since that time, at the cost of painful sacrifices and despite the endurance of the tyrannical yoke of the Eastern despot, the Lithuanian people have indomitably fought for the recovery of their freedom and independence. Not for a single moment throughout the eleven years of this alien occupation have the Lithuanians faltered in their faith, nor have they accepted the alien Soviet communist regime imposed upon them or the vile tutelage of Moscow.

In 1840 Lithuania was not strong enough to resist in open battle the colossal Red Army of occupation. When the Red Army tanks inundated the land, the President of the Lithuanian Republic left the country. Lithuania's diplomatic representatives abroad publicly protested against the gross violation of Lithuania's sovereign rights; and even today the destruction of Lithuania's independence, brought about by Soviet treachery and violence, is not recognized by the Western democracies.

In the country itself, since the very beginning of the occupation in 1940, there began to be organized a Lithuanian independent underground movement. Almost simultaneously with the first secret underground administration, the Lithuanian Council was formed. Resistance organizations began to be created, among them the renowned Union of Lithuania's Freedom Fighters founded on December 26, 1940. The underground newspaper "Lais-voji Lietuva" (The Free Lithuania) began to be issued. Liaison with foreign countries was established. At the beginning of 1941 all the Lithuanian resistance organizations began to combine into a single Lithuanian Activist Front. In spite of painful sacrifices, arrests, torture, and persecution by Soviet security forces, the Lithuanians secretly organized in anticipation of a suitable moment to throw off the hated Soviet yoke.

When Germany, in June of 1941, declared war on Soviet Russia, a widespread revolt against her broke out in Lithuania. None the less the Lithuanians entertained no pleasing illusions about the imperialistic aims of Nazi Germany. The purpose of the organizers of this Lithuanian uprising, which embraced the entire country and in which some 100,000 insurgents participated, was to confront Germany with an accomplished fact and, by the efforts of the Lithuanians themselves, to regain Lithuania's independence, to form a provisional Lithuanian Government, and to take authority and the administration of the country into their own hands.

Several thousands of the fighters in that insurrection perished in this conflict but their objective was attained; the independence of Lithuania was restored by the Lithuanians themselves and a Provisional Government took over authority in Lithuania, including the more important towns freed from the former Soviet occupants before the entry of the German army units into those towns.

It goes without saying that Hitlerite Germany did not respect this restoration of Lithuania's independence. The Provisional Lithuanian Government was after a few months summarily displaced by a German administration. The Lithuanians were therefore obliged to enter upon a fresh struggle against the new occupants. And another Lithuanian underground movement was created.

The new and previously formed resistance organizations and political groups began vigorously to manifest themselves in the national conflict for freedom and independence. The Union of Lithuania's Freedom Fighters (Lietuvos Laisvės Kovotojų Sąjunga), the Lithuanian Front (Lietuvių Frontas), the Social Democratic Party, the Farmers' Populist Union (Valstiečių-Liaudininkų Sąjunga), the Nationalistic Party, the Christian Democrats, all these at first operated separately but subsequently formed common organs such as the Supreme Lithuanian Committee (Vyriausias Lietuvių Komitetas), the Lithuanian Council (Lietuvos Taryba), and, lastly, at the end of 1943 a single united Supreme Lithuanian Committee of Liberation (Vyriausias Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Komitetas). There also operated in the country an extensive secret semi-military organization known as the Lithuanian Army of Freedom (Lietuvos Laisvės Armija).

There was not a single Lithuanian political organization that would have consented to collaborate with the Nazi-German occupational government. The Lithuanians believed in the eventual victory of the Western Democracies and reposed all their hopes in it.

The Lithuanian underground press was very prolific and widely circulated. In secret printing-offices there were printed "Laisvės Kovotojas" (Freedom's Fighter), whose circulation reached 10,000 and sometimes even 20,000; "Nepriklausoma Lietuva" (Independent Lithuania); "Į Laisvę" (To Freedom); "Apžvalga" (Review); "Vieninga Kova" (Unanimous Combat);

"Laisvas Žodis" (Free Word); "Lietuva" (Lithuania); "Lietuvos Laisvės Trimitas" (Trumpet of Lithuania's Freedom); "Baltija" (The Baltic) and others, which afforded the most conclusive proof of the inflexible resolve of the Lithuanian people to battle for the recovery of their independence and their political maturity. Under the influence of this secret press, and while avoiding unnecessary sacrifices, the Lithuanians refused in any way to help Hitlerite Germany in her war against the Western Democracies. The Lithuanians refused to form and to enlist in the Lithuanian SS Legion organized by the Germans; they refused to go to work in Germany; and they refused to join the German labour legions.

In German-occupied Lithuania there began to operate the sole public radio transmitter in all of Europe occupied by Germany, a fact which aroused astonishment among the Western Allies. All other radio transmitters operated from elsewhere and not in the countries which were themselves under German military occupation. The Lithuanian resistance movement collaborated with the Latvian and Estonian resistance movements, established links with the Free West and kept it constantly informed of developments in the enslaved Baltic States.

Nazi Germany retorted with savage repression. In March 1943 the Lithuanian universities and the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences were closed, and the professors and intellectuals, the priests and others were deported as hostages to German concentration camps. In 1944 extensive arrests of Lithuanian underground political workers took place. It will suffice to point out that Lithuania, a country with a population of hardly three million and which was not formally at war with Germany, figured in the eighth place with 2,480 martyred and murdered Lithuanians in German concentration camp at Flossenbürg, among 73,296 such victims representing 18 nations.

THE YEARS 1944-45 in Lithuania were tragic. On the one hand, the Lithuanians, having stood by the side of the Western Democracies and having resisted the Nazi-German occupation, were eager to believe that when the Western Democracies won the Second World War, Lithuania, like the other European countries, would regain her lost freedom and independence. The Atlantic Charter had promised them this. On the other hand, knowing well the Soviets and their true aims, the Lithuanians anticipated with fear and dread a possible second occupation of Lithuania which they were firmly convinced would bring in its train renewed dreadful enslavement for them. The Lithuanians clearly saw what the Western Democracies did not see or did not wish see: the unrestrained irruption of the Soviet into the West and the enslavement of Europe. When in 1944 the Soviet armies again engulfed Lithuania, a spontaneous mass revolt broke out in the entire country.

The West is aware of the tragic Polish uprising in Warsaw but has still heard little about the no less tragic and no less heroic revolt of 1944-46 which involved all Lithuania and lasted until 1948 and was finally crushed only at the end of 1952 or the beginning of 1953. The Warsaw insurgents were regarded by the Germans as a regular army and when taken prisoner they were treated as prisoners-of-war. The Lithuanian insurgents were regarded as "bandits." Their bodies were publicly exposed in the city streets and squares, their families destroyed and deported, their homes burnt and demolished.

Not counting the deported or martyred families, the number of Lithuanian freedom fighters who have perished with arms in their hands against a tenfold larger force totals from 25,000 to 30,000. For a nation of three million this figure represents 1%; and is twice as large as the number of fallen Germans in the Second World War. To overpower the Lithuanian insurgents the Soviet forces were obliged to make use of tanks and airplanes.

The Lithuanian revolt of 1944-48, hopeless and tragic as it was, little known in the West and deprived of Western support, will rank in history of Lithuania as the most illustrious manifestation of the will for freedom and independence of a small nation.

Until 1946 and for some time afterwards, it was not the Soviet administration but the Lithuanian freedom fighters and the Lithuanian underground movement that ruled Lithuania. The Soviets destroyed one Lithuanian authority after another; the Lithuanian Council of Liberation (Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Taryba), the Committee of Unity (Vienybės Komitetas), the Supreme Committee of Lithuanian Restoration (Vyriausias Lietuvos Atstatymo Komitetas), the Presidium of the Common Democratic Resistance Movement (Bendrojo Demokratinio Pasipriešinimo Sąjūdis) with which were linked all the resistance organizations, and the Supreme Authority of the Fighting Lithuanian Nation (Vyriausia Kovojančios Lietuvių Tautos Vadovybė). In 1949 from the Common Democratic Resistance Movement (BDPS) fell away the groups of partisans, the freedom fighters, who formed the separate Movement of the Fight for Lithuania's Freedom (Lietuvos Laisvės Kovos Sąjūdis).

From 1944—1952 the Lithuanian underground press was very much alive although every year it tended to become gradually weaker. "Aukuras" (The Altar), "Aukštaičių Kova" (Combat of Aukštaitis), "Laisvės Varpas" (Bell of Freedom), "Laisvės Žvalgas" (Scout of Freedom), "Kovos Kelias" (Path of Combat), "Kova" (Combat), "Laisvės Rytas (Morning of Freedom), "Laisvės šauklys" (Herald of Freedom), "Už Tėvų Žemę" (For the Land of Fathers), "Partizanas" (The Partisan), and others are living witnesses that the Lithuanians never accepted and never will accept the Soviet Communist regime and Moscow's occupation which was forcibly imposed upon them.

The Lithuanians who battled during those painful years for their freedom broke through the iron curtain and sought in the free West support, advice, and the fulfilment of the pledges to restore freedom to Lithuania. News about the tragic struggle of the Lithuanians, about the Communist occupant's shameless, sacrilegious desecration of the corpses of the Lithuanian fallen had reached even the press of the United States. The Lithuanians found sympathy in the West but unfortunately ten

years ago in the West the reality of the Soviet Communist peril was not so clearly perceived as it is today. No effective measures had been taken to restore freedom and independence to half the peoples of Europe subjected to the Soviet Communist yoke, and no steps had been taken to confront the Kremlin with a peremptory demand for the liberation of the enslaved nations.

Today one is often surprised that, when in 1946 all Western Europe was practically disarmed and would not have been in position to offer effective resistance to Soviet irruption into it, the Soviets did not take advantage of that opportunity. The answer to that question should not evoke the slightest doubt. Western Europe was saved by the immense self-sacrifice of such nations as Lithuania. The active struggle of the Lithuanians and other nations against the Soviet occupant arrested Moscow's further incursions into the West and enabled the West to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for the defense of Europe. The West should never forget those small, but glorious, liberty loving nations like Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were most cruelly enslaved by Moscow.

For what was "Lithuania Militans" fighting during those tragic years? She herself proclaimed her purpose in one of the underground publications of those years which clearly explains to the Lithuanian nation and the free world why Lithuania was compelled to take up arms.

"We ardently desire to live in a free, independent and democratic Lithuania in which:

Life is based on principles of Christian ethics;

There are neither slaves, serfs, dictators, satraps nor tyrants;

Cultural life and creative progress can flourish and prosper;

There is law, justice and respect for the fundamental freedoms;

We are carrying on the struggle because it is our duty, and in order to fulfill the will of those who perished for freedom: a testament written with their life blood in the characters of suffering and grief.

"We are carrying on the struggle because we want to show to the whole world that there are ideals which can make a giant out of a dwarf, and can inspire such courage and strength that the tyrant is at a loss to crush them because he dares not strangle them openly.

"We are carrying on the struggle because we believe that it is not only for our own freedom and well-being but for that of our brothers, for the ideals of all suffering and oppressed people, for human rights and justice. These are the ideals which the Great Powers of the West have solemnly proclaimed to the whole world, affirming their belief in them during the war by giving the lives of their best sons, by cruel sacrifices, by uniting their powerful forces, and by their joint victory. The value and superiority of these ideals is amply vindicated in the high cultural development of the West and unparalleled social progress...

"We are carrying on the struggle because we are still alive: how then could we refuse to continue the fight?

"We have not the strength to look with indifference upon the long columns of half-dead prisoners, at the procession of deportees, at Russian infiltration into all spheres of our life, creeping in everywhere at the smallest opportunity.

We cannot sit by and watch the systematic impoverishment of our economy, the subtle poisoning of the spirit of man, turning human beings into wild beasts with no purpose but to live for the day, without pity for the sufferings of others, machines to whom nothing is dear, no longer recognizing the spiritual values, making a mock of Christian ethics. Over all is the immeasurable fear, the insecurity of tomorrow expressed in a low cringing servility.

"The essence of our struggle is freedom, justice, humanity, democracy, Christian ethics and natural human rights.

"That is why our struggle is our life, and our life is the life of our country.

"That is why our struggle is a continuation of that which began 2,000 years ago, against the forces of evil..."

Lithuania fought for her freedom because she could do nothing else but fight. She fought not only for the freedom of her own people but for the freedom of all, and her sacrifice was not meaningless.

The Soviet occupants smashed the Lithuanians' armed resistance yet, to this day, they have not succeeded and never will succeed in smashing the spiritual resistance of the Lithuanian people. The Lithuanian nation expects and has the right to expect that the free world will continually raise and agitate the cause of freedom and will ceaselessly demand from those who have deprived her of her freedom its restoration to the Lithuanian people.

Whatever means Moscow may resort to against Lithuania, and however it may strive to sovietize or Russianize her, Lithuania, as in 1947 the underground paper "Kova" wrote, "is alive and is here where the Nemunas and the Viliija flow, where the Lithuanians lament under the yoke of the occupation, because here blood is flowing, because here the lives of the fighters for freedom are being extinguished like candles, like falling stars, because here are the tombs of giants and of their descendants — Lithuania Militans".

In Eastern Europe are nations, many with a long and proud record of national existence, which are in servitude.

They were liberated from one despotism only to be subjected to another, in violation of solemn international undertakings.

John Foster Dulles