

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COUNCIL

The Lithuanian American Council has an important role in the fight for the freedom of Lithuania, and thus it actively participates in the fight against communism. The creation of this organization was a consequence of the occupation of Lithuania by Russians.

In this article we wish to acquaint our readers with the reaction of the free American public which resulted when the land of their origin was occupied by the Red aggressors.

— Editor.

When in the summer of 1940 the forces of Soviet Union occupied the Republic of Lithuania, the people of Lithuanian descent or extraction living in the United States joined their forces for an organized defense of freedom and rights of the Lithuanian nation. This movement resulted in the formation of the Lithuanian American Council on the 10th of August, 1940.

The Council consists of representatives of the four major ideological groups of the patriotic Lithuanian Americans — Lithuanian Roman Catholic Federation of America, Lithuanian Social-Democratic Federation of America, National Lithuanian Society of America, and National Lithuanian League of America; also of the two largest Lithuanian fraternal associations — Lithuanian Alliance of America and Lithuanian Roman Catholic Alliance of America. It has branches in many cities and towns from the West to the East Coast of the United States. Hundreds of local benefit societies, political and cultural clubs, labor union locals, and other associations throughout the country are affiliated with the Council. The most popular and influential Lithuanian newspapers, dailies as well as weeklies, are supporting its activities. It could be said with certainty that the overwhelming majority of American citizens of Lithuanian extraction is behind the Lithuanian American Council.

Besides its headquarters office in Chicago, the Lithuanian American Council maintains the Information Center, an agency for public relations and contacts of the East Coast.

The principal aims of the Lithuanian American Council, as formulated in its by-laws, are to unite all democratic forces of Lithuanian Americans for the common task of supporting and promoting the principles of American democracy among the Lithuanian nationality group in the United States; to support the military efforts of the U. S. aimed at achieving victory over the totalitarian aggressors; and a lasting peace founded on principles of justice, democracy and freedom for all the peoples, great or small; to seek that the provisions of the Atlantic Charter be put into effect and that they be fully applied to Lithuania by restoring her as independent republic within her proper historic and ethnographic boundaries; to render moral and material aid to the people of Lithuania in their struggle for freedom as well as to those Lithuanians who managed to escape from the Communist tyranny or were deported to Russian slave labor camps; to furnish the American people and the people of the free world with true information concerning Lithuania and to fight the Soviet propaganda of lies and slander.

Founders of the Council were greatly encouraged by the memorable statement of July 23, 1940, by Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles which constitutes the cornerstone of the American policy with respect to the Baltic States. In this statement, made after the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, Mr. Wells expressed the position of U. S. government as one of refusing to recognize the act of force on the part of Soviet Union against her neighboring countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

On October 15, 1940, the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt granted an audience at the White House to a Lithuanian delegation composed of representatives of various political and ideological groups which came to see the Chief Executive

of the United States Government about the fate of Lithuania. The President then expressed his firm belief that Lithuania shall be free again and praised the efforts of Lithuanian Americans in helping to achieve this end. His words were a great inspiration to the Lithuanian Americans.

During the first years of its existence, the main objective of the Lithuanian American Council was to prevent the United States from yielding to the pressure by the Soviet Union to obtain recognition of its claim to Lithuania and the other Baltic States. The position of the U. S. Government on the question of these countries was bitterly attacked by the Kremlin and, as the Soviet Union was a wartime ally of the United States, the possibility that the U. S. might change its position could not be ruled out entirely.

Even after the war, the Lithuanian American Council had to be on constant guard against the Soviet efforts to induce the great democratic powers to sanction the annexation of the Baltic States.

The cessation of hostilities found tens of thousands of Lithuanian refugees in Western Europe without proper care and protection. The Lithuanian American Council immediately made steps with the authorities in Washington to guarantee them safety from extradition to the Soviets. To help take care of their needs, the Council took initiative in creating a special organization, called the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America. When the question of permanent settlement of refugees arose, the Council did not spare its efforts in support of a legislation permitting as great a number of Lithuanian refugees as possible to enter this country.

Much time and energy was devoted to get the Genocide Convention adopted by the United Nations and ratified by member governments. The fight is still on as the Senate of the United States has not honored the signature of the United States upon this document as yet.

The Lithuanian American Council also vigorously campaigned against the Draft Code of Offenses Against Peace and Security of Mankind, a Communist-inspired project, which tends to scuttle the Genocide Convention and to create a situation in which Soviet Russia might gain advantage over the free democratic nations. As a result of the efforts of the Lithuanian American Council, the position of the U. S. Government on this project was clarified. U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge has notified the Lithuanian American Council that "it will be the objective of the U. S. Delegation this year to prevent adoption or any endorsement of the Code by the present General Assembly."

The most recent achievement of the Lithuanian American Council was the creation of a Congressional Committee to investigate the facts and circumstances pertaining to the seizure and forced incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. After having made the decision to seek Congressional authorization of such an investigation, the Lithuanian American Council worked strenuously for several months until the House of Representatives gave its unanimous approval. Then the most important and complicated phase of the program followed, the one of locating, gathering, checking, and preparing witnesses and documents to evidence the Soviet aggression and fraud against Lithuania and her people. In more than a year of painstaking work, an impressive amount of material was compiled, in addition to the oral testimony given at the public hearings. Nothing of this kind or volume, in behalf of the Baltic nations, has been accomplished before.

The original House resolution calling for investigation into the Soviet aggression against the Baltic nations was later amended by extending the scope of investigation into all other countries, victims of Soviet aggression.

There were many other cases in which the Lithuanian American Council stepped out in defense of the rights of the Lithuanian people or the interests of this country. It can be mentioned that the Lithuanian language broadcasts, as well as broadcasts in the Latvian and Estonian languages, and Baltic representation on the Committee for a Free Europe were established mostly as the result of the successful efforts by the Lithuanian American Council. The idea of getting the U. S. Senate to denounce the Soviet practices in the occupied territories and approve the U. S. policy of nonrecognition of the Soviet enslavement of the Baltic States also originated from among the membership of the Lithuanian American Council. Senator Paul H. Douglas from Illinois formulated this idea in a resolution which was unanimously passed by the Senate.

At the present time, the chief concern of the Council is that the Congressional investigation into the Communist aggression be continued and its findings be used to initiate an action within the United Nations to force the Soviets to withdraw from the territories unlawfully held.

During its 15 years of existence, the Lithuanian American Council has submitted numerous statements and memoranda to the President and the Department of State of the U. S. Its Executive Board has often been in Washington, visiting offices of the Department of State and Congress. Besides the already mentioned White House reception by the late President Roosevelt, delegations of the Council were three times accepted by President Harry S. Truman and once by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Plenum meetings of the Lithuanian American Council are held once a year. Four national conventions of the Lithuanian Americans were sponsored and organized by the Lithuanian American Council.

The most ardent desire of the Lithuanian American Council is to see Lithuania liberated from the claws of the ruthless Soviet imperialism and given a chance to live again as an independent and democratic republic. The same desire, the

Council is convinced, animates the hearts of the over-whelming majority of the patriotic Lithuanian Americans.

** * * "By destiny or by its spirit the peoples of the Soviet Union are marching by way of revolution and communism in order to save the world. The Baltic countries were occupied by force because they were not ripe for bol-shevism, but we Bolsheviks, we shall not consider and we do not consider what means are to be used until every foot of land or every verson is under the shadow of the red flag* * **

Kirsanov