

... Russia without any prejudice recognizes the self-rule and independence of the State of Lithuania with all the juridical consequences . . . and for all times renounces with good will all the sovereignty rights of Russia, which it has had in regard to the Lithuanian nation or territory.

Peace Treaty with Russia
Moscow, July 12, 1920

Lietuvos
nacionalinė
M. Mažvydo
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President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill:
1. Their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;
2. They desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;
3. They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.

Atlantic Charter
August 14, 1941

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On The Eve Of The Lithuanian American Conference At Pittsburgh

The Lithuanian National Council, composed of Lithuanian citizens who fled from totalitarian oppression and found hospitality in this country, views the forthcoming Conference of practically all Lithuanian American organizations, which is to take place in Pittsburgh on September 2 and 3, 1943, with a mixed feeling of joy and tragedy.

The sponsor of this Conference, the Lithuanian American Council, represents the three major and principal groups of Lithuanian Americans, the Catholics, the Sandara liberals and the Social Democrats, and is rightly regarded as the big brother of the Lithuanian National Council. It is this body that the Lithuanian National Council looks up to as the vanguard of moral and financial support needed by the oppressed and destitute people of Lithuania.

Thanks to the efforts of the Lithuanian American public, rendered through the medium of the Lithuanian American Council, the Lithuanian National Council has been able to organize, develop and strengthen its activity.

The Pittsburgh conference, as evidenced by the enthusiastic support given to it by practically the entire Lithuanian press in this country, has every sign of becoming an event of historic importance in the life of modern Lithuanianism. It is the Lithuanian Americans who, a generation ago, gave an impetus of independent life to the Lithuanian people with their untiring labors and plentiful dollars.

Can there be any doubt that a ray of hope and joy will project itself from Pittsburgh to the Lithuanian people who at this tragic moment lay prostrate under the heel of the oppressor, and is it not again, as twenty five years ago, that the home country is looking for salvation to its children on this side of the ocean?

The Lithuanian National Council extends its fraternal greetings to the Pittsburgh Conference and expresses its assurance that the Lithuanian people repose their utter confidence in their American brethren. They well know that just as the Lithuanian Americans have never failed their motherland in the past, so they will again bend every effort at this historic gathering in Pittsburgh to organize effective moral and financial help to free Lithuania from the tyrannical yoke.

Valio Pittsburgho Konferencija! VALIO NEPRIKLAUSOMA LIETUVA!

Eventful Days Of 1939 . . .

The events of 1939 had been developing at the tempo of a lightning. The occupation of Czech Prague in March had restored sight to the blind and awakened the sleepers. What had already seemed clear was finally perceived. The seizure of Klaipėda-Memel was but an insignificant incident in the general international kaleidoscope.

English-French conversations with the Soviets, initiated in May, had towered over the spring months in the international chronicle. London and Paris were still hopeful of resurrecting an Entente with Russia that had lain buried since

the first World War. A coalition sufficiently strong to stop the imperialistic appetites of Hitler was hoped for.

An old adage says: a drowning person would seize upon a straw. Same thing held true here — a serious hope was entertained for some time that it will be possible to arrive at an understanding with the Russians. Consequently the surprise of August 23rd. (the Soviet—German Pact) was the more painful, the recovery from shock was the more unpleasant.

Many observers had, by then, already forgotten the circumstances of the new era. Western

K. V. GRINIUS
Colonel G. S. C.
Chairman of Lithuanian
National Council

statesmen, intimidated by a German imperialism, had overlooked the communist imperialism. A situation resulted not unlike the well known fable about the swan, the lobster and the pike. Each pulled one's own way: Hitler was making haste to administer a blow with the sword; Stalin was manoeuvring to stay on the sidelines while the "plutocrats—capitalists" would go on massacring each other; and the western democracies, militarily weak, were still day-dreaming of their ability to stop aggression.

The spring of 1939 was very disquieting in Europe. Rumors were making rounds about a concept of „indirect aggression” propounded by the Soviets and to be applied to Latvia and Estonia. According to this concept, the Russians were asserting a right of unappealable control over Estonia and Latvia. **The issue over Lithuania was not yet being raised:** there was no direct approach for the Russians to reach Lithuania — a Polish-ruled corridor of Vilnius—Švenčionys separated them.

In justice and honor to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Halifax, it must be stressed that the British delegates had refused to condone this Muscovite concept, mostly on ethical-moral considerations. Subsequent events have shown that Moscow was altogether lacking in any determination to enter into whatsoever combinations with the Democracies. Its aims were entirely different. All these negotiations were nothing but a mere “pulling of wool over the eyes”, a cleverly conceived farce. The appellation of a farce must also be attached to Moscow's demurrer over the Russian behavior during the period of capitulation at Munich.

The Soviet behavior in 1938 and 1939 was, in point of fact, dictated by two circumstances: a desire to become a “tertius gaudens”, and a fear that the Germans might take the field against them. Today we know incontrovertibly that the Soviets had at the same time conversed with the Germans also. Nor do we know this but today. Some of the responsible statesmen had known what had been going on behind the Soviet curtain. (Some interesting details in this regard are to be found in Arthur Krock's article, “How War Came”, published in the magazine section of The New York Times, July 18th, 1943.)

Among the Berlin circles, I was repeatedly told of the fact of the Soviet-German negotiations by a certain military attache of one of the Baltic States, whose name could not be safely revealed today, for reasons readily understood.

Looking backward in retrospect, the systematic attempts by Stalin to negotiate with Hitler have begun in December, 1938, — that is, since the time that the total military weakness of the Democracies had been exposed by the capitulation at Munich. As always in similar situations, an opening wedge was driven by means of an innocent proposal to initiate trade negotiations. Throughout these negotiations, Germany was represented by Count Werner von der Schulenburg, German ambassador at Moscow and a diplomat of the old school. Nothing had come of this initial attempt. Suddenly, in January, 1939,

a German economic delegation was held up on the way to Moscow and recalled home.

The negotiations were renewed in April, — consequently, after Hitler had seen that the Poles could hardly be swayed „by nice means”. Hitler, undoubtedly, was much impressed by Polish-British negotiations for a mutual assistance pact. Regardless of this, one day, close to the end of April, Merekalov, the Soviet representative at Berlin, was suddenly summoned to the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Colonel Gerasimov, the Soviet military attache, was likewise summoned to the Army Headquarters. Both callers departed to Moscow immediately after these visits. It may be conjectured that this marked the beginnings of German-Russian political conversations that led to the pact of August 23rd and, ipso facto, to the World War II. On May 2nd Litvinoff was removed from the office of a commissar for foreign affairs, and Molotov replaced him in that office.

The Russian mood in conversations with the Democracies has grown more sullen, Russian demands more uncompromising. Presently the Soviets demanded the right of transit for their troops in Poland and Rumania. The Poles and the Rumanians deemed this Soviet proposal to be outside the scope for any consideration. The Baltic region was growing more alarmed. To accentuate their independence and in protest over the behind-the-curtain negotiations, Latvia and Estonia signed non-aggression pacts with Germany on June 7th.

Altogether, within this period the Germans had conceived and executed in a demonstrative manner a series of political manoeuvres, i. e. the noisy tour of Finland and Estonia by General Halder, the Chief of Staff; a similar trip to Lithuania by a German General von Tippelskirch; an excursion of several U-Boats to Tallinn; finally, the systematic flights of German bombing craft from Brusterort (in East Prussia) to Tallinn, Helsinki and back, with Finnish and Estonian fliers serving as relief co-pilots. All these facts could not remain unnoticed by the Russians. Germans were cleverly attempting thereby to intimidate the Russians, to make them more amenable in negotiations.

On their own part, the Russians countered the Germans by undertaking intriguing negotiations with the British and French. Each side manoeuvred against the other with all means at their disposal. As we see, the little Baltic region had, in the summer of 1939, become a passive subject of chantage, just like the great Western Democracies.

Throughout June and July crooked negotiations continued at Moscow. It seems that the Russians at the very inception of negotiations demanded territorial compensation in the West, — that is, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, eastern Poland and Bessarabia. The question of the territory of Lithuania was not being raised meanwhile. Germans, on their part, were tempting the Russians to become partners, that is, to **attack and divide Poland jointly.**

Russian politicians had managed to circumvent the Germans: they seized one-half of Poland for

themselves, but the distinction of becoming aggressors and inflicting a sacrifice of blood they managed to reserve for the Germans alone. Subsequent events proved beyond doubt that the Russian appearance in Poland on September 17th was a surprise to the Germans and a belated event.

Meanwhile, around the middle of June, a notorious Dr. H. Wohlthat went to Moscow to conduct trade negotiations. It was a cloak of sorts, behind which the political experts conducted their bickering. A trade agreement was signed on August 19th.

In a word, everything was proceeding as if Stalin had been transformed into a rich maiden, with the Britons, Frenchmen and Germans vying as rival suitors... The only difference was that the Germans were in a somewhat better situation, inasmuch as they had known of the British and French countermoves.

As mentioned already, the name of Lithuania did not figure in the German-Russian negotiations of the summer of 1939. However, the diplomacy could not have avoided mentioning Lithuania. Lithuania was referred to in the Polish-British Mutual Assistance Pact, which was signed on August 25th. On Poland's demand, the British agreed to invoke a "casus foederis" in the event that the Germans should encroach on the territory of Lithuania. This circumstance shows the strategic importance of Lithuania to Poland.

August the 5th must be deemed to be an unusual dateline — on that day the Fuehrer of the Germans decided to go "bingo" and to sign formally a pact with Moscow. Von der Schulenburg was directed to inform the Narkomindel (the Soviet ministry of foreign affairs) that the Government of Germany consents to the conditions already talked over. It remained but to draw up the final texts and to subscribe same. This was done by von Ribbentrop, German minister of foreign affairs, at Moscow on August 23rd.

The extreme secrecy and crookedness of the whole affair may be shown by the circumstance that exactly on August the 5th a joint military mission of Britain and France was dispatched to Moscow. Stalin demanded that military experts be sent. Having completed but a couple of preliminary sessions, the mission was overtaken by new events, and on August 24th it departed from Moscow.

The whole business was transacted in a truly "refined" manner of crooks. Not counting the trade treaty signed but a few days earlier, the so-called "non-aggression" treaty was signed on August 23rd, including an incomparably more important secret supplement. Insofar as the sum total of available information and subsequent events enable one to judge today, it seems that the secret supplement embraced not only the details of the dismemberment of Poland, but also, generally, a division of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. Eastern Poland, it seems, was deeded away to the Soviets under a title in fee. Finland, Estonia, and Latvia were recognized as being within the sphere of influence of the Soviets. Vilnius and its environs were to be returned to Lithuania, which remained in a German sphere.

Several months later, the Soviets attacked Finland on the strength of a peculiarly interpreted right of the "sphere". The same treaty conferred upon the Soviets a right to recover Bessarabia. There is some basis to suppose that this treaty contained an agreement to cede to the Russians the Polish areas up to the line of Narew-Bug, Vistula, and San rivers. We shall see further that this "gentlemen's agreement" was amended to some extent in the midst of events, among such amendments being a paragraph on Lithuania — the latter country was transferred from a German sphere into a Soviet sphere.

In this same treaty the Soviet had "solemnly" promised to refrain in its sphere from any annexations, occupations and whatsoever sovietizations (except in the areas of Poland granted into full ownership of the Soviets).

The pact of August 23rd seemingly symbolizes a return to the traditional Russian-Prussian imperialistic collaboration. In this connection, one is tempted to remind of the comparison with the year 1721, when Peter I, having come to an agreement with the former Elector of Brandenburg and the then new King of Prussia, had finally ejected the Swedes and annexed so-called Livonia (presentday Estonia and the territories of Latvia on the right bank of Dauguva-Dvina river). This marked but a profitable beginning of further annexions, — in the first place, the dismemberment of Lithuania and Poland. Geopolitical factors, apparently, do not tend to change overnight. The pact of August 23rd gave a new impulse for the second world war, and inaugurated the terrible tragedy for the peoples of eastern Baltic shores. The sequences of that pact elude a full recognition even today.

THE SUDDEN TURN.

The contemporary coalition government of Lithuania decided to adhere to a strict neutrality. Lithuania unwaveringly held to this policy, regardless of attempts by one or another person to influence the government to act otherwise. All officials on posts abroad had received explicit instructions in this sense. A similar policy was pursued by other Baltic States also.

About the middle of September the monolithic command of the Polish army had, apparently, fallen apart, and the mobilization was irreparably disrupted. The Germans, unchecked, broke into the depths of Poland. The catastrophe was assuming greater proportions daily. In the south the Germans had already reached the upper Vistula, while in the north, from the direction of East Prussia, the exceptionally important Narew-Bug line seemed definitely lost by the Poles. The roads to the Polish rear were wide open for the Germans. Von Kuechler's group rushed unretainedly towards Brest Litovsk.

In the face of these circumstances, Stalin decided to act, to retrieve his share of the loot. At dawn on September 17th, across the whole eastern frontier line, Russian vanguards pressed westward. The weak rearguard of General Anders (presently commanding the Polish Near East Army) could not hold out long. This Russian march was a surprise not only to the Poles. The

Blp (LKA) /
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1943, Nr. 6

Germans were equally surprised... Most likely, the Russians had promised to attack the Poles at the same time that the Germans strike, on September 1st. By September 17th the Germans definitely were not expecting the Russians to move... This explains the headlong German thrust towards Brest Litovsk, that, under the terms of the pact of August 23rd, was to belong to Russians.

An entirely new and unexpected situation arose. It was necessary to seize upon urgent emergency measures to fix a new line of demarcation.

By that time, German vanguards had marched beyond Vistula, in some places somewhat east of the line of Bug. New conversations were broached in Moscow. The Germans proposed to the Russians a new line of demarcation along the Bug river, — in other words, they demanded for themselves huge areas of ethnographic Poland with some five million population. **The Russians demanded Lithuania in exchange.** The issue was to be decided quickly, inasmuch as both armies were fast moving forward and were to meet next day, if not this day. Incidents could arise out of an indefinite situation.

Of this period, the future historians will most likely pause a little longer over the so-called episode of Danzig. Hitler, accompanied by his major aides, arrived at Danzig on or about September 20th. There the data for the so-called second German-Russian agreement were concentrated and worked out. In the light of certain contemporary symptoms, it is possible to assert unwaveringly that **the Germans were averse to letting Lithuania slip out of their grasp.** It must be supposed that they had done all they could to prevent such a turn. At about that time they had made arrangements to **summon Mr. Juozas Urbšys, the minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania.** Supposedly in prospect for an eventual consolidation of „ties” between Lithuania and Germany. I use “supposedly” advisedly, inasmuch as the purpose of such summons has never been really clarified. Herr von Ribbentropp failed to reply to minister Urbšys’ natural request for a preliminary precise definition of the object of such a visit.

It must be said in this connection that certain reporters from German-occupied Europe, less interested in objectivity, are attempting to this date to cast a shadow of guilt upon minister Urbšys. It is being insinuated that through his reservedness and dilatory indisposition to hastiness Lithuania was surrendered to the Russians. This is an empty and entirely unfounded charge. It is true that during this new crisis the Germans had, one nice day, summoned the Lithuanian Envoy in Berlin, Colonel Kazys Škirpa, to Danzig. Yet this was a wasted trip, inasmuch as he was made to return to Berlin 24 hours later. The crisis has been resolved meanwhile in the above mentioned manner, and the **officials of Lithuania could not have affected the solution by their relative weight.** The Germans obviously had no other way out, considering that no one had ever witnessed a German renouncing anything of his own will.

Lithuania was finally transferred from a German sphere of influence into a Russian sphere. We shall probably learn of the true moves behind the curtain of that period at some later time,

when the participants themselves published their memoirs. There I suppose that we shall not be of for that.

In my opinion, the final decision was dictated by geopolitical, or rather, by military factors. In the perspective of new plans (the Germans were already preparing for “all out” actions in the west) it seemed safer for the Germans to hold the Russians along the Bug line, rather than along Vistula. In other words, German strategists considered the Russians to be less dangerous to themselves in Lithuania, rather than in the heart of Poland. Of course, everything was being decided from the point of view of security for Germany alone.

The critics of minister Urbšys should remember that the Germans ordinarily decide such problems by themselves, without consulting any lesser powers. The finale of Klaipėda—Memel provides a case in point.

Altogether, it is advisable to analyze the events of those days against the background of the general situation of the moment. As against that background, Lithuania was but a little pea, especially since the **Germans had thereby credited themselves with great areas settled by some 5,000,000 denizens.**

The events following thereafter are well known to all: on September 27th Ribbentropp had flown to Moscow for his second visit there. A final arrangement was worked out there on a whole series of important issues. Among other items, the problem of Soviet garrisons in the Baltic States was settled. An impulse was inspired there for a Russian try-out of arms against Finland.

In short, the second German-Soviet agreement decided the fate of Lithuania up to June 22, 1941, including the consent to a Soviet occupation. The Germans were most concerned with the solution of western complexes, particularly that of England, as soon as feasible. They were confident of squaring their accounts with the Russians at some later time, most likely in 1940, by which time England was to have been beaten to its knees. A different fate was in the cards, however, — having failed to buckle England to the knees, the Germans were compelled some 20 months later to start their eastern campaign. This campaign is continuing today.

While considering the situation from this or that viewpoint, we, the Baltic peoples and descendants of the natives of those countries, should remember that **the direct initiators of this war are Germans, and only the Germans.** True enough, Lithuania has immeasurably suffered from the Soviets. A Soviet occupation, if prolonged, would most certainly have meant a final deletion of our race. Regardless of this, there are two active and inseparable offenders in our tragedy: German nazis and Russian communists. It would be a historic inobjectivity to inflect the latter and to forget the former. Such a reasoning would be comparable to that of a child who, rather than accuse the kidnaper who had covertly pushed him, would direct all his anger against the corner of a table that had painfully hurt him. In the present instance — against the ruthless bear.