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Edited by

ŠARŪNAS LIEKIS, ANTONY POLONSKY

and

CHAERAN FREEZE

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‘A Close, but Very Suspicious and Dangerous Neighbour’ *Outbreaks of Antisemitism in Inter-War Lithuania*

VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS

DESPITE the fact that daily intercourse between Jews and Lithuanians was inescapable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the mindset of Lithuanian peasants the Jew was part of the foreign, non-Christian world and ought to be avoided. Religious motives (such as the alleged use of Christian blood by Jews) dominated in the formation of this negative image in the peasantry’s imagination. Jews were also disdained by the Lithuanian intelligentsia and were considered to be a factor hindering the emerging modernization of Lithuanian society. The first expressions of modern—racist—antisemitism in Lithuania also date from this time.¹ It should be noted too that in the period under consideration there were few major anti-Jewish riots in Lithuania, which was almost completely bypassed by the wave of pogroms that flooded the Russian empire in 1881–2. This does not, of course, mean that there were absolutely no outbreaks of violence against Jews.²

¹ V. Sirutavičius, ‘Katalikų Bažnyčią ir modernaus lietuvių antisemitizmo genėzė’, *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 14 (1999), 69–77; id., ‘Lietuvos žydų bendruomenės integracijos problemos XIX–XX a.’, *Kultūros barai*, 2002, no. 2, pp. 83–7; id., ‘Vincas Kudirka’s Programme for Modernizing Society and the Problems of Forming a National Intelligentsia’, *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 5 (2000), 109–12; id., ‘Notes on the Origin and Development of Modern Lithuanian Antisemitism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century’, in A. Nikžentaitis, S. Schreiner, and D. Staliūnas (eds.), *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews* (Amsterdam, 2004), 61–72; L. Truska and V. Vareikis, *Holokausto prielaidos: Antisemitizmas Lietuvoje XIX a. antroji pusė–1941 m. birželis* (Vilnius, 2004), 21–68. The phrase quoted in the title of this chapter encapsulates the viewpoint of Bishop Motiejus Valančius as expressed in his *Paaugusių žmonių knygelė* (1868), and represents an attitude widespread among the Lithuanian public of the inter-war period.

² There are records of pogroms taking place in the town of Prienai in the Suwalki province in 1882. In 1900 some twenty violent clashes between Jews and Lithuanians were recorded in the Panevėžys and Šiauliai districts in the north of Lithuania. Similar events took place in Dusetai during the 1905 revolution, and somewhat later in Buivydiškės. Outbreaks of violence between Lithuanians and Jews also occurred during the initial stages of the formation of the state, for example in 1919 in Ukmergė and Panevėžys. In 1920 in Vabalninkai a crowd of about 800 conscripts looted nine Jewish shops. For more

What trends characterize Lithuanian antisemitism in the period after the establishment of independence? What factors influenced Lithuanian antisemitism in the inter-war period? Before answering these questions, some general observations should first be made that can give insights into them.³ First, with the re-establishment of the state after the First World War, Lithuanians became the politically dominant ethnic group, while Jews retained ethnic minority status. But even though Jews were a minority group in the Lithuanian nation state and had only very limited leverage on the country's politics, they still held relatively important social and economic positions. The Lithuanians, however, were unwilling to accept this situation. As a result, various Lithuanian social organizations were formed that not only actively tried to strengthen 'national consciousness' or to nationalize the state, but also aimed to combat 'foreigners', opposing the 'negative' influences of ethnic minorities. Among these organizations were the paramilitary Riflemen's Union (*Šaulių sąjunga*) and the Lithuanian Businessmen's Union (*Lietuvių verslininkų sąjunga*), both of which published periodicals featuring anti-Jewish material. Another circumstance that influenced Lithuanian–Jewish relations is also important to note: although Lithuanian culture formally became dominant in the new national state, for the most part it did not appeal to ethnic minorities, Jews among them. This attitude was determined primarily by one factor: the basis of Lithuanian culture was peasant-oriented, and being thus primarily a local and provincial culture, it had low prestige in the eyes of the Jewish and Polish minorities. This does not, of course, mean that Lithuanian culture was completely closed off to outsiders or that it was not influenced by general European trends. Nevertheless, to Poles, Jews, and Germans it seemed provincial. It is also no coincidence that in the Lithuanian press Jews were blamed for transmitting foreign culture, as Jews felt more comfortable with the Russian culture and language.⁴

Finally, even before the revival of statehood, Lithuanians' attitudes towards ethnic minorities, including Jews, were divided; or, put simply, more negative than positive. Once the state was established, this trend only strengthened. In the Lithuanian public space, it was commonplace to doubt the loyalty of ethnic minorities to the nation state. Minorities were often described as hostile (especially Poles, because of the conflict with Poland) or selfish, conceited, and unconcerned about forming a strong Lithuanian state (this was a more typical description of Jews). It may thus be said that having fought for and won their political independence,

on this, see V. Sirutavičius and D. Staliūnas (eds.), *Kai ksenofobija virsta priedarta: Lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a.–XX a. pirmojoje pusėje* (Vilnius, 2005), L. Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio: Antisemitizmo Lietuvoje raida* (Vilnius, 2005), 78.

³ Liudas Truska has written probably the most systematic account of the details of Lithuanian antisemitism from 1918 to 1940. See Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 105–11, 132–95.

⁴ The Lithuanian press and the dominant attitudes expressed in it towards Jews are analysed by L. Venclauskas, 'Moderniojo lietuviško antisemitizmo genezė ir raida (1883–1940 m.)', Ph.D. diss. (Vytautas Magnus Univ., Kaunas, 2008).

Lithuanians still had to consolidate their economic and cultural domination within the state. The nurturing of national culture and national consciousness was probably the most important objective of the nation state. Similar trends were common in other central European countries, often referred to as *nationalizing* states.

In Lithuania, in contrast to other new central European nation states, no new laws were introduced that were in any way formally directed against Jews (as, for example, the *numerus clausus* was in Poland). However, attempts were definitely made to reduce and limit the role and influence of Jews on the economy and state politics.

As elsewhere in central Europe, the formation of political and social organizations was based on national principles. Few foreigners or Jews were members of the most important Lithuanian political parties; those who were had insignificant roles.⁵ This statement does not of course apply to the underground Lithuanian Communist Party (Lietuvos komunistų partija), of which Jews comprised a considerable part of the membership. Until the coup of December 1926, when Antanas Smetona's authoritarian regime was introduced, Jews participated in elections to the Seimas (parliament) on separate national lists. During the elections to the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania in 1920, of all the ethnic minority groups, Jews received the most votes—and this was for the only Jewish political organization to take part in the elections, the Jewish Popular Union (*Žydų liaudies susivienijimas*), which received 44,709 votes; six Jewish deputies were elected.⁶ During the elections to the First Seimas in 1922, even more ballots were cast in favour of the Jewish political parties (a little over 55,000 votes), but only three Jewish deputies were elected because of the nature of the electoral system.⁷ Seven Jewish representatives were elected to the Second Seimas in 1923, thanks to the fact that the ethnic minorities (Jews, Germans, Russians, and Belarusians) established a common list that received

⁵ During the 1920 elections to the Constituent Assembly, there was one Jew on the party list of National Progress (*Tautos pažanga*), led by Antanas Smetona. It appears that this was unique in the history of Lithuanian political parties (and, incidentally, the party was not elected to the Seimas). Another example is afforded by the 'patriotic' paramilitary Riflemen's Union. According to its founding statutes of 1919, 'all Lithuanian citizens' were able to become members. It admitted non-Lithuanians too, but required that they have Lithuanian-language skills. However, in 1922 it was announced that the organization was henceforth open only to those of 'pure Lithuanian blood'. The government's influence on it also continued to grow, and the union gradually became a structure that united officials across the board.

⁶ For more on this, see V. Sirutavičius, 'Lithuanian Administration and the Participation of Jews in the Elections to the Constituent Seimas', in V. Sirutavičius and D. Staliūnas (eds.), *A Pragmatic Alliance: Jewish-Lithuanian Political Cooperation at the Beginning of the 20th Century* (Budapest and New York, 2011), 181–205.

⁷ The new electoral law allowed the electoral commission to favour stronger, i.e. Lithuanian, party lists. In fact, it was not only Jews who were losers under the new electoral law: the changes had a much greater impact on Poles and on smaller Lithuanian parties. See S. Kaubrys, 'Tautinių mažumų dalyvavimas rinkimuose į Lietuvos Respublikos Seimą 1920–1926 m.: Kiekybinių charakteristikų projekcija', *Parlamento studijos: Mokslo darbai*, 2005, no. 4, p. 131; L. Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai* (Vilnius, 1996), 146.

a majority of the ethnic minority vote (100,480 votes in total);⁸ in the elections to the Third Seimas in 1926, such a broad coalition was not formed, and Jews won mandates for just three deputies. When Smetona dissolved the Seimas in 1927, Jewish politicians in practice lost the opportunity to participate in or at least to try to influence Lithuania's national politics. It should again be noted that this situation affected not only Jews, but other Lithuanian parties too, except for the nationalists.

In the early days of the Lithuanian state, Jews played an active role in local self-government, primarily in the cities. At this time, 1918–20, the percentage of Jews on city councils ranged from about 15 per cent to at least twice that proportion. For example, in 1918 various Jewish parties held twenty-two seats on the Kaunas city council, which amounted to 31 per cent of all council members. Only the Poles held more seats.⁹ Jews usually formed a separate faction on city councils, irrespective of whether there was one or several lists in the elections.¹⁰ This political activity by Jews, based on national principles, frequently met with the opposition of the local Lithuanian population.¹¹ With the changes to the law on municipalities introduced in 1929 and 1931, Jewish representation on local self-governing bodies in city and district councils fell sharply. In 1934, for example, the number of Jews elected to six district councils fell to only forty-six out of a total of 1,929 councillors.¹² This does not mean that provisions in the laws directly discriminated against Jews. The new laws simply aimed to reduce the numbers of voters: with the introduction of the property qualification, voting rights existed only for farm and enterprise owners and civil servants of various levels. The more important circumstance to note is that government-appointed administrators—district governors—began to play a much more significant role in elections.¹³ They had great influence on the selection of candidates, the formation of the local administration, and the appointment of officials. These officials often had autonomous powers and it was in practice their decision that determined whether an individual became a municipal servant or not. This obviously reduced the opportunities for Jews to pursue political careers, since Jews were not favoured by the district governors.

There were in effect no Jews in the executive or bureaucratic apparatus. Lithuanian historiography does record that at the very beginning of the formation of the state several Jews were appointed as senior ministerial officials and participated in the preparation of the 1922 Lithuanian constitution or were appointed to sit on various commissions of the Seimas. Yet these were isolated occurrences, and subsequently quite the reverse trend became more and more apparent, with the

⁸ Kaubrys, 'Tautinių mažumų dalyvavimas rinkimuose į Lietuvos Respublikos Seimą 1920–1926 m.', 125–42.

⁹ A. Morkūnaitė-Lazauskienė, *Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybių raida 1918–1920 m.* (Šiauliai, 2007), 265–71.

¹⁰ Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 66.

¹¹ A. Morkūnaitė-Lazauskienė, 'Interesai ir konfliktai: Vietinės savivaldos kūrimas 1918–1919 metais', *Darbai ir dienos*, 34 (2003), 20–5; Venclauskas, 'Moderniojo lietuviško antisemitizmo genezė ir raida', 151–2.

¹² Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 106–7.

¹³ Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai*, 200–1.

Lithuanian political class and ruling elite dissociating themselves from Jews. In 1934, just 477 of the 35,200 municipal and state civil servants were Jewish, a number that included 290 teachers from Jewish schools (thus, excluding teachers, Jewish civil servants made up less than 1 per cent of all the civil servants of the state). A similar situation existed in the ministries, the police force, and the military. In the mid-1930s, only nine out of 1,800 civil servants in the Ministry of Defence were Jews; in the Ministry of the Interior, it was only five out of 5,600; in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just three out of 162; in the police force, two out of 3,600; and in the military, there was only one Jewish officer among 1,300.¹⁴ One might suggest that a language problem discouraged Jews from seeking a civil service career, as the civil service required Lithuanian-language skills. However, the selection of personnel usually rested on political, party, or personal loyalties. Keeping in mind that there were almost no Jews in political or party structures, and that their loyalty to the nation state was questioned, it followed that there were practically no opportunities for them to pursue a career in this field.

Similar trends existed in economic policy. It could be claimed that the Lithuanian government protected—that is, supported—Lithuanian business and tried to build up a class of Lithuanian entrepreneurs. As a result, economic policies restricted and minimized Jewish influence in business. Both the government and Lithuanian businessmen saw the limitation of Jewish influence in business as a positive move that would strengthen the nation state. Thus, in its economic policies, the Lithuanian government, 'in trying to tackle the task of overcoming the backwardness it had inherited from its forefathers, essentially had to manoeuvre between indirect discrimination of Jews and positive support for Lithuanians'.¹⁵ Among the examples of this 'indirect discrimination and positive support' was the requirement introduced by the government in the mid-1920s that all account-keeping for businesses was to be conducted only in the state language, Lithuanian. However, many Jewish craftsmen and small-scale traders found it very difficult to adhere to this requirement, as the majority of them had not learnt the language. Such a law created unequal conditions for businesses, placing Lithuanians at an advantage. In other words, although formally the law did not directly target Jews specifically, preference was nevertheless given to Lithuanian businessmen, and hefty fines were imposed on those who disobeyed the law.¹⁶ Further, it should be noted that such instances of

¹⁴ *Lietuvos statistikos metraštis*, vii (Kaunas, 1934), 302–7; Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 107.

¹⁵ G. Vaskela, *Lietuva 1939–1940 metais: Kursas į valstybės reguliuojamą ekonomiką* (Vilnius, 2002), 176.

¹⁶ D. Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 2000), 98–9. To give another example, in 1933 the government introduced a system of permits for enterprises that provided public transport, a field in which Jews had been dominant for a long time. After the introduction of the permit system, the number of Jewish enterprises declined sharply. Later, a semi-governmental Lithuanian capital enterprise called 'Auto' was founded, which received the majority of the permits issued for the continued provision of transport services. Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 110–11.

the government's 'tactical manoeuvring' in policymaking did not please some radical businessmen, who urged the government to take more drastic legal and administrative measures that would 'once and for all push out' Jews from the business sphere.¹⁷ In other words, they demanded direct discrimination against Jews. These trends became especially pronounced in 1938–9, but the government still did not go ahead with the requested discriminatory policies. Thus, the Lithuanian government did not aim to encourage inter-ethnic tensions, and often even tried to damp them. Of course, the government acted in this way for pragmatic reasons: it was concerned not only with social cohesion and good relations between ethnic groups (between the majority—Lithuanians—and the ethnic minorities, among them the Jews), and moreover with their integration into the country's socio-political life, but also, and most importantly, the government was concerned with the stability of the political system and the state, and ethnic tensions and conflicts only served to threaten this stability.

Such were the general socio-cultural and political conditions that influenced relations between Jews and Lithuanians and that formed the background to open manifestations of antisemitism. It is important to note that, in the period under discussion, Lithuanian–Jewish conflicts and acts of violence were also influenced by specific socio-economic circumstances and rising tensions in the state and political system. As socio-economic conditions worsened dramatically, so conflicts between ethnic groups intensified. Lithuanians launched a search for someone to blame, and the scapegoats, because of their position in the socio-economic structure of society, were often Jews. This was exactly what happened in Lithuania between late 1922 and early 1924, when the country experienced an economic crisis (and, in a certain sense, a political crisis). It was precisely then that an increase in antisemitic agitation in the legal press occurred, as well as the distribution of illegal posters. This resulted in a series of organized actions in the cities, in the course of which public notices written in the languages of the ethnic minorities (above all the Jewish languages) were destroyed.

Certainly an important precondition for the appearance of expressions of antisemitism and their intensification was a decline in or complete loss of the government's political prestige. This was especially obvious at the end of the 1930s, after Poland's ultimatum to Lithuania in 1938; the loss of the Klaipėda district further mobilized the Lithuanian public, causing various national, often radical, organizations to become more active. Criticism of the government increased, not only attacking its passivity and unwillingness to put up a fight, but also pointing to its 'over-protective' policies towards 'disloyal' ethnic minorities (primarily the Jews). There were accusations that the government was in effect the 'representative' of Jewish interests. Most of the criticism was directed at Smetona. The same period

¹⁷ 'Ko mes norime: Lietuvių verslininkų dabartiniai siekiai', *Verslas*, 1938, no. 50, p. 1; A. Gututis, 'Reikia įstatymų, kurie sunormuotų žydų klausimą', *ibid.* 3; 'Neatidėliokim žydų klausimo sprendimo', *Verslas*, 1939, no. 3, p. 4.

saw more instances of violent actions of various kinds (such as the smashing of windows of Jewish houses, schools, and synagogues), and there were some outbreaks of mass violence that had to be controlled by local police.¹⁸

Examining more closely the development of antisemitism in Lithuania, one can identify several waves of antagonism to Jews, or periods when antisemitism intensified, was more organized, and, understandably, was more evident in the public space. The first such wave of antisemitism rose in 1922 and lasted until approximately the summer of 1924. The general socio-economic climate at this time was conducive to the growth of inter-ethnic tensions. The country had still not recovered from the war and its struggles against the Bolsheviks and Poles. In the cities, especially in the capital Kaunas, shortages of basic foods were experienced and the public was concerned about the introduction of the new currency, the litas, which only added to the rise in speculation. In order to stabilize the situation in the capital, the government was forced to take administrative measures, and some shop-owners were driven out of the city for breaking certain of the trading rules.¹⁹ The public also prepared itself to do battle with rising prices and speculation. At the beginning of October 1922, as elections to the First Seimas approached, the Riflemen's Union organized a meeting in Kaunas that was widely publicized in the organization's publication *Trimitas* ('Trumpet'). It appears that the meeting was predominantly attended by officials. Jews were blamed for most of the period's socio-economic problems. One of the organizers, Antanas Bružas, a member of the presidium of the Riflemen's Union, launched a direct attack on the Jews, saying that all they thought about was how to empty people's pockets: 'The Jews will still have to move to Palestine in the next few years', he proclaimed at the end of his speech. Other speakers demanded that dishonest traders be deported from Lithuania, and according to one, 'people can run out of patience over such behaviour'. Some speakers were more careful to avoid openly antisemitic rhetoric. Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, for example, suggested that all *šmugelninkai* (a colloquial word for 'traders'), both Lithuanians and Jews, be treated the same. The main means of countering them should be active support for co-operatives. The finance minister Vytautas Petrušis spoke along similar lines.²⁰

Political problems added to the economic and social difficulties. In the spring of 1922, the Lithuanian public experienced a cultural-political trauma when Vilna and the Vilna district were annexed to Poland. On 23 February the Polish Sejm ratified

¹⁸ Jews found themselves at the centre of this policy for socio-economic reasons too. In 1938 and early 1939 a number of Jews left Klaipėda and withdrew into Lithuania proper. They began to be blamed for the ever-worsening economic situation in Lithuania. For more information on these ethnic tensions in 1938–9, see D. Mačiulis, 'Žvilgsnis į vieno pogromo anatomiją tarpukario Lietuvoje', in Sirutavičius and Staliūnas (eds.), *Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta*, 181–96; V. Vareikis, 'Žydu ir lietuvių susidūrimai bei konfliktai tarpukario Lietuvoje', *ibid.* 157–80.

¹⁹ *Trimitas*, 21 Oct. 1922.

²⁰ Abas, 'Mitingas Kaune dėl brangenybės', *Trimitas*, 14 Oct. 1922. Exhortations to support Lithuanian co-operatives and to allow them certain privileges were reiterated, as an effective way of 'fighting against' the well-established Jewish domination in trade: *Trimitas*, 4 Nov. 1922.

a request of the Sejm of Middle Lithuania (Sejm Litwy Środkowej) to incorporate these areas into Poland. It is true that at the beginning of 1923 the Klaipėda district was incorporated by force into Lithuania, but the final, formal, legal resolution of the status of this district was long-drawn-out. A no less complex situation unfolded in the country's internal political life. Elections to the First Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania were to take place in the autumn of 1922. An electoral battle radicalized the public. As part of the agitation conducted by parties and various political (usually right-wing) organizations, 'national' aspects did slip out into the public space. Voters were urged not to vote for the ethnic minority lists (Polish, Jewish, and Russian), while it was alleged that minority representatives who were not loyal to the Lithuanian state were being elected to parliament.²¹ As a consequence of the outcome of the election, relations grew even more complicated between the ethnic minorities (primarily Jews and Poles) and the right-wing factions (Christian Democrats, the Farmers' Union, and the Labour Federation²²), who essentially won the election and held a fragile majority in parliament. The complication came about because the Polish and Jewish deputies protested over the results. They believed that the principle of proportional representation had not been followed in the interpretation of the electoral law and in the counting of votes.²³ As their complaints were ignored, the Polish and Jewish deputies refused to take part in the activities of parliament, and the Jewish deputies withdrew from the Seimas on 17 November 1922.²⁴ They returned only in March 1923 and joined other Lithuanian leftist

²¹ 'Koks turi būti Lietuvos seimas', *Laisvė*, 11 Oct. 1922; *Trimitas*, 23 Sept. 1922; *Trimitas*, 7 Oct. 1922. Incidentally, just before the elections the Christian Democrat newspaper *Laisvė* ran an article claiming that Germans and Jews did not like Lithuanian money (4 Oct. 1922). It was also noted that Jews had raised the prices of food products, and that the Germans favoured this move. The article was called 'The Struggle with the Forces of Evil', and Jews were undoubtedly considered to be those 'forces of evil'. This was emotionally the strongest example of electoral agitation of an antisemitic nature. The content of the posters being spread in the provinces is not known, nor whether they featured anti-Jewish elements.

²² Respectively, Lietuvių krikščionių demokratų partija, Lietuvos ūkininkų sąjunga, and Lietuvos darbo federacija.

²³ By contrast with the elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1920, when 112 members were chosen, the new electoral law stipulated that seventy-eight members were to be elected to the First Seimas. Jews participated in these elections on three different lists: the Zionists, the Folkspartey, and Agudah. These three Jewish political groups received a total of 55,157 votes, or 6.8% of the total votes for all listed groups. Three Jewish representatives were elected to the Seimas: Leib Garfunkel, Julius Bruckus, and Juozas (Yosel) Berger. It was noted in Jewish political circles that one seat in the Seimas represented 8,971 votes for the Christian Democrats, 7,905 votes for the nationalists, and 6,744 votes for the Social Democrats. For the Jews, however, it took 18,000 votes to account for one seat in the Seimas, and for the Poles—27,000 votes: see Š. Liekis, *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania, 1918–1925* (Vilnius, 2003), 182. Contemporary authors cite somewhat different figures, yet even they depict the disadvantage faced by the ethnic minorities: see Pr. Ysakas, 'Rinkimų teisė Lietuvoje', *Teisė*, 8 (1925), 16.

²⁴ Leib Garfunkel, a member of the Seimas, read out a statement claiming that the electoral law had not been followed, that Jews did not have the number of representatives that they legally could, and that

parties in expressing a vote of no confidence in the government led by Ernestas Galvanauskas. After that, the Seimas was dissolved and elections to the Second Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania were announced.

These political battles, the governmental crisis, and the dissolution of the Seimas were all widely reported in the Lithuanian press. In the right-wing political press, the blame for the prolonged period of political and parliamentary unrest was laid not only on the left, but also on the ethnic minorities, including the Jews.²⁵ These newspapers claimed that Jews were 'furious with everyone' and that Jewish voters were even casting their ballots for Social Democrats and the Bolsheviks. A correspondent from the semi-official Christian Democrat newspaper *Laisvė* exclaimed ironically that 'the state would not be harmed' by the non-participation of Jews and Poles in the work of the Seimas, as their salaries would in that case not need to be paid. It was also claimed that the behaviour of Jews was annoying the Lithuanian public, and could 'result in unfortunate consequences'. In the end, *Laisvė* announced that 'the trumpets of Jericho' would never demolish the Lithuanian state but would only 'hasten the establishment of Lithuanian fascism'.²⁶

The Riflemen's Union played a very important part in encouraging antisemitism in late 1922 and early 1923.²⁷ The organization's weekly *Trimitas* regularly featured articles of an antisemitic nature. Generally speaking, by the end of 1922 this publication had become more and more active and aggressive in its anti-Jewish agitation. It did not hesitate to voice assertions about the Jews' disrespect for the Lithuanian language and their submission to the influence of 'Russification' and to publish claims that a significant proportion of the Jewish community was 'looking to the east'.²⁸ It was said that the Jews were on the offensive, while Lithuanians were forced to defend themselves. One author writing for *Trimitas* claimed that Jews had declared economic war against the Lithuanians, which was why it was necessary to boycott Jewish traders. Another tried to prove that Jews usually acted as enemies of independence. An author calling himself Alf. Pavartonis stated that Lithuanians could never be friendly towards Jews, as Jews feared and respected only physical until the 'injustices were eliminated', the Jewish faction would not participate in Seimas proceedings. After this announcement, laughter was heard in the hall. The left deputies supported the demands of the ethnic minorities. The Social Democrat Steponas Kairys, for example, was sympathetic to the claims of the ethnic minorities and those of Antanas Smetona's National Progress party: the principle of proportionality had not been adhered to, and on the basis of the votes that these groups had received they were under-represented in the Seimas. *Seimo stenogramos*, 1st Seimas, 2nd session, 17 Nov. 1922, p. 3; *ibid.*, 6th session, 1 Dec. 1922, p. 11.

²⁵ 'Kas atsitiko', *Laisvė*, 26 Oct. 1922; 'Mažumos ar didumos', *Laisvė*, 31 Oct. 1922. For more on the election results and the dissolution of the Seimas, see *Laisvė*, 1 Nov. 1922; A. Jakštas, 'Naujasis krašto šeiminkas', *Laisvė*, 16 Nov. 1922; Ged., 'Nelipkit ant sprando', *Laisvė*, 25 Nov. 1922; D.D., 'Žydų balsai', *Laisvė*, 10 Dec. 1922; 'Socialistai paaiškėjo', *Laisvė*, 14 Mar. 1923; Antropos, 'Kovo 9 diena', *Laisvė*, 17 Mar. 1923; 'Kodėl krikščioniškaisi blokas palaikė dabartinį Ministerių kabinetą', *Laisvė*, 21 Mar. 1923; Matas, 'Ką rinkti Seiman', *Laisvė*, 24 Mar. 1923.

²⁶ 'Rinkimu rezultatai', *Laisvė*, 8 Nov. 1922.

²⁷ On the Riflemen's Union, see n. 5 above.

²⁸ A. Vaičiūnas, 'Apie žydus', *Trimitas*, 14 Oct. 1922.

force.²⁹ Jews were thus blamed for the various economic and political problems that had unfolded in Lithuanian society. Doubts grew as to their ‘usefulness’ in the Lithuanian state, and there were calls for Lithuanians to distance themselves from all things Jewish. ‘Our friendly feelings towards Jews are waning’, stated Senas Šaulys (‘Senior Rifleman’, a pseudonym), while Pavartonis openly urged that ‘We must be brave and make it clear that they [Jews] are our enemies, and we must deal with them accordingly, as enemies.’³⁰ However, riflemen were warned to be wary of instigating pogroms, the organizers of which would be treated as traitors. The press mentioned the existence of a ‘Secret Committee to Cleanse Lithuania of Jews’, a reference to a poster displayed in the autumn of 1922 titled ‘Citizens’ that was signed by a committee of that name. It urged the destruction of non-Lithuanian shop signage. It was claimed that this committee was possibly ‘the creation of the Bolsheviks and Polonized Jews’; there might even have been one or another ‘mised’ Lithuanian involved, but ‘the money smelt Jewish’.³¹

Nearly every issue of *Trimitas* in November and December 1922 contained anti-semitic material, culminating in the series of articles titled ‘Jews—Our “Friends”’ that appeared in December, signed by Jokūbas Blažiūnas.³² Throughout the inter-war years, there were probably no articles more antisemitic than these published in the Lithuanian press—they not only had xenophobic and racist overtones, but also were indisputably pathological in nature.³³

It was in this context at the beginning of 1923 that a wave of events swept across Lithuania during which signs written in languages other than Lithuanian (most often Yiddish and Polish) were damaged, besmeared, or vandalized in various other ways, not only in the larger cities (Kaunas, Panevėžys, Šiauliai, Klaipėda) but in smaller towns as well. This sort of vandalism, now waning, now waxing, lasted almost up to 1924. Posters also urged Lithuanians to combat Jewish exploitation and domination, to boycott Jewish businesses, and to avoid any sort of relations with Jews. One announced: ‘The Jews have again drawn their horrible scribbles on their signs, and are even so boastful as to challenge us to conflict . . . We started with signs and windows, and we will finish with the throats of the Jews and their hangers-on.’ This poster was signed (as was usual) in the name of the Lithuanian Fascist Executive Committee.³⁴ The Lithuanian Intelligence Department had information

²⁹ Ad. Noragas, ‘Už ekonominę nepriklausomybę’, *Trimitas*, 14 Oct. 1922; Alf. Pavartonis, ‘Žydų pažinimo klausimu’, *Trimitas*, 28 Oct. 1922.

³⁰ Senas Šaulys, ‘Dar apie žydus’, *Trimitas*, 18 Oct. 1922; Alf. Pavartonis, ‘Žydų pažinimo klausimu’, *Trimitas*, 28 Oct. 1922; see also *Trimitas*, 4 Nov. 1922.

³¹ *Trimitas*, 4 Nov. 1922.

³² *Trimitas*, 2 Dec. 1922; 9 Dec. 1922; 16 Dec. 1922; 23 Dec. 1922.

³³ Thoughts such as the following can have no justification: ‘If the Jews were to leave Kaunas, nothing but a pile of shit would remain’, or ‘this breed is in its final days . . . it is in [a state of] degeneration, it cannot think or rule. Jews are not the same type of people as other nationalities. They have been overcome by an incurable, degenerative disease.’

³⁴ Poster ‘Fellow Countrymen’ (Mar. 1923): Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas, Vilnius (hereafter LCVA), f. 1265, ap. 1, b. 73, fo. 35. Several different versions of the poster were distributed in Lithuania

on the Lithuanian fascists and their activities: a report from the general headquarters of the department states that 'the fascist organization started operating' at the beginning of 1923, and that its centre was in Kaunas, but it also had branches in other Lithuanian cities. The identities of some of the more active members of the executive committee of this fascist body and of some members of the local branches were also known.³⁵ According to the informants of the Intelligence Department, the fascists were organizing meetings, deciding what action to take against Jews, and preparing posters with headings such as 'Fellow Countrymen', 'Be Aware!', 'Once Again', 'Let's Rid Lithuania of the Jews', and 'Lithuanians'. Having started out by creating such posters, the fascists later moved on to vandalize signs and smash windows. Judging by the Intelligence Department report, this was the extent of the Lithuanian fascists' activities. (Incidentally, the Lithuanian press often reported on the events of 1922 in Italy. The right-wing press was, in effect, supportive of the fascist movement in Italy, as were some students and some of the younger generation of the military.)

It thus appears that the government was aware of, or could at least guess at, who was organizing the vandalization of signs and spreading fascist posters. Various exchanges between officials mention that young people (most likely school or university students) and soldiers were taking part in the vandalizing sprees.³⁶ In a note to his superiors in Kaunas, an official of the Šiauliai city and district claimed that approval for the fascists' posters was evident 'among the representatives of the leading political groups'. He added that 'among those spreading the above-mentioned posters are individuals who have participated in patriotic acts such as the liberation of the Klaipėda district'.³⁷ In truth, as far as we are aware, police investigation squads never identified the actual perpetrators of the acts of destructiveness or the authors of the posters—perhaps because they never really wanted to find out who was responsible, especially since among the suspects there might have been members of the military or individuals recognized for their 'patriotic acts'.

However, we should not believe that the government took no action against the vandals or fascists. The central government did put pressure on local officials to take

at the time, but all were signed in the same way: 'Lithuanian Fascist Executive Committee' (Lietuvos fašistų vykdomasis komitetas). See LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 7247, fos. 42 and 47.

³⁵ According to the intelligence data, the more active members of the fascist executive committee in Kaunas were Baikutėnas, deputy editor of the newspaper *Darbininkas*; P. Butėnas, a student; J. Vareikis, head of the Jonava Riflemen's Union squad; and Gerulis, a National Audit Office inspector. Among the members of other local branches there were school-age students, civil servants, and priests (as in Ukmergė, for example). See 'Fascists', a review prepared by the reconnaissance department of the General Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, undated [Sept. 1923]: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 7247, fos. 3–4; I thank my colleague Gediminas Rudys for this reference.

³⁶ Note from the Panevėžys district governor, 22 Nov. 1923: LCVA, f. 404, ap. 1, b. 141, fo. 46. See also Truska and Vareikis, *Holokausto prielaidos*, 47.

³⁷ Note from the Šiauliai district governor to the Ministry of the Interior, undated [Mar. 1923]: LCVA, f. 412, ap. 5, b. 262, fo. 4.

'strict measures' against the offenders. Posters were confiscated and destroyed, their disseminators threatened with prosecution, and locals warned to keep the peace. In fact, Karolis Žalkauskas, the Minister of the Interior, issued a new order in the autumn of 1923 that was sent out to all district governors. One of its articles dealt with those who damaged signs, stating: 'Of late there have been many acts of vandalism of signs written in languages other than Lithuanian. Such vandalizing of signs is the greatest expression of a lack of culture, which discredits our state's position abroad and leads one sector of the population into provoking another.'³⁸ Hence, the order urged city and district governors to take 'strict measures against similar outbreaks'. The exact nature of these measures was not specified, and it appears that the choice was left in the hands of the officers themselves. Stricter means of combating various types of 'antisemitic propaganda' were also prescribed.³⁹

In the end, on 7 July 1924 the Minister of the Interior promulgated a law stipulating that all signs and posters in public places could be written only in Lithuanian. Signs in other languages could be displayed only in closed spaces ('courtyards without an exit into the street' and within buildings). Those who violated the law were threatened with substantial fines or arrest.⁴⁰ During the same summer, a 'patriotic' Christian Democrat government was formed, which finally laid to rest any ideas of Jewish national autonomy. After this, the wave of antisemitism subsided.

A second wave of antisemitism started in the early 1930s, gaining momentum and intensity in 1938–9. Its beginnings can be traced to the foundation in 1930 of the Union of Lithuanian Tradesmen, Industrialists, and Craftsmen (*Lietuvių prekybininkų, pramonininkų ir amatininkų sąjunga*, often called simply the Lithuanian Businessmen's Union). The publicly declared aim of the organization was to protect Lithuanian producers and liberate them from 'the slavery imposed by alien merchants',⁴¹ and only Lithuanians could join it. It published a newspaper called *Veršlas* ('Business'), which often contained antisemitic articles. Jews were usually depicted as obstructing Lithuanian enterprises and modernization in Lithuania in general. The government was urged to support Lithuanian business more actively, while the public was encouraged to boycott Jewish traders.

Other antisemitic publications also emphasized the necessity of an economic war against Jews; among those that appeared from the early 1930s were *Tėvų žemė* ('Land of our Fathers'), *Tautos balsas* ('Voice of the People'), and *Tautos žodis* ('Word of the People'). In its leading article on 15 April 1933, *Tautos žodis* urged readers to join the struggle against all foreigners—that is, all national minorities—

³⁸ Order no. 3041 of the Minister of the Interior, transcript, 20 Sept. 1923 (?): LCVA, f. 1265, ap. 1, b. 57, fo. 18.

³⁹ Note from the Civil Security Department of the Ministry of the Interior to the Šiauliai city and district governor, secret, 17 Mar. 1923: LCVA, f. 412, ap. 5, b. 262, fo. 5.

⁴⁰ The law also banned 'damage' to signs written in languages other than the state language: Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 84. See also the order of the Panevėžys district governor, 14 July 1924: LCVA, f. 404, ap. 1, b. 148, fo. 71.

⁴¹ Truska and Vareikis, *Holokausto prielaidos*, 54.

and especially Jews 'as the greatest economic exploiters of Lithuanians'.⁴² It was precisely in such newspapers that the idea was raised in 1933 of creating an 'antise-mitic union' whose purpose would be to combat Jewish hegemony in Lithuanian society. Usually only a few issues of this type of newspaper would be published before they were closed at the behest of the military commanders, or they would simply 'die out', often because of their publishers' financial problems. Little was made known about who the publishers were, but judging by information collected during official investigations, the publishers of *Tautos žodis* seem to have been a few students and an unemployed individual (a former teacher and policeman), who produced the newspaper with their own funds. They were not found to have ties with organizations from abroad, and it was also stated that 'No ideas from abroad have influenced this newspaper'.⁴³ The circulation of such papers is also not known. It is quite likely that the police were more aware of their existence than was the wider public. This type of press differed from the 'serious' newspaper *Verslas*.⁴⁴

There were also outbreaks of violence, yet these were rare and isolated in the earlier part of the inter-war period, becoming systematic only in the late 1930s. The events of the summer of 1929 in Kaunas are quite comprehensively described in Lithuanian historiography. At the beginning of August, communists organized a demonstration in which many workers from the city's businesses participated, including Jews. During the demonstration, several altercations occurred between Lithuanian and Jewish workers. According to historians, members of the Iron Wolf organization (*Geležinis vilkas*), who also belonged to the Vilijampolė squad of the Riflemen's Union, decided to 'teach the Jewish communists' a lesson. They checked the documents of people passing by and beat up those that they found to be Jewish (though during later interrogation, the Riflemen's Union denied that its members had taken part in this event). Criminal proceedings were taken against the rioters, and in 1932 several of them were sentenced to terms in prison, among them a policeman.⁴⁵

Expressions of antisemitism in public spaces were, however, generally criticized and denounced by the highest government officials. This was especially true of the republic's president, the authoritarian state leader and 'commander of the nation' Antanas Smetona.⁴⁶ Nor was it only words and proclamations that were used in the

⁴² 'Mūsų veikimo tikslas, pagrindas ir priemonės', *Tautos žodis*, 15 Apr. 1933, p. 1.

⁴³ Publication of *Tautos žodis* was halted 'for the entire period of the state of war' by order of the Kaunas city and district commandant. During a search of the publishers' premises, the police found numerous antisemitic manuscripts and a copy of *Der Weltkampf*, a newspaper about the 'Jewish question' published in Munich. The material collected during the investigation was sent to the Kaunas district court, but there is no further information about the outcome. For more on the publishers of *Tautos žodis*—Antanas Išganaitis, Stasys Kriaučiūnas, and Martynas Vabuolas—see LCVA, f. 378, ap. 3, b. 2528, fos. 6–7.

⁴⁴ The circulation of *Verslas* in the mid-1930s was approximately 10,000 copies.

⁴⁵ Lithuanian scholarship provides no data on the number of people who were injured during the incident: Truska and Vareikis, *Holokausto prielaidos*, 53; Vareikis, 'Žydų ir lietuvių susidūrimai bei konfliktai tarpukario Lietuvoje', 170–1.

⁴⁶ Smetona was criticized by right-wing radicals (usually followers of the former prime minister Augustinas Voldemaras) for pandering to Jews, and was dubbed 'king of the Jews': Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai*, 296–305.

war against the expression of antisemitism: in accordance with a law proclaimed in 1931, military commanders could fine or even imprison individuals who were found to be setting one nationality against another. The Minister of Defence in 1936 once again obliged district commanders to defend national minorities, including Jews, and to initiate criminal proceedings when a minority group came under ‘organized attack’ and its property was being destroyed.⁴⁷ Jews themselves tried to relax inter-ethnic tensions. The Union of Jewish Soldiers (*Žydų karių sąjunga*) commenced publication of the newspaper *Apžvalga* (‘Review’) in 1933. Its aim was to familiarize Lithuanians with Jewish culture and to show them that Jewish businesspeople were loyal and were working for the Lithuanian good. However, these ideas encountered opposition, and *Apžvalga* often entered into debates with *Verslas*, which only served to increase the anger of the Lithuanian radical right. In 1938, when antagonism to Jews was strengthening, the director of the Lithuanian State Security Department suggested that the Minister of the Interior close down *Apžvalga*, as the paper’s ‘defiant tone against Lithuanians is raising even greater animosity in Lithuanian society towards Lithuania’s Jews and is a clear cause of the growth of antisemitism in the country’. Closing down the newspaper would help to ‘calm society vis-à-vis Jews’. However, the minister ignored the official’s suggestion.⁴⁸

Indeed, the attitudes of the leadership, state bureaucracy, and especially lower-ranking officials towards expressions of antisemitism were rather inconsistent. (It is interesting to note that for several years the editor of *Verslas* was an official in the Ministry of Finance.) It is not a simple matter to identify the general attitude of the leadership towards the Jews, but probably it did not differ much from the opinions prevailing in society. The State Security Department reported in 1939 that animosity towards Jews was being expressed not only by farmers and labourers, but also by officials. It was doubtful whether administrative or repressive measures could affect such attitudes, so the report suggested that Lithuanian businesses should be supported by the handing over of state contracts to them. ‘The state has nothing to gain from Jews’ was the author’s closing remark.⁴⁹ It could be said that, in general, the Lithuanian business class did receive support from the state bureaucracy and officials, though the more radical demands made by Lithuanian businessmen that clearly impinged on Jews’ rights were usually ignored by the government.⁵⁰

At the end of the 1930s antagonism towards Jews in Lithuania became even more intense and was expressed in additional ways. For one thing, there were louder calls

⁴⁷ Military commanders not only banned the publication of antisemitic newspapers and brochures, but also punished their editors and authors. In 1938–9 several issues of *Verslas* were also confiscated, and participants in various anti-Jewish activities were also arrested and fined. Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 101–5.

⁴⁸ Truska and Vareikis, *Holokausto pridelaidos*, 55.

⁴⁹ State Security Department Bulletin, 1939: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 5, b. 4421, t. 2, fos. 516–18.

⁵⁰ In 1939 the Palanga city council banned the ritual slaughter of animals (as requested by Lithuanian businessmen), but the district governor overruled it: Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 98.

for discrimination against Jews, as in Poland and Germany. The government was pressed more and more often to pass laws that would limit Jews' rights, for example by requiring them to obtain permission to purchase real estate, especially in 1939 when Jews from Klaipėda started relocating to 'Lithuania major'. In 1939 students from Vytautas Magnus University demanded separate seating for Jews, as had been implemented in Poland, though this demand and others like it were never implemented. Antisemitic posters were disseminated throughout Lithuanian cities, urging Lithuanians not only to stop 'bearing the Jewish yoke' and being economically exploited, or to boycott Jewish traders, but also to drive Jews out of the cities as mere 'transient residents'. Handwritten posters were displayed in Skuodas that urged people to oppose the exploitation at the hands of the Jews that had become established in all towns. Police in the village of Skaudvilė in the Tauragė district discovered a notice attached to a telegraph pole that said: 'Jewish Arabs—out of Skaudvilė to Palestine to tread dirt.' There were other posters bearing similar proclamations, usually handwritten and distributed only locally. According to Security Department and police data, these were usually the work of senior gymnasium students. In one way or another, all these occurrences were evidence of a radicalization and intensification of opposition to Jews by at least a certain part of Lithuanian society.

From approximately the mid-1930s and especially in 1938–9 the State Security Department and the police recorded ever more cases of violence committed against Jews. In January 1936 in Varniai, on market day, some Jews were attacked, several were beaten, and the windows of several houses were smashed; the warden of the Užventis precinct was also a casualty. A group of soldiers was called in to restore order. It appears that the pretext for this outbreak of violence was a rumour that Jews had kidnapped a child.⁵¹ Further aggression was displayed in later years, and Security Department records from 1938 contain numerous accounts of violent incidents between farmers and Jews in towns and villages. Often the pretext for such outbursts was the belief that Jews were using Christian blood. During the altercations, property would be destroyed and the windows of Jewish houses, schools, and synagogues would be smashed.⁵²

These excesses and pogroms require a deeper analysis, however, as the antagonism directed towards Jews was determined not only by the traditional belief that Jews kidnapped children and used Christian blood. Other circumstances were also significant, for example the weakening of the government's authority and a decline in the public's trust of it, particularly after Poland's ultimatum to Lithuania in 1938, and in the spring of 1939 when Lithuania gave in to pressure from Germany and surrendered the Klaipėda district. In conflicts between Lithuanians and Jews during

⁵¹ The police demanded that seven individuals receive punishment for the unrest in Varniai. All seven were to be dealt with according to set administrative procedures, and their case was handed over to the Telšiai commandant, who was to decide on the punishment; exactly what it was remains unknown. State Security Department Bulletins no. 4 (7 Jan. 1936); no. 10 (9 Jan. 1936); no. 12 (10 Jan. 1936): LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 88a, t. 1, fos. 16, 41–2, 49.

⁵² Truska and Vareikis, *Holokausto prielaidos*, 60.

this period, in some cases amounting to pogroms, the local governing bodies were increasingly condemned for their identification with Jews and were seen as their defenders.⁵³ Various economic and social conditions and hardships added to the radicalization of the public. A broader analysis of pogroms in Liepalingis and Kretinga shows that the violence was provoked by a whole complex of factors. Yet it must be noted that during all the excesses and pogroms mentioned above, no fatalities were recorded.⁵⁴

The Lithuanian security and police bodies recorded several cases in 1939 that confirm that attempts to spread antisemitic attitudes, and perhaps even incite pogroms, originated in part in National Socialist Germany. Despite the fragmentary nature of the data, it nevertheless permits the supposition that it was in the German government's interests to stir up ethnic tensions between Lithuanians and Jews; this is true first and foremost of the regions bordering East Prussia. Of course, we cannot say with certainty whether this policy was simply the initiative of the local governing bodies (separate secret services), or whether it was initiated from the 'centre'. At a fair in the town of Naumiestis in the Tauragė district in May 1939, a quarrel arose between German and Jewish traders which escalated into a brawl in which windows were smashed, including those of the synagogue. The crowd was calmed only when soldiers stepped in. They arrested a man who was taking photographs of the homes of Jews damaged during the pogrom. After his interrogation it came to light that he was a Gestapo officer.⁵⁵

One feature of the radicalization of Lithuanian society was an increasingly stronger tendency to associate Jews with the communist movement. The first signs of this identification with communists (who were, along with Poles, considered the greatest enemies of the state) were evident even before the coup of 1926, during the preceding parliamentary elections.⁵⁶ In these elections, legal Lithuanian left-wing

⁵³ Police in Kelmė who attempted to apprehend individuals suspected of beating up Jews not only received no help from other inhabitants of the town, but were 'sworn at' and dubbed 'Jew boys'. According to the officers, this happened because 'Generally speaking, the opposition to Jews in Kelmė is growing'. State Security Department and Criminal Police Bulletin: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 5, b. 4421, t. 2, fo. 483.

⁵⁴ A good analysis of the pogrom in the village of Liepalingis has been carried out by Mačiulis, 'Žvilgsnis į vieno pogromo anatomiją tarpukario Lietuvoje'. He claims that the local Riflemen's Union squad leader played a major role in the escalation of the conflict. During the pogrom, Jews' property was damaged, but no people were killed.

⁵⁵ Seventeen people were arrested in connection with these events, including Lithuanians and Germans. State Security Department and Criminal Police Bulletin no. 78 (3 May 1939): LCVA, f. 378, ap. 5, b. 4421, t. 1, fo. 366. There is further information that serves as evidence that antagonism between Lithuanians and Jews may have been encouraged by German official bodies. Temporary labourers from Lithuania working in the Klaipėda district testified to the security police that 'some of them were being sent to Lithuania for the purpose of agitating the population against Jews. In Kretinga, German and Lithuanian labourers (who were temporarily working in Klaipėda) spread rumours about Jews and distributed posters which read "if you care about the future, beat up the Jews"': *ibid.*, fos. 203, 205.

⁵⁶ V. Sirutavičius, 'Rinkimai į Steigiamąjį Seimą: aktyvumo problema', *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, 2008, no. 2, pp. 80–2.

parties were often associated with Jews in the public space, and their members were called 'Jew boys'. In the 1930s the communist Jewish stereotype became more entrenched, and negative perceptions were extended to the entire Jewish community without differentiation and without any deeper awareness of the political streams or trends within it.⁵⁷

It appears that this mindset identifying Jews and communists was typical of many layers of Lithuanian society. Sometimes it was declared openly, but at other times it was more covert. Having already recorded an increase in the intensity of antisemitism in the country in the mid-1930s, the Lithuanian State Security Department concluded that, in seeking to resist outbreaks of antisemitism, Jews would 'most likely rally alongside the communists, who disregard differences of both nationality and faith'. So that Jews would not increase the numbers and the influence of the Lithuanian Communist Party, it was recommended that their emigration be encouraged and supported, except to the Soviet Union.⁵⁸ In other words, Jews, who resided primarily in the towns and villages, were believed to make up a significant part of the Lithuanian Communist Party. The repressive structures accordingly saw the communist movement as disproportionately Jewish, often ignoring the fact that Jewish communists made up only a very small part of all Jews living in Lithuania.⁵⁹ Besides, the proportion of Lithuanians in the Lithuanian Communist Party grew in the late 1930s, so that by 1939 the proportion of Jews in the membership had reduced to about 32 per cent.⁶⁰

It can thus be said that expressions of antisemitism in the late 1930s in Lithuania were characterized by the interweaving of various, often contradictory, elements:

⁵⁷ The stereotype is well exemplified in the book *Komunizmas Lietuvoje* ('Communism in Lithuania') by the priest Stasys Yla, published in 1937. The author argues that communist ideas are close to Jews' hearts, claiming that this is why it is said that communism protects Jews, the aim of both being control of the world.

⁵⁸ At the same time it should not be overlooked that both the police and security organs stated that Jewish organizations and their activities did not pose a threat to the country's safety, and that in their activities they were loyal to Lithuania: A. Eidintas, *Žydai, lietuviai ir Holokaustas* (Vilnius, 2002), 117; see also State Security Department Bulletin, 12 Oct. 1936: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 88a, t. 2, fos. 310–11.

⁵⁹ According to data from the Security Department, greater efforts by the Lithuanian Communist Party to boost the number of non-Jewish members, in the hope of increasing its popularity and influence, were noticeable from the mid-1930s.

⁶⁰ According to State Security Department statistics, at the end of 1939 the Lithuanian Communist Party had about 1,120 members, of which 670 (60%) were Lithuanians and 364 (32%) were Jews. At the same time 280 people were under arrest for 'communist activities'; the majority of them were members of the Lithuanian Communist Party, and almost half of them were Jews. The proportion of Jewish members in the party was at its greatest in 1932, when they made up almost 54% of all members. See Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje*, 132; N. Maslauskienė, 'Lietuvos komunistų tautinė ir socialinė sudėtis 1939 m. pabaigoje–1940 m. rugsėjo mėn.', *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 5 (1999), 84, 87–8; Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio*, 129–30. At the same time, we must remember that Jews were active not only in the party itself, but also in various other pro-communist organizations. In 1939, for instance, out of 234 activists in the International Organization for Aid to Revolutionaries (Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya pomoshchi bortsam revolyutsii), 141 were Jews. Jews also dominated the Lithuanian Komsomol organization.

Jews were accused of not being loyal to the state, they were said to be aligned with the communist movement, they were reproached for dominating the economic sphere, and they were considered to be of no social or economic benefit to Lithuanian society. Their safety, in effect, depended more and more on the stability of the regime. One might have thought that the relatively moderate authoritarian regime of Antanas Smetona would have tried to suppress ethnic tensions and stand up against outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence. Yet we should also note that the implementation of such policies usually depended as much on the competence of local governing bodies as on their sympathy with or antipathy towards Jews. That is why policies designed to reduce ethnic tensions were not always successful and anti-semitism in Lithuanian society at the end of the 1930s continued to grow. Moreover, the most important conclusion should be that it was precisely the destabilization of the regime and its sudden downfall, and the ensuing radical socio-political transformation of the public, that—alongside the policies of the Nazis—eventually brought Lithuania's Jews to the tragic events of 1941.

Translated from the Lithuanian by Albina Strunga