

## DEPORTATIONS FROM LITHUANIA UNDER STALIN. 1940-1953\*

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The forced deportation of people of various nationalities to the interior of the Soviet Union was an important aspect of mid-twentieth-century European history which as yet has not been studied adequately. This paper attempts to fill the gap by drawing attention to recent scholarship on this tragic and sensitive topic in Lithuania. It does not cover voluntary migrations, such as those which occurred before and immediately after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, when many people fled from fear of Nazi occupation, or those that took place after the war, when masses of people had to flee in order to avoid famine and drought.

As is well known, the Baltic states were incorporated into the USSR in 1940. Deportations from Lithuania began in June of that year, when the Soviet army occupied the country after its forcible annexation. In 1940-41 the population's traditional mode of life came under threat as Lithuania, along with the other Baltic states, was brutally Sovietized and the Stalinist form of socialism imposed on the political and economic order as well as in social and cultural life. The mass deportations of Lithuanian inhabitants resulted from a deliberate policy adopted by the leaders of the Soviet Communist Party and government. They were carried out largely by internal security troops under the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs). Deportations took place not only from the Baltic states but also from Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and Moldova. The Lithuanian SSR had its own branch of the NKVD, which on March 8, 1941, was divided into two agencies: state security (NKGB) and internal affairs (NKVD), both of which were charged with the task of spying on, registering and arresting 'anti-Soviet', 'counter-revolutionary' and

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‘criminal elements’. Following instructions received from the USSR NKVD in Moscow, the Lithuanian NKVD started to register, in readiness for arrest, people in the following categories:

1) former state officials of independent Lithuania, such as directors of departments, prosecutors, court and police officials, owners of large enterprises, tradesmen and farmers;

2) ‘Lithuanian nationalist counter-revolutionaries’, i.e., leaders and active members of political parties, social and youth organizations, editors of newspapers and magazines, as well as activists of national minority organizations: Poles, Jews, Belorussians, Ukrainians and Russians (‘White’ émigrés);

3) officers of the Lithuanian and Polish armies, persons repatriated from Germany, Germans who intended to leave for their homeland, refugees from Poland, etc.

The lists compiled of so-called criminal and anti-Soviet elements also included producers and purchasers of weapons, seals and documents, embezzlers, profiteers etc. Thus, the Lithuanian repressive organs drew up in advance lists of people earmarked for deportation from Lithuania and confinement in prisons or GULAG camps in interior regions of the USSR.

On May 16, 1941, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and the USSR Council of People’s Commissars passed a secret resolution ‘On the eviction of socially alien elements from the Baltic republics, Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and Moldova’.<sup>1</sup> The USSR NKGB and NKVD were charged with putting this resolution into effect by setting up operational staffs at the central, regional and city level, whose members were drawn largely from the local NKGB and NKVD. It was their job to calculate the number of railway wagons and trucks necessary, to determine where they should be distributed and to fix the number of soldiers needed to convoy the deportees. On May 23, 1941, the Central Committee Bureau of the Lithuanian CP(b) passed a resolution ‘On the arrest and eviction from Lithuania of counter-revolutionary and socially dangerous elements’, which approved the plan drawn up by the operational staff and worked out concrete measures for implementing it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Šadžius. Didysis tautos trėmimas. Nauji dokumentai apie 1941 m. Birželio 14-18 d. Trėmimus. *Gimtas kraštas*, 1990, Oct. 4-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940-1941, 1944-1953 metais sovietinės okupacinės valdžios dokumentuose*. Sudarė: E. Grunskis, V. Kašauskienė, H. Šadžius, Vilnius, 1995, 159-160.

In the '40s and early '50s the forced deportation and imprisonment of large numbers of Lithuanians were of vital importance for the Soviet state, which derived three main advantages. First, repressive measures enabled the local authorities to get rid of actual or potential antagonists of Soviet power, so-called 'enemies of the people', and their families including women, the elderly and under-age children. Secondly, the government sought to change the composition of the Lithuanian population, to make it less ethnically homogeneous. The permanent residents, most of whom were Lithuanian by nationality, were forcibly transferred to the Asiatic part of the USSR, while tens of thousands of people, mostly Russians, from the eastern regions of the USSR came to live in Lithuania, where they served as Communist Party and Soviet functionaries, army officers and officials of the repressive organs. They formed the main bulwark of the Soviet regime in Lithuania. Thirdly, unpaid labour by exiles ('special settlers') and prisoners in camps was profitable for the state. The poorly developed Soviet economy, managed by an incompetent bureaucracy, was always short of labour. This was especially true in remote sparsely populated regions such as Siberia, the Far East and Far North. Forced labour by deportees was very important in developing resources in distant parts of the USSR and fulfilling the Five-year plans.

As is now known, the deportations from the annexed western territories of the USSR were planned long in advance. Directives about deporting people from these territories were signed in Moscow as early as the end of 1939.<sup>3</sup> The first mass deportations from Lithuania took place on June 14-17, 1941. By a decision of the Soviet government, 17,485 people were deported from Lithuania on these four days.<sup>4</sup> Their social and political profile is reflected in following table.

*Table 1*

Social Composition of Lithuanians Deported on June 14-17, 1941 (according to the classification of the USSR NKGB and NKVD)

	Social group	Number	%
1.	Leaders and activists of former parties and social organizations of the Republic of Lithuania and their family members	7,153	40.9

<sup>3</sup> V. S. Parsadanova. *Deportatsiia naseleniia iz Zapadnoi Ukrainy i Zapadnoi Belorussii v 1939-1941 gg. Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, nr. 2 / 1989, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, 202.

Cont.

	Social group	Number	%
2.	Farmers, businessmen, (high) senior state officials and their family members	4,075	23.3
3.	Officials of the state security and police of the Republic of Lithuania and their family members	2,081	11.9
4.	Refugees from Poland	1,767	10.1
5.	Former officers of the Lithuanian, Polish and other armies and their family members	325	1.9
6.	Persons repatriated from Germany and Germans who did not have time to depart to Germany, and their family members	195	1.1
7.	Family members of persons sentenced to death	116	0.7
	Total (according to data of NKGB)	15,712	
	Total (according to data of NKVD)	1,773	10.1
	Total	17,485	100

Source: *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940-1941, 1944-1953 metais sovietinės okupacinės valdžios dokumentuose*, p. 199-200.

3,649 men were separated from their families.<sup>5</sup> The men were sent to camps and convicted there. Women with children and elderly parents were deported to the Komi ASSR, Altai and Novosibirsk territories. Women living in misery and children bereaved of their parents looked in vain for support from the Soviet authorities. They wrote letters to the government in Moscow asking for information about their husbands and permission to rejoin them, or else pleaded for aid to save the life of their children who were dying of starvation. But their cries for help went unheard.

An especially hard ordeal fell to some deportees in the Altai region, to which about 7,500 Lithuanians were deported in 1941.<sup>6</sup> In the summer of 1942 the Soviet authorities decided that some 3,000 exiles should be sent from Altai to the Yakut Republic, where they worked as fishermen on islands in the Laptev Sea, north of the Arctic circle.<sup>7</sup> Living conditions for the exiles, most of whom were women with children, were unbearable, and they

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 611.

These figures exclude those arrested and deported before June 14, 1941. Arvydas Anušauskas points out that the total number of people deported from Lithuania to remote regions of the USSR before the war was 2200: A. Anušauskas. *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas 1940-1958 metais*. Vilnius, 1996, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>7</sup> H. Šadžius. Didysis tautos trėmimas. *Gimtas kraštas*, 1990, Dec. 6-12.

had to fulfil high work norms. On these deserted islands they had to build 'ice dugouts' for themselves, fulfil the plans for fish output, and endure the pain and helplessness of separation and exile.

When the Soviet authorities returned to Lithuania in 1944, planning started immediately for a new wave of deportations. The first victims were German families resident in Lithuania. According to an order of February 7, 1945, issued by the deputy minister of the USSR NKVD, people of German nationality were to be deported to the Komi ASSR and employed in felling timber. Later it was decided that it would be better to use these industrious Germans in agricultural work at Kuibyshevskii settlement in the Tadzhik SSR. A train with Lithuanian Germans left for that Central Asian republic on May 3, 1945. At this time 261 German families were deported from Lithuania: 219 men, 372 women and 263 children.<sup>8</sup> Most of them could not get accustomed to the extreme climate and the exhausting work in the cotton fields.

As before the war, the Soviet government made plans in advance to banish Lithuanian people from their homeland. It co-ordinated efforts by the central and republican ministries and departments to employ exiles in places where cheap manpower was most needed. In official documents, the exiles were termed 'anti-Soviet', 'socially dangerous', 'enemies of the people', 'nationalists', 'bandits' or 'bandits' helpers', 'kulaks' or 'counter-revolutionaries'. In reality these terms embraced the flower of the Lithuanian nation. Those deported included people of different social status: officials, office-workers, wealthy tradesmen and poor artisans, farmers and workers, politically active persons and professionals (teachers, priests, doctors, etc.). Likewise the haul extended to sick and elderly dependants of the deportees and their children. People of Jewish and Polish as well as Lithuanian extraction were exiled.

The first post-war deportations started early in 1945 and continued with interruptions until the autumn of 1953. In 1945 there were eight operations (including the Germans already mentioned), during which about 5,600 people were deported from Lithuania.<sup>9</sup> In 1946 there was only one deportation, on February

<sup>8</sup> E. Grunskis. Pokario trėmimų Lietuvoje pradžia (1945-1947). *Metai*, nr. 9, 1991, 129.

<sup>9</sup> *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, 611.

The historian Eugenius Grunskis puts the number at about 7000: E. Grunskis. *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940-1941, 1945-1953 metais*. Vilnius, 1996, 277.

18-21. In later years, as Sovietization of the country was speeded up, those taken included the families of freedom fighters as well as those of large farm owners.

The greatest deportation in Lithuanian history was carried out on May 22-27, 1948. Opinions vary as to the number of people deported from the country during this operation. According to a summary report of the NKGB of the Lithuanian SSR dated May 12, 1988, 39,482 persons (about 11,233 families) were removed.<sup>10</sup> This figure is not completely accurate, for Eugenijus Grunskis' analysis of the relevant reports from former districts and towns, stored in the archive of the ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, shows that the actual number of deported families was 11,365, comprising 40,002 individuals.<sup>11</sup>

These people were banished in conformity with resolutions passed by the USSR Council of Ministers (February 21), the Central Committee of the LCP(b) and the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR (May 18). Orders were also confirmed as to the confiscation of their property. The operation was prepared in secret, using the code-word *Vesna* (Spring). Nevertheless, the imminence of the deportations could be guessed from the presence of empty goods wagons in railway stations, the concentration of trucks at district centres, and extra military units. Besides, officials in district branches of the MGB leaked information, so that some people whose names were on the lists received advance warning. About 1,200 families and individuals absconded,<sup>12</sup> but the officials in charge of the operation replaced them with 'reserve' or newly chosen families that had not been included on the lists. Over 23,200 civilians and servicemen were involved in the deportation of 1948;<sup>13</sup> 2,000 active Party and Soviet workers were sent by the LCP(b) Central Committee.<sup>14</sup>

By June 14, 1948, all the trains with deportees from Lithuania had reached their destinations: 23,734 people were sent to Krasnoïarsk region, 11,644 to Irkutsk district, and 4,014

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. ...

<sup>11</sup> E. Grunskis. *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940-1941, 1944-1953 metais*. Vilnius, 1996, 194.

<sup>12</sup> V. Kašauskienė. Didžiausias Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimas (1948 m. gegužės 22-27 d.). *Lituanistica*, nr. 4 (16), 1993, 41.

<sup>13</sup> E. Grunskis. *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> V. Kašauskienė. Didžiausias Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimas, 40.

to the Buriat Mongol ASSR.<sup>15</sup> However, not all those deported reached their assigned places of exile. Documents of the USSR MVD contain evidence about death and disease among the deportees. On the other hand, some people managed to escape or stray from the trains. For example, an echelon of deportees from Lithuania (May 24, 1948) to the Krasnoiarsk region had a railway accident at Iamatov station, Kuibyshev on June 1 in which 19 persons were killed and 57 injured; most of the latter were left behind at the local hospital.<sup>16</sup>

The second largest transportation of deportees from Lithuania occurred on March 25-28, 1949. According to a resolution signed by Stalin on February 29, 1949, tens of thousands of people were to be deported simultaneously from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Referred to derogatorily as 'kulaks', these peasants and farm workers were to be banished for life to Siberia: to the Iakut ASSR, the Krasnoiarsk and Khabarovsk regions, and the districts of Omsk, Tomsk, Novosibirsk and Irkutsk. According to incomplete data, 9,199 men, 11,736 women and 8,245 children under fifteen were deported from Lithuania at that time.<sup>17</sup> The military code-name for this operation was *Priboi* (Surf). No less than 13,777 people managed to avoid deportation by going into hiding.<sup>18</sup>

The third episode of post-war mass deportations from Lithuania took place in October 1951. By a resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers dated September 5, 1951, 4,000 families were to be deported from Lithuania because, in the Soviet authorities' view, they were obstructing the formation of collective farms.<sup>19</sup> The resolution was duly endorsed by the LCP(b) Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR. The October 1951 deportation bore the code-name *Osen* (Autumn). The total number of deportees in that

<sup>15</sup> *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*. 421. According to the Russian historian V. N. Zemskov, on 1 January 1949, 46,940 'special settlers' were registered by the Soviet authorities as having been deported from the Lithuanian SSR between 1945 and 1948. His figures for their distribution are comparable: Krasnoiarsk region 23,233, Irkutsk district 11,383, Buriat Mongolia 3,987; the rest were in other parts of Siberia, the Urals or the Komi ASSR. *Prinuditel'nye migratsii iz Pribaltiki v 1940-1950-kh gg.*, *Otechestvennyye arkhivy*, nr. 1/1993, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 413-414.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 534.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 571-572.

year came to 20,357 individuals.<sup>20</sup> Among them were the families of soldiers who had served in the Polish army of General W. Anders and followers of the Jehovah's Witness sect.

There were cases when members of the anti-Soviet underground, called 'forest brothers', tried to save people from deportation by warning them in advance or even firing at officials in charge. However, this was a fight against heavy odds. If caught, they were as a rule shot. In 1947 family members of these fighters for Lithuania's independence and also of people who helped them were deported in their turn. Of all population groups in Lithuania, farmers suffered the heaviest losses.

During the five deportations of 1952, 526 families (2,934 individuals) were exiled.<sup>21</sup> The last forced removal of people took place in 1953 when family members of those deported earlier, minors and elderly persons who had escaped from exile were rounded up. During the pre-war and post-war years (1940-41, 1945-53) the Soviet authorities ordered 35 separate actions, involving the deportation from Lithuania of between 125,500 and 130,000 people.<sup>22</sup>

*Table 2*  
Chronological Sequence of Deportations from Lithuania

Date of deportation	Number of deportees	Number of families deported
1941 (June 14)	17,485	7,439
1945 (April 24-May 2, July 17-September 3)	5,479	1,504
1946 (February 18-21)	2,082	501
1947-1948 (December 22-March 28)	3,938	1,027
1948 (May 22-27)	39,482	11,233
1949 (March 25-28, April 11-May 3)	32,735	9,633
1950 (August 31-October 1)	1,355	360
1951 (September 20-21, October 2-3, November 3)	20,357	5,139
1952 (January 23, August 5, November 29)	2,934	526
1953 (February 26, April 12, September 12)	100	...
Total	125,947	37,362

Source: *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, p. 610-612; E. Grunskis. *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, p. 50, 63, 68, 72, 118, 134; V. Kašauskienė. *Neprokhodiashchaia bol naroda. Zavtra po vsei Litve otmechaetsia Den Traura i Nadezhdy. Sovetskaia Litva*, 13 June 1989.

<sup>20</sup> E. Grunskis. *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, 280.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.



These data are, unfortunately, not final since the files on some families and individuals deported are still closed. It is thought that further information is held in the archive of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The 'newcomers' were settled in the remotest and least developed territories of the Soviet Union and given jobs in wood processing, chemical plants, mines, or collective and state farms. Irrespective of their educational and professional background, all deportees had to perform hard physical labour. They were sentenced to terms of 10 to 20 years, or even for life. Referred to officially as 'special settlers', they had no right to leave their assigned area of residence and had to report regularly at the headquarters of the local NKVD-MVD commandant. For disobedience settlers were imprisoned or sent to camps in the GULAG. As we have noted, deportees' property was usually confiscated. According to formal instructions each family deported had the right to take with it up to 1,000 or 1,500 kilograms of food, clothing and household articles, but these regulations were not always kept to.

Only after Stalin's death in March 1953 was the prohibition on deportees working according to their speciality mitigated. Living conditions were slightly improved and various restrictions eased. In 1954 the children of deportees were allowed to return to Lithuania, and the next year this privilege was extended to large families. In 1956-57, a mass repatriation of deportees to Lithuania got underway. However, the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party and government were afraid that returning deportees would exercise a negative ideological influence on the rest of the population. For this reason returnees faced enormous obstacles in re-establishing themselves in their native land. The problems of restituting deportees' property were not solved until the restoration of Lithuanian independence on March 11, 1990. On November 5, 1956, the Central Committee of the LCP passed a decision forbidding the return to Lithuania of members of the former government of the Republic of Lithuania, party leaders, leaders of the anti-Soviet underground and members of their families.<sup>23</sup> From 1954 to May 1, 1988, about 60,000 former deportees returned to Lithuania.<sup>24</sup> However, about 20,000 people died far from their native country from unbearably

<sup>23</sup> V. Kašauskienė. *Laisvė ir teisingumas buvo toli. Pozicija*, nr. 19, 1993, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai*, 612.

heavy workloads, disease and exhaustion.<sup>25</sup> These included about 5,000 children.<sup>26</sup> About 50,000 deportees who survived have not yet returned to Lithuania.<sup>27</sup>

A number of studies on the Lithuanian deportations have been published in émigré publications and, since the recovery of independence, in Lithuania itself. Only in the last decade, the years of national revival, could the true nature of the deportations be documented openly. The first historians to publish documents and articles about this topic were, apart from the present writer, Henrikas Šadžius, Liudas Truska and Eugenijus Grunskis. The latter's doctoral thesis on deportations was published as a book. Some aspects of the deportations and the life of the exiles were also described by Arvydas Anušauskas, et al.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>28</sup> For a study of deportations and survey of recent literature, see V. Kašauskienė, *Verbannungen der Einwohner Litauens in den Jahren 1941 und 1945-52: Überblick über Publikationen der Jahre 1988-1992. Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismus-forschung*, Mannheim, 1993, pp. 276-283.