

Lithuanian Press in Brazil

by Klemensas Jūra

Since the time of the press ban the Lithuanian has been known as a lover of his own Lithuanian press and a tenacious defender of it. Even in the most difficult material conditions, Lithuanians sacrificed for their printed word.

The love of the press was also evident in the life of Brazilian Lithuanians. Despite the fact that many Lithuanians who had settled in the São Paulo region were constantly receiving shipments of books and newspapers from Lithuania and North America, they began to organize and support their own local Lithuanian press from the very first days of their establishment.

Material difficulties and the lack of experienced press workers hindered and impeded the flourishing of Lithuanian press in Brazil. The lack of a good printing house with fonts suitable for use and the lack of availability of people with a background in journalism were

hindrances and obstacles for many decades.

The Lithuanians of North America, even those in Argentina, were much more fortunate in this respect. Whereas in São Paulo Lithuanian newspapers died soon after they were born, among our northern brothers periodicals survived and thrived for many decades.

The first long-lasting Brazilian Lithuanian newspaper was born on January 13, 1929. In the beginning it was called *Lietuvis Brazilijoj* (Lithuanian in Brazil), which after a few years was shortened to *Lietuvis* and lasted until the outbreak of World War II, i.e. for more than ten years.

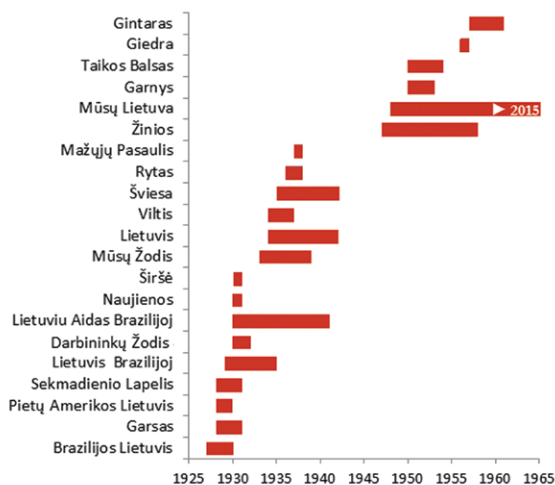
The *Sekmadienio Lapelis* (Sunday Leaflet), edited and published by Fr. Jeronimas Valaitis, survived for only a short while. Also published were *Naujienos* (News), *Lietuva*, *Jaunujų Žiedas* (Youth Circle), *Garsas* (Voice), and *Širšė* (Wasp), but these publications did not leave much of a mark on the cultural life of the Lithuanians in Brazil.

The strongest in material terms, but the weakest in terms of numbers, was a publication close to the Lithuanian government. It was called *Lietuvis* and was heavily supported from Lithuania. It was edited for the longest time by the talented journalist Stasys Vancevičius. The group behind this paper had the most

intellectual strength, as it included staff from the Lithuanian Consul and teachers sent from Lithuania. In terms of cultural and organizational activities, this paper did not move any mountains, as it reached only a small group of Lithuanian emigrants. When the war broke out, when presses and schools closed, this group withdrew promptly from all Lithuanian cultural work. What was incredibly surprising was the withdrawal of Lithuanian teachers from Lithuanian work, even among their own families, and their failure to teach their children the language of their fathers. This perhaps did not apply to everyone, but it was true for the majority.

A second group, socialist and left-wing, was large in number and was active not only in internecine struggles, but also culturally. This group published a weekly newspaper, the *Lietuvių Aidas Brazilijoje* (Lithuanian Echo in Brazil) that had a broad readership and was cleverly and interestingly edited. Its long-time editor, the talented journalist Antanas Dutkus and his close associates withdrew from Lithuanian cultural activities during the war and for many years thereafter. Many Lithuanians in this large group drifted even further to the left and stopped participating in cultural activities.

A third group united cultural immigrants with a Catholic spirit. This group would subscribe to a weekly newspaper called *Šviesa* edited by the poet Fr. Aleksandras Arminas. Even after this periodical ceased publication, Catholic Lithuanian activities continued under



Timeline for 21 newspapers published in Brazil by Lithuanian immigrants. Most of the newspapers were relatively short-lived, the one notable exception being *Mūsų Lietuva*, which ran from 1929 through 2015.



Inaugural issue of *Lietuvius Brazilijoj*, Jan 13, 1929. (epaveldas.lt)

auspices of the Lithuanian Catholic Community, St. Cecilia Choir, the parish, and various unions, under the leadership of two young energetic priests, Fr. Arminas and prelate Fr. Pijus Ragažinskas. After the war ended they were joined by many more serious Lithuanians. This group was the first that managed to revive the teaching of Lithuanian. They published a bi-weekly magazine, *Mūsų Lietuvą* (*Nossa Lituania* or *Our Lithuania*) which subsequently became a weekly newspaper and that remains in circulation today. The first editor of the newspaper was Fr. Pijus Ragažinskas. Subsequent editors included Vladas Vijeikis (until his departure to North America), Fr. Kazimieras Miliuskas, Klemensas Jūra and again Fr. Pijus Ragažinskas, until publication was handed over to the Jesuit Fathers. To discuss the entire scope of cultural activities of the Lithuanian Catholic group in detail would require a separate article; this article is limited to a discussion of published newspapers.

The left-wing Lithuanians, thanks to the efforts and material support of Aleksandras Bumblys,

published a weekly newspaper *Žinios* (News), edited by former teacher Simas Bakšys, which survived for a number of years. Before the war, Bakšys had published and edited the children's newspaper *Mažųjų Pasaulis* (Childrens' World) and after the war he contributed to the standard-setting book by Klemensas Jūra titled *Tėvų Kalba* (Our Parents' Language).

The Sports Union "Lituania" published a youth magazine called *Viltis* (Hope). Immediately after the war, Klemensas Jūra published and edited a humor and information magazine called *Garnys* (Heron), which apparently found the Brazilian "climate" unsuitable as in its the third year of existence it departed Brazil for countries with a cooler climate. During its short existence, the *Garnys* publishing house in Brazil did publish a number of Lithuanian books.

Publishing Lithuanian books in Brazil had always been difficult. During the first 25 years of Lithuanian emigration to Brazil until the end of the war hardly any books had been published here apart from one or another publication of little value. Why did the prewar Lithuanian press

in São Paulo fail to flourish? If one looks hard enough, many reasons can be found, but the main cause was the very harmful division and fragmentation among the Brazilian Lithuanian community.

In the post-war period, Lithuanian national and cultural life began to recover very slowly. It was clear to everyone that it was already too late. Most of the elder activists had retired from work, while others became old and died out. The publications that recovered had a very small circulation. *Žinios*, *Mūsų Lietuvą* and *Garnys* could not draw even a thousand readers. After several years, only *Mūsų Lietuvą* remained, and this publication avoided demise solely because of the support and efforts of the Jesuit Fathers. Thanks to their dedication, the publication is still holding on, though despite support from "sustaining honorary subscribers" it operates at a considerable deficit. That publication is approaching its 30th anniversary. [Editor's note: This article was written in 1976. The 30 year anniversary of *Mūsų Lietuvą* would be in 1978. *Mūsų Lietuvą* ceased publication in 2015.]

The prospects for the survival of the Lithuanian press in Brazil are more than bleak. The older generation of readers is melting away, and young people, if there remains one or another who can read Lithuanian, attach very little importance to the printed Lithuanian word. It will be very difficult to maintain Lithuanian cultural activities once the last newspaper has ceased publication.

Editor's note: Klemensas Jūra-Jūraitis (Rimas Amalviškis) was a poet, essayist, journalist, and newspaper editor (*Mūsų Dienos*). This article has been translated from Lithuanian in a book titled, *Lietuvių Imigracijos Brazilijon Penkiasdešimtmetis, 1926–1976*. (Lithuanian Immigration to Brazil. 50 years, 1926–1976, São Paulo, Brazil, 1976)