

THE COLLECTIVIZATION OF LITHUANIAN AGRICULTURE (1940 -1952)

PRANAS ZUNDĖ

Until World War II Lithuania was an agricultural country. The sovietization of Lithuania introduced great changes in the economic structure of the country, as well as in agriculture. From the commencement of sovietization, the soviet regime sought to industrialize the country. Nevertheless, despite notable progress in industrialization, agriculture is still of principal importance in the economy of the country.

Until the soviet take-over in 1940, Lithuania was a land of small and medium farmers; 90.2% of all farms had land areas ranging from 2.5 to 75 acres and cultivated 66.2% of all arable land.

Table 1:

Distribution of Farms According to size, 1930 [1](#)

Size of the Farm in Acres	% of Total Farms	% of Total Arable Area
2.5 - 12.5	18.6	3.6
12.5 - 25	27.3	13.5
25 - 37.5	20.7	16.7
37.5 - 50	11.7	13.2
50 - 75	11.9	19.2
75 - 125	7.0	17.6
over 125	2.8	16.2

Most of the farmers cultivated the land themselves. For example, in 1939 farmer — owners and their family members comprised 78.7% of the agricultural labor force, while the hired labor comprised only 21.3%. [2](#) Compensation to the hired labor was just between 11% and 15% of the cost of agricultural production. [3](#)

The light and food products industries, which are based on agriculture, were the principal industries of the country. Agricultural products — butter, bacon, ham, eggs, poultry, cattle, etc., — were the most important export goods.

Table 2:

Export of Agricultural Products, compared to Total Export of Lithuania [4](#)

	% of Total Export Value
1929	41.6
1931	70.5
1933	62.5
1935	56.5

1937	52.2
1939	69.2

On July 22, 1940, just over a month after soviet take-over of Lithuania, the so-called People's Diet promulgated a proclamation, nationalizing all land. Among other things, the proclamation also declared the following:

"The Diet decides to determine a limited 30 hectare norm per farm to the peasant farms throughout Lithuania and the additional land area above this norm transfers to state funds, for the purpose of aiding the landless and small-holding peasants to acquire land.

All land held from this moment by the workers and the peasants and also the land which will be transferred by the state to landless and small-holding peasants, is appropated for eternal use by the peasants. All attempts against the personal property of the peasant or attempts to force them into organizing collective farms against the will of the working peasantry will be strictly prosecuted as harmful to the interests of the people and the state." [5](#) (Emphasis added).

The contention that the farmers will not be forced into collective farms was just an intentional hoax. It would have been naive to expect that the Soviets would make an exception to Lithuania and would tolerate private ownership of land. It was only a question of time when agriculture would be "socialized", i.e. nationalized.

On the authority of the cited proclamation of the People's Diet, a land fund of 1,518,980 acres was created in a few months. In the main, the state land fund acquired land by confiscation from large farmers or "kulaks"; i.e., from farmers who had more than 75 acres of land. About 982,500 acres (68.3%) of the confiscated land was distributed for "free and eternal use" by the landless. [6](#) Eleven per cent of the land fund was used to establish the first soviet farms (sovkhozy) in Lithuania. Table 3 shows the land distribution among farms just before and right after the soviet agrarian reform in 1940.

Actually, this reform was not aimed at the strengthening of the farming peasantry. The agrarian reform was to create conditions for easier collectivization. Soon after the 1940 agrarian reform, i.e., when no farmer had more than 75 acres of land, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL) Antanas Sniečkus declared before the Fifth Congress of the CPL (1941):

"In our village there are now proletarian elements and very poor peasants, the middle peasants who today comprise the largest mass in the village, and kulaks.

Table 3:

Farms according to Size, Before and After Soviet Agrarian Reform, 1940. [7](#)

Size of Farm	1940				1941			
	No. of Farms	of %	Areas Acres	in %	No. of Farms	of %	Areas Acres	in %
Up to 12.5 acres	97,310	27.4	593,800	5.3	65,660	17.2	392,075	3.6
12.5 - 25	91,290	25.7	1736,500	15.3	154,670	40.0	2670,500	24.7
25 - 50	104,890	29.6	2985	33.2	104,890	27.1	3735,950	34.5
50 - 75	38,630	10.9	950	20.8	61,000	15.7	4024,325	37.2
Over 75	22,730	6.4	2346,175	25.4	-	-	-	-

There always was a vital struggle among these groups. This struggle has not disappeared now and will not disappear while there will be a kulak in the village.

Our policy is clear in this struggle — in alliance with middle peasantry and strongly leaning ourselves upon the poor of the village, to strengthen the positions of socialism in the village." [8](#)

First of all taxes were used to "strengthen the position of socialism" in the village. In the tax law announced on May 1, 1941, the following rates were determined:

Table 4:

Rate of Taxation, 1941. [9](#)

Income (in rubles)	Taxes (rubles)	% of Income
2,000	35	1.75

3,000	75	2.5
4,000	135	3.4
5,000	225	4.5
6,000	355	6.0
7,000	535	7.6
8,000	775	9.7
9,000	1,095	12.2
10,000	1,515	15.15
10,000 and over	1,515 + 55%	

According to Table 4, a farm which had an annual income of 10,000 rubles had to pay taxes 8 times greater than the taxes of a farm with 2,000 rubles' annual income. Furthermore, taxes were assessed not on the actual income of the farm, but on a combination of norms (according to size of farm, number of cattle, etc.). Here are several norms considered in total assessment of taxes for a farm: for 2.5 acres of arable land — 300 rubles, for 2.5 acres of garden — 380 rubles, for 2.5 acres of meadowland — 120 rubles, for one cow — 230 rubles, for one pig — 160 rubles, for one horse — 200 rubles. [10](#) For example, if a 50-acre farm had 25 acres of arable land, a 5-acre garden, 20 acres of meadows, 10 cows, 3 horses, and 15 pigs, then it was considered that the farm had at least 10,200 rubles of income, regardless of whether the farm was actually capable of having such an income. The tax law also provided that taxes on farms which had a supplementary income may be raised from 20% to 50%. Monetary contributions were not the only means to pressure the free farmers. Another heavy burden, which especially pressed the middle farmers, was the mandatory deliveries of agricultural products to the state. The amount of state requisitions according to the size of the farm is indicated in Table 5. State requisitions took 30—50% of the entire agricultural production.

Table 5:

Amount of Deliveries to the State for Selected Agricultural Commodities, according to the Size of the Farm [11](#)

	Size of farm in Acres, kg/acre					
	up to 12.5	12.5 - -25	25 - 37.5	37.5 - 50	50 - 62.5	over 62.5
Grains	100	125	162.5	200	325	550
Potatoes	100	133	183.3	250	333	383.3
Milk	100	125	150	175	225	300
Meat	100	166	266	433	733	1000

The first indication of the fact that a preparation for collectivization of agriculture had been in progress from the very beginning (notwithstanding the aforesaid promises to the contrary) was the establishment of MTS. In the spring of 1941 there already were 42 MTS and 283 Machine and Horse Renting Stations. Also, 60 soviet farms, with 115,000 acres of land, were organized. At the same time the soviet government prohibited the practice of breaking-up compact villages into widely dispersed individual homesteads. The propagation of an individual homestead had been one of the essential features of the progressive agrarian reform initiated in 1922 by the independent Lithuanian government. Finally, first prophets of collectivization appeared in the beginning of 1941 in the form of articles and "spontaneous expression of will" by the farmers. Even the headings of the articles — "Samogitians Desire Collective Farms" - — indicated what was being sought. [12](#) In January of 1941 the first collective farm was organized in the County of Akmenė and was named after Lenin. In May of 1941 this collective farm consisted of 22 farming families and had 1,150 acres of land. [13](#)

Further reconstruction of agriculture was impossible, because in June of 1941 the Germans marched into the Soviet Union and the soviet regime was pushed out of Lithuania, Under the German occupation most of the soviet confiscated land was returned to the former owners, even though the occupying authority formally did not recall the soviet land nationalization decree. In many cases the nationalized large estates remained in charge of the German civilian authorities as state property.

Toward the end of World War II, when the Soviets again returned to Lithuania, the 1940 agrarian reform was continued. In addition, the "Law on the Liquidation of Consequences to Agriculture by the German Occupation," issued on August 30, 1944, became applicable. Among other things, this law authorized stricter measures for the realization of the agrarian reform. For example, the state land funds also acquired the "land robbed by the German colonists, land of the enemies of the people who escaped with the German occupants, and land without owners." In addition, the norm of 75 acres per farm was modified in certain ways. Land property of persons who actively supported the German occupation authorities could be diminished to 12.5 acres. This provision was subject to political abuse, since even the compliance to German orders regarding deliveries of agricultural products to the state could be considered "active support" of the occupier. The land thus acquired by the state land fund had to be distributed first of all to the red soldiers and their families, to the soviet partisans and other persons who actively fought against the Germans, and to those farmers who were forced out of their farms by

the German occupation government. The state lands also had to be distributed to soviet farms, MTS, and other state undertakings.

With this agrarian reform the Communists desired to acquire the support of the landless and the small-holders. The expected success of this policy did not materialize, however, because the real soviet motives of the agrarian reform became apparent. Even farmers who acquired 12.5—25 acres from the soviet regime saw that this reform can in no way advance the well-being of the small-holders or to raise the level of agricultural production. They clearly saw that they could do nothing with the newly acquired land, because there was a shortage of implements and animals. The soviet regime did nothing to alleviate this condition. Loans to new settlers, provided by law, were insufficient for a good start; also, nobody believed that the soviet government sincerely intended to consider land as a private farmers' property for a longer period of time. No wonder, then, that the agrarian reform was progressing unsatisfactorily. On December 22, 1944, the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR promulgated a decree which spelled out the measures to be taken in realizing the provisions of the "Law on the Liquidation of the Consequences to Agriculture by the German Occupation." Among other statements, the decree declared the following:

"Many local soviet and party organs undervalued the political significance of a rapid reconstruction of the soviet order of land management, insufficiently used the means of returning the land-rights to convene the peasants around the organs of Soviet government, feebly drew the agricultural workers, landless and small-holding peasants into the work of executing the Law, faintly led the work of district and county land commissions, showed indecisiveness in appropriating work animals and surplus of inventory from the kulak farms and in the mandatory purchase of cows, also failed to take measures to demolish sabotage and opposition to the law by the kulaks and to protect peasants acquiring land from the threats and vengeance of the kulaks." [14](#)

According to this decision, the agrarian reform was supposed to have been completed in 1945; actually, it lasted until 1948. During the period 1947-1948, 3,403,125 acres of land changed owners. Table 6 indicates the distribution of confiscated lands in 1940 and in 1944-1948 and suggests the severity of the second round.

Table 6:

The Soviet Agrarian Reform, Distribution of Land from the State Land Fund [15](#)

Recipients of Land	No. of Acres	1940		1944 - 1948	
		No.	%	No. of Acres	%
Agricultural Workers	141,970		9.9	224,745	8.2
Landless Peasants	373,762		25.9	919,990	33.5
Small-holders	418,277		29.0	496,762	18.1
Village Artisans	186,540		1.3	6,772	0.2
Total to Peasants	953,050		66.1	1,648,270	60.0
Soviet Farms and MTS	112,735		7.8	429,180	15.7
Subsidiary Farms	-		-	170,740	6.2
Forest	274,992		19.1	390,227	14.2
Others	100,517		7.0	107,690	3.9
Total Distributed	1,441,295		100.	2,746,110	100.0
Undistributed	77,685			657,015	
Total in Fund	1,518,980			3,403,125	

This radical land distribution created a mass of small farming units, as is indicated in

Table 7:

Distribution of farms, according to Land Area [16](#)

Size of Farm in Acres	No. of Farms, May 1941	%	No. of Farms, June 1948	%
Up to 12.5 acres	65,000	17.2	118.800	30.3

12.5 - 25	154,700	40.0	146.900	37.4
25 - 50	104,900	27.1	108.500	27.6
50 - 75	61,000	15.7	18.200	4.7
Over 75	-	-	-	-
Total	386,300	100.0	392,400	100.0

Clearly the purpose of this land reform was the artificial creation of a village proletariat, which formerly was lacking in Lithuania. Under Lithuanian conditions, where agriculture was based on grain production and animal breeding, farms of up to 12.5 acres could not operate efficiently; these farms now comprised 30.3% of all farms. Besides, new settlers and small-holders were in need of seeds, animals, implements, fertilizers, etc. Under such conditions many small-holders left their uncultivated fields and moved to the cities.

Despite all the measures of pressure, for some time the Soviets delayed the start of the final attack on the medium farms and against private ownership in agriculture. Even property taxes were not as highly discriminative as they had been in 1941. The Soviets themselves acknowledge that the limited moderation was designed to quickly reconstruct agriculture which had been so highly devastated during the war. Table 8 shows the rate of taxation on various classes of farms.

Table 8:

Average Tax per One Farm, according to Size of Farm, 1945 - 1948 (in Rubles) [17](#)

Size of farm	1945	1946	1947	1948
Up to 2.5 acres	3.4	3.7	4.7	5.4
2.5 - 5	18.2	17.6	12.1	24.3
5 - 7.5	62.7	56.2	25.0	51.7
7.5 - 12.5	82.0	87.5	50.6	88.4
12.5 - 17.5	146.2	150.0	98.7	170.2
17.5 - 25	231.0	231.9	208.5	343.5
25 - 32.5	395.2	331.8	405.5	696.0
32.5 - 40	594.4	600.0	738.4	1140.0
40 - 50	1232.9	1213.4	1365.0	2221.3
50 - 62.5	2384.4	2419.7	2185.0	3783.6
Over 62.5	3236.1	3289.3	3647.7	5143.7

Similar rates prevailed among mandatory deliveries of agricultural products to the state. During the first post-war years, state requisitions (according to the size of the farm) were also not as discriminatory as those of 1941. This is expressed in Table 9.

Table 9:

Mandatory Deliveries of Agricultural Products to the State, 1947 - 1948, [18](#)

Agricultural Commodity	Size of Farm in Acres				
	2.5 - 25 kg	25 - 37.5 kg	37.5 - 50 kg	50 - 62.5 kg	over 62.5 kg
Grains	100	130	171.3	228.6	214/3
Potatoes	100	133.3	166.7	211.1	244.4
Milk	50 kg. from every 2.5 acres				
Meat	100	125	150	175	175

At the end of 1947 a new tactic against the so-called kulaks was applied. On December 12, 1947, the Central Committee of the CPL determined who may be designated as a kulak.

According to this definition, the following! were considered as kulak farms:

"(a) Farms which utilize hired workers B for compensation in money or in kind...;

(b) Farms which at the moment do not I continuously utilize the work of hired laborers I for money or products, but who did utilize it I during the German occupation or after it;

(e) Farms which provide other peasant farms with work animals, seed, products, and agricultural machines under slavish conditions;

(f) Farms which have complex agricultural machinery... mills, lumber mills, and other plants;

(g) Farms which systematically purchase goods and agricultural products for resale;" [19](#)

With such a definition of a kulak, the local party organs could designate practically anyone they wished as being a kulak. A kulak had to pay notably higher taxes, even retroactively. Thus, the so-called kulaks had to pay 15% to 250% more in taxes for 1947 (the directive where a kulak was defined was issued on Dec. 12, 1947). In 1948, taxes were further increased: now kulaks had to pay from 150% to 500% more in taxes. If, for example, a farm normally having an income of 15,000 rubles had to pay 1,535 rubles in taxes, then a kulak's farm equivalent in income was taxed 7,975 rubles. A kulak's farm with an income of 22,000 rubles had to pay 18,425 rubles in taxes; i.e., it had to pay 84% of its income. [20](#) It is, therefore, understandable that many farmers could not meet such taxes and had to leave their farms.

The first collective farm in post-war Lithuania was organized in the district of Kėdainiai on February 26, 1947. Despite various advantages offered by the regime, "spontaneous" organization of collective farms proceeded very slowly. Only 20 collective farms were organized by the end of 1947; this constituted 0.08% of the farms and had 0.09% of the total arable land of the country. Even the low taxes on collective farms, as compared to those of private farmers, did not provide enough incentive for voluntary collectivization. Furthermore, mandatory deliveries of produce to the state were also lower for the collective farms than for private farms. For example, during 1945-1948, for 2.5 acres of cultivated land the private farmer had to deliver 50 kg. of milk, while the collective farm was assessed only 12.5 kg. for same area. Even though less than a tenth of a per cent of all farmers had joined collective farms, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania and the Council of Ministers contended that "the peasants of Lithuania are rushing into collective farming" and in a joint meeting on March 20, 1948, accepted a decree "Concerning the Organization of Collective Farms in the Republic." [21](#)

Despite the Party — Soviet decree on collectivization, during the first half of 1948 the number of collective farms rose very slowly. In the summer of 1948 there were only 150 collective farms. Because of this situation, the soviet regime decided to take drastic measures. In addition to the pressures of taxes and mandatory deliveries of produce, threats and brutal force were now applied. By the end of 1948, the number of collective farms rose to 524. They incorporated about 12,000 individual farms, i.e. 3% of all farms. This achievement was sufficient for the CPL to "confirm" in its Sixth Congress (beginning of 1949) "the united wish of the Lithuanian peasants to join collective farms." [22](#) The Sixth Congress of the CPL decided to eliminate entirely private ownership in agriculture.

First to give in to the pressure of the Party were persons who had recently acquired some land during the soviet agrarian reform. [23](#) This is further proof that the goal of the soviet agrarian reform was not to help the landless and the small farmers. First to sense this were the new settlers and soon they lost all hope to have a private farm and land. Generally, however, the opposition of the farmers to collectivization was extremely strong and desperate. The opposition of the farmers could not be broken just by economic pressure. To break the resistance to collectivization, the soviet regime undertook to deport all those who opposed the policy; thousands of those deported later perished in exile or in Stalin's labor camps. The soviet regime talks about this period very unwillingly; however, even their fragmentary references to the opposition to collectivization are significant. A soviet publication to commemorate twenty years since the establishment of soviet regime in Lithuania, describes the opposition in the following manner:

"The process of socialistic reconstruction of the village sharpened the class struggle, increased the opposition of the kulaks. An important means of kulak struggle against collectivization was the agitation against collective farms. The kulaks talked a lot about the alleged achievements of agriculture during bourgeois rule, about the alleged temporariness of soviet government in Lithuania, persistently slandered the collective farms. Playing on the religious feelings of the peasants, the kulaks utilized the church, through the clergy's attempts to poison the peasants with the poison of anti-collective-farm, anti-soviet agitation. Anti-collective-farm and anti-soviet agitation was spread through radio by the traitors of the Lithuanian nation who retreated abroad, by the servants of the German occupiers.

Terror against the Communists, Komsomols, village activists, all moral soviet people who supported the soviet government was an important means of the kulak struggle against collectivization. For this end they utilized the bourgeois nationalist underground in Lithuania, they themselves participated in and supported the bandit bands.

Harm, destruction of the production — economic basis of the collective farms was also an important means of kulak struggle against collectivization, especially during the continuous period of stamping of the bourgeoisie as a class. The kulaks changed their hide, pretending to be proponents of collective farms. Having penetrated the collective farms, they poisoned the atmosphere, rabble-roused, attempted to inflame every dissatisfaction and in this manner to undermine the spirit of the collective farmers, to influence the wavering, less conscientious members, attempted to do harm, to spitefully devastate collective farm property, to break up the unity of collective farmers.

The Party and the government actively fought against the kulaks, against banditism. In 1948 the Soviet government applied repressive means against bandit elements and their helpers." [24](#) (Emphasis added)

With such repressive measures and force, 50% of all farmers were forced into collective farms by 1950. In September of 1952, 96% of all farmers were already collectivized. At the end of the same year collectivization was completed.

The consequences of collectivization were catastrophic to the productivity of agriculture. To this day the collectivized agriculture has not achieved the pre-war level of productivity. This is sharply indicated by Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10:

Yield (100 kg/2.5 acre) of Selected Agricultural Commodities, 1939 - 1959. 25				
Commodity	1939	1950	1955	1959
Rye	12.7	8.5	5.1	9.4
Wheat	13.5	7.6	5.7	11.8
Barley	12.1	7.6	4.3	12.7
Oats	11.4	7.2	2.8	6.0
Sugar beets	192.0	134.0	43.0	144.0
Flax	3.4	2.0	1.8	2.1

Table 11:

Number of Farm Animals in Lithuania, 1939 - 1962. 26				
	1939	1951	1957	1962
Cattle	1,288,840	731,000	925,000	1,342,000
Cows	848,800	504,000	531,000	773,000
Pigs	1,068,000	723,000	978,000	1,606,000
Sheep	611,000	378,000	434,000	352,000
Horses	546,000	381,000	272,000	-

Material deprivation has become a permanent state of the collectivized farmers. Their labor is exploited to such a degree, that it is impossible to find a parallel in any civilized country. Even in 1958 an average annual income of a collective farmer was approximately 684 rubles (in old currency) and 452 kg. of grain. For comparison purposes let us consider several prices; 1 kg. of sausage — 28 rubles, 1 kg. sugar — 8.30 rubles, one male sweater (No. 2758) — 202 rubles, a motorcycle "K-750" — 9,802.10 rubles. The collective farmer could not possibly exist on his salary if he did not have a garden plot (its size is limited to 1.5 acres), which can be cultivated in the free time, and if he did not have cattle — their number is also limited.

The soviet regime strives to explain these conditions as a temporary hardship, as an infantile illness of a new order. However, this infantile illness is continuing too long without a sign of improvement. Even if some progress has been made in agriculture during the past few years, nevertheless, the soviet leaders have to recognize that the efficiency of agricultural production is very low. Up to now, only Poland has arrived at the correct conclusion and has arrested collectivization of agriculture, which had been initiated on the example of the Soviet Union. Within several years, the Poles surpassed all other communist countries in agricultural production.

¹ Centralinis Statistikos Biuras, *Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis*, 1939 m., (Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Yearbook of Lithuania, 1939), Vilnius, p. 125.

² *Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis*, 1938 m., Kaunas, pp. 104-105.

³ *Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis*, 1939 m., Vilnius, p. 111.

⁴ *Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis*, 1939 m., Vilnius, p. 242.

⁵ Lietuvos TSR Teisingumo Ministerija, *Lietuvos TSR įstatymų, Aukščiausiosios Tarybos Įsakų ir Vyriausybės Nutarimų Chronologinis Rinkinys*, (Lithuanian SSR Ministry of Justice, A Chronological Collection of Laws of the Lithuanian SSR, the Decrees of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and the Decisions of the Government), resp. ed. A. Žiurlys, Vilnius, 1956, Vol. I, p. 9; hereafter cited by original title only.

⁶ A. Butkutė-Rameliėnė, "Soviet Agrarian Reform in Lithuania in 1940," *Komunistas* (Communist), Vilnius, No. 8 (1958), p. 19.

⁷ M. Gregorauskas, *Tarybų Lietuvos Žemės Ūkis, 1940-1960*, (Agriculture of Soviet Lithuania, 1940-1960), Vilnius, 1960, p. 80

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹² *Tiesa* ("Pravda"), February 6, 1941. 13 Gregorauskas, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁴ *Lietuvos TSR Įstatymų, etc.*, Vol. I., p. 91.

¹⁵ Gregorauskas, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

21 Lietuvos TSR Įstatymų, etc., Vol. II, p. 31.

22 Tiesa, March 3, 1957.

23 Gregorauskas, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

24 Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademija, Ekonomikos Institutas, *20 Metų Tarybų Lietuvos Liaudies Ūkiui*, (Institute of Economics, Lithuanian SSR Academy of Sciences, 20 Years to the National Economy of Soviet Lithuania), Vilnius, 1960, p. 192.

25 Pranas Zunde, *Die Landwirtschaft Sowjetlitauens*, Marburg/Lahn, 1962.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 70.