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I. BEFORE MY ARRIVAL

I stopped in Kaunas for a day on my way to Moscow. A day would do for Lithuania, I thought. In all its twenty years it had never be so important. And now, with war shaking Western Europe and Eastern Asia, little Lithuania lay still more outside the stream of world events. Rumors had reached the outside world that Lithuania was “being Sovietized”; this was the reason why I stopped at all. I would ask about the new alliance with the Soviet Union and the recent arrival of Red Army forces, and be on my way.

After the first hour I knew that I must stay longer. The day grew to a week, the week to a month. Lithuania had become important. It had become even epoch-making. A sovereign state was changing from capitalism to socialism quite constitutionally without destruction of life or property. This thing had never happened before.

Everything was so orderly, even so decorous, that it was hard to think of it as revolution. The talk was all of trade unions, of elections, of protecting public properties. What could be more sedate than that? Yet a new speed had hit this quiet land, and in a few short weeks it was traveling into the first stages of socialism: nationalizing of land, of banks and industries; a workers’ control, Soviets.

“And without firing a shot,” boasted editor Zimanas of the Communist *Tiesa* (*Truth*) which had grown in three weeks from an illegal sheet the size of your hand to an eight-page paper printed in Kaunas’ biggest plant. “Without even stopping a wheel. The ‘revolution without violence’ that the liberals always prayed for. But the capitalist world won’t like it any better for that.

He was right. They didn’t. Up at the foreign embassies they spoke of it as “the death of Lithuania.” One of the American legation staff was more frank:

“It wouldn’t have been so bad if the Red Army had merely seized the country and established a protectorate. But they’ve started something going among the lower classes that is undermining the whole social structure. You should see my janitor!” Yes, that was what had happened. Not an occupation by an army, not the seizure of territory, but the release of forces among the common folk of Lithuania, who were rapidly beginning to organize. “The masses are moving,” said one of the Lithuanian progressive intellectuals. “And no one knows how far they will go.”

The events of the previous days may be briefly summarized. In early June the Soviet Union had presented an ultimatum, demanding the formation of a government in Lithuania which would fulfill the treaty of mutual assistance signed the previous autumn. The ultimatum was accepted and on June 15 a considerable force of the Red Army entered the country where smaller units had been present since the signing of the treaty. Tanks, cavalry, infantry in trucks rolled through the streets of Kaunas and passed on to appropriate camping places. They did not mix in Lithuania's internal life at all. The Red Army gave concerts and dances to the Lithuanian army, as allied armies should. Otherwise it was known to be out in the woods near the border.

But long-oppressed Lithuanians, whose champions had been thrown into prison for the fourteen years of the Smetona dictatorship, took heart and began to talk and organize. President Smetona fled; Prime Minister Merkys thus became president, appointed Justas Paletskis, a brilliant progressive journalist, as prime minister and himself resigned. This Paletskis in turn became president and appointed a cabinet of Ministers consisting of well-known intellectuals, later adding a few Communists.

It was all highly constitutional. All the new ministers were of standing; some of them had held cabinet posts in the "democratic" days before Smetona. Others were well-known writers. Kreve-Michevicius, new chairman of the cabinet and Minister of Foreign Affairs, for instance, was the best known author in Lithuania; his writings had been issued in ten volumes and translated into many languages. "If we had a candidate for the Nobel prize in literature it would be he," people said. Minister of Agriculture Mitskis had graduated both in law and agriculture and was known for his works on agriculture.

Other ministers were equally well chosen. "They are widely known as patriots and greeted with great satisfaction," wrote the press. "The chains have been broken which bound the fighters for the people's freedom. The political system of the land will be placed at the service of the working people."

There was no doubt whatever that the great mass of the people, heartily sick of Smetona's dictatorship, welcomed the new government. Even in the foreign embassies they admitted that.

But under this new government and under constitutional forms, deep social changes got under way- Paletskis' first decree set free

about a thousand political prisoners – including Communists and Communist sympathizers. These had in most cases close contacts with the factories and, with their encouragement and leadership, the workers organized. Within a week after Paletskis came to power, the first of the big popular demonstrations took place. Tens of thousands of workers marched through the streets of Kaunas, demanding the legalization of the Communist Party, and secured it.

Two days later a Ministry of Labor was formed, and was shortly appealing to the workers to observe discipline and “not to take factory property by workers’ committees but to await government action, which might be expected soon.” The new Minister of Agriculture was similarly assuring the peasants that “those who till the soil will not be molested in their property but large estates and monastery lands will probably be nationalized.”

Other ministers were announcing that control of vital statistics – births, marriages, deaths – would soon be transferred from the church to the state. The Sejm, the legislative body previously elected under conditions of Smetona’s terror and with suffrage restricted by property qualifications, was dissolved, and new elections ordered with civil rights for all. The army was given] political instructors and ordered reorganized as a “people’s army,” while soldiers were given citizens’ political rights.

These were the events of a single week before my arrival. These were the things that made me stay. I wished to observe the stages in this transformation of a people, this socialist revolution. It was something for the workers of the world to know.

II. THE WORKERS ORGANIZE

“What shall I see first?” I asked “Glovacksas, a gentle human being who had been in prison fourteen years under Smetona and who, since the change, had become Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.

He glanced through the morning paper first and then with a single sentence he pitch-forked me into the very center of Lithuania’s new life. “This noon,” he said, “the Factory Committees of all Kaunas are meeting at Darbo Rumai to launch an organizing drive for trade unions throughout the country. I will give you a note to Shumauskas, organizer-in-chief.”

I found that fiery, energetic organizer, Motejus Shumauskas – who like many of the leaders I was meeting was only a few days out

of prison – in a beautiful, well-equipped building, full of assembly halls, committee rooms and secretarial offices.

“Our present from the plutocrats,” laughed the workers whom I met on the steps. This building, the Darbo Rumai, had barely been finished when Smetona’s dictatorship was finished too.

The name “Darbo Rumai” engraved on the handsome stone of the building was all that remained of Smetona’s “Chamber of Labor,” a system of state-controlled company unions. It had been formed for the purpose of controlling the workers and had first been a bureaucracy attempting to keep them quiet, and later a tool of the secret police to spy on their activities. It was supposed to receive workers’ complaints and to act on them in the workers’ interests, but the workers had soon learned that their complaints were sent directly to their employers so that these might know with which workers to take suppressive measures. They had avoided Darbo Rumai after that.

Now, however, the workers were all over the building, jamming its offices, its restaurant, its assembly halls. They had taken it over very simply. The new People’s Government had appointed Shumauskas as chief of Darbo Rumai, and the building at once became the center for all the factory committees that were so rapidly organizing in Kaunas. They still called it Darbo Rumai, for there was as yet no Central Council of Trade Unions. But as soon as the workers got around to it they would chisel the old hated name off the stone.

Trade unions, said Shumauskas to me, had been legal in Lithuania for scarcely more than two weeks.

“There was no special decree passed, but as soon as the Red Army came and Smetona fled, the workers knew that they were free to organize and began to do so at once. They held meetings in the factories and elected factory committees. In some of the industries there have already been meetings of delegates from several factories to form trade unions on the industrial basis.

“The process is still in its infancy,” added Shumauskas, “It exists chiefly in Kaunas. Today we are organizing to spread trade unions rapidly through the land.” He invited me to meet with the presidium. Almost at once the meeting began.

More than three hundred workers, of whom perhaps a fourth were women, gathered in the well-equipped hall. Straight from the factories, women in old cotton gowns, men mostly in blue denim shirts.

Shumauskas spoke: "To secure a better life for us all, the working class must be organized. Kaunas workers have always been leaders; now you must organize the whole land. We cannot handle everything from this central office; you must form twenty-four industrial unions, each with its secretaries and offices. This building is already too small for all our meetings; we have asked also for the use of the school buildings, and the Ministry of Education has agreed.

"Choose today from your ranks your best organizers to go to all parts of Lithuania over the week-end. Our Central Office will pay their wages and expenses so that they will lose nothing." (The old-Darbo Rumai had funds to call on; the workers had taken over a going concern!)

Hands went up and questions piled in by the dozen. One question suggested another, and the vast variety of them indicated the initiative of the Lithuanian workers and the wide expanse of their problems.

"In factories where committees are already elected, do these stand?"

"For the present, yes," said Shumauskas.

"We have already our wage demands for our factory. Shall we present them direct to the boss or bring them to the union meeting?"

"The union will make a wage scale for all factories at once," was the reply.

"Shall spinners be a separate union from weavers?"

"No, both are in the textile workers' union, but may have separate sections if they desire."

"Where do the glass workers belong? The gardeners? How are women doing home work for the factories to be represented? Must we take initiation fees? Shall we organize shoemakers' helpers when there is only one helper in the shop?"

The first questions dealt with technical details, but soon they passed to political problems. "The boss is hiring new people, not serious workers but gangsters. Must these be accepted into the union?" "What are the rules for accepting or rejecting members?" "Is membership voluntary or compulsory?" "What credentials are needed to legalize our delegates; must there be a notary public and an oath?"

"So far the Communist Party fraction does the organizing in our factory. Will this now be done by the trade union or by the Party?"

“What shall we do if we see that the owner is trying to close the factory? This will throw us all out of work.”

The answers come rapidly: Membership is voluntary but if properly explained, most workers will join.... Hiring of new workers will henceforth be done only with consent of the union.... As soon as the union is formed, the union, not the Communist Party; will take charge of the organizing, but of course the Communists will help.... The owners’ sabotage is a government question; organize first as workers for your own demands and then you will present this matter to the government.”

“Who are the most numerous here? Textile workers.... You take the third floor balcony and choose your organizing committee with delegates on it from every textile factory. By tomorrow this committee should be everywhere at work enrolling members and holding elections of factory committees where these have not yet taken place.... Railway workers to the fourth floor; leather workers the third floor offices; metal workers second balcony; printers....”

A shout comes up from the printers: “We have organized already. Our new union has already met.”

(Some days later they told me at the American Legation about the “new drive which the Russians have started”; they implied that it was all done on “orders” from the Red Army, and seemed surprised when I told them it was a bunch of energetic Lithuanian workers without a single Russian near the place.)

* * *

“Would you like to go with one of the new organizers to see how the trade unions start in the provinces?” asked Shumauskas. I asked when we should go “Tonight,” he said. (Such was the new speed in Lithuania. Organizers chosen at noon on Friday spent the afternoon getting their assignments and credentials and left that same evening for a whirlwind campaign over the week-end.

Thus I came to Siauliai, third city in size in Lithuania, a drab provincial town with many small factories. Our train arrived long after midnight, and I went to the hotel. But the young organizer wasted no time in sleep. He spent the hours till dawn trudging to the homes of various workers, picking the ones he had known as energetic and reliable during the long illegal years. With these as organizing staff, next morning began the campaign.

By Saturday noon meetings were being held in the smaller factories. By Saturday evening the larger ones were ready to meet. Saturday night and all day Sunday meetings of delegates began from many factories, organizing whole industries at once. By Sunday the Siauliai workers were sending new organizers to hold meetings of workers, farm hands, and peasants in little towns and villages some fifteen miles away.

Thus the great wave of organization rolled out from Kaunas, first into the larger centers like Siauliai, thence into smaller places, and before the week-end was over it was reaching the farms.

“The leather workers were organized before we got here. The workers’ initiative does not wait on orders from above.” Thus my companion told me on Saturday morning, as he introduced me to the new president of the Leather Workers Union, Phillipov, a tannery worker for fifteen years.

The “big excitement in Siauliai” according to Phillipov, had been some two weeks earlier when the political prisoners were released from prison. “We had fifty in prison from this town alone and nearly all workers. I myself was one of thirty-three workers arrested in a single bunch; we met to organize a unit of the Communist Party and a provocator gave us away. When we all came back to Siauliai the workers gave us a big demonstration and sent us off to rest in the villa of the former President of Lithuania.”

Phillipov had not rested long; he had thrown himself into the task of organizing the leather workers whom he knew so well. “We have two thousand leather workers in Siauliai,” he said, “including two leather works and one big shoe factory. The factory where I work is the biggest in the Baltic so we had to be first to organize. We called a big meeting of a thousand workers; candidates were nominated both by the committee and from the floor.”

Then Phillipov described the informal but effective democracy of the leather workers’ union. Twenty names were proposed with eleven to be chosen. Each candidate went on the stage so that he could be recognized (“sometimes they know him by sight but not by name”); then he went behind the scenes while his characteristics were discussed, and he was voted on by the raising of hands. The one with most votes became president – this was Phillipov; the next highest became secretary, the third became treasurer, the next six – members of the Executive Committee, and the next two – alternatives.

The leather workers and metal workers had thus organized their Executive Committees before our arrival; they were rapidly enrolling members and taking dues. Other trade unions were being organized over that week-end. I attended, among others, those of the unemployed and of the textile workers. Some three hundred fifty unskilled unemployed workers, ragged, hungry-looking, assembled in the Siauliai Theater. They cheered loudly the People's Government, and still more loudly the Red Army. They cheered point by point the new election program of the Working People's Union, which they heard for the first time, with its demands for better wages, social insurance, low rents and many other things. They added some points of their own: "Down with cellar, dwellings for janitors," at which there were the loudest cheers.

So far, so good, but the meeting proved incapable of electing a committee. They were unacquainted with each other; they were suspicious and full of national hates. It seemed also that there were disorganizers present in the meeting – the mention of a candidate by any one group was enough to let loose a storm of personal attack from another group. The chairman could not make them understand that nomination was not election and that they would have a chance to vote. They didn't seem to know what elections were. After an hour spent in trying to get some orderly procedure, the young organizer from Kaunas – himself not very experienced – had to give it up. It was his only failure in Siauliai.... Yet even here the time was not entirely wasted; the unemployed learned for the first time of a political program for which they cheered.

The meeting of the textile workers was a complete contrast. These workers had known the discipline of collective work. They were acquainted with the workers of their own factory, if not with all the factories in the town. There were twelve of these, including not only the usual spinning and weaving factories but a flax-cleaning and a rope-making plant. Some of them had already elected their factory committees; others had not.

Some seven hundred workers from twelve factories met in one large meeting. "These are the first meetings of workers held in this city for years," they said. They applauded item by item the Working People's Union election platform; they added items like "eight-hour day, better sanitation in the plants, equal pay for women."

"Till now," said the chairman, "the labor inspectors were government bureaucrats who gave you no help. Their role is over; now

your own trade union comes on the scene, to decide with you about working conditions.” (*Loud, continuous applause.*)

Each factory was asked to elect one member to a general organizing committee; the larger factories were allowed two. They voted in very disciplined fashion, each factory voting separately but in the presence of the others.

“We are not yet acquainted with the workers in other factories,” said the chairman, “so this organizing committee is temporary. It will register our constitution and enroll members. In a week or so we shall then have a general membership meeting and vote, not by factories, but by all the membership at once, to elect our permanent board.”

The announcement, made at my request – that an American writer was in the room and would like to speak after the meeting to some of the workers who could talk Russian – also met with general applause. I saw the different factory groups nudging each other and shoving members forward. “You can talk Russian; you go for the rest.” After the meeting some twenty energetic women hiked up to the platform and I knew that they came to me, not as individuals, but as the chosen delegates of all.

“What shall I tell them in America about you?” I asked them.

“Tell them,” said one, “that we are glad to have at last our word to say.”

“Tell them that, we suffered long but now are happy,” said another.

“Yes, happy, but also afraid,” said a third.

I remembered the panic that had swept through some of the intellectuals in Kaunas, fear of the unknown future, so I asked what she was afraid of. Her fears were of the opposite sort from theirs; she was afraid only of the past.

“I’m afraid that somehow or other those lords [bosses] will manage to come back again. Then they will kill us entirely.”

The others consoled her: “They’ll never come back. Isn’t there the Red Army?”

“The foreman in our factory is scaring us,” she apologized. “He says: ‘Go ahead, go ahead while you can! But when you have to go back...?’”

“We’ll never have to go back,” insisted the others.

Then they told me, one by one, the conditions of the bad old days, with which they had determined to finish.

“Our flax-cleaning factory was so full of dust,” said one, “that when I went home my eyes were so sore I couldn’t see. You couldn’t get away from dust, even for lunch; there was no place to eat. Everyone coughs and many get tuberculosis.”

“We have a ventilator but it is always broken,” said another. “When they clean the factory and repair the ventilator, we know that the inspector is coming. The boss knows ahead and gets ready; our complaints aren’t heard.”

“If you get hurt on their machines, they fire you,” said a third. “It they lay you off in the slack season and you ask for unemployment compensation, they won’t take you back next season. Many women went hungry last winter because they were afraid to ask for compensation.”

“A mother of three children was fired from our factory because she agitated for an eight-hour day,” said another. “All the workers asked the foreman to take her on again but he didn’t do it until the Red Army came.”

Many of the women, I learned, after working ten hours in the factory, worked also as janitors in the evening in return for a room. They were laughing over the changes which the coming of the Red Army had brought.

“I clean the yard for a merchant,” said one, “and he lets me live in a shack in his yard. Now he is giving me boards to build a kitchen; he has even offered material for a ceiling. He has heard that janitors who live in cold or damp quarters will be moved into their masters’ dwellings. So now he wants me to have a decent dwelling, though he never cared before.”

“Tell them in America that now we shall make a good future,” they said as I left them. “Tell them we wish the American worker the same joy that we have now.”

* * *

In the market-place in the evening they held a great citizens’ mass meeting, with bands and banners, to announce the coming elections to the People’s Sejm. They read the same Working People’s Union platform that had been read in the trade union meetings. But now, for the first time, they brought out lists of candidates. Then I understood that the young organizer who had come with me had had a double function, and that out of the scores of meetings he had held over that weekend in Siauliai and the surrounding towns, and out of

discussions with the new trade union leaders, candidates had been chosen who should lead the Working People's ticket to victory in Siauliai district for the coming People's Sejm.

Thus was it done that week-end all over Lithuania.

III. THE. RED ARMY AND THE PEOPLE

It began, of course, with the coming of the Red Army. The foreign embassies claimed that the Red Army did it all. The capitalist press abroad wrote of it as an "army of occupation," imposing its will. That's the way the imperialists look at it. But you can't build a Soviet Socialist Republic that way.

A Soviet Socialist Republic has to be built from the inside, by the will of its workers and peasants. It has to be built freely, without sense of compulsion. Soviet Lithuania really arose that way. Nine-tenths of the Lithuanians will tell you that. They know, for they felt themselves build it.

The most applauded folk in all Lithuania during the months of my visit were the Red Army boys. At concerts, dances, popular demonstrations, and meetings of the new trade unions, I heard them mentioned scores of times, and never without cheers. In the earlier weeks they were not yet regarded as "our Army," for Lithuania had not yet become Soviet. But they were looked upon as "Our Great Ally," which had marched into the Baltic States to strengthen their defenses and protect them from Europe's war.

This of itself was enough to make them accepted, for the Baltic peoples, like all peoples, dread the war which is today sweeping Europe and threatening to engulf the world. But the Red Army swiftly added to its popularity by its behavior. They won the envy of the Lithuanian soldiers by their superior equipment; yet they treated them as equal allies. They amazed the peasant by their scrupulous consideration for his property, even to the last fence-post. They startled the intellectuals by their culture and knowledge of world affairs. The factory workers, of course, were with them from the first. While the comment I heard most often from the Lithuanian women was: "Aren't they grand," a tribute to the courtesy with which they treated women.

I, on one occasion, struggling out of a great concert into a night of darkness and rain, came with the crowd to a fence which was hard to cross: I was slipping in the mud and holding onto the fence-post in the dark while the crowd pushed impatiently by. A Red Army man,

who had been at the concert came up, saying: "Little mother, shall I help you across?" Being a woman, I do not like to be reminded of my age. But I certainly appreciated his courtesy to an unknown woman as he helped me through.

At another time I met a Red Army lieutenant sitting with a group of Red Army men in a third-class compartment of a train. As soon as he heard my name and knew that I was an American writer, he asked: "Aren't you the author of *China's Millions*. I have read that book." Then he introduced me to a dozen Red Army men as "that famous American author whose books on China you know." What author, I ask you, is proof against a compliment like that? And what army in the world knows intimately so many books on foreign lands?

A tall, bony peasant woman whom I met bringing strawberries to Kaunas told me: "Rich folks frightened us about the Red Army. They said the Army would take our lands from us and steal our food. But they take no food from us, not even if we offer it. It seems they have plenty of their own; maybe more than we have." This was what impressed her; she began to believe in the Soviet country whose soldiers had "plenty of their own food."

Even those foreign legations which have tried for years to organize the Baltic States against the Soviet Union and which bitterly hate the present Soviet transformation in those states will admit to you in conversation that "the Red Army men have done nothing rough."

An American relief worker, who has spent the past six months in Vilna, also told me: "In all these months I have not heard of a drunken soldier or of any scandal with women. Any army in the world – no, any group of cultured gentlemen in the world – might be proud of the record they have made."

* * *

It should not be assumed that the whole Lithuanian populace cheered the Red Army from the beginning. Some of them cheered, but most of them wondered and waited. For twenty years they had been filled with tales of horror about the Soviet Union, and they did not yet know what to believe. Besides, the people who cheered the Red Army when it first came in September of 1939 were later arrested by the hundreds by the Smetona regime. So, the second time, when the Red Army came in numbers on June 15, 1940, many of the people waited to see when it would be safe to cheer.

Dozens of people have told me the story of that second coming. The most complete account was given me by Zimanas, editor of *Tiesa*:

“We all thought it would be easier for workers’ organizations after the mutual assistance pact was signed. The ministers were so scared that they even promised amnesty for Communist prisoners. But then there came the worst terror we had ever known. Nobody was allowed to see the Red Army when it came into the country; it went to its post by night and stayed there. Hundreds of workers were arrested for just talking to Red Army men. In Vilna, which the Soviets gave to Lithuania, the Smetona government at once staged a pogrom against those people who had welcomed the Red Army. When Kaunas workers marched to the Soviet Legation to thank them for Vilna, they were beaten up by the police right in front of the Legation.”

So strict was the Smetona censorship that even the Communists in Kaunas, who were watching and hoping, did not know in June that the Red Army was coming in larger numbers until a few hours before they actually arrived.

“We knew at one o’clock by the Moscow radio that the ultimatum had been accepted. At three o’clock the Lithuanian radio admitted it, and by seven o’clock the Red Army was already on the streets. The people at first stood silent, just watching, hardly knowing what it all meant. Then some began to clap and then to cheer and then to sing. The crowd sang Red Army songs that we had learned from the Moscow radio. After that the Red Army also sang. Then the people understood that the Red Army had come as Allies, to protect us from war. More and more they began to cheer them as they came – tanks, cavalry, infantry in trucks – strong and endless.”

Thus the Red Army came into Kaunas.

It was different in Vilna. There was little open cheering there.

“The cheers were in our hearts,” said a Jewish journalist of that city, “but we remembered the pogroms. The Vilna police were still reactionary and for several days arrested people who cheered the Red Army. I knew a boy who was arrested more than a week after Smetona fell for saying: ‘Hail to the Red Army.’ His father went to the police and they asked a bribe of 100 lits but they finally bargained to let him go for 25 lits, for they knew they would not be in power long.”

For the first two days the Red Army did not cross the Niemen, and rumors flew around among the people that Lithuania would be

divided at the river and the Germans would get the other side. A panic started among the Jews over there, and some of them began to sell their homes and move to Kaunas. Zimanas told me of a Jew who came to the *Tiesa* office from Vilkaviskis and wept: "How lucky you are here! If only one of those Red Army men would show himself on our side of the river! What do you think? Shall I sell my house?"

Later the Red Army crossed the Niemen and the panic stopped. That was where they got the biggest ovation!

* * *

The coming of the Red Army and the fall of the Smetona dictatorship which accompanied it released forces among the working class, the peasants and the progressive intellectuals which had been suppressed for fourteen years. A thousand political prisoners were almost at once released from prison; a large part of them were Communists. After their years in prisons and concentration camps they were in various stages of ill health. The most exhausted were sent at once to rest homes. The others threw themselves immediately into work.

"We had to reorganize on the run," said Adomas to me, in the new secretariat of the Party, "to change into a legal party, to get offices and telephone numbers all over the country, to prepare for Party elections, to consider the large number of applications for membership which began to pour in.

"At the same time we had to consider our responsibility towards the new government apparatus, to get reliable men into the strategic positions, to check sabotage. Since the upper officials, especially in the police, were bound to act against us, we had not only to replace them but to organize a People's Militia from below. Trade unions had to be organized, and at the same time the general elections to the People's Sejm."

For all of these rapid activities the Communist Party swiftly became the general staff and organizing center.

"But we could never have done it," said Adomas, "without the widest possible help from non-Party sympathizers. We had always been able to keep a large and active group of sympathizers around us, all through the illegal days. So we pulled the workers of Kaunas and Vilna to their feet and sent them out to organize the country. That is the secret of today's rapid revolutionary success.

“The people can do it. The knowledge and the will are in the people. We have only to bring them out, to help them organize and choose. We have only to know – and be ready to organize – when the people are ready to move.”

And as these forces grew and expanded, the presence of the Army and its behavior strengthened among the people the desire for Soviet power. The Red Army men were not merely allies. They were the bearers of a new idea. They were forbidden by international propriety to preach this idea in words, but they proclaimed it by their acts. Day after day they were convincing the Lithuanians – separated from them for twenty years by a barrage of lies – that the Soviet system which produced such soldiers must be good.

Old-time Lithuanians told me: “We have seen in our lives three armies – the old tsar’s army, the German army of occupation during the first World War, and now these Soviet troops. This is by far the most cultured army we have ever known.”

A peasant told me: “The Red Army tanks were coming through our village and there was a hen with a brood of chickens on the road. The tank stopped and a Red Army man got out and drove off the chickens so that the tanks could go on. Never have we seen such an army. Our own Lithuanians, in time of maneuvers, are not as careful of the peasants’ property as that.”

Another told how the tanks had come by mistake through their village, and had been compelled to turn around. “They went two kilometers ahead on the road before turning, so as not to trample the peasants’ meadow,” he said.

Others said: “If they knock down as much as a fence post or go over a row of vegetables, they jump out at once and ask you the damage and pay you on the spot.”

Still more surprising to the peasants were the joy-rides which the peasant children were given in the army trucks. The peasants of Eastern Europe never ride in automobiles; these are for the upper official strata. But the Red Army spanned this gulf and took the children riding around the village.

In Siauliai the workers told me of an aged worker, bedridden from arthritis which had progressed so far that he could not walk and feared soon to lose the use of his arms. Since he was too poor to pay and the treatment is complicated, the local doctor had long since given him up. One of the Siauliai Communists brought the Red Army surgeon to visit him, and the latter gave him a clear explanation of his

disease, and told him that he could be helped by a health resort in the U.S.S.R., but until this became possible, there was a course of treatment which he could take at home. The fact that this helpless, penniless old worker could get the best medical advice from the Red Army made a deep impression on all the Siauliai workers.

One of the customs of the Red Army was to refuse all foodstuffs, even cigarettes. They will accept from the population only gifts of flowers. It has always been an East European tradition that peasants must seek favor from officials by gifts of chickens and livestock. The Red Army is smashing this tradition and reassuring the peasants that they expect no bribes.

“Even when they ask you for a drink of water,” said a peasant woman, “they are so polite about it that it is really a pleasure to give it.”

If these were the manners of the Red Army which won the confidence and enthusiasm of the peasants, the culture of the Red Army men appealed especially to the intellectuals. I listened for an hour to a conversation between a Red Army engineer and a middle-aged Lithuania engineer; who met by chance on a train. The Lithuanian had studied long ago in Kiev in the days of the tsar; for the past twenty years he had heard nothing but evil tales about the Soviets.

The young Red Army specialist said not a word about socialism, Soviets or any political subject. He discussed the technical problems of electrifying oil wells in Baku and railroads in the Caucasus. He was neither patronizing nor obsequious, just a thoroughly competent fellow-engineer. They lost themselves in a comparison of German with American technique.

Suddenly the older man mentioned “Petersburg,” and then stopped, fearing that he had made a *faux pas*. The younger man put him at ease by saying casually: “We call it Leningrad today.” This emboldened the older man to ask if it were true as he had heard, that Kiev had been changed to Dniepropetrovsk.

“No,” said the Red Army man, “that was Ekaterinoslav. Kiev is still Kiev.”

It was a casual phrase but the tones gave a warm reassurance that the city of the old man’s boyhood memories remained.

Rather apologetically the older man asked what had hap penal to certain factories which he remembered. He gave them by their locations and by their former owners’ names.

“I really don’t know those names,” said the younger man pleasantly. “They were before my time. But there are tremendous factories at the places you mention. They are producing for the whole Ukraine.”

On the older engineer’s face you could see the thought struggling: “How they have lied to me about those ‘starving, barbarous Bolsheviks’! And all this great growth went on while I was absent! Shall I now live to see my boyhood haunts in Kiev?”

The culture of the Red Army as shown by its concerts was also an important force in arousing the Lithuanian people to warm feeling for the Soviets. Never had they heard such music produced by ordinary soldiers. It was such good music that the foreign legations spread the gossip that these were Grand Opera artists dressed up in soldiers uniforms.

Even more important than the excellent music was the spirit that was expressed in the concerts. I remember especially the big concert given by a Red Army troupe in the Sports Palace in Kaunas just before the election. After two hours in which an enraptured audience applauded and cheered some of the best performances they had ever seen, the master of ceremonies declared that the formal program was over, and that the entire audience was now invited to join in dancing. At least a thousand people poured down from the benches onto the floor of the Palace and danced late into the night with the Red Army men to the excellent music of the Red Army band.

* * *

Such were the ways in which the Red Army men influenced the changes taking place in Lithuania. But as for the trade unions, the elections and the questions of Lithuanian politics, the Red Army had nothing to do with those. There were no Red Army men telling the Lithuanians how to vote, as the foreign legations pictured them. I traveled two hundred miles during the Lithuanian elections, and the only time I saw any Red Army men near a voting place was in one town where the local committee had secured a dozen Red Army musicians to play for the election dance. Otherwise – this was a Lithuanian election and the Red Army men weren’t there.

No! They did it all themselves, the Lithuanian workers. The trade unions, the elections, the Soviets. They did it all themselves without any outside pressure. Any Lithuanian worker will tell you that.

It may be a bit naive to say that the Red Army wasn't present. Even in that meeting of the silk-weavers, when the girls were so laughingly joshing the candidates they elected, the Red Army was there. Not visible, of course! But if they hadn't been somewhere nearby the Kaunas police would have smashed that gathering with a ton of bricks.

There's no such thing as impartial "law and order." The old police would have supported the employer even if he destroyed his factory or took his capital out of the country. The new law says that the factories must be kept running, by the will of the workers, even against the claims of all past owners. That's law and order now. A law that became possible suddenly, without bloodshed.

IV. REMAKING THE OLD VILNA

"Whoever solves the problem of Vilna can solve the problem of Europe. Vilna is an insoluble mixture of national hates."

So they said in Geneva before I came to Lithuania. They know about Vilna there. It has often been before the League of Nations, which didn't even try to solve the problem but yielded to *force majeure*. Vilna is a world example – there are many such in Europe – of the insolubility of the problem of national hates under capitalist rule.

"The only thing to do with Vilna," said an American diplomat in Kaunas to me, "is to pick it up and take it a long way out and squeeze the people out into their respective nations and then put the town itself in a museum." Thus cynically he admitted the bankruptcy of diplomacy in dealing with Vilna.

To Lithuania's workers, Vilna presented an even more serious problem. It was the center of chronic unemployment for years. It was a city of paupers, where a whole family had a single shirt in which to go out of doors. Three children would have one pair of shoes and take turns going to school. Matches were carefully split in half to avoid buying new ones. Even when workers had jobs, wages were so low that families slowly starved. People fought in Vilna for crusts of bread.

Yet Vilna had been a metropolis, a center of traffic and trade since the Middle Ages. Under the tsar four railroads met here, connecting the Baltic, the Petersburg district, Moscow and Asia with Europe and Warsaw. Vilna was rich, specializing in luxury goods, fine gloves, fashionable tailoring.

During the first World War Vilna changed hands many times. Finally the Soviet armies got it and gave it to Lithuania, and the League of Nations confirmed it as Lithuanian, but the Poles drove the Lithuanians out by armed seizure and the League acquiesced. Vilna went down in history as the first spectacular failure of the League.

It became a ghost city, forcibly closed to all life. It lay at the end of a long finger thrust up by Poland between Lithuania and the U.S.S.R. East, west and north of it the frontiers were closed firmly for more than twenty years. Once a traffic center of Eastern Europe, now it lay at the end of a railway that led nowhere, that ended in a closed sack.

Vilna was the cheapest place in Poland to live. Hordes of retired Polish officials on small government pensions moved here, where they could still be lords, with plenty of half-starved servants. They spent their time dreaming of Greater Poland, which Vilna – once capital of a great Lithuania empire – symbolized.

Vilna contained seven nationalities. All lived in full separation and hated each other. Nobody really knows the numbers of them. There has never been an honest census. The Jews claim a majority in the city's center, but the Poles created a Greater Vilna with suburbs and claimed a majority there. They took the census not by race but by religion. All Roman Catholics were considered Poles. Thus the Lithuanians and many of the Byelorussians were simply eliminated from the census returns. Their languages and schools were suppressed. From time to time Vilna had pogroms, both under the tsar and later under the Poles.

Into such a Vilna last September came tens of thousands of Polish refugees fleeing from the German bombs. I met one man who had walked all the way from Cracow, a month on the road.

“At first,” he said, “the people had money. Then this gave out and they were penniless and sick with dysentery and dying on the road. Most of the peasants went home again but those with money came on. The really wealthy bourgeois got to Stockholm and London. But hordes of Polish landlords, intellectuals and small business men got only as far as Vilna. There they were caught by the advance of the Red Army, and were later turned over to Lithuania. The Lithuanians did not recognize the Polish currency, the zloty, so they became penniless and starved.”

When the Red Army first came into Vilna on September 19, 1939, the common people met it with cheers. After six weeks it

withdrew, and Vilna was given to Lithuania. Promptly the Smetona government staged one of the worst pogroms in Vilna's history, attacking under the name of "Jews" all persons who had shown sympathy with the Red Army. Some twenty thousand of Vilna's workers, especially the Jewish didn't wait for this pogrom. They went with the Red Army into the U.S.S.R.

"I stood and watched them go," the principal of the Jewish schools told me. "They couldn't endure not to be in a Soviet land. I went with them to the railway station. On one side of the platform the workers' families were departing, with their meager possessions on their backs and their children by the hand. On the other side were arriving the 'black coats,' the priests and the bourgeois of all nationalities, yelling for porters to handle their heavy bags. I thought: 'Darkness comes; light goes.' "

As soon as Smetona's government got Vilna, he set up a Lithuanian nationalism as exclusive and oppressive as the Polish had been. Nobody could be a citizen or have the right to employment unless he could prove that he had resided in Vilna before the Polish seizure of 1920. So much red tape and so many documents were demanded that of 250,000 persons living in the city, only 50,000 were able to qualify. Bribes could buy citizenship; lacking money for bribes, many Jewish families which had lived in Vilna since the Middle Ages were left without citizenship and passports.

Smetona's governing officials received people only in the Lithuanian language, which most of Vilna's people could not speak. School teachers were required to pass examinations in Lithuanian; this threw most of the teachers out. Poles were not only expelled from government jobs but even within the Catholic church, Polish priests were replaced by Lithuanian priests. Jewish signs were forbidden on shops where they had been tolerated for centuries, even under the tsar and the Poles.

A city hungry and jobless, full of long-embittered national hates, where the government refused to talk in the languages understood by the people. A city crowded with Polish refugees who dreamed of a Greater Poland, to be born from the ancient cradle of Vilna and to reach again from the Black Sea to the Baltic, from northern to southern sea.

Such was the Vilna into which the Red Army came again in 1940. Such was the Vilna which I visited when its new People's Election campaign was on.

* * *

Everywhere in Vilna I saw the shocking heritage left by the Polish lords. A large proportion of the children and young people had never been to school at all. Even those who got some schooling had been taught eighty or ninety in a single room. Teachers often got tuberculosis from the strain on their lungs and the bad food which was all they could afford.

A teacher told me that a few years ago a whole class of fifteen and sixteen year old children had been arrested because they had discussed in their club the Moscow trials of wreckers. Most of the children were kept in jail six to eight weeks, but a few were given two-year sentences. One girl of sixteen was sick in bed with a fever of 103 degrees when the police came to arrest her as “a dangerous Communist.” The policeman himself was embarrassed at the extreme youth of his victim and apologized to her as he told her to “dress and come.”

Vilna workers had been even more suppressed than those in the rest of Lithuania. As late as the spring of 1940 there were factory owners who beat their workers with sticks like Asiatic despots. Such was the owner of a small, primitive glass factory in which I saw a trade union election held. The speakers stood on a cart in the factory enclosure, a great space with low walls and high sloping roof. The owner sat on the balcony of his house, which looked down into the factory yard.

“Comrade workers,” said the speaker. “You have here a building and raw materials, you have here machines. You have here working hands. Why do you need an owner?”

All of them cheered.

* * *

The new people’s government of Lithuania had appointed as governor of Vilna an able Communist, Didzhulius, not long since out of prison. Prison had injured his health and he had gone to a rest home, but had not been able to take the time to get well. People were needed for Vilna, and so he came. When I saw him he had held office only three days.

“We must end this evil process whereby first Poles suppress Lithuanians and then Lithuanians suppress Poles,” he told me.

“Under Smetona only thirty thousand people here had the vote. We have given it at once to everybody.

“There were one hundred thousand unemployed here. We at once began road-building and other public construction; we are setting up public relief. The old Polish pensioners had buildings and funds which Smetona did not let them touch. We have made their possessions available to them for the relief of those most in need. We have done more to relieve the misery of starving people in three days than Smetona did in six months.”

One of the first decrees passed was that government officials must hear citizens’ requests in whatever language the citizens choose. For this purpose officials are sought who can speak as many languages as possible. Schools also are to be in all the local languages.

“Under the Poles education was only in Polish; under Smetona it was only in Lithuanian,” said Didzhulius. “Now we shall have to have schools in our languages since there are four chief languages in this district: Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian and Byelorussian.”

Vilna was the seat of a Polish university. Smetona closed it down and used the buildings as a branch of the Kaunas University. Didzhulius told me this university also would be run in four languages. “It will be difficult but it is necessary. All the people have a right to an education in the language they know best.”

Didzhulius told me of the many difficulties created by the Polish nationalists. They issue secret instructions: “Poles, creep in everywhere. Into the police, the trade unions, the Communist Party. Wherever there is a Polish majority, it will fight for the Greater Poland.” They also issued fake leaflets, purporting to come from the Communist Party, but designed to stir up national hate: “The Red Army has freed us from the Lithuanians! Poles, you can be active now!” Some of these leaflets contained attacks on Germany, which were designed to stir up trouble between Germany and the U.S.S.R.

“We intend to give equal rights to all nationalities,” he concluded. “We shall see it to that a certain proportion of our elected officials and civil servants are Poles. But if these Polish nationalists think they can use the situation to cause trouble, they will be stopped with a firm hand.”

Didzhulius then turned to the question of the Vilna peasants.

“Vilna is not only a city; it is a district. Most of our population is peasant,” he said. “Poverty-stricken, living on tiny strips of poor soil

while the great estates of the feudal lords surround them. The Poles took over the feudal conditions of tsardom and made them worse. Even the tsar's law allowed the peasants to pasture cattle and pick berries and mushrooms in the woods of the vast estates. The Poles forbade this and shot them for trespassing if they as much as entered the woods. Smetona's government never modified these land laws; Lithuania's land laws were never applied to Vilna. They were not even permitted to be discussed.

"That reminds me," said Didzhulius. "It is the season for mushrooms." He turned to his secretary, "Make a note," he said. "I must announce by radio and send word to the foresters that peasants may have free access to the berries and mushrooms in the woods."

Then he turned back to me. "It is a little thing," he said, "but it means much in diet and in human dignity to the peasants. I had overlooked it; I have only been three days on this governor's job."

V. THE ELECTIONS TO THE PEOPLE'S SEJM

Never in any land – in the U.S.S.R., in Spain, in China – have I seen a whole people so swiftly come to life. Day and night, for weeks, singing did not cease in the streets of Kaunas.

"The masses are moving," said one of the officials in the Ministry of Education, "and no one yet knows how far they will go." Meetings, demonstrations succeeded each other, marching of workers, bands. From the organizing workers the new momentum of life spread outward, reaching peasants and farmhands, reaching intellectuals, reaching even the little beggar boys in the streets.

It was not yet clear in what form the demands of the people would crystallize. Some of the marching workers bore the slogan: "Lithuania, the Thirteenth Soviet Republic";* these banners steadily increased. Others bore slogans: "For a free Lithuania." But most of the banners at this time – from July 7 to 14, the pre-election period – hailed chiefly the People's Sejm, the "Working People's candidates."

The vast majority of the people were obviously glad to be rid of the bitter Smetona dictatorship. They were glad to be coming out to cheer "our own kind of folks, workers, peasants, progressive intellectuals, fighters for the people's cause," instead of the old corrupt

* At that time the Moldavian S.S.R. had not been formed. Lithuania in fact became the fourteenth Soviet Republic – *Ed.*

official caste. They thought the Red Army was something new and fine in the way of armies, and that the U.S.S.R., which produced it, must be a good place.

There were meetings and meetings – in buildings and in the open air. I recall one such meeting on the outskirts of Kaunas, in a poor working class district, where the people were impressed, not so much by the speakers, as by the fact that the Kaunas police band, for the first time in human memory, put on a free concert for the common people. Shabby women with hordes of small children sat on the grass beside their men to listen. “The first concert we ever heard,” they said. By such small things the common people felt themselves become important – and they cheered.

The big “get together” of workers and peasants on July 10 in Kaunas climaxed the election campaign. All day the peasants poured into the city: groups of girls in colorful national costumes, clusters of youths on bicycles from distant farms. Trains, trucks and carts poured their human freight into the boulevards, and the newcomers formed in line to march. Hour after hour the streets were filled with singing: old Lithuanian folk-songs, sad with the darkness of peasant life, mingling with new triumphant songs of the Red Army, sung by Kaunas workers.

I stopped by some big auto-trucks of the Pieno-Centras, the dairy cooperative. “Where are you from?” I asked. They named a village a hundred kilometers from Kaunas. “We started at two o’clock,” they said.

“What do they say there about the elections? Are they for Soviet Lithuania?” I inquired.

“Thirteenth Soviet Republic,” shouted several of the girls.

“All of them?” I asked. They shook their heads: “No, not the old ones. They don’t know what they want.... But *we* know.”

In late afternoon they gather on the great grass field on the hill above Kaunas. Here is a long row of peasant carts, smelling of manure and horse-flesh; here are trucks festooned with flowers. Nearby a heap of bicycles surrounded by a dozen youths. Here are bearded men, kerchiefed women, high-booted soldiers, peasants with bare brown feet thrust into rough wooden-soled shoes. Children are playing in the dusty sand or trailing tired behind parents.

Cutting across the vast field come the marchers from the city. Organized! Not long organized, only since last Sunday, a matter of three or four days. They have not yet learned to march; their banners

are crude and the spacing of their ranks is haphazard. The new People's Militia clears a way for them among the crowd and they move steadily towards the tribune, bearing portraits of Stalin, Voroshilov, President Paletskis. One union has a dozen portraits of Shumauskas, that energetic trade union leader who had been guiding the storm of organization this past week.

Far away across the field of grass and surging people rises a tribune of white unpainted wood draped in red. I do not even try to approach it; it is impossible and also unnecessary. Loud speakers carry the voices of the speakers to all parts of this enormous field. We sit on the grass, scattered far out, but still we hear them.

"No more race and national prejudice.... The friendship of all working people," says President Paletskis, from the faraway tribune. The people cheer. "In past years many people have died to win this day...." The strains of the revolutionary funeral march rise over the field and the people respond to its solemn rhythm and stand silent, feeling but not knowing what it is. Few of them have ever heard these long forbidden strains. But they know the *Internationale* and rise to their feet for it when Paletskis finishes his speech; they listen while the band plays but they cannot sing the words.

Three women with fists upraised in this demonstration remain in my mind as the symbol of this period, before the people's will had crystallized into Soviets. One of them starry-eyed, looking straight ahead in the future; one of them tossing her fist aloft and turning to smile at me; and the third, the nearest one, eyes closed, chin set, determined. All of them were household servants, nearly seventy years old.

Sinking to rest beside them after the *International*, I seek for a conversational opening. "It is nice that we old folks can celebrate," I say. They nod; they accept me, so I go on.

"Are you going to the election on Sunday?"

"Everyone is going. We also are going." It is she of the grim, determined chin who answers, in the deferential tone of the long-accustomed servant, which none the less asserts her rights. I learn that she is sixty-nine years old.

"Are you for Soviet Lithuania or so-called 'independent Lithuania'?" I asked. But she looks puzzled as if the distinction disturbs.

"What do I know of such things," she answers. "Our father Stalin's words are very good."

"Are you Russian or Lithuanian? What is your nationality?"

“I am Roman Catholic,” she says. Then I notice the “Mother of God” on a thin chain under her grim chin, and recall that through all her long years in this almost medieval country, people have been listed by religion and not by race.

“Then how is Stalin your father? He is not Roman Catholic.”

She is not in the least disturbed.

“They say he is the father of all toilers,” she answers, hesitating a little, as if she had found something almost too good to believe.

Still I persist. “You think then that life will be better under the new government?” But she was no prophet; she was a plodding realist. “I do not know what will be. It is better now,” she said.

Better now? Already? Before the elections? Before anything happened at all? It flashed into my mind that employers were said to be treating their workers better since the Red Army came. So I asked: “Since when better? How better? Better wages?”

She shook her head. She was not used to analysis. But she was certain. “It feels better,” she said.

I looked at the harsh, worn face under the tightly drawn hair and suddenly I saw her life from its beginning. She had not even the ruins of comeliness that any man should ever have desired her. For sixty-nine years she had ministered humbly to the bodily needs of others. A household servant and a Roman Catholic – that was her whole life, nothing more.

Now suddenly she was part of bands and banners and of a great crowd shouting. She was raising her fist for candidates – workers like herself – who asked for her vote. She had become a human being; she had become even government. She had found a “father of all toilers” here on earth.

* * *

The rain poured down on the day of the elections. It began the night before with continuous loud bursts which by morning turned the rural districts into a sea of mud. In the cities the effect of the rain was less noticeable. The janitor of our hotel went to the voting place with the first crack of dawn “in order to be first.” He found hundreds more with the same intention. The polls had opened at six o’clock, but so many were ahead of him that it was seven before he was able to vote.

Leaving the city of Kaunas, where the voting was proceeding rapidly and early, I went by automobile some two hundred kilometers

to visit the rural polling places, as far as Naumiestis on the German border and back by Mariampole. With me went Minister of Education Ventslova and the well-known novelist Tsvirka, themselves candidates for the Sejm, but from a different district.

“We are not touring our own district,” said Tsvirka, “because we do not think it proper to push ourselves, but rather the whole Working People’s Union platform. We are visiting the voting places today not to make speeches but to see how the people are turning out and what their sentiment is.”

We drove through the dark, primeval forests of Lithuania and through wide, rolling fields, bending heavy with rye. I shall long remember the deep shadowy tangle of tall evergreens, with branches drooping low under their load of gray moss. The little white birch groves, the long mud road and the wet grass bending beside it – over all, the grey Northern sky.

We came to the first voting place in a small village. It was housed in the Farmers’ Cooperative Hall. The outside of the building was decorated with evergreen branches; the inside was full of people. A man at the first desk inspected each new arrival’s passport, and then gave him the list of candidates, printed on a long strip with intervals between the names so that the voter could easily tear out any he did not desire. Each voter received also an envelope stamped with an official seal. Since many of the peasants, and especially the peasant women, had no passports, there was a special table where their names were registered and where they were given a temporary registration slip, good for this election only.

Primitive as was the equipment, there was a certain ceremony in the procedure. The voters did not put the ballot into the envelope under the eyes of the officials. They went into another room. Here they carefully read the list, removed any names to which they objected, and put the rest in the envelope, which they sealed. Then they came back to the first room where an official dropped the envelope in the box and marked the voter’s passport with the fact that he had voted.

Everywhere the peasants were turning out to the elections, despite the mud and rain. They came for miles in carts decorated with flags above the horses. Others plodded along the roads on foot. Many men over thirty told me: “This is our first voting. We refused to vote under Smetona even though the police threatened us for not voting. Now we are coming out gladly to vote for the People’s candidates.”

Many of those who were coming to vote were the old-style peasants who know the “proper place” for women. I photographed a peasant and his wife trudging along a muddy pathway. The man carried an umbrella but did not trouble to shelter his wife. It did not even occur to him to make this chivalrous gesture for the sake of the photograph. Everything was quite proper in his eyes; the head of the family should naturally have the umbrella! But the wife – huddled under her large wet shawl – was turning out to vote for the first time in her life. Peasant women had no vote under Smetona unless they were tax-paying heads of families.

Most of the peasant women trudged barefoot to the election. Why should they spoil their shoes? But they wore their best clothes and carried their shoes. I saw them at the edges of small towns and villages cleaning their feet and putting the shoes on, in order to “honor the elections.” They did not consider it proper to come into government without shoes.

“Even the peasant men,” said Tsvirka, “are accustomed to having only one pair of boots all their lives. My old father got a pair of boots when the tsar took him for the army. He brought these home and wore them on special occasions for the rest of his life. On ordinary occasion^ the peasants go barefoot or wear straw sandals. Such is the ancient backwardness and poverty of village life.”

We come next to a small *volost* center (township center) in the heart of the Suwalki district. Of 2,900 voters listed here, 2,100 have already voted, though it is barely noon. I asked them why their district has such a good turnout, and they answer: “Because there is very good feeling and we like the new government a lot.”

Ventslova gives me a clearer explanation. “This was the center of the peasant uprising in 1936. Losing their farms because of debts, the peasants struck against the low prices and heavy taxes, and refused to sell their products or pay their taxes. When Smetona sent in the police, the peasants fought them with pikes; many were shot and hundreds arrested. That is why this district is so much more active than the others.”

I talked with many of the voters. “Do you think it will be better under the new government?” But even though they came out to vote, they refused to commit themselves in speech.

“At any rate we know these candidates,” said an old man, “We know they are good folks who suffered for the good of the people.” He expressed considerable enthusiasm for the Red Army.

“In my youth I was in the tsar’s army but an army like this I never saw.” I asked if he would like to have Lithuania a part of the Soviet Union, and he nodded. “Yes, I’d like to have that army,” he answered. Then he added: “But we should have something Lithuanian too.” I knew that he was thinking confusedly of the old days of tsardom when Lithuanians were forbidden to have even their own language. It was not quite clear to him how the new arrangement would be managed, but he knew that he wanted “the Red Army and something Lithuanian too.”

Most of the voters everywhere were voting the whole ticket. But there were always enough who did not, so that some candidates ran ahead of the others and some stood at the foot of the list. It was quite a matter of pride for any candidate to stand at the head of the ticket; it showed him the most popular in his district. In one election room I saw a group of people consulting and showing each other what names to take off the ballot. I recognized from their malicious smiles that there was a tiny organized group intent on kniving one of the list. Later I learned that in some places chauvinistic groups eliminated Jewish names or Polish names. But there was little of this; it was only a small fraction.

The list of candidates in this electoral region – the Mariampole region – was headed by Meshkauskene, new chief of the Land Reform in the Ministry of Agriculture. She was a brilliant young woman who, as a student at the age of nineteen, had been arrested by Smetona. She had become a Communist in prison. She had been given a sixteen-year sentence but had served only eight of them, she told me. “Only eight,” I thought. How casually they take these sentences. Eight long years out of a brilliant young life! Now she was working day and night on the division of land among the peasants.

At Naumiestis on the German border the voting place was a big school house so near the frontier that it looked straight towards a Lutheran church in East Prussia. This was an energetic precinct; 70 per cent had already voted by early afternoon.

Upstairs in the largest hall of the building an “election dance” was going on. Husky girls sat around the hall on benches, neatly, and even gaily, dressed. You would never have taken them for farmhands in their shiny rayon gowns.

“We never before came to this *gymnasium* (high school),” they told me. “We farmhands get only three or four years of school.”

They were, however, despite their small amount of education, the clearest thinking young people I had met in the rural districts. They knew where they were going and why. Most of them had “work-tickets” that allowed them to cross the frontier to work on the farms of East Prussia. They told me that the harvest there was in full swing, but was “slow in this part of Lithuania.”

“How so?” I asked. “Isn’t it the same climate?” They laughed and said that the big farmers were sabotaging but “after the election we’ll take care of that.”

Yes, these farmhands knew what they wanted.

As I returned to the voting place below – it was still crowded – my eye was caught by the gentle shining face of a wrinkled old kerchiefed woman who was modestly explaining her perplexities to the official in charge. As I came near she shared her problem with me also. “Well, my dear, I had no passport and I thought this registration was a passport but it seems it is only for this one voting.... Well, praise be to God, the old government is gone!”

I told her that I was a writer from America and I asked if I might take her picture. So she posed for me in the light against the green decorations, holding the list of candidates which she could barely read. “My picture to America,” she said with face softly shining. “My wishes to America; I have a sister there. In a place they call *She-Cawgo*.... The old life is gone, praise God!... Give my best wishes, my dear.”

“To whom, mother?” I asked. “To your sister?”

She made a little modest, deprecating gesture and her face grew still more radiant as she answered: “To all, to all, to all.”

This was to her the meaning of this new election: the Soviet land, America, the world!

* * *

Back in Kaunas they were counting the votes. The district which I had visited had been, next to the Vilna district, the most backward. In most of the cities and towns of Lithuania, from 90 to 95 per cent had voted, while even in the rural districts, in spite of the rain, there had been a turnout of more than two-thirds. In some places there had been a certain amount of confusion spread by the opposition. The Christian Democrats, for instance, had spread through the churches the word that only one candidate could be voted for, whereas actually one might vote for eight or ten. Elsewhere there had been some slight

organized opposition to some candidates, especially on nationalist grounds.

This was especially marked in the Vilna district. Word had been spread among the Poles that Poles could not vote in a Lithuanian election; and many Poles believed this, because under Smetona they had not been allowed to vote or even to register as citizens. Elsewhere among the Poles word was spread that they should vote only for Poles and not for the Jews.

In view of the rain, the government extended the elections a second day. In the intervening night two hundred and fifty organizers were sent out into the rural districts to check all weak spots. Twenty-two Polish-speaking organizers were sent into the Polish villages of the Vilna district to explain that there were four Poles on the Vilna ticket and that all adult residents, regardless of nationality, could vote. Rapidly the weak spots cleared up; the Polish villages swung into line with the others.

When the votes were counted, it was found that 95.5 percent of the total adult electorate had come to the polls. A figure unheard of in Lithuania, unbelievable in any election in the capitalist democracies. The Lithuanian Government ministers themselves were surprised at it; they had never dreamed there would be such a turnout.

VI. WORKERS' SOVIETS

Events moved faster after the elections. Day and night the hum in the once quiet streets of Kaunas never ceased. "Watch our speed," said the workers proudly. "It is speed that Lithuania never knew before."

I was caught unaware by the speed of the changes. I had thought that the elections marked the end of the popular activities. For a whole day I stayed in my room writing cables and articles to America, telling how the changes thus far were within the framework of a constitutional democracy, and that nowhere were there indications of Soviets. Then I came down into the streets and bought a paper and "Workers' Soviets" were all over the front page. Overnight they had organized in a dozen factories.

The elections had marked not the end of the people's activity but the beginning. As the drive for trade unions had aroused the workers, so the elections had aroused the whole people and prepared them for further change. They had not merely voted, and then sunk back passively to await the coming sessions of the Sejm. They were holding

more meetings than ever, themselves discussing what the Sejm should do. It was during this week – between the elections and the convening of the Sejm – that the tide of the people’s will set strongly towards union with the U.S.S.R. Among the workers this took the form of the organization of Soviets. These Soviets were not yet government; they were formed “to assist our People’s Government” in the “preservation of law and order” and the “protection of property.”

I attended the organization of half a dozen of these Soviets. The workers assembled after work in some convenient place, most often in the factory yard. The chairman of the Factory Committee took the chair. Either he or somebody from the Kaunas Central Labor Union – this name was already replacing the “Darbo Rumai” – made a short speech to the effect that they had already formed trade unions to protect their interests as workers, but they needed a wider organization – a political organization – to protect their interests as citizens of the new Lithuania.

“We recently elected a People’s Sejm.” (*Applause*) “It will soon meet to pass laws that we are all demanding for a better life for the workers.” (*Renewed applause.*) “You yourself see how the bosses are acting. They are afraid the Sejm is going to nationalize their factories. Quite likely it will.” (*Burst of bigger, better applause.*) “So these bosses are already sabotaging their own factories and sneaking their capital abroad. If this continues it will throw a lot of us out of work.” (*Faces grow intent to see what the speaker proposes to do.*)

“We workers must protect these properties and keep them running. We must check up on raw materials and markets and see that the factories get what they need to keep them running. Part of this our government is already doing. But the government cannot be everywhere. The workers are everywhere where there is any raw material or factory property. We can keep it from being destroyed. We will cooperate with the city authorities to maintain order and to see that all the new labor laws and any laws that may be passed about nationalizing industry are enforced. We will also collect information about the industrial properties of Lithuania, to present to the People’s Sejm.”

Then they proceeded to elect the “Soviet,” on the basis of one delegate for every fifty workers. “Choose men of good repute, known as sober, reliable citizens, to whom can be entrusted the properties of the people.” By the end of the week their delegates are meeting with

the delegates from other factories in their locality, to form District Soviets and eventually a Kaunas City Soviet.

In the big modern silk factory of Kauna-Audinai some eight hundred workers – the greater part women – assembled in the factory yard. A little wave of laughter ran over the gathering as names were called for. They were amused, it seemed, by their inexperienced chairman who had never run a meeting before. But it was good-natured laughter, and they soon settled down to business. It was clear they knew what they wanted. They greeted some names with applause, some with silence, and one or two with cries of opposition. They voted by raising their hands. The tellers put benches between the crowd to divide it, and stood on the benches to count. All hands went up for the first name, that of a young woman; then came other names with a smaller show of hands. Then came a name at which all hands went up swiftly and voices were calling “Unanimous! Needn’t stop to count.”

In the Pienocentras Milk Distributing Center the workers and employees gathered in the large cooperative dining room. Chervinsky, chairman of the Factory Committee, explained briefly the order of the day. “We are electing not a trade union but a political body. Our present government arose from the masses and must have organized contact with them and help from them.... Work in the future will go on not for the bosses’ profit but to produce for the country’s needs.... The boss may flee, or be put out by the government, but you workers remain in charge. With the help of these Soviets we are now electing, we shall look after the raw materials, prevent sabotage and organize the industries of the country.”

Here, as before, the Factory Committee suggested several names, then others were put up from the floor. Each candidate left the room as he was discussed, so the others might feel more free to comment.

Some of the candidates got many votes; others got very few. “I don’t know him; he’s a newcomer,” said a man beside me. “He may be all right but this is a serious thing we are doing. We must vote only for people whom we can guarantee.” Such was the seriousness with which they look their vote.

Does he drink? Is he flighty? Was he ever suspected of being a stool-pigeon? Or has he been known for years as a trusted, reliable man? These were the questions they asked before they voted. Two of the five nominees proposed by the Factory Committee are rejected by

the meeting. Of one of them the criticism is: "He talked very well before he was elected to the Factory Committee, but since then he does little work. If he hasn't time for the Factory Committee, he won't have time for this besides." Two weeks' trial had been enough for the workers to reject a man who was a good orator but lazy at work.

The second nominee rejected had once been in the police force. A member of the Committee explained: "He was fired from the police for opposing Smetona and in that way he came to work with us." One worker said: "If he was in the police, maybe he is good for keeping order," but this comment was not favorably received. "He may be all right," said others, "but we haven't known him long enough." He lost, getting only thirty votes.

In place of these two the rank-and-file workers nominate a man from the office staff. "He was the one who always did the best he could for our complaints." They put up also a girl who had been in jail for political action against Smetona. Both these are elected, one with more than eighty and one with seventy-four votes. The rejection of two of the Factory Committee's nominees does not mean that the workers are against the Factory Committee. Its chairman, Chervinsky, is most popular of all. They do not even let him leave the room while they discuss him. As he starts to withdraw, a dozen girls throw themselves in his path and throw their arms around his shoulders, dragging him back to the presiding chair.

"Unanimous, unanimous," they shout and he is unanimously elected.

Five candidates were elected, two of them unanimously, one almost unanimously and the others with some three-quarters of the votes. But now a representative from the warehouse arises to complain that: "Our candidate was turned down and there ought to be one from the warehouse, since that is where much property is kept." A brief inquiry is made into the size of the warehouse and the number of workers in it, and then by unanimous vote the warehouse candidate replaces the lowest of the five who had seventy-four votes.

Very democratically, very informally, very frankly and very effectively the whole thing was done. Seldom have I been in a meeting of such good feeling where the results so accurately mirrored the choice of all. The thing that surprised me most was how these workers took to it. The chairmen in most of the meetings were just out of prison. The workers had not been allowed to hold meetings

until the past few weeks. Here they were raising their hands and getting the floor and electing Soviets like veterans. Just like ducks to water!

What surprised me next was how sensible and prosaic it all seemed. They were just telling decent, respectable workers to keep on with their jobs and protect property and elect reliable representatives. The recent election of a Working People's government had made it possible for the workers to uphold the laws instead of opposing 'hem; it had given to the Revolution the weapon of stability and law.

* * *

But it was revolution for all that. It was clear that as soon as the Sejm should pass laws nationalizing industry, the Workers' Soviets would be ready to carry the decision through.

Not only in the cities but in the rural districts discussions and meetings were going on. It was already known that the large estates would be divided among the peasants and that no *kolkhozes* (collective farms) were planned for the present. Already the poorer peasants and farmhands were beginning to interest themselves in the idea of getting more land.

I spent three days among the farmers and fishermen of the Far Northern sea coast, as the guest of Stasia Vaneikiene, the new burgomaster of Palanga, a tiny port close to the Memel frontier. Stasia's revolutionary history goes back into the closing days of the last century when, as a girl of sixteen, she had smuggled leaflets in the forbidden Lithuanian language over the East Prussian frontier. Later she went with her husband into a tsarist exile in Yakutsk beyond the Arctic Circle. Forty years of struggle for the rights of the Lithuanian people – she had lived them all.

In her garden at Palanga she showed me a large five-pointed star solid of red flowers. "When I planted it last spring the neighbors said I would be arrested for it. But when the flowers were red, the Red Army came."

For two days I went with the Young Communists of Palanga into the villages. They were organizing the farmhands on all the larger farms, and explaining to them the new plans of the government. "Watch all the livestock and equipment; let no one sabotage, for it will soon be yours." It was much the same type of organization as I had seen in the factories, but on a smaller, more primitive scale.

Most of all I remember the vivid new life that had come to the fishermen of Sventosos Uostas, a small port north of Palanga. They gathered around me there and would not let me go.

“We don’t get people from the city very often,” they told me, “and we can’t afford to go to Kaunas, so you must take the message of the things we need.”

They had already organized what they called a “trade union.” It was hardly a regular union, for they do not work for wages; they own their own boats. But they felt themselves workers, and together with the building workers’ union and the office workers’ union, the new “fishers’ union” made up the new life of the port. They had enrolled two hundred members, and passed a resolution, which they had sent to President Paletskis with copies to several ministries.

Insurance for sickness and for families of drowned fishermen, insurance for boats were among their demands. A government organ on the coast, and not far away in Kaunas, to look after fisheries and to buy their fish. There were a lot of other things they wanted but what struck me most was their own initiative. They had already enrolled two hundred fishermen who wanted to study Russian, and had secured three aged intellectuals, who dated back to tsarist days, to act as teachers.

“But we haven’t any textbooks, and the courses are ready to start at once. Send us at least fifty textbooks of the Russian language. Also we want a school to teach us about fishing and navigation.”

“But you have fished all your life. Don’t you know fishing?” I asked!

“What my father told me, that I know,” said a tall, weather-beaten fisherman in whose eyes were the blue distances of the sea. “Only that and nothing more. I don’t know the compass, I don’t know motors, I don’t know how to read charts. Nobody ever cared to teach us. Smetona sent us only corrupt officials. Now we also want our share of the new life.”

As I left their little settlement, two of them stuck their heads into my automobile: “Tell Stasia Vaneikiene, our deputy, to remember why we send her to the Sejm,” they said. “Don’t let that Red Army get away. If she doesn’t get us into the Soviet Union, let her never show her face around here again.” Then they laughed in a friendly way, for they knew that this was what Stasia and many millions of others wanted, and they were sure that it would be.

Thus all through the week in all parts of the country the tide set ever stronger towards the Soviet Union, and towards the whole revolutionary program of the Communists, which included four points for the coming People's Sejm.

1. Lithuania a Soviet Socialist Republic.
2. Incorporation into the Soviet Union. ‘
3. Nationalization of land, with users' rights for all actual soil tillers.
4. Nationalization of banks and industries.

Towards the end of the week I dropped into the *Tiesa* office again. I had been unable to get it by phone. I soon saw the reason: both phones had been occupied for hours, taking down the resolutions that were pouring in from the provinces.

Editor Zimanas let me listen in on a conversation with an organizer in a distant village, reporting the meeting just held.

“Many peasants there?” asked Zimanas.

“Lots of them,” came the answer.

“What are they saying?”

“They are applauding.”

“Applauding what?”

“The whole program.... Lithuania a Soviet Republic, joining the Soviet Union, nationalization of banks and industries and...”

“How about the land?”

“Sure,” said the organizer. “They’re applauding that also. They say it is just that the man who tills the land should have it, but not the man who hires.”

“Tell me the truth,” said Zimanas. “Don’t indulge in wishful thinking. Aren’t they really worried about the Bolsheviks?”

“They don’t sound worried” said the man in the village. “They said the Red Army men are not bad people.”

“If you had told me a week ago,” said the editor of *Tiesa* as he turned from the phone to me, “or even five days ago that a single peasant meeting would applaud Soviets; if you had told me that we could get the whole land on its feet, singing, applauding...”

“Yes! There is really such a thing as the people moving. Even we who are in the midst of it, even we who organize it, marvel at the strength and sureness with which they move.”

VII. THE SEJM DECIDES

At 3:30 o'clock in the afternoon of July 21, 1940, Lithuania became a Soviet Socialist Republic by unanimous vote of the People's Sejm. Two hours later, also by unanimous vote, the Sejm voted to apply for admission into the Soviet Union.

This was the first sovereign state ever constitutionally entering the Soviet Union as a fully organized government. It was a moment of great historic importance.... A few hours later, on the same day, Latvia and Esthonia followed.

The procedure was imposingly correct. On a high stage of the Kaunas Grand Opera House, under great Lithuanian flags, President Paletskis outlined the long centuries of oppression of the Lithuanian people, first by Polish and then by tsarist overlords. Then he spoke of the past twenty years of the "Lithuanian Republic." "Our so-called independence was always a myth. Our country was the football of foreign imperialists; its fate was decided in London, Geneva, Warsaw, but never in Kaunas. It was oppressed by its own capitalists and by international capitalists.... Never again will capitalists exploit Lithuania."

Prime Minister Kreve-Michevicius, one of Lithuania's most famous educators and writers, presented the report of the government for the recent weeks since the flight of Smetona, and offered the formal resignation of all the ministers. The Sejm at once unanimously voted fullest confidence in the government and requested the ministers to continue at their posts "pending revision of the Constitution." Minister of Home Affairs Gedvilas made the motion to organize Lithuania as a Soviet Socialist Republic; this was seconded by speeches from many of the deputies and then unanimously adopted, the deputies voting by raising aloft their credentials. Minister of Justice Pakarklis made the motion to apply to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. for admission to the Soviet Union, which was similarly adopted after several supporting speeches. There were continuous applause and cheers from the great audience in the theater and from thousands waiting outside. After the passage of both motions the deputies embraced each other, kissed and cheered.

This was the climax of that whirlwind campaign which in a single fortnight had reached not only every city but every farmhouse in the country, and which had brought out 95.5 per cent of the electorate in the greatest election Lithuania had ever known. The ticket of

the “Working People’s Candidates,” thus elected, contained twenty-four peasants, twenty one workers, four soldiers and thirty progressive intellectuals. In the week after the elections the tide had run even stronger towards the Soviet Union. Resolutions supporting the present decision had poured in from all over the land.

Throughout that rapid week the attitude of the patriotic intellectuals had been changing while you wait. Those who were close to the people had been swept along by the tremendous tide of the elections and had begun to rationalize their choice. “I do not understand this form of voting,” said one of them to me. “I wanted another kind, with several parties, such as they have in America and England. But the people are clearly happy in this election, so I must approve it too.”

During the first week of my visit many of these intellectuals had wanted “an independent Lithuania with close military alliance with the U.S.S.R.” These had been swinging towards a new position for much the reasons that Paletskis gave. One of them, a non-Communist but a sincere lover of the Lithuanian people, who had spent many years in prison under Smetona for his anti-fascist politics, told me:

“For us patriotic intellectuals there was a certain opium in the words ‘free, independent Litva.’ Even when I lay in prison, I charmed myself with the opium that Litva was ‘free.’ But we must look at the facts. We were never really free from economic domination. And now in the present face of Europe, there is no room for even those so-called independent states that existed before. There is only a choice between our two great neighbors. As an honest lover of Lithuanian freedom, I must vote to enter the Soviet Union.”

The conversion of the intellectuals was greatly aided by the arrival in Kaunas of a brilliant troupe of artists from the Moscow Grand Opera and Ballet and from the state theaters of the U.S.S.R. The whole history of the Baltic states has never known such superb concerts and such delirious applause. They wafted the artists and the intellectuals towards the Soviet Union on waves of dance and song. Listening to these world-famous artists, interspersed with a few of the best of the Lithuanian artists, it was suddenly clear that the old dream of an “independent culture” meant only a barren isolation, starving the people’s spirit, shutting them away from the great heritage of human culture beyond their small frontiers. Here, close, at hand, was a mighty many-nationed culture which not only offered to these isolated artists a contact with great art and music, but which

demanded of them, not to become Russianized or Polonized, but to be truly Lithuanian, and thus win recognition and fame among their peers.... Outside the concerts, in the night and the rain, great hordes of the populace waited for hours to cheer and have a glimpse of the artists, barefoot beggars rubbing shoulders with well-dressed government employees.

* * *

Even before the Sejm met, the preliminary steps towards nationalization of industry were well under way. These were accomplished by the Ministry of Finance, whose new chief, Veisnora, was an energetic red-headed young economist. He told me: "We are now going over from capitalism to the planned economy of socialism. We must destroy the exploitation of labor. Not capital, but labor, must henceforth be the decisive factor. The change should be easier in the Baltic countries than it has ever been previously imagined. We have had no shocks of war or revolution; all our economic organization is still intact. It remains to take it over in the public interest without stopping a wheel."

The first step was to place in every one of the private banks an "administrator" from the Ministry of Finance, who had the right to investigate all transactions and to forbid any that seemed to him abnormal. Then similar administrators were placed in the larger industries. They cooperated with the Workers' Soviets to fix norms of production, to see that the industry kept on producing, and that no raw material or factory equipment was injured or destroyed.

"So far," said Veisnora to me in the week before the Sejm met, "all the industrialists are in their places, under strict orders from the government to run the factories as usual. We shall remove any who sabotage." He added that, with the aid of the workers, it was fairly simple to protect the fixed machinery and material, that the chief attempt of the employers to evade nationalization was by converting the working capital into jewelry and other small articles of value which might be smuggled abroad.

"We stopped that at once by requiring all financial transactions of any size to be done by bank drafts, under constant inspection by our "administrators." Only the smallest petty cash accounts are allowed to be carried in currency in the factory office; the rest is handled under our control.

Veisnora also told me how they had stopped the brief panic of buying up goods in the shops which I had noticed in the first week of my stay. I went into a shop to buy a pair of stockings and found long lines of people buying sweaters and suits by the half dozen at a time. They were clearly speculators who wished to convert their cash into objects of value. Within a few days this buying stopped. "We did it by requiring all shops to keep lists of purchasers," said Veisnora, "and by listing all purchases of important commodities on the buyer's passport. This will not harm the honest buyer who buys only what he needs. But it would be inconvenient for anyone to have a dozen coats on his passport when the police inquire." These two measures had stopped the most obvious forms of speculation.

Minister of Agriculture Mitskis had also been busily preparing the law for nationalization of land. The Vilna district was still full of feudal estates and poverty-stricken peasants; in the rest of Lithuania two "land reforms," one in 1922 and the other in 1929, had taken place, breaking up the feudal lands. These had, however, allowed landlords to retain as much as one hundred and fifty hectares;* and, under Smetona corrupt officials had "rented" back to the landlords an additional part of their previously confiscated estates. The "land reforms" themselves had set up a large number of farms of from thirty to one hundred hectares which were farmed with the aid of hired labor. In fact, one-fourth of the total farming population consisted of landless laborers.

Of landowning peasants, a fourth were poor peasants with less than five hectares who could not live by their land alone. The great majority, over two-thirds, had farms of from five to thirty hectares, on which farming families might live without hiring help. This left less than a tenth of the farms with more than thirty hectares, but they included about one-third of the farming land. The new law proposed to limit individual farms to thirty hectares and to use all above that amount to increase the holdings of those peasants who had not enough for the family's food.

"Many of the biggest landlords have already fled," said Mitskis to me, a week before the Sejm met. "They had bad consciences; they had broken not only our present ideas of justice but even the bourgeois land laws of the past. They had got land lawlessly by bribing

* A hectare equals 2.47 acres – *Ed.*

officials. Honest men, even past landlords, need not fear us. Old Count Zubovas, who held land from the days of Catherine, is still here. He was one of the few progressives among the nobility; even in the 1905 Revolution he sided with the peasants. He will lose his land now, but he is an able farmer and might get a job as agronomer. No one will injure him.”

* * *

Such were the preparations and the discussions which preceded the Sejm assembly. At the end of that rapid week of organizing which had created Workers' Soviets and already placed “administrators” in the larger factories and which had scattered throughout the rural districts the new government policy about the land, the deputies began to arrive in Kaunas. The Metropolis Hotel, where I was staying, was cleared to them, but I was allowed to remain. Thereafter for four days I mingled freely with the deputies.

They were an informal lot, fully aware of the great importance of the occasion, but totally unspoiled by the formalities of government. On learning that I was a writer from America, they welcomed me almost as a fraternal delegate, and invited me to their excursions and dining room. Thus I heard their informal discussions of the important matters of the Sejm sessions. The matter of entrance into the U.S.S.R. was very realistically viewed by them. Moreover, it was plain from their comments that they knew they were expressing the views of wide constituencies.

A mechanic from Vilna said: “These little countries are stupid. We have suffered long enough from small frontiers. For twenty years Vilna knows unemployment and hunger. And we have seen how, close to our borders, Bielostok which the Soviets took last autumn, already flourishes with new factories. If we join the Soviet Union, we also shall flourish with new factories and shall have no unemployed.”

A peasant spoke up: “More than anything else, all our peasants want peace. All of them say: Let be what social system you will, only no war.... We think the Red Army can protect us from war. And what is the use of all these little nations. They only put on heavy taxes for big armies, and then their armies are no good anyway. We see what is happening in Europe to all the little countries. In the Union we shall have a big army that can really protect.”

This was the hard realism that caused the Sejm deputies – voicing the will of their constituents – to vote for union with the U.S.S.R.

* * *

On the second day of the Sejm sessions the decree of land nationalization was passed. It was brilliantly prepared and worded in a manner to win the widest support from the peasants. It began by cancelling some fifty million dollars' worth of peasant indebtedness, in accumulated taxes and mortgages owed to the state. It declared the tillers of the soil the rightful and only possessors of Lithuanian soil, which they hold without payment. It prohibited sale, mortgaging and speculation in lands. On the basis of these principles and for the protection of the soil tillers, land was declared state property, to be entrusted to the soil tillers for their use; individual holdings being limited to thirty hectares and all lands above this to be distributed to peasants with insufficient land, and to farm hands. Any attempt at forcible collectivization or the taking of the peasants' livestock, houses and inventory was declared a crime against the state.

Banks and factories were nationalized on the third day of the sessions without stopping a wheel. The existing owners and directors were ordered to remain on the job pending confirmation or removal by the state. Workers' guards were placed overnight at some forty of the biggest factories in Kaunas to forestall sabotage, but none was attempted. The Sejm adjourned at noon after appointing a Constitutional Commission and a delegation to go to Moscow to apply to the Supreme Soviet for admission to the Union.

Sitting at tea in the session intervals in a room behind the theater boxes, President Paletskis said to me, cheerfully, informally: "Lithuania's path to socialism is the easiest ever known." I have seldom seen a man more happy.

Outside in the rain as the Sejm session ended a great crowd of Kaunas people waited their report.

"The Soviet Union now extends from Kaunas to Vladivostok," said the President to their cheers.

VIII. TAKING OVER THE FACTORIES

Almost at once after the Sejm sessions the taking over of the factories began. A new Ministry of Industry was formed, secured two rooms in another ministry as temporary offices and at once became

the general staff for the nationalization. In automobiles commandeered from other ministries, several dozen inspectors were sent out to the factories, beginning with the largest ones.

In each factory the inspector called together the workers' Factory Committee and with their help selected a commissar, in most cases some well-known and reliable worker in the plant itself. He was not charged with management; all former directors and even owners were ordered to remain on the job pending the government's final decision. The commissar's task was to make full inventory of plant, machines, raw materials, finished products and general conditions of the plant and its relations with other factories, preparatory to the formal taking over.

The Ministry of Industry gave me a letter of introduction authorizing me to visit the factories to see how the nationalization was going on. They were proud of the new seal with which they stamped this letter; it bore a red star with a sickle and hammer inset. "Historic," they said. "No ministry ever had such a seal before. By the time the other ministries get seals like this, they'll not be 'ministries' but 'commissariats.'" "

The automobile in which I drove with Inspector Izim to view the factories on a Sunday afternoon still bore the name-plate of Count Komaras, a nobleman and landlord from tsarist days, now dispossessed. As we drove through a crowded part of the city, Izim said: "I can't get used to it. Less than two months ago I wouldn't have dared walk down these streets. This was a regular nest of police spies and one would have surely seen me and turned me in. Now..." his hand indicated the sweep of the journey we were making, "ten factories visited in an afternoon."

Never have I seen a gayer bunch of workers than we met in the Gumi Plant. This is a large establishment which makes galoshes, garters and fancy elastics and other rubber articles. Operation was shut down for Sunday, but in every department a group of workers was busily taking inventory. In one room thousands of aluminum forms had to be counted, in another room tens of thousands of yards of fancy braids had to be measured. Elsewhere they were counting boxes of galoshes. The new commissar, they told me, had been appointed the previous day. He had at once called a meeting of the most active workers and had formed with their help a "commission" of seven members, one for each main shop. Each of these seven had then organized a "workers' brigade" of volunteers from his shop,

who were giving Saturday night and Sunday to the task of listing the properties. In the stock room they had hung up a red flag with the hammer and sickle. Under it they were busy as bees.

One of the girls in her haste dropped an aluminum form which she was counting. Another girl at once reproved her. "Take care of those things. They're ours now," she said.... Yes, "ours" for the past two days and not yet listed, but already the mental attitude was new. They were learning their new possessions.

Then I saw what the process of "inventory and take-over" was doing to the minds of the workers. It was breaking down lifelong habits of thought. All of their lives they had been trained under capitalism. This and that "belonged" to the boss. Their working day also "belonged" to him.

Trade unions were all very well, but they didn't break down that feeling. Even with collective bargaining the boss was still "the boss." Even the election of Shop Committees and Workers' Soviets had not stirred the workers like this. They had talked and listened and elected; they had been told that new life had come. But workers think not so much through talk and elections; they think more deeply through their hands on machines. Now they were putting their hands on the machines and listing them, carefully, thoroughly, listing them as "ours."

I went from the stockroom in "Gumi" into the room with tile big machines. Instead of the gay flock of girls there were more skilled and older workers here, the men who know machines. Three days ago the clatter of those machines was hateful, reminding them of the long exhaustion of a worker's life.

The clatter was still there, the machines were still as speedy. Yet everything had changed. A worker laid his hand caressingly on the biggest machine and introduced it to me.

"These are our treasures," he said.

Not far from "Gumi" we stopped at Inkaras, another large factory of rubber goods. The new commissar had formerly been a chauffeur and "one of the best comrades in the plant," the workers said. He told me Inkaras had belonged to a large stock company, with capital from Latvia and England. The company had another factory in Poland and had tried to reduce the conditions of Lithuanian workers to those of Poland, which were among the worst in Europe.

I asked if the bosses of Inkaras were worse than others? "All bosses are of one bone," he said. "But the big ones – the colonizers –

are better organized and hungrier. In that way they are worse.” He added that “no doubt some of our bosses have already reached America and are telling tales about us, trying to get America into war with the U.S.S.R. for the sake of their property. Tell America from us that we have a new life now, with open eyes.”

The whole plant was being listed in a day and a half – over Sunday; then the lists were to be worked into correct form by the office staff during the week. “We are taking inventory faster than the bosses ever took it, and without stopping work,” they boasted. “Since we are owners now, we must know what we have here.”

They had already found that their chief difficulty was shortage of raw material. They had only ten tons of caoutchouc, barely enough for a week. The workers at “Gumi” had heard of this shortage at Inkaras and had themselves informed the Ministry of Industry that they had enough caoutchouc for three months and might help out Inkaras. A week earlier such cooperation would have been unheard of.

The Inkaras workers were especially proud of the new Workers’ Club they had started. They had rented a building and set up an assembly hall, a library and many classes and lectures. They already had several “workers’ correspondents” who were writing for the newspapers, sending in news about the plant and the life of the workers.

“I waited for this hour when I could work for the workers’ own factories,” said a young machinist whom I asked why he was giving his Sunday without pay. He urged me to tell American workers to prevent their government from doing anything against the U.S.S.R. “We are all optimistic about the future if only there is no war,” he said.

I went rapidly through a whole series of textile factories, most of them antiquated, in ancient, badly lit and badly ventilated buildings. In some of them women had been appointed as commissars. Young Esther Bayer, a girl not yet eighteen, was commissar in the textile mill, and was finding it hard. Older workers thought her too young, some of the men objected to a woman. But she was a good fighter and though she had only become commissar at noon that day, she had formed a brigade of ten of the forty-eight workers and had the factory half inventoried already.

“It’s funny about the machines,” she said. “The bookkeeper says they are worthless, but we think they are worth very much.” The

machines were fourteen years old, and the bookkeeper had “amortized” them out of existence. “I think the boss counted them that way to lessen his taxes,” said Esther. “We have estimated them as worth to us 50 per cent of new.”

At Shilkas silk factory, we found a bookkeeper working out the inventory from the lists which the workers’ brigades had finished. “Everybody’s happy,” he said.

In Fortuna, another old textile mill, the new woman commissar took me up the ancient stairs to the weaving rooms where I found a woman weaving in such atrocious light that I was shocked at what it would do to her eyes. “It’s very dark here,” I said.

“It will be very bright soon,” she replied with a swift glance. I looked for the electric attachment but saw none near.

“Did she mean actually or politically?” I asked the commissar as we left. “Both,” smiled the commissar. She was in a concentration camp for agitating for better conditions here.”

* * *

Back in the Ministry of Industry I found Assistant Minister Maimin working late into the night. Instructors were coming to report on their day in the factories; phone calls were coming in from the provinces too. Here in this office a balance had to be struck each day. What factories needed help, and raw materials? Where were the weak spots?

Between the phone calls Maimin talked with me. He listed for me the chief tasks in their order. First, take inventory and take over the factories. Next, secure adequate raw materials. Third, organize and improve the actual functioning of industry.

“The taking over is proceeding in fullest order. No country ever went to socialism before without destruction of property and life. The chief cause of such orderly proceeding is the presence of the Red Army. Next is the fact that our bourgeoisie is not strong or well organized. Most of it is actually active in industry in a productive sense; we have few people living on dividends and interest.... Besides this, we are proud that the office and technical staff of our factories did not split away from the industrial workers, as they did in the Russian Revolution in 1917. They are fully cooperating; because of this we have had practically no sabotage thus far.

“Raw material is our chief problem. Our commissars phone in that in a week they will have no material, or no fuel. A week ago this

did not interest them. Now it is their affair.... Next to raw material comes training personnel. If the old directors are good they can stay; but they must be carefully watched. Meantime we must prepare our own staff to run industry.

“Sometimes this office is like a madhouse. Worse than the concentration camp,” he grinned. “What keeps you going is the wide initiative of the workers. They already are making suggestions for the better running of industry and for guarding our properties better. In some places, they act as if they had always run the plant. Elsewhere it isn’t so good.

In one factory, he said, the owner ran away, leaving the workers hungry with two thousand lits wages unpaid. The commissar at once sold some of the finished products and paid the workers amid cheers.... In another factory the Factory Committee phoned that the commissar was honest but not able enough for the job; the Ministry investigated and appointed another commissar.

The phone calls come. “What shall we do to get our raw material? There is plenty of it here but it is sealed away under a bank loan.”

“Why worry about that,” answers Maimin. “Aren’t the banks ours too?”

Another phones: “Our products are waiting to be shipped to fill a German order. Shall we let them go?”

“Certainly,” replies Maimin. “All our international obligations must be fulfilled.”

Again the bell rings. A commissar wants to know what to do with a director who refuses to give up the shares of stock. “He says he doesn’t know where they are, but he must be sabotaging.”

“Do you need them?” asks Maimin. “Are they valuable?”

“Valuable? What do you mean? They are the company’s whole capital.”

“Wait a minute,” says Maimin, “Isn’t your factory nationalized?”

“But of course. What a question.”

“Then what’s the use of those bits of paper of past ownership? Don’t worry about them. See to the materials and machines.”

A delegation arrives – a whole shop committee – to ask: “The owner asks for a salary. Does he get it?”

“What was he doing during the time?” asks Maimin. “Was he at the factory or cutting coupons?”

“He was at the plant directing it.”

“Then he needs a salary – the same that the technical staff gets.”

* * *

“Siauliai calling. Siauliai calling.” It is an instructor reporting from the city where I saw trade unions start. I listen to Maimin’s replies.’

“Of course we nationalize electric stations even with only ten workers. Anything that has to do with electric power....

“Quite right. The big ones first. You can take in the little electric power plant tomorrow....

“No, no, don’t take factories unless they have motors. Motors, I said, not electricity. They all have electricity....

“Didn’t you read the papers? Hadn’t time? Well, you’re a bright one, for an instructor! Better read the Nationalization Law!...

“How are all the administrators? All on the job? Nobody sabotaging? That’s good. How about raw materials? Big ones all right but the little ones complain. Well, the rich factories always had it better. But tell them to signal any shortages at once. Tomorrow we’re opening a department for supplying raw materials. Also for credits. Send in your needs....

“No! No! Raw materials are for our own factories only, as far as we are able. We certainly can’t bother to supply those little private shops. They are asking to be nationalized, are they, since otherwise they’ll go bankrupt? Tell them we haven’t time. What are they to do? Let them form collectives. Maybe they’ll survive. ...

“None of you are to come back to Kaunas till it’s over. That’s orders now. Did you take enough money? Well, you’ve got to eat. Tell the bank to lend you on our credit and to phone me for authorization. Phone tomorrow evening. Good night. Good night.”

IX. LIMITLESS HORIZONS

Coming back from one of the newly nationalized factories I passed a narrow ravine on the edge of Kaunas, out of which rose the peaks of four red banners blowing in the wind. A muddy path, well trodden, led into it from the highway, between green hillsides on one of which browsed a cow. Above the path an arch bore the inscription: “Murdered comrades, the Lithuanian people carries on the work that you began.”

A lonely spot, or rather, a spot that had been lonely. It had been an execution ground. Near enough to the city for the early dawn drive from the prison; far enough so that no citizens might interfere. Here fourteen years ago, on Smetona's armed seizure of power, were executed four Communist leaders: Karolys Pozhila, Suozas Greifenbergeris, Rapolas Chiornis and Kazys Giedrys.

They shot them. They buried them. They left no heaped-up earth, no loadstone to mark the graves. Workers came at night to heap the earth and cover it with flowers. Anyone caught visiting the graves was arrested. But nights are dark, and many a red dawn found wreaths there, which the police angrily removed and leveled the ground again. For fourteen years Smetona's police stamped into the earth the very memory of the men they slew.

The ravine is no longer lonely. Above each grave a great red banner gives temporary tribute until a more permanent mark can be made. A similar red banner not far away marks grave of a peasant leader, executed here for the Suwalk peasant uprising in 1936. Great wreaths of flowers from the new trade unions of Kaunas cover the spot. Young workers come here with their girls in the early evening, and mothers with their small children. They trudge through the mud and water of a little brook that drains the hillside. They stand silent with uncovered heads.

Near us stands a worker, holding his small son by the hand. Here, formerly," he explains to the boy, "they shot folks for politics." Then, as the child's eyes grow round, the father makes it clearer: "For organizing workers they shot them." It is already a history lesson he teaches, as of a long past.

* * *

I think of this ravine as the special train pulls out from Kaunas, bearing the Sejm delegation to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. It is full of happy and excited people whom I have learned in these short weeks to love. Crowds and bands are at all the stations, bidding goodbye or welcoming. Every compartment is buried in flowers from well wishers: flowers from Kaunas, flowers from Vilna, flowers from Minsk and from Moscow too. Even the automobiles are garlanded.

We changed trains unexpectedly at Vilna; rapid construction work had shifted the narrow European gauge to the wider Russian gauge and the Soviet train met us here. "Already the wider road," said one of the delegates smiling.

“A few miles back,” said another, “we crossed the old frontier between Lithuania and Poland; last autumn it was wiped away. Soon we shall reach the frontier between Lithuania and the Soviet Union and then the former frontier between Poland and the U.S.S.R. Three frontiers gone in a single year.”

We came to the small red post that marked the boundary. Soldiers drawn up on both sides saluted the train. The delegates looked long at the post, pointing it out to each other. “It will be gone when we come back; this is the last of it,” they said.

Then the train moved on toward Moscow.

In Moscow a welcoming arch. “Long live the mighty friendship of the peoples of our great motherland.” In Moscow the white halls of the Kremlin palace under their red stars. In Moscow the cheering session of the Supreme Soviet, hearing for the first time in history the president of an independent sovereign state make application for admission to the U.S.S.R. After President Paletskis several others speak. Last of all Pranas Zibertas, translated by my old friend Shumauskas, tells of his twenty years in prison and of the old mother who believed all those years that he would some day come out.

“And now all those years are as if they had never been. We have plunged into work with young strength.”

I know that the speeches are being heard by radio in Kaunas, that around the loud-speakers on Laisves Allee, great crowds are cheering in unison with Moscow’s cheers. I know that socialist competition has begun already among Lithuanian workers, that bricklayers have laid three times the normal tale of bricks, and that elsewhere production increases because “the factories are our own.”

Thus the narrow frontiers gave place to the limitless horizons. There are no boundaries any more from the Baltic to Vladivostok, from western to eastern sea.