

THE FATE OF LITHUANIA

The Problems of Small States Re-examined

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The fate of small nations in our modern world is not enviable. Although the Wilsonian principle of self-determination was re-affirmed in the Atlantic Charter, today's international politics have reduced this principle to a shining but empty generality. It is argued that an independent existence of small nations is possible neither economically nor militarily. Especially in a world which is divided into two power blocks, the independence of small nations is neither favored nor desired.

Great Progress of a Small Nation

Lithuania is a small nation, although in terms of territory it is larger than Belgium or the Netherlands. Situated on the North-eastern Baltic sea coast and inhabited by a people racially neither Slavic nor Germanic, the Lithuania of the Middle Ages was a large state extending from the Baltic to the Black sea. This territory included most of the Ukraine, White Russia, and some Great Russian lands. In 1569 the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was united with Poland in a manner similar to the Scotch-English unification under James I. However, the rise of Russia and the mismanagement of the union-state bound together by the ties of a personal union resulted in a division of Lithuania and Poland among Russia, Prussia, and Austria; in other words, between the rising Russian and German Powers. It is interesting to note that Russian-German friendship usually brings about the abolishment of independent political entities situated between the German and the Russian worlds.

Lithuania was occupied by the Russians (1795—1914). The XIX century was probably the blackest in Lithuanian history. After an unsuccessful insurrection against the Czar, the only university of Lithuania was closed in 1833. As a consequence of another misborn rebellion in 1863, all Lithuanian schools were banned. Printing the Lithuanian language in Latin characters was declared illegal and violations were punished with banishment to Siberia (1864-1904).

However, the spirit of independence was not suppressed. Because of the determination of her people and as a consequence of World War I, Lithuania regained her independence in 1918.

The following twenty-two years (1918-1940) were a period of over-all national progress. Not only was the standard of living brought up to the level of Central European countries, but also the cultural life of the nation burgeoned faster than that of the Soviet Union. At the end of her political independence, Lithuania had two state universities, 12 academies of higher learning, two opera houses, several municipally supported drama theaters, and many professional schools. These achievements should be evaluated against the background of the Czarist Russian occupation prior to 1914 when Lithuania was permitted to operate only approximately 1000 grammar schools and a handful of secondary schools for a population of three million. There were no universities, colleges, academies or other establishments of higher learning allowed by the Russians.

Lithuania's political independence was first recognized by Germany and the Soviet Union, the two states which 20 years later jointly conspired against the independence of that very country. The cornerstone of Lithuania's foreign politics was her trust in the collective security guaranteed by the League of Nations; the furtherance of close relations with her neighbors, Latvia and Estonia, through the Baltic Entente; and neutrality amidst the clashes between the Soviet Union, Poland, and Germany. Culturally and politically, however, Lithuania was oriented toward Western Europe. More than 40% of her foreign trade went to Great Britain alone. French was the first foreign language taught in the schools. Students were sent for post-graduate studies to Western European countries.

An interesting sidelight is this: that the volume of Lithuanian foreign trade with the far-away United States was larger than that with the neighboring Soviet Union.

Roots of Tragedy

The League of Nations could insist upon, but could not guarantee the political independence of her smaller members. Although the achievements of the League are not unimportant to an historian of international relations, it must be noted that the League failed utterly as an organization for collective security. It did not stop the rise of Hitler. It could not protect Lithuania from Hitler who in 1939 took away her only port and the territory of Memel - Klaipeda. Nor could the League restrain the Soviet Union from attaching Finland or enforcing an involuntary "mutual assistance pact" which permitted the stationing of Soviet troops in Lithuanian territory. These troops were the Trojan horse which helped to complete the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in June of 1940.

As in 1795, the occupation of Lithuania by a foreign power was the result of an agreement between Russia and Germany. Indeed, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of August 28, 1939, partitioned the buffer zone between the Nazis and the Soviets, and, as a consequence, the Baltic States and other Central Eastern European countries lost their independence. The declarations of complete neutrality that were made by the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia at the beginning of World War II could not save the lambs from a hungry and determined Soviet wolf.

It is sometimes alleged that the independent existence of Lithuania and the other Baltic States was contrary to political reality in Eastern Europe. All of the familiar arguments against the existence of small nations are advanced to prove this point. However, the fact of the independent existence of these states has proven conclusively that Lithuania and her neighbours were able to conduct successfully their domestic affairs and were capable of becoming worthy members of the international community. The disappearance of the Baltic States from the post war map does not prove the futility of independent existence of small states. It rather shows the failure of the collective security system as organized by the League of Nations. It is commonly agreed today that this system was ineffective and unsuccessful. The fault largely lies with Big Powers which organized Europe between the two wars and later with those that planned peace for the post - World War II period. In the same breath it must be mentioned that the United States, Canada, and some other countries have not recognized the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, thus affirming to Lithuania and her neighbours the right to independent existence.

Small Nations in the Atomic Age

Without going deeper into the problems of small nation-states, it must be stated that the most recent political developments warrant a reappraisal of the views advanced in opposition to the independent existence of small states.

First, in an atomic age the relative size of the territory or the population are of decreasing importance for the organization of a state for security and prosperity. No matter how large or wealthy, a nation cannot afford the risk of standing alone against the danger of the Soviet Union.

Second, the Soviet threat is no less ideological than it is military or political. The religion-like, Messianic philosophy of Soviet Communism has an universal ideological claim to the entire world. Consequently, Soviet politics is crusading politics. The very multifarious Soviet expansionism is driven by the Marxian promise of a paradise on earth. Translated in terms of power, this expansionism means Soviet imperialism with intentions to win domination not only over the old philosophies of life also over new territories and the already established power structures of culturally varied societies. Several decades ago, when the expansionist claims of states were based on economic, ethnic, linguistic or merely strategic claims, the imperialism of Russia or any other was of a limited character. The present imperialism of the Soviet Union is totalistic. Therefore, the rise of the Soviet phenomenon in international politics has changed completely the nature of international relations. The Soviet Union has of necessity enforced upon the world totalistic international politics which makes all partial solutions of world tension ephemeral and unsuccessful. In other words, the Soviet phenomenon in international politics excludes the possibility of a lasting compromise on which a peaceful coexistence among different economic or political power structures can be based.

This development makes it impossible to think that any nation can feel protected from the claims of Communism that is supported by all the destructive weapons that modern civilization has devised for mankind. Consequently, the size of a nation is not a shield of protection. This fact opens new vistas for considering the problem of small nations. In the opinion of the author, it completely refutes the arguments *in principe* against the existence of small political entities. On the other

hand, it raises questions about a new world order in which no big and no small nation would have to suffer the fate of Lithuania or of the other Communist enslaved nations.