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A TROJAN HORSE: LITHUANIAN COMMUNIST PARTY ACTIVITIES IN LEGAL ORGANISATIONS, 1934–1940*

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This article examines the activities of the Lithuanian Communist Party and its efforts to utilise a strategy emerging after the Seventh Comintern Congress to infiltrate, establish, and exploit legal Lithuanian organisations in order to influence their members, disseminate propaganda, or bring these organisations under their control. Although communist activity in Lithuania was fairly insubstantial, communists used their operations to approach and establish contact with individual leaders on the Lithuanian left and later, after the Soviet occupation, exploited them to form a new administration.

Keywords: Comintern, Communist Party of Lithuania, communist infiltration, communist legal work, fifth column, Seventh Comintern Congress

Introduction

A new strategy adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress in the summer of 1935 marked a significant shift in the policies of the Communist Party. Firstly, communist parties were expected to alter their position towards more moderate socialist parties and become a political force through the creation of popular fronts in coalition with centre-left parties. Secondly, local Comintern sections

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were to be given greater independence, since it was felt that guidance suitable for all of them could not be provided solely from Moscow.[1]

A change also occurred in attitudes towards legal opportunities for communist activity. In his address to the conference, Secretary General of the Comintern Georgi Dimitrov asserted:

> "Comrades, you recall the ancient legend about the capture of Troy. Troy was inaccessible to the armies attacking her. [...] And the attacking army [...] was unable to achieve victory until, with the aid of the famous Trojan horse, it managed to penetrate [...] We revolutionary workers, it appears to me, should not be shy about using the same tactics with regard to our fascist foe [...]."[2]

Although Dimitrov spoke at length about popular and united fronts,[3] by using the Trojan Horse allegory he referred to a different tactic – covert activity within organisations and parties, and not collaboration in any "fronts". The resolution adopted by the congress after Dimitrov's address stipulated that communists must "penetrate all mass fascist organisations possessing a monopoly of legality in their countries"[4] to undermine a given government's social base. This article discusses the adoption of the aforementioned tactic undertaken by the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL) within legal organisations. This article will not delve into the CPL's efforts to collaborate with other opposition parties, form a united or popular front, or even infiltrate and influence them. While these topics have been explored in Lithuanian historiography,[5] a comprehensive analysis would require different sources.

The CPL was illegal in Lithuania for almost all the interwar period, due to its involvement in the failed attempt to create a Soviet state with the help of the advancing Red Army in 1919. Forced underground, the CPL published newspapers, proclamations and organised demonstrations and worker strikes. These activities attempted to disrupt the life of society and to foster dissatisfaction

1 Firsov 2019.

2 Georgy Dimitrov (1935). The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism. [Marxist Internet Archive], at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm (last access: 02.09.2023).

3 A United Front was an alliance of working-class groups; Popular Front was a broader coalition that included both leftist and non-proletarian parties.

4 Resolution of the Comintern adopted after the address of Dimitrov [in Lithuanian], 20.08.1935. Special archive of Lithuania (Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas, Vilnius; hereinafter: LYA), 77–18–1, p. 79.

5 Svarauskas, Tamošaitis 2007; Labanauskas 2010.

with the government and its policies. The goal was to pave the way for a coup or the overthrow of the government. But the members and leaders of the party were often arrested, so its activities were disrupted. Operating underground was not the only difficulty the CPL faced. Managing party activities proved to be challenging as well when two key leaders, Zigmas Aleksa-Angarietis and Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas, left Lithuania for Soviet Russia after the failed attempt to create a Soviet puppet state. Their prominence made operating within Lithuania too risky for them. The Lithuanian government would have spared no effort to apprehend them. Working within the Comintern apparatus, they directed the CPL from afar. However, covert communication methods made this a slow process: until the mid-1930s, communication relied solely on couriers. Radio communication was not established until around 1934.

The early 1920s saw Lithuanian communists, despite their outlawed status, begin covertly seeking opportunities to participate in legal activities. This included some communists successfully being elected to the Lithuanian parliament under the guise of representing labour organisations. Communists also took part in elections to the National Health Insurance Fund, municipal elections, operated in various nationwide legal organisations, and also tried to become active within the military.

As the overall strategy changed after the Seventh Comintern Congress, these activities were meant to become more systematic, and in countries where communist parties were banned, as in Lithuania, communists were to begin operating both within legal left-leaning organisations and in official state-inspired ("fascist")[6] organisations – a tactic they had previously shunned. These were the only opportunities available for them to increase the dissemination and influence of the communist propaganda.

Communist activity in the Republic of Lithuania before the Second World War was modest. Notably, efforts to operate legally were no exception to this trend. By operating discreetly and leveraging legal channels, the CPL successfully recruited and organised individuals who later played key roles in the consolidation of Soviet power in 1940–1941. While the highest positions in the new administration after the occupation were appointed by the Soviet envoy Vladimir Dekanozov, lower-level officials, such as heads of ministerial departments, newspaper editors

6 Communists applied a very broad meaning of the term "fascism". It could be used to describe social democrats ("social-fascists") as well as other left-wing, centrist and right-leaning organisations. As for involvement with "fascist" organisations, however, communists had in mind right-wing organisations or parties founded with the official backing of the state, such as the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (*Šaulių Sąjunga*).

and many more, were often selected by the leadership of the Communist Party of Lithuania (often in consultations with Dekanozov or other Soviet officials).

The Comintern's activities in various countries had been studied quite extensively: from European countries[7] and USA[8] to Latin America[9] and other continents.[10] The Comintern's politics, relations between the Comintern and Soviet leadership have also received considerable attention in literature.[11] Most researchers tend to focus on illegal activities and secret networks or on the Comintern and communist party activities in general. They often overlook legal or semi-legal activities. This paper aims to research the CPL's legal activities in 1934–1940. It will explore the methods, organisations used, and the outcomes of such policies. While this analysis will provide context through general events, the sheer volume of small-scale legal activities necessitates focusing on particularly significant and larger-scale examples. To delve deeper into these tactics, we will explore two case studies: the Freethinkers' Ethical Cultural Society and the Jewish Educational Society. The organisations were chosen for study to illustrate varying approaches and outcomes, providing a nuanced understanding of the CPL's methods. While these organisations were not inherently hostile to left-wing ideology, the CPL's efforts were not simple.

In the post-independence period, Lithuanian historians have largely overlooked the CPL's broader activities. Their primary focus has been on the Party's interactions with the intelligentsia. To avoid duplicating the existing research,[12] this paper will not delve into the CPL's internal organisational challenges or its relationship with the left-wing intelligentsia. These topics require separate analysis using specialised sources.

Soviet historians, on the other hand, wrote extensively about the CPL's history, exalting the party and its activities. Legal party activities also have received some attention.[13] The focus has been mainly on communist efforts to

7 In 2019, a conference was held in Moscow in honour of the centenary of Comintern. Papers on Comintern and communist party activities in Denmark, Yugoslavia, Norway, and other countries were presented there. See Kajzer, Sorokin 2020. Numerous other research publications on this topic have also been published: Fishman 1995; Thorpe 1998. For a recent overview on related literature and a list of references, see Laamanen 2019.

8 Zumoff 2014; Klerh, Haynes, Firsov 1996.

9 Caballero 1986.

10 Onimaru 2016.

11 McDermott and Agnew 1996; Rosenfeldt 2009, Firsov, Klerh, Haynes 2014, Studer 2015.

12 Tamošaitis 2010.

13 Lempertas 1960, 1962; Mančinskas 1968; Beresnevičius 1983.

influence the intelligentsia and form a popular front.[14] Other historians focused on the CPL's attempts to influence political opposition to the ruling party in Lithuania.[15] These pro-communist historians generally emphasise the influence of communist activists in such organisations, but did not discuss the difficulties that these activists faced. Their portrayal of the CPL as a highly influential force is exaggerated. This paper argues that despite notable influence within specific organisations, the CPL's broader impact on Lithuanian society was limited. Its most significant achievement was the establishment of a network of individuals who could be mobilised post-occupation.

This article is based almost exclusively on unpublished sources: documents (correspondence, reports) of the CPL Central Committee (CC); unpublished memoirs of Communist Party members,[16] and documents produced by the pre-war Lithuanian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and the Lithuanian Department for State Security (DSS).[17] Analysing these documents is challenging due to inherent biases. For instance, the CPL's materials may exaggerate the Party's operational reach, and DSS reports might contain operational information gleaned from informants, that after some time proved misleading. Comparing the CPL and DSS documents reveals that communist records only captured a fraction of the CPL activities. The CPL leadership lacked complete information about its members engaged in legal organisations, and such activities were likely omitted from reports for secrecy. It is thus paradoxical that, while the CPL's reports contain little information about communist infiltration of legal organisations, the DSS documents mention communist activity occurring in some organisations. Admittedly, the DSS assessments of the CPL membership and participation in legal activities might be inaccurate. Some left-leaning individuals likely interacted with the CPL members without realising their party affiliation, so these interactions alone do not necessarily indicate sympathy for the communist cause, but the DSS sometimes viewed such interaction as a contact with the CPL. However, we can partially corroborate the DSS information by tracing the individuals mentioned there to documented pro-communist activities, or even their participation in the Soviet administration after Lithuania's occupation. Such cross-referencing across sources is crucial for a comprehensive picture.

14 Glovackienė 1974; Bložė 1980.

15 Bauža 1976.

16 They are kept in the Special Archive of Lithuania (LYA).

17 These are stored in the Central State Archive of Lithuania (Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas; hereinafter: LCVA).

A tactical shift in the Comintern and the directions of legal activities of the CPL

The strategy of the Comintern and changes in it can be analysed in specific phases. The years between 1928 and 1933 have been called the "third period", during which discord with social democrats intensified. But after the Nazi rise to power in Germany in 1933, one of the reasons cited for the National Socialists' success was the existing discord and division within the "leftist bloc", leading to a cautious discussion about the need for changes to the Comintern's strategy.[18]

Discussing changes to the Comintern's strategy was one thing, but implementing them in practice proved far more difficult. As previously noted, the CPL's leadership, geographically distant and struggling with slow communication channels, lacked a clear understanding of the situation on the ground in Lithuania. The first systematic operational instructions about the implementation of the new tactics reached Lithuania only in November 1935. These were not instructions developed for specific cases. The CPL leader Angarietis admitted that it was impossible to issue such guidelines without sufficient knowledge of specific circumstances. As a result, his proposals were confusing and out of touch with situation on the ground, demonstrating how far removed the CPL leader was from what was happening in Lithuania.[19]

Examining Angarietis' "advice" alongside other sources reveals three strategies for communist activity within legal organisations. Two of these – establishing new cover organisations and infiltrating the existing political parties and their affiliates – received some attention but ultimately proved unsuccessful, mainly due to government policies. As Lithuania was still under martial law (due to the failure of ceasefire talks and continued tensions with Poland), some laws and liberties were suspended, district commanders had considerable authority. Having assumed the post of Lithuania's president after the coup of 1926, Antanas Smetona strengthened his authoritarian regime in the 1930s. On 6 February 1936, in preparation for the scheduled parliamentary elections (the previous parliament had been dissolved in 1927), the government decided to disband all political parties (except the ruling *Tautininkai* [Nationalists] and parties in Klaipėda Autonomous District). While this measure curtailed the legal activities of communists, it also pushed some members of the outlawed parties underground, where they adopted a more radical stance in opposition to

18 McDermott and Agnew 1996, 120.

19 Letter of Angarietis to the CPL CC [in Lithuanian], 05.11.1935. LYA, 77–18–11, p. 196.

the ruling *Tautininkai* party. Forced to focus on organisations still able to operate legally, communists faced further restrictions with the passage of a new Law on Associations in February 1936, which granted the Ministry of Internal Affairs broad authority to restrict organisations and parties. Faced with stricter regulations, organisations either amended their charters and re-registered, or faced outright bans.

The CPL, however, aimed to retain influence by infiltrating or establishing units within existing organisations. This strategy was the most successful. Communists were instructed to join these groups, not undermine them: Angarietis' labelling these groups "Christian" or "fascist" mattered little, as they were often neither of the sort. The communists' goal was to gain control through pro-communist leadership elected by loyal to them members, while also disseminating communist or pro-Soviet information and ideas within these organisations. This could involve organising lectures: for example, by well-known writers and artists who had returned from the USSR with glowing reports or seizing control of the organisations' newspapers.[20]

The CPL prioritised infiltrating organisations with large working-class membership. This is evident in their successful infiltration of the athletic clubs of the Chamber of Labour, an organisation established to provide leisure activities and education for workers. According to a DSS report: "A considerable number of all kinds of communist elements have slipped in among club members, where they freely disseminate communist propaganda. The clubs organise all kinds of events and, as we have seen, a portion of profits from these events is given to benefit the Communist Party, because there is no proper bookkeeping."[21] The document cited a specific example where *Maistininkai* (Food Processors') Club leaders allegedly conspired with cinema owner Epstein to screen a film, diverting the profits to the Communist Party. A similar incident reportedly occurred at the *Viktorija* Club.

Another example was an attempt to exploit social problems and organisations dedicated to solving them. In the 1930s, the provisional capital Kaunas had a housing crisis – it was particularly difficult to purchase housing in Kaunas, so renting was quite common. Fuelled by Kaunas' rapid growth, apartment rents skyrocketed, prompting the establishment of the Tenants' Society in 1938. This association aimed to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants, support struggling

20 Letter of Angarietis to the CPL CC [in Lithuanian], 05.11.1935. LYA, 77–18–11, p. 196.

21 Information of State Security Department [in Lithuanian], 01.04.1940. LCVA, 378–10–575, p. 13.

renters, and promote cultural activities for residents of Kaunas and its suburbs. The founders of the organisation had no affiliation to the Communist Party, but due to the scale of the problem, interest in the society grew, and by early 1939 it had six hundred members,[22] including communists whose influence gradually increased. By March 1939, these members secured a pro-communist executive board through an election. The CPL member Jadvyga Rutkevičiūtė took charge of the cultural affairs. Meanwhile, two prominent figures, pro-Soviet journalist Justas Paleckis and agronomist Alfonsas Žukauskas, were elected chairman and vice chairman, respectively.[23] Both were already actively advocating for radical, anti-governmental, and pro-Soviet ideas through their involvement in other organisations. After the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940, Paleckis was installed as the Prime Minister and interim President, while Žukauskas took charge of the Land Commission, which oversaw the redistribution of land ownership.

The CPL also attempted to influence intelligentsia. The CPL member Michalina Meškauskienė was instructed to establish a literary journal. She secured the crucial support of Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, a prominent professor at Vytautas Magnus University.[24] Despite being short-lived, with only two issues published before its ban, the journal served the CPL's goals. It provided a platform for disseminating their views, not overtly radical communist ideology, but rather moderate leftist ideas and, crucially, pro-Soviet sentiment.

The Communist Party of Lithuania employed infiltration tactics to influence over a dozen organisations. As the following case studies will demonstrate, their primary objective was to gain control of these organisations. This meant securing enough members, not necessarily card-carrying communists, but people with radical leanings opposed to the existing power structure. This influence allowed them to elect pro-communist leadership and manipulate the organisation's press, common tactics across these groups.

Case one: The Freethinkers' Ethical Cultural Society and communist infiltration

Founded in 1923, the Freethinkers' Ethical Cultural Society (*Laisvamanių etinės kultūros draugija*; FECS) aimed to unite freethinkers and others who had cut all ties with religion. Though none of the Society's founding members were affiliated

22 Organizational Statistical Data [in Lithuanian], 17.07.1939. LCVA, 402–5–38, p. 16.
23 Letter from the Tenants' Society [in Lithuanian], 01.03.1939. LCVA, 402–5–38, p. 12.
24 Michalina Meškauskienė (1966). LKP telkė inteligentijos jėgas. *Komunistas*, 10, p. 68.

with or openly supported the Lithuanian Communist Party, the organisation's secular focus resonated with communists, particularly in Lithuania's provinces during the 1920s. This non-religious direction unintentionally facilitated communist infiltration. Initially, the CPL viewed the FECS as too moderate, dismissing it as "bourgeois". However, this perspective shifted following the Comintern's Seventh Congress, which emphasised exploiting all avenues for communist activity.[25]

The dissolution of political parties and some organisations in February 1936 significantly impacted the FECS. It became a refuge for liberals, socialists, and even communists who all were denied other legal avenues for political activity: the Freethinkers experienced a surge in growth after 1936, the amount of units jumped from 20 in 1933 to 68 by 1937,[26] and membership nearly quadrupled, rising from 340 in 1932 to 2143 by 1939.[27] This transformed the FECS into a key platform for disseminating anti-government rhetoric, aligning in part with communist goals. However, communists also took a more active role, expressing their ideology and pro-Soviet views through leaflets, lectures, and open agitation.[28]

While the influx was not limited to communists, they actively participated in establishing new units, contributing to the FECS's growth. Already in 1935, Angarietis encouraged communists to "[begin; M. Ė.] opening Freethinkers' units in villages and small towns, to have options of legal operation there. Initially, avoid aggravating relations with the centre [board], which should be formally recognised so that we can organise as many units as possible".[29]

The creation of these units, according to Angarietis' instructions, was also part of the infiltration strategy, albeit a more subtle version. And although the communists' approach was cautious, the final objective remained the establishment of control over the entire organisation. The CPL members in the provinces did receive these instructions, because the DSS began obtaining information in early 1936 regarding communist plans to take control of particular FECS

25 Daulius 1936, 22.

26 Request to the Interior Minister regarding the registration of Freethinkers' chapters [in Lithuanian], 08.03.1937. LCVA, 1367–1–467, pp. 42–44.

27 Organizational Statistical Data [in Lithuanian], 15.07.1939. LCVA, 1367–1–467, p. 138.

28 Report of State Security Police, 09.07.1937. LCVA, 378–3–4577, p. 398; Report of DSS agent, 22.06.1939. LCVA, 378–10–606, p. 16.

29 Letter from Angarietis [in Lithuanian], 08.11.1935. LYA, 77–18–11, p. 202.

units.[30] The CPL had also designated a special instructor, Leiba Solominas, to work with the FECS, but he remained principally active in Kaunas.[31]

The CPL prioritised infiltrating FECS units for three critical reasons. First, FECS units provided convenient opportunities for various unlawful political activities, particularly those promoting communist ideas. A DSS agent's report documented a case in Alvitas County where CPL members created a FECS unit, which served merely as a facade to amass funds and hold seemingly legitimate gatherings.[32] During a routine surveillance operation, a DSS officer monitored a FECS unit outing in Šančiai, a primarily working-class district of Kaunas. He identified approximately twelve individuals known to be the Communist Party members. The officer's report noted that the group sang Russian Soviet songs, and one member collected donations to support imprisoned communists.[33]

Communists also pursued more ambitious infiltration goals. The second reason involved strategically electing communist sympathisers or party members as unit leaders, effectively seizing control from within. Third, unit representatives elected the FECS congress, which in turn elected the organisation's leadership. By gaining influence in both units and the congress, the CPL aimed to subvert the entire FECS towards a pro-communist or more radical ideology.

Originally an apolitical cultural organisation, the FECS became a target for pro-communist activists who saw an opportunity to politicise the society and intensify pressure on the government.[34] A key objective was seizing control of *Laisvoji mintis* (Free Thought), the FECS's newspaper, popular among leftists. This attempt was successful. Despite censorship in Lithuania, its lax enforcement allowed the paper to become a platform for pro-Soviet and communist views. It is worth noting that due to Lithuania's interwar geopolitical situation, the USSR was regarded as a friendly state. Unresolved conflicts with Poland, over Vilnius, and Nazi Germany, particularly over the Klaipėda (Memel) region, made Lithuanian politicians to often lean for support towards the USSR – a non-aggression pact was signed in 1926. Caught in a geopolitical dilemma, Lithuania found itself between a friendly-seeming USSR and the internal threat posed by the Comintern and its Lithuanian affiliate, the CPL.

30 Report by DSS agent "Kapsas" [in Lithuanian], 30.01.1936. LCVA, 378–10–671, p. 80.

31 Autobiography of Leiba Solominas [in Lithuanian], 27.05.1966. LYA, 3377–46–811, p. 4.

32 Report by DSS agent "Maurutis" [in Lithuanian], 31.01.1940. LCVA, 378–5–4426, p. 166.

33 Report by DSS officer [in Lithuanian], 10.06.1939. LCVA, 378–10–84, p. 161.

34 *Laisvoji mintis*, 9 (83), 01.05.1939, p. 8.

A personal conflict between two FECS board members in late 1939 presented an opportunity for communist sympathisers and CPL members. They capitalised on the situation by calling for a new board election. The communist infiltration of FECS units remained largely undetected. Many were unaware that communist members and sympathisers dominated some units' delegations to the congress. As one delegate later revealed, their goal was to oust "government agents from the Central Board"[35] and install individuals aligned with the CPL or its cause.

Despite outward appearances of a smooth congress,[36] sharp disagreements erupted during the board election, particularly concerning the voting procedure. Failing to reach consensus, the presidium recessed for deliberation. Upon their return, they bypassed open nominations and presented a pre-determined list of candidates for the board. The pre-selected slate of candidates secured a unanimous vote. While the participants' motives remain unclear, it is likely they were unaware of the full extent of communist or radically anti-government element manipulation and simply desired to avoid further discord. The newly elected FECS board saw three of its seven members openly affiliated with the communist cause: Mečislovas Gedvilas, Alfonsas Žukauskas, and Valerijonas Knyva.[37]

While no direct documentary evidence exists of instructions issued to the CPL members to infiltrate the FECS leadership, this absence could be due to the need for secrecy in such operations. The main communist Trojan Horse within the FECS was Gedvilas, a CPL member since 1934, he never acted bluntly and was considered a more moderate oppositionist. This, it appears, was a deliberate CPL's tactic. By remaining active in multiple organisations, including the FECS, Gedvilas could subtly push them towards an anti-government and even a more radical stance. Over time, he rose to prominence within the FECS, wielding significant influence. He strategically recruited loyal individuals from his past associations (Gedvilas and Knyva had worked together before) solidifying his control and further tipping the scales within the organisation.[38]

The CPL members' infiltration of the FECS leadership played some role in advancing the Lithuanian Communist Party's agenda, but the main outcome was gaining some important contacts with like-minded people. The CPL leveraged these contacts strategically when the time was right. In March 1940, the DSS reported the CPL's attempt to organise a general strike. Their strategy involved

35 Memoirs of Kazys Jočys [in Lithuanian], 08.08.1954. LYA, 3377–2–56, p. 5.

36 Drąsiai žengsime į ateitį. *Laisvoji mintis*, 12 (85), 15.06.1939, p. 1.

37 Note to the Interior Minister about the election of a new board [in Lithuanian], 09.06.1939. LCVA, 1367–1–467, p. 118.

38 Report by DSS agent "N" [in Lithuanian], 22.04.1940. LCVA, 378–10–597, p. 96.

communist members within the Freethinkers' organisation, as well as two others known for pro-communist or anti-government leanings: Tenants' Societies and Chamber of Labour athletic clubs.[39] While the general strike failed, the report indicates the CPL's efforts to mobilise these groups for disruptive actions.

The Soviet occupation, in the summer of 1940 saw the disbanding of all independent Lithuanian organisations. Notably, the Freethinkers' Society was one of the few exceptions. This suggests the communists valued the Freethinkers' potential to spread atheism, evidenced by the society's expanded atheistic programme and the increased circulation and page count of its newspaper, *Laisvoji mintis*. The FECS only ceased operations in 1941, after the outbreak of the Second World War on the Eastern front.

The Soviet occupation saw communist infiltrators from the Freethinkers' Society and other organisations rise to prominence. One such figure was Gedvilas, who swiftly assumed leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the newly established *People's Government*. He filled key positions with his associates, including the afore mentioned Knyva, who became a department director. Within weeks, Gedvilas ascended to the position of Prime Minister, a title later changed to Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Soviet Lithuania, a role he held until 1956.

Case two: The Jewish Educational Society and its newspapers

The second case study shows how pro-communist elements seized control of the Jewish Educational Society (*Yiddishe Bildungs Gezelshaft*; JES), publisher of the Yiddish-language newspaper *Folksblat*. This manoeuver provided them with a platform to disseminate propaganda, effectively transforming the publication into a pro-Soviet and sometimes even communist mouthpiece.

While some portray the Lithuanian Jews as inherently pro-communist, this view is inaccurate. Only a minority within the sizable Lithuanian Jewish community embraced communism. The CPL actively sought Jewish support, assigning dedicated members to the task and even establishing a department within their Central Committee.[40] Schools, teachers, cultural/educational societies, and the press served as their primary channels for influencing the Jewish opinion.

39 Review of political parties and organisations' activity in March 1940 [in Lithuanian]. 00.03.1940. LCVA, 378–10–67, p. 1b.

40 Note regarding the work of the CPL CC Bureau among Jews [in Russian], [s. d.]. LYA, 77–23–1, pp. 67–68.

Far from monolithic, the Lithuanian Jewish community grappled with diverse political, cultural, and religious viewpoints. Zionists on the right and Folkists on the left represented the two main political movements, while others adhered to liberal or centrist ideologies. This division transcended politics, influencing cultural spheres as well. Private schools emerged with Hebrew, Yiddish, and Lithuanian as languages of instruction, shaping their students' perspectives.[41] Capitalising on this leftist leaning, communists actively infiltrated secondary schools, particularly the Jewish Commercial (later *Sholem Aleichem*) Gymnasium.

To solidify their hold on the Lithuanian Jews, communists targeted various Jewish cultural organisations. These included the Jewish Theatre Society (*Idishe Teater Gezelshaft*), the Society for Promotion of Commercial Studies, and others. Their most successful infiltration, however, was at the Jewish Educational Society.

Despite the closure of most organisations and political parties in 1936, the JES remained operational. This vacuum provided an opportunity for left-leaning and communist Jews to become increasingly active within the JES,[42] gradually wresting control of it. By 1937–1938, several communist-linked activists secured seats on the JES board. Notably, Aronas Kolodnas, a communist sympathiser (though not yet a CPL member), became both chairman of the society and editor of its newspaper *Folksblat*.[43]

Folksblat's content gradually shifted as communist sympathisers infiltrated its editorial board. Previously, the newspaper had embraced diverse perspectives, including both praise and criticism of the USSR. However, the new editorial team steered *Folksblat* towards presenting a more favourable view of the Soviet Union. The paper's editor, Kolodnas, later recalled that censors criticised him for the abundance of pro-Soviet material in his publication. In defence, Kolodnas cited a lack of funds to subscribe to Western news services, forcing him to rely on the official Soviet news agency TASS. He further justified his newspaper's content by pointing out the official designation of the USSR as a friend of Lithuania at the time.[44]

To broaden its reach, the JES, now controlled by pro-communist individuals, began publishing an evening newspaper called *Ovntblat* in 1938. They followed

41 Atamukas 2007, 173–176.

42 Autobiography of Leiba Šausas [in Lithuanian], 01.06.1967. LYA, 3377–46–866, p. 5.

43 Note to the Kaunas City and District Chief [in Lithuanian], 01.04.1938. LCVA, 402–5–164, p. 17.

44 Memoirs of Aronas Kolodnas [in Lithuanian], 20.09.1954. LYA, 3377–8–103, pp. 6–7.

this up with the *Shtraln* magazine, both publications led by party member Genrikas Zimanas.[45]

The DSS repeatedly documented communist infiltration within *Folksblat* and *Ovntblat's* editorial boards. As early as in 1935, the DSS flagged *Folksblat* for publishing a significant amount of pro-Soviet content, allegedly overseen by a former CPL member.[46] Later, according to the DSS, *Folksblat's* content transitioned to openly advocating for communism. The DSS information report from February 1940 revealed that "the leftist Jewish (Jewish Educational Society) newspaper in Kaunas, *Folksblat*, and the evening *Ovntblat* have recently become true promoters of communist ideas in Lithuania. There has not been one single issue without references to articles in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* which are important for the communists".[47]

The DSS also raised concerns about *Folksblat's* financial viability. Published in a large, six-page format similar to Soviet newspapers, it remained cheaper than the Zionist paper *Idishe Shtime* despite having fewer subscribers. This discrepancy fuelled suspicion among the DSS executives. The DSS report, while not explicitly stating it, hinted at potential Soviet financial backing for *Folksblat* due to a curious shift. Previously, the Soviet Legation in Lithuania had collaborated with various Jewish newspapers. However, they now focused solely on *Folksblat*, whose editor, Kolodnas, received frequent invitations to legation receptions. This close relationship fuelled suspicion of a financial link.[48] In his memoirs, Kolodnas recalled the conspicuous favouritism he received from Soviet representatives, including First Secretary Fyodor Molochkov, Military Attaché Major Korotkich, an advisor named Semyonov, and TASS correspondent in Lithuania Lukyanov.[49] Raising further suspicion, *Folksblat* reporter Emanuelis Vaserdamas held a concurrent position as secretary at the Soviet Legation from October 1939 to August 1940.[50]

After surviving for six months after the Soviet occupation, *Folksblat* was ultimately shut down in December 1940, whereas many Lithuanian newspapers had been closed already in June. By 1941, only *Shtraln* magazine remained.

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45 Memoirs of Aronas Kolodnas [in Lithuanian], 20.09.1954. LYA, 3377–8–103, pp. 5–8, 11.

46 Report by DSS agent "Rauskis" [in Lithuanian], 06.06.1935. LCVA, 378–3–3152, p. 48.

47 Kaunas district State Security Police report [in Lithuanian], 26.02.1940. LCVA, 378–5–3702, p. 212.

48 Ibidem.

49 Memoirs of Aronas Kolodnas [in Lithuanian], 20.09.1954. LYA, 3377–8–103, p. 10.

50 Autobiography of Emanuelis Vaserdamas [in Lithuanian], 06.06.1966. LYA, 3377–46–972, p. 7.

While the true impact of pro-Soviet publications like *Folksblat* and *Ovntblat* on the Lithuanian Jews is unclear, these papers served the CPL. They helped establish valuable contacts within the community, and after the occupation in June 1940, the CPL hired many former staff from these publications to Sovietise Lithuania's major newspapers – Leiba Šausas, a CPL member from 1936, after the Soviet occupation became deputy editor of the main newspaper *Tiesa*, while Genrikas Zimanas, also a CPL member from 1934, became editor-in-chief of *Tiesa*; the aforementioned Vaserdamas became deputy editor of the main communist youth newspaper *Komjaunimo Tiesa*. These individuals, with their experience and connections, played a key role in reshaping the media landscape after the occupation.[51]

Conclusions

Infiltration proved the most successful strategy for the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL) to influence legal organisations. Establishing new communist organisations and infiltrating the existing political parties were hampered by government restrictions. Instead, the CPL focused on infiltrating the existing organisations, aiming to gain control through electing pro-communist leaders and manipulating their publications or events to spread pro-communist and pro-Soviet ideology. The Communist Party of Lithuania employed infiltration tactics to influence over a dozen organisations.

Two case studies demonstrate how the CPL infiltrated the Freethinkers' Ethical Cultural Society (FECS) and the Jewish Educational Society (JES). CPL members, sympathisers, and even other radical oppositionists joined these organisations only as a cover (as a facade to amass funds or hold seemingly legitimate gatherings), or with the intention to achieve influence in the leadership (by strategically electing pro-communist unit boards and/or the central board). This influence allowed them to shape activities and publications.

Pro-communist elements within the FECS gained influence by electing a pro-communist board, leading the organisation to adopt a more political and oppositional stance, deviating from its original apolitical and cultural focus. Meanwhile, pro-communist members, within the JES, gained influence in the leadership and influenced the existing newspaper *Folksblat* and even established two new pro-communist and pro-Soviet publications. The Lithuanian

51 Leiba Šausas employment records [in Lithuanian], 01.06.1967. LYA, 3377–46–866, p. 1; Leiba Zelanskis employment records, 23.06.1977. LYA, 3377–46–1221, p. 1.

Department for State Security (DSS) suspected Soviet financing of these publications due to their pro-Soviet and openly communist content. Following the Soviet occupation and Sovietisation of Lithuania, leaders from both organisations were appointed to leadership roles in the new government and institutions.

ABBREVIATIONS / SAĪSINĀJUMI

DSS – Department for State Security
FECS – Freethinkers' Ethical Culture Society
JES – Jewish Educational Society
CPL – Communist Party of Lithuania
CC – Central Committee
MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs

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TROJAS ZIRGS: LIETUVAS KOMUNISTISKĀS PARTIJAS DARBĪBA LEGĀLAJĀS ORGANIZĀCIJĀS, 1934–1940

Marius Ėmužis

Rakstā aplūkota Lietuvas Komunistiskās partijas darbība un tās centieni izmantot stratēģiju, kas izveidojās pēc Kominternes 7. kongresa, lai infiltrētos, dibinātu un izmantotu legālās Lietuvas organizācijas, ietekmētu to biedrus, izplatītu propagandu vai pakļautu šīs organizācijas savai kontrolei. Lai gan komunistu darbība Lietuvā bija diezgan nenozīmīga, komunisti izmantoja dažādus paņēmienus, lai tuvotos un nodibinātu kontaktus ar atsevišķiem Lietuvas kreiso organizāciju līderiem, un vēlāk izmantoja tos, lai pēc PSRS okupācijas sākuma 1940. gadā izveidotu jaunu pārvaldi.

Atslēgas vārdi: Kominterne, Lietuvas Komunistiskā partija, komunistu infiltrācija, komunistu legālais darbs, piektā kolonna, Kominternes septītais kongress

Kopsavilkums

Lietuvas Komunistiskā partija (LKP) pēc 1935. gada Kominternes 7. kongresa pieņēma jaunu taktiku – iefiltrēties legālās organizācijās. Šīs taktikas mērķis bija graut Lietuvas valdību un izveidot sociālo bāzi turpmākai komunistu varas pārņemšanai. Rakstā uzsvērts, cik svarīgi ir pētīt komunistisko partiju legālo darbību. Lai gan šī taktika bieži vien palika pagrīdes darbību ēnā, tai bija liela nozīme komunistu mērķu sasniegšanā PSRS īstenotās Lietuvas okupācijas priekšvakarā.

Lietuvas KP koncentrējās uz infiltrēšanos organizācijās ar lielu strādnieku šķiras biedru skaitu, piemēram, sporta klubos pie Darba palātas vai kreisi noskaņotos kultūras klubos. Viņu galvenais mērķis bija iegūt kontroli pār šīm organizācijām, ievēlot tai simpatizējošu vadību un manipulējot ar presi.

Brīvdomātāju ētiskās kultūras biedrība ir veiksmīgas komunistu infiltrācijas piemērs. LKP saskatīja iespēju izmantot šīs biedrības sekulāro orientāciju un pieaugošo pret valdību vērsto noskaņojumu. Komunisti infiltrējās biedrības nodaļās un galu galā ieguva kontroli pār organizācijas vadību un tās izdoto laikrakstu. Vēl viens piemērs ir Ebreju izglītības biedrība. Komunisti iefiltrējās arī šajā biedrībā un pārveidoja tās laikrakstu *Folksblat* par komunistu propagandas mediju. Viņi izmantoja Ebreju izglītības biedrību, lai publicētu Padomju Savienībai komplementārus rakstus.

Šī taktika izrādījās veiksmīga, jo izveidoja tādu personu tīklu, kuri vēlāk palīdzēja īstenot PSRS okupāciju Lietuvā 1940. gadā. Bijušie infiltrēto organizāciju biedri tika iecelti vadošos jaunās sistēmas amatos padomju izveidotajā administrācijā.

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