

## LITHUANIANS IN LATIN AMERICA

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During the 1920s the majority of Lithuanian emigres settled in Latin American countries. They had been driven out of Lithuania by the misery bequeathed to their native country by Russian domination and by the devastations of the First World War, which caused an acute and far-reaching economic depression.

The independent Lithuanian state, re-established in 1918, was for a while not in a position to assist its needy people, especially since its underdeveloped industry and business could not supply employment for every person who was able and willing to work. The government had inherited only the ruins of an economy. Public expenditures for setting up a government apparatus, waging a war for independence and laying the foundations for the future build-up of the national economy exhausted the meager resources that came either from foreign creditors or from remittances from Lithuanians living in the United States.

The agricultural system that the Lithuanian government inherited from the Czarist regime was backward and ill adapted to the country's needs. The greater of the productive land was in the hands of large estate-owners, who were often aliens living outside the country. The remaining arable land was cultivated by a large number of small landowners who could scarcely feed their families with what they received from their small and poor farms. The land reform that was undertaken in 1922 could not satisfy everyone, and many of the children of these small landowners, disgusted with the economic conditions resulting from the Russian oppression, proceeded to look for better living elsewhere. Since the U.S. quota for Lithuania was small, a number of them settled in France; others went as far as Latin America in search of fortune.

Even before the First World War, some Lithuanians had fled to South America from the Russian yoke. (For instance, in 1837—more than a century ago—Prof. I. Domeika took up residence in Chile, where he reorganized the Chilean school system according to the Lithuanian pattern, was President of the University of Santiago de Chile for 16 years, created the Chilean chemical industry, and made important discoveries of rare metals and minerals in Chile. Domeicit, argnerit, copper, gold and coal deposits were discovered in Chile by Mr. Domeika who also published valuable scientific works in his field. His genius, untiring energy, and remarkable achievements made him one of the greatest men in Chile, and the grateful Chilean people erected monuments to him and pave his name to cities, mountains, plazas and streets.) The attention of their countrymen in distress was drawn to these early settlers, and they were attracted to the southern part of the Western Hemisphere.

They found neither prosperity nor pleasant jobs awaiting them when they landed there. The emigres had to face the hardships of pioneer life and were compelled to work under entirely different climatic conditions and to accommodate themselves to ways of life to which they were unaccustomed, among dissimilar people who spoke unfamiliar languages. Besides their native tongue, the newcomers from Lithuania knew Russian and Polish, as well as some German, English and French, but none of them had any knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese.

In spite of these difficulties, about 100,000 Lithuanians left their country and settled in Latin America as a result of Russian exploitation, two wars, an underdeveloped economy, a depression, and, finally, Communist religious and political

persecutions; they were distributed as follows: 45,000 in Brazil, 35,000 in Argentina, 10,000 in Uruguay, 2,000 in Venezuela, 500 in Colombia, and the rest in Peru, Chile, Bolivia and other South American countries.

Once they had succeeded in mastering the first hardships, quite a few of them acquired vast estates; others took up trades, and many entered business and industry. The well-to-do among them lack nothing, even by North American living standards. But a large number of the emigres have not achieved the living conditions they were looking for. This fact has exerted a certain influence on their political convictions and has exposed them to the danger of Communist infiltration. Indeed, 300 Lithuanians were misled by Soviet agents and in 1956 returned to occupied Lithuania. The defectors, forced to live in that huge prison which is the Communist state, would like to return to their previous places of residence if they could. Deceived and disappointed, they are sending to the friends they left behind in Latin America letters that, despite the Communist censorship, speak out against oppression and picture the harsh reality of their present life. Their disillusionment has discouraged other fellow-travelers and caused them to redefect, and it is strengthening the resistance against Communist penetration. None of those who left Lithuania in 1944 followed these unfortunate people; the 1944 exiles knew what Communism was. and no Soviet agent, could lure them back to their enslaved country. The defectors were promised property, freedom of enterprise and a liberal political regime. None of these was granted them when they entered Lithuania; after propaganda welcoming speeches, they were placed in shabby, dilapidated state-owned buildings, being allotted one room per family, and were sent to work in factories. The customs authorities retained their personal property, and so far it has not been returned to them.

The experience of these deceived people has contributed more than any propaganda to the strengthening of the spirit of unity among the Lithuanian emigres and to animating their previously dormant national activities. Patriotic organizations of Lithuanians are numerous in Latin America. Lithuanian Communities that unite most of the emigres except Communists and Red fellow-travelers have been established in Argentina (Buenos Aires, Rosario and Berisso), Brazil (Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), Colombia (Barranquilla, Bogota and Medellin), Uruguay (Montevideo) and Venezuela (Caracas, Maracay, Maracaibo and Valančia). In addition to the Community organizations. Lithuanian faithful have established Roman Catholic parishes in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo, and the Salesian Fathers have established a parish in Barranquilla. Lithuanian newspapers are published in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia. Cultural, social and sports societies have organized anti-Communist exhibitions in Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires and are maintaining three grade schools as well as having radio programs, Sunday schools and libraries in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

Animated by their interest in fighting Communist expansion, Lithuanian emigres, individually or as representatives of their organizations, contributed to the organization of the Anti-Communist Front in Brazil and are taking part in the activities of the Committee for a Free Europe in Rio de Janeiro. This committee is headed by Senator L. Chateaubriand, owner of Latin America's largest press concern, who publishes, among other newspapers and periodicals, the magazine "O Cru-zero," which is specially dedicated to the problems of freedom. Lithuanians in Argentina took part in the conference of captive nations that was convened in Buenos Aires last November and are preparing material for a new anti-Communist exhibition to be held in May of this year by people of Central and Eastern European descent.

Latin American political organizations, particularly the Christian Democratic Parties, count many a Lithuanian in their ranks. These people deserve special recognition for creating a friendly attitude on the part of Latin American political leaders toward the cause of the liberation of Lithuania and other captive nations. For example, Monsignor Aruda Camara, President of the Christian Democrats of Brazil and a Federal Deputy, and Professor Montoro, Secretary General of the same party and also a Deputy, are constantly fighting in the Brazilian legislature for the freedom of nations and condemning Communist infiltration.

Several informative books and pamphlets have been published in Spanish by Verax, a Lithuanian and a well-known columnist for Montevideo's "El Dia," one of the most influential dailies in Uruguay and its neighboring countries. The same writer and his colleague Gumbaragis publish articles in other Latin American newspapers and periodicals. Their incisive ideas and eloquent pens have acquainted thousands of readers with Lithuania's fight for liberation. The Lithuanian Legations in Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro and the Consulates in Sao Paulo and Bogota are facilitating their information work.

Moreover, by maintaining relations with local leading figures, the Lithuanian emigres have made friends for their subjugated nation and are inspiring the statesmen of their adopted countries to take the necessary measures to forestall Communist expansion. This activity is especially important in our time because we are suffering an eclipse of the idea that man is a person in his own right. In Communist-oppressed countries this idea is being replaced by the doctrine that the individual is a creature of the state, deriving such rights as he may have from the state and holding them at the mercy of the state. This doctrine provides a climate favorable to social injustice and— with the inevitability of cause following effect— to misery and slavery.

In view of the Communist attempts to penetrate Latin America, the hearts and minds of men there should be strengthened in a new outlook, a new set of ideals and new ideas that could bring about indispensable changes in the social structure of nations where they are needed. On the other hand, if the people's obsolete conservative and confused outlooks persist, if their ideas continue to correspond to no known reality and if some people insist on holding on to their unfounded privileges, then the most exemplary constitutions and laws will bring no progress, and the countries may still find

themselves in trouble. Laws, as the example of many countries proves, are not foolproof. Any law can be twisted out of its original intent. Laws are the creations of men, and men will use them according to their needs. If strong inclinations run counter to law, they will find satisfaction in extralegal ways.

To enlighten the people to the dangers of Communist expansion and to reveal the benefits of social justice and democracy has been, is and will remain the chief aim of Latin America's Lithuanian emigres. Highly appreciating the haven of freedom that the great freedom-loving Latin American nations have so generously granted them, the Lithuanians living in their midst are with profound gratitude dedicating all their efforts to a brighter and more prosperous future for these culturally progressing and economically expanding countries.

*We must never place a price tag on what freedom is worth to us or the world. As long as armed aggressors are on the loose in the world, free men must stay strong enough to keep the peace.*

*R. M. Nixon*