

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 13, No.1 - Spring 1967

Editor of this issue: Antanas Klimas

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1967 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



THE TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF SOVIET RULE

GINUTIS PROCUTA
University of Chicago

The annexation of Lithuania in 1940 by the Soviet Union was a relatively simple and rapid process¹, in comparison to the complex and difficult problem of integrating Lithuanian society and its institutions into the Soviet social and political order. This article will examine several aspects of the reorganization and transformation of higher education in Lithuania into the Soviet type. The discussion will encompass approximately the first decade of the uninterrupted Soviet rule, beginning with the later part of 1944.²

Higher Education as an Instrument of Socio-Political Transformation of Society

Formal reorganization of higher education in a superficial way was already attained during the 1940-1941 period of Soviet rule; however, the intervening German occupation and destruction of war not only brought to nought the Soviet reorganization, but also destroyed much of the physical plant, apparatus, and intellectual resources. After pushing out the Germans, the Soviet regime had to begin the reorganization de novo.

The institutions of higher learning, while undergoing extensive structural reorganization and intensive transformation in character and orientation, were required by the Communist Party to produce new technical cadres and intelligentsia, loyal and capable of fulfilling its policies in Lithuania. In addition to replenishing the stock of specialized manpower, decimated by war, forced or voluntary exile, the institutions of higher education were faced with the urgent task of meeting specialized manpower needs arising from rebuilding the extensively war damaged economy, supplying the new administrative apparatus and the new cultural sector with personnel, committed to socialism.

The fact that the regime paid so much attention to the creation of a new Soviet intelligentsia and commandeered the services of what essentially were the old elite institutions, suggests that Soviet ideology had no base in the Lithuanian society. To establish its system, the regime had no other recourse but to disseminate its ideology and culture from above. In sociological terms, creating a new type of intelligentsia and investing it with important roles was a step toward the formation of an elite, and a step away from the idea of homogeneous — classless society. The apparent necessity for the party to enlist the assistance of newly created intelligentsia, suggests that, despite its supremacy, the party is not self-sufficient, that in a certain sense it must share power. The party lacks the expertise of the intelligentsia, without whose cooperation its program may not be realized. Thus, in the framework of the goals of Soviet regime, the institutions of higher education acquire a very important, even indispensable instrumental function. However, before higher education could become an effective instrument, facilitating social and political transformation of Lithuanian society, it had to undergo a substantive and structural transformation itself.

Student Recruitment Policies

The Soviet regime in Lithuania, lacking substantial social base, faced a very problematic situation in higher education. In one very definite sense, the regime had to destroy the old institutions as the intellectual centers of the social order it sought to replace. But, on the other hand, it needed their experience, knowledge, and, not the least, the respect these institutions commanded in the Lithuanian society. In other words, the regime somehow had to destroy or radically change the old spirit of the universities and other institutions of advanced learning without harming their aura and ability to produce scientists, technical specialists, artists, teachers, and various functionaries, necessary for Soviet society. To achieve this, at once a

radical and a sensitive transformation of principles and attitudes embedded in the character of higher education, the regime combined administrative measures with extensive reeducative program and, what it termed, systematic "improvement of social composition of the student body".

The last measure was essentially a recruitment device whereby the regime facilitated or barred the entry to higher education of students with certain social class or political characteristics. By this means, the regime selected ideologically sympathetic or promising students of lower social background and, by offering rapid social mobility, recruited them into the ranks of the new intelligentsia. At the same time the sons and daughters of the dispossessed classes and ideologically doubtful or hostile individuals were prevented from entering higher education. Careful selection and strict control of the successive cohorts of future intelligentsia was to secure its cooperation and loyalty to the Soviet regime and its policies.

The process of "improving social class composition" of the student body was carried out in two distinct ways. The first consisted of an accelerated secondary school program for "workers and peasants", conducted at the universities of Vilnius and Kaunas. "The task of these courses was to prepare in the quickest possible way the children of workers and proletarian peasantry with incomplete secondary schooling for graduation and entry into higher education."³ They were decreed by the People's Commissariat for Education on January 27, 1941, but did not start until April. By the beginning of June there were 180 persons enrolled in these courses at the University of Kaunas and 106 at the University of Vilnius.⁴ The program was reestablished after the second Soviet reentry of Lithuania, at Vilnius and Kaunas universities on October 31, 1944, and in 1948 at the Academy of Agriculture in Dotnuva. The accelerated courses for workers and peasants functioned until the Spring of 1950, producing about 700 graduates.⁵

The selection to the workers' and peasants' preparatory program was based on appropriate political consciousness and personal or psychological commitment of the prospective candidates. Preference was given to demobilized soldiers, Soviet guerillas, active members of the Komsomol, and children of families whose immediate members have suffered from the Lithuanian underground movement combating the introduction of the Soviet system. In other words, preference was given as a kind of reward or encouragement to those, who in some way have already fought or suffered for the Soviet cause and, therefore, could be expected to identify their future with the Soviet regime. It is significant that according to policy the candidates could be under 20 years of age only in exceptional cases. In every case they had to be recommended by the District Communist Party Committee, which also issued a document of social origin. Before the candidates were accepted to the program they had to be cleared by a screening commission consisting of the director of the program, the chairman of city's executive committee, head of the program's party organization, and the representative of the Komsomol committee.

The selection appeared to be scrupulous. Out of over 300 candidates recommended during 1945 - 1946, only 170 were finally accepted⁶, though there were 500 places instituted for this purpose.⁷ Once accepted, however, the regime provided the entrants with extraordinary attention. They were lodged at university hostels and received 400 ruble monthly stipend — double the regular university student stipend.⁸ When at the end of the first year of the program examinations revealed generally poor academic results, an elaborate tutorial and control system was provided to improve their academic performance. In the program itself, "the whole schooling process was directed to produce fervent Soviet patriots with firm Marxist attitudes" and special attention was paid to teaching the Russian language.⁹ Eventually most of the participants of the workers' and peasants' preparatory program graduated from higher education and joined administrative, economic, or scientific sectors. A considerable number of them have attained important positions, several have become leading authorities in their fields.¹⁰

The second part of students' "social class improvement policy" was carried out through a system of screening commissions, called mandate or admissions commissions. In principle this method did not differ from the workers' and peasants' selection just discussed. The main difference was that the students, after being admitted to higher educations, did not get the extraordinary economic, and ideological attention as did the participants of the workers' and peasants' preparatory program. Up to 1948 each institution of higher learning had one general screening commission; thereafter larger institutions, for example the University of Vilnius, had one screening commission for each division or faculty. The increase in commissions suggests that they scrutinized the applicants and their background in great detail. They were composed of academic and administrative officials of the appropriate institution or of its faculty, Communist Party, Komsomol, and trade union representatives. The screening commissions, in cooperation with local party organizations and security organs, investigated the social origins of the applicants, their personal and family political leanings, and participation or position in social and economic life prior to Soviet annexation. The commissions were charged to give preference to applicants of proletarian background, selecting ideologically the most deserving and promising and to keep out "all class enemies".

The major task of admissions commission was to select suitable candidates for the skilled cadres building socialism, to see that socially and politically alien elements would not enter higher education. It must be noted that there was a considerable attempt of the ideologically alien section to enter the Soviet higher education system and the admissions commissions had to reject a part of the applicants for social class and political motives. Some of the applicants attempted to enter higher education by concealing their true social origins and contacts with the bourgeois nationalists¹¹

The screening commissions not only scrutinized entering students, but also continued to investigate social origins and political loyalties of the students already admitted. "The mandatory commissions exposed class enemies and they were dismissed from the institutions of higher learning."¹² During 1944-1951, about 300 students were dismissed from the University of Vilnius alone for their connections with the Lithuanian underground movement. Dismissals of similar nature took place in other institutions.¹³ Thus, in spite of all precautions, some "hostile elements" penetrated through the control system into higher education. Among other things this suggests that proletarian origins did not automatically guarantee loyalty to the regime, that the control system itself was apparently contaminated by some disloyal elements or at least was imperfect. As a result of this situation undetermined number of students hostile to the regime remained undetected throughout the institutions of higher education.

The recruitment policy apparently did not specify nationality quotas. The available post-war data on the nationality of students at the University of Vilnius (see Table 1) shows that the Lithuanians and Poles were under-represented, while Russians, Jews, and others were over-represented in proportion to their numbers in the Lithuanian republic. The Jewish over-representation continued to reflect their pre-war position in a comparable major institution. There is little doubt that Jewish students are included under the classification of "others" for 1940 and 1956. This follows the general Soviet policy of avoiding direct reference to the Jews. Decrease of Poles and the disappearance of Germans is due to repatriation. The steady rise of Russian students resulted from the post-annexation influx of Russian officials, specialists, Army personnel, and other settlers. Moreover, the recruitment policy gave preference to the demobilized soldiers, former red partisans, and active Komsomol members. In the early post-war years these categories were dominated by Russian nationals.

Table 1: NATIONAL COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION AND THE STUDENT BODIES AT THE UNIVERSITIES OF KAUNAS AND VILNIUS, FOR SELECTED YEARS, IN PERCENTAGES¹⁴

	Population of Lithuania.	Students, U. of Kaunas	Students, U. of Vilnius			Population of Lithuania
	1933	1933	1940	1952	1956	1959
Lithuanians	80.6	72.5	51.0	73.8	76.3	79.3
Poles	3.0	2.7	14.9	4.0	3.0	8.5
Russians	2.3	1.5	2.5	10.4	11.5	8.5
Germans	4.1	1.6	—	—	—	0.4
Belorussians	0.2	0.3	0.9	—	—	1.1
Jews	7.1	20.7	—	7.0	—	0.9
Others	0.8	0.6	30.5	4.0	9.2	1.3

Table 2: PARENTAL SOURCE OF INCOME OR OCCUPATION OF STUDENTS, UNIVERSITY OF KAUNAS, FALL SEMESTER, 1933¹⁵

To what extent ideologically based recruitment policy to higher education affected the post-war social composition of its student population, is difficult to determine. It is evident beyond any doubt, that collectivization of land, nationalization of profit producing property, large scale deportations, affecting some social groups more than others, and increasing industrialization, all contributed to the change in the social composition of the student population of higher education. It is practically impossible to assess the nature of change attained by the Soviets (irrespective of causation), in comparison to the pre-war period, because the concepts of social class and classification of society into social groups is different (compare Tables 2 and 3). For some reason the Soviet sources do not reveal the social origins of students during the last years of Lithuanian independence, nor during the German occupation, 1941-1944.

In analyzing the data on social origin of students during the Soviet period, several broad trends can be observed (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). If we disregard the artificial division between peasants and collective farmers, and consider them an agricultural group, we observe a very sharp drop in the enrollment of peasants. At the principal academic institution of Lithuania, the University of Vilnius, the enrollment of students whose parents were engaged in agriculture drops steadily from 63.3% in 1945-46 to 33.5% in 1956-57, i.e. almost by half in just over a decade. To some extent this phenomenon can be explained by growing industrialization and urbanization. However, the larger proportion of this diminution of peasants in higher education is probably due to the deeply embedded ideological antagonism that the party and the regime has traditionally exhibited toward the peasants. In Lithuania the farmers constituted by far the most numerous social and occupational group. Their strong attachment to their land, closely structured family life, religion, and traditional way of life stood in the way of building Soviet socialism. In addition, the Lithuanian underground movement was concentrated in the rural areas and fought with the regime for an extended period from 1944 to early 1950's. A large proportion of manpower and most of the food and shelter for the underground movement came from the farming population. Large farmers and those possessing medium sized farms¹⁷ were automatically suspected by the regime for aiding the partisans. There is little doubt that the children of these farmers were affected most in this sharp drop of peasant enrollment. This is clearly shown by the 50% reduction of students coming from medium sized farms at the University of Kaunas (see Table 4). It is puzzling that the enrollment of the ideologically favored, formerly poor-farmers' social category remained constant at the University of Kaunas. Somewhat similar situation can be observed in case of the workers'

children attending the University of Vilnius. Their percentage curve levels off at a certain point and remains constant for a period of six years, unaffected by the rising rate of industrialization.

In contrast to the falling enrollment for peasants' children, there has been a very dramatic increase of students from the stratum of non-manual workers. Intelligentsia's share of enrollment sprang from 14.1% in 1945-46 to 40.3% by 1956-57. This is particularly dramatic in view of the students' "proletarianization" policy, that appears to have lost its intensity by 1950. This phenomenon appears to signify the growth in size and influence of Soviet bureaucracy and intelligentsia. The economic, administrative, and cultural sectors probably demanded more realistic, less ideologically determined recruitment requirements to higher education. The urban school, white collar, and professional homes generally are able to provide better environment for academic preparation than the rural schools and the homes of workers. In addition, the bureaucrats and professional parents are better informed and more influential in placing their sons and daughters into highly coveted academic institutions. It is not accidental that the State Conservatory of Music at Vilnius had even a higher percentage of students (56.7% in 1952-1953) coming from professional and white-collar social background.¹⁹ On the other hand, the less prestigious and socio-economically less promising Pedagogical Institute of Vilnius had no such attraction for the children of the intelligentsia. The institute was predominantly filled by students whose parents were engaged either in farming or other manual activity (see Table 5).

The disproportional increase of students coming from professional and white-collar homes was not peculiar to Lithuania of 1950's. This phenomenon was a part of a general trend occurring at that time in the Soviet Union. By 1957-58 "only 30 to 40 percent of all students enrolled in the higher educational establishments of the city of Moscow were workers or peasants by origin, or their descendants. Thus two-thirds or more of all students in the Soviet capital were descendants of bureaucrats, white-collar

Notes:

1 Complicated diplomatic maneuvers to absorb the Baltic States into the Soviet Union began after the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. The actual occupation of Lithuania by the Red Army occurred on June 15-17, 1940. After the act of occupation Moscow moved rapidly to incorporate Lithuania formally into the Soviet Union. On August 3, 1940, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a decree, making Lithuania a Soviet republic. The most complete account of the incorporation is: U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee on Communist Aggression, 83rd Congress, *Third Interim Report on the Forced Incorporation of the Baltic States Into the U.S.S.R.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954). See also V. Stanley Vardys, ed., *Lithuania Under the Soviets: Portrait of a Nation, 1940-1965* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), ch. 3. Soviet viewpoint may be found in Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademija, Istorijos Institutas, *Lietuvos TSR Istorija* (History of Lithuanian SSR) (Vilnius, 1965), vol. III, ch. 6.

2 The Universities of Vilnius and Kaunas began their academic year on October 10, 1944. A. Bendžius, "Aukštųjų mokyklų pertvarkymas ir išplėtimas Tarybų Lietuvoje 1940-1950 m." ("The Reorganization and Expansion of Higher Education in Soviet Lithuania, 1940-1950") in Vilniaus Valstybinis V. Kap-suko Vardo Universitetas, *Mokslo Darbai, Istorija II* (State University of Vilnius, *Scientific Works, History*), (Vilnius, 1960), vol. XXXII, p. 67.

3 *Ibid.* p. 63.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Cf. P. Žostautaitė, "Darbininkų ir valstiečių parengiamieji kursai prie Vilniaus Valstybinio Universiteto 1940 ir 1944-1950." ("Preparatory Courses for Workers and Peasants at the State University of Vilnius, in 1940 and 1944-1950"), in *Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademijos Darbai, Serija A*, (Works of the Lithuanian SSR Academy of Sciences, Series A) (Vilnius, 1966), 1 (14), p. 183.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

7 Bendžius, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

8 Žostautaitė, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 192.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

11 Bendžius, *op. cit.*, p. 73. "Bourgeois nationalists" is one of several designations applied to the Lithuanian nationalist partisans who fought against the Soviet regime after the war. For the nature and scope of the nationalist resistance see: K. V. Tauras, *Guerilla Warfare on the Amber Coast* (New York: Voyages Press, 1962); also Vardys, *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

12 P. Žostautaitė, "Vilniaus aukštųjų mokyklų išaugimas socializmo statybos Lietuvoje metais 1944-1953" ("The Growth of Higher Education Establishments in Vilnius During the Period of Socialist Construction in Lithuania, 1944-1953"), in *Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademijos Darbai, Serija A* (Vilnius, 1964), 1 (16), p. 206.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

14 Sources of Table 1: For national composition of the population: Finansų Ministerija, Centralinis Statistikos Biuras, *Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis 1933 m.* (Kaunas, 1934), p. 13; Centrinė Statistikos Valdyba prie Lietuvos TSR Ministrų Tarybos, *Tarybų Lietuvos Dvidešimtmetis: Statistinių Duomenų Rinkinys* (Vilnius, 1960), p. 78. For the nationality

composition of the student body: *Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Kalendorius 1934*, V.D.U. Kanceliarijos Leidinys Nr. 3 (Kaunas, 1934), pp. 68-71; J. Bulavas, ed., *Vilniaus Universitetas* (Vilnius, 1956), pp. 87-88; Žostautaitė, *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 210; *Vilniaus Valstybinis V. Kapsuko v. Universitetas: 1957 m. Žinynas* (Vilnius, 1957), p. 102.

15 Source of Table 2: *Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Kalendorius 1934*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

16 Sources for Table 3. For 1945-53: Žostautaitė, *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 208. For 1956-57: *Vilniaus Valstybinis V. Kapsuko Vardo Universitetas*, 1957 m. Žinynas, p. 102.

17 According to Marxist methodology, farms in Lithuania were classified as follows: Up to 2 hectares farms were called proletarian farms; 2-10 hectares — small farms; 10-20 hectares — medium farms; over 30 hectares, using hired labor — capitalist farms; those between 20-30 hectares — farms of mixed nature. For detailed discussion see L. Truska, "Visuomenės klasinės sudėties pakeitimas Lietuvoje socializmo statybos metais" (The Transformation of Social Class Structure in Lithuania During the Years of Socialist Construction") in *Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademijos Darbai, Serija A* (Vilnius, 1965), 1 (18), pp. 109-133.

18 Source of Table 4: Bendžius, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

19 Žostautaitė, *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 207