

FROM DEFENCE TO REVOLUTION: LITHUANIAN PARAMILITARY GROUPS IN 1918 AND 1919

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ABSTRACT

The article explores various linkages between the violence of the Great War and the postwar conflict in independent Lithuania. The author focuses on several key Lithuanian paramilitary groups that emerged as a result of the collapse of the German occupying regime, the Bolshevik advance, and the ensuing power struggle in 1918 and 1919. It explores their grassroots origins, their motivation to fight, and their role in processes of forming a community, and state and nation-building. The author argues that these armed paramilitary formations contributed to the militarisation of the country's civilian life. Having emerged in the contested peripheral regions of Lithuania, they were led by veterans of the Great War acting as independent war-lords. Besides providing security for local people, these formations occasionally engaged in terror against civilians who were perceived as harmful elements that had to be purged from local communities. These paramilitary formations also showed a degree of operational freedom, by controlling certain peripheral regions for considerable periods of time. But the state was able to share its monopoly on legal violence with them only for as long as its own survival required the mobilisation of all economic and human resources for the war.

KEY WORDS: paramilitarism, revolution, nation-building, terror, war veterans, refugees.

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ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos sąsajos tarp Pirmojo pasaulinio karo sukeltos smurto bangos ir pokariu Lietuvoje vykusio konflikto. Autorius tyrinėja kelias paramilitarines lietuvių grupuotes, susikūrusias žlugus okupaciniam vokiečių režimui, bolševikams skverbiantis į kraštą ir pradedus ginkluotoms kovoms dėl valdžios. Aptariama šių grupuočių kilmė, motyvacija kautis ir vaidmenys kuriant vietos bendruomenes, tautą bei valstybę. Autorius teigia, kad šios pusiau karinės struktūros prisidėjo prie krašto gyvenimo militarizavimo. Jos susiformavo Lietuvos periferijose, o joms vadovavo buvę karo veteranai, kurie elgėsi kaip vietinės reikšmės karo vadai. Šios grupuotės ne tik reguliavo ekonominį bendruomenių gyvenimą, užtikrino jų saugumą, bet kartais imdavosi teroro prieš tuos jų narius, kurie buvo laikomi žalingais elementais. Dažnai jos veikė nepriklausomai nuo Lietuvos ar bolševikų valdžios ir kurį laiką kontroliavo atskirus šalies regionus. Tačiau valstybė su jais dalijosi legalios prievartos monopolium tik tol, kol jos išlikimui reikėjo mobilizuoti visus ekonominius ir žmogiškuosius išteklius.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: paramilitarizmas, revoliucija, tautokūra, teroras, karo veteranai, pabėgėliai.

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After the Great War, fresh military activity swept across the western borderlands of the former Russian Empire in a wave of bloodshed that was unseen since the early days of the war.¹ As part of this wider conflict, between 1918 and 1920, the current territory of Lithuania was flooded with armed formations of different stripes and political interests. The main conflict was between Lithuanian nationalists and Bolsheviks, each offering transformative state-building projects. However, they were also joined by Poles, Russian counter-revolutionaries and German volunteers, who fought the Bolsheviks, and occasionally the Lithuanians.²

All these troops bore little resemblance to the imperial armies that had battled against each other just a few months previously. Initially, they were poorly equipped paramilitary formations with loose command structures, led by charismatic and opportunist commanders. They depended to varying degrees on their ability to be fed by the local population and on force when it refused to cooperate. It is no wonder that this many-sided power contest produced an array of violent responses, in the shape of various defensive and revolutionary groups, home guards and peasant partisans (both nationalist and communist). Some of them tried to protect their local communities against these troops, but also to take advantage of the shifting military fortunes by joining one warring side or another.

My aim here is to provide an overview of a few key Lithuanian paramilitary groups that emerged as a result of the collapse of the German occupying regime, the Bolshevik advance, and the ensuing power struggle in Lithuania throughout 1918 and 1919. The focus is on grassroots groups which quickly displayed a high degree of operational freedom, and which at least temporarily acted independently of the Lithuanian government and the Bolshevik regime. I will explore their origins, their motivation to fight, and their role in processes of forming a community, and state and nation-building.

My argument is that these paramilitary formations played a significant role in mobilising the local population in this many-sided power contest for political control of Lithuania. In effect, they contributed to the militarisation of civilian life.³ From this perspective, they can be studied as part of the same phenomenon, irrespective of their political and ideological backgrounds. Over the course of time, these groups were eliminated by the regular armies, or they simply disintegrated. But some of them (particularly those on the winning side) were incorporated into the new state and military structures that were forged in the midst of the war. Some became vehicles of civil activism, patriotic education, or nationalist or revolutionary indoctrina-

¹ For a recent overview of this conflict see, *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*. Ed. by R. GERWARTH, J. HORN. Oxford, 2012.

² One of the best overviews of the conflict in the Baltics remains RAUCH, G. von *The Baltic States: the Years of Independence, 1917-1940*. Berkeley, 1974.

³ By 'militarisation', I mean, first of all, the process by which a society organises itself for military conflict and violence when the military needs of belligerents take over civil law.

tion. Thus, starting from the early interwar years, paramilitarism was an inseparable part of the political culture of independent Lithuania, and of the wider European region.⁴ The broader question investigated here is: what are the connections between the violence of the Great War and the postwar conflict?

My second point is that this paramilitarism is closely linked to the legacy of the Great War, in particular to the demobilisation and displacement of populations. The massive demobilisation of the imperial Russian and German armies in 1918 led to the rapid remobilisation of large numbers of war veterans into these new paramilitary formations. When they returned to their transformed homelands in the stream of war refugees, new political projects actively sought their allegiance. Not all veterans were willing to continue fighting, but many threw in their lot with these newly emerging paramilitary groups. They did so for a variety of reasons: patriotism, revolutionary passion, the hatred of revolution, new military careers, land, social and political status, unemployment, poverty, and others. In my view, exploring the origins and the social roles of these paramilitaries may help us to understand long-term processes of 'brutalisation' and the difficult transition from war to peace.⁵

My third point is that the violence perpetrated by these paramilitary groups was substantially different from the violence seen during the Great War. It was more low-key and less destructive in terms of numbers of casualties. However, it was more ideologically motivated and multi-directional. A lot of this violence occurred within local communities. One feature of the period was that post-First World War paramilitaries did not shy away from the use of terror against the civilian population.⁶ Violence against civilians was perpetrated by both sides (nationalists and communists), and therefore requires closer investigation as a separate phenomenon that had its own logic and dynamics. Thus, one of my intentions here is to show the interplay between paramilitarism and terror that occurred in Lithuania during 1918 and 1919.

Features

These paramilitary groups are commonly described in Lithuanian historiography as 'partisans'.⁷ Those that were on the right of the political spectrum are usually as-

⁴ For a recent overview of the region in the middle of this conflict, see PRUSIN, A. V. *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992*. Oxford, 2010.

⁵ On the 'brutalisation thesis', see MOSSE, G. L. *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. Oxford, 1990. A similar argument was put forward by LYTTLETON, A. *Fascism and Violence in Post-War Italy: Political Strategy and Social Conflict*. In *Social Protest, Violence and Terror*. Ed. by W. J. MOMMSEN, G. HIRSCHFELD. London, 1982, pp. 262-263.

⁶ By 'terror', I mean violent acts perpetrated for a variety of political, ideological or ethnic reasons, intended to create fear (terror) and deliberately targeting non-combatant civilians.

⁷ ČEPĖNAS, P. *Naujųjų laikų Lietuvos istorija*. T. 2. Chicago, 1986; VAREIKIS, V. Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga Lietuvos ir Lenkijos konflikto metu, 1920-1923. In *Šauliškas, tautiškas ir Lietuvos nepriklausomybė*.

sociated with the military activities of šauliai.⁸ However, they frequently included paramilitary groups that had their own largely defensive but also patriotic agendas. For a historian, they are the most difficult group to explore, since they formed in the countryside within local communities, they left few official records, and their activities are mainly described in a small number of memoirs.⁹ It is an open question as to what extent all these bands had clear-cut ideological motives, although they were certainly inspired by them. There is little doubt, though, that their incentive to fight was created primarily by the political and social activism that had been unleashed by the collapse of all forms of government in the region.

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Most of these bands emerged in peripheral regions of Lithuania: in the highly contested northwest (Skuodas, Seda, Mažeikiai, Kuršėnai, Telšiai, Šauliai), the northeast (Panevėžys, Joniškėlis, Pasvalys, Joniškis), and in the southeast, which was disputed by Lithuania and Poland (Perloja, Valkininkai, Alytus, Širvintos, Giedraičiai). As a rule, most of these groups were claimed by the Lithuanian government. Over the course of time, they were gradually incorporated into military units of šauliai, civil militias or the army. However, it is important to emphasise again that, during the initial period of the wars of independence (late 1918 to early 1919), some of them exercised a degree of autonomy. Some even showed a reluctance to commit themselves to the Lithuanian government, šauliai, or any other side. This feature has been examined very little in current historiography.

There was also a tendency among them to flirt with the powers that managed to dominate their localities at specific points in time. These formations were able to retain their operational freedom only for as long as their stronger and more numerous competitors did not claim a monopoly on power in their localities. The emergence of these paramilitary groups testifies to the slow and uneven process of state and nation-building in early interwar Lithuania, plagued by the initial weakness of state institutions. However, they also point to the high degree of local civil activism and militarism that emerged in these years.

It is almost impossible to give a precise number of these paramilitary formations. According to one estimate, there were about 30 armed nationalist 'partisan groups' in northern Lithuania in the autumn of 1919.¹⁰ Matusas claims that in the Joniškėlis

Sud. A. LIEKIS, Vilnius, 1993, p. 51–69; GUDELIS, P. *Joniškėlio apskrities partizanų atsiminimai*. Čikaga, 1983; MATUSAS, J. *Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga*. Vilnius, 1992; ALIŠAUSKAS, K. *Kovos dėl Lietuvos nepriklausomybės 1918–1920*. T. 1. Čikaga, 1972, p. 257.

⁸ MATUSAS, J. Op. cit., p. 25–30; JUREVIČIŪTĖ, A.; VEILENTIENĖ, A. Šauliai nepriklausomybės kovose. *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 1998, Nr. 6, p. 62–71.

⁹ NAVAKAS, J. *Lietuvai besikeliant*. Kaunas, 1928; GUDELIS, P. *Joniškėlio apskrities...*; STEPONAITIS, V. Bermontininkai Lietuvoje. *Mūsų žinydas*, 1921, Nr. 1, p. 76–98; Nr. 2, p. 50–74; *Savanorių žygiai*. T. 2. Sud. P. RUSECKAS, Vilnius, 1991; *Karo archyvas*, 1938–1940, Nr. 10–12.

¹⁰ LESČIUS, V. *Lietuvos kariuomenė nepriklausomybės kovose, 1918–1920*. Vilnius, 2004, p. 230.

area alone there were about 17.¹¹ If the peak of the activities of nationalist groups came in the autumn, the Red groups were most active in January and February of 1919. Armed Red groups emerged in Mažeikiai, Seda, Kuršėnai, Panevėžys, Kupiškis, Rokiškis, Švenčionys, Joniškėlis, Šiauliai, Joniškis, Kretinga and other areas.¹² The size of their membership ranged from small units, such as in Seda (with 11), to larger ones in Kuršėnai (40), Kupiškis (60) and Šiauliai (1,000). Their lifespan was usually short: from a few weeks to several months. Only a few of these paramilitary formations were able to act independently.

I will focus here in detail only on five of the most prolific (three nationalist and two revolutionary) groups that initially exercised some autonomy and were able to control certain localities for substantial periods of time: 1) the nationalist troops of Povilas Plechavičius in the area around Seda, Skuodas and Mažeikiai (northwest Lithuania); 2) the nationalist formations of Joniškėlis (the Joniškėlio partizanai in the northeast); 3) the group for the defence of the town of Perloja (southeast), 4) the Red detachment of žemaičiai (the *Žemaičių* pulkas), and 5) the Red group of the Military Revolutionary Committee of Žemaitija (the Žemaitijos karinis revoliucinis komitetas) in Seda and Kuršėnai (northwest).

All of them shared a number of features. They were largely made up of ethnic Lithuanians from the areas in which they operated. Only the *Žemaičių* pulkas included some non-Lithuanians, Russian prisoners of war and Old Believers, but its core was formed of local workers and peasants.¹³ The group in Perloja, a tiny town with a population of about 700, included only local males who had known each other for a long time. The Joniškėlis and Seda-Kuršėnai groups were also formed on a local basis, their core being made up of local men.

All five groups were organised and led by veterans and refugees of the Great War. The core of the Perloja group was made up of several veterans who returned from the Russian army in the middle of 1918. In September, they were assembled by the NCO Jonas Česnulevičius to defend the town from marauders, and from requisitions and robberies carried out by splinter groups from the German army.¹⁴ Similarly, in early February, the Seda group came to life, when the two Plechavičius brothers, former officers in the Russian army, and a friend, another war veteran and former prisoner of war, decided to form an armed unit to defend their community against marauding gangs and local Bolsheviks.¹⁵

¹¹ MATUSAS, J. Op. cit., p. 21.

¹² VAITKEVIČIUS, B. *Socialistinė revoliucija Lietuvoje 1918–1919 metais*. Vilnius, 1967, p. 421, 605.

¹³ LESČIUS, V. Op. cit., p. 70; ŽEMAITIS, F. Lietuviškojo tarybinio pulko formavimas Šiauliuose 1918–1919 metais. In *Revoliucinis judėjimas Lietuvoje*. Sud. R. ŠARMAITIS. Vilnius, 1957, p. 225.

¹⁴ ČESNULEVIČIŪTĖ, P. *Kovojanti Perloja*. Varėna, 1998, p. 17.

¹⁵ Memoirs of Povilas Plechavičius. In JURGĖLA, P. *Gen. Povilas Plechavičius*. New York, 1978, p. 11.

The Joniškėlis band was established by a local regional council (*apskritis komitetas*) on 5 December 1918, and at its peak included about 20 ex-NCOs.¹⁶ Although the council was authorised to act on behalf of the Lithuanian government, in reality it operated independently, and maintained only weak links with Kaunas until as late as the beginning of May 1919.¹⁷ Its primary aim was to take control of the region from the hands of demobilised German units. The group did so quite successfully, before the arrival of the Bolsheviks in mid-January 1919.¹⁸

The Žemaičių pulkas was established in Šiauliai in early January 1919, as a result of a local anti-German rebellion. It was led by an ex-Russian army NCO, Feliksas Žemaitis-Baltušis, who was sent by the Kapsukas government.¹⁹ In a matter of weeks, it grew to become one of the largest Red paramilitary formations in Lithuania (about 1,000 strong), thanks to the resentment that the local population felt towards the German occupying regime.²⁰ The numerical strength of the unit does not reflect the fact that only half of it was properly armed and ready to participate in military operations.²¹ The most able part of this group was also made up of Great War veterans.²² By late February, the group had been incorporated into the Red Army, and soon suffered a crushing military defeat at the hands of German volunteers near Luokė.²³ Lowering morale among its soldiers led to its rapid disintegration, as many changed sides by joining pro-Lithuanian government formations.²⁴

The group of the Military Revolutionary Committee of Žemaitija was founded in Seda on 1 January 1919, when Red activists from Seda, Židikai and Kuršėnai joined forces, totalling about 300.²⁵ They were led by Domas Budinas, another Great War refugee, who was active in both Russian revolutions. The military operations of the group were supervised by the former NCO Stasys Čečkauskas.²⁶ The group operated independently until late January, when it was incorporated into the Red Army and suffered a military defeat near Šiauliai.²⁷

¹⁶ GUDELIS, P. *Joniškėlio apskritis...*, p. 131; NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁷ NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁸ GUDELIS, P. *Joniškėlio apskritis...*, p. 136.

¹⁹ Žemaitis-Baltušis continued his career as a Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. He participated in the suppression of the Antonov rebellion. See LESČIUS, V. Op. cit., p. 70; *Komunistas*, 1919, Nr. 4, p. 2.

²⁰ GUDELIS, P. *Bolševikų valdžios atsiradimas Lietuvoje 1918–1919 metais jų pačių dokumentų šviesoje*. Londonas, 1972, p. 60–64; ŠARMAITIS, R. Op. cit., p. 261, 265.

²¹ GUDELIS, P. *Bolševikų valdžios atsiradimas...*, p. 63–64; ŠARMAITIS, R. Op. cit., p. 228.

²² ŠARMAITIS, R. Op. cit., p. 228.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁴ Gen. S. Nastopkos 1920 m. liepos 16 d. dienos telefonograma Nr. 666 II divizijos vadui. *Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas* [Lithuanian Central State Archives], f. 929, ap. 3, b. 218, l. 1.

²⁵ VAITKEVIČIUS, B. Op. cit., p. 426.

²⁶ BUDINAS, D. *Vėtros žemaičiuose*. Vilnius, 1959, p. 128.

²⁷ GUDELIS, P. *Bolševikų valdžios atsiradimas...*, p. 62.

All of these formations had charismatic leaders, acting like local warlords, who either enjoyed the support of the local population (Antanas Stapulionis, Petras Gudelis, Jonas Česnulevičius, Jonas Leonavičius) or were feared for their ruthlessness, bravery, and their military or revolutionary experience (Povilas Plechavičius, Feliksas Baltušis-Žemaitis, Domas Budinas).²⁸ These paramilitary entrepreneurs, who were usually veterans of the Great War, were able to operate almost entirely without limits, issuing orders and controlling local economic resources.

Terror

It is no wonder that some of their activities, especially the use of terror, led to complaints to official bodies. Thus, an official envoy (Rapolas Skipitis) was sent from Kaunas in the autumn of 1919 to investigate rumours that Plechavičius' group was involved in a number of summary executions of civilians suspected of criminal and Bolshevik activities.²⁹ Plechavičius himself never denied the accusations, justifying his 'cleansing of the whole local area', as he wrote in his memoir, as part of the struggle for independent Lithuania.³⁰ Among the approximately 60 victims summarily executed by his troops, there were local robbers, Bolsheviks and Bolshevik sympathisers. The victims also included his maid, sentenced by a military court for spying for the Bolsheviks, and shot in public in Seda.³¹ According to one memoir, Plechavičius' group was also involved in the executions of seven peasants from the village of Kaukolikai near Skuodas.³² Despite all of this, the envoy concluded that Plechavičius 'serves the Lithuanian nation sincerely'.³³

Although in 1918 and 1919, the terror in Lithuania was quite limited in comparison with the massive terror campaigns that swept through Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Russia, local paramilitaries did not shy away from its occasional use. The Lithuanian government legalised the use of terror, with the Special Laws on State Security (*Ypatingi valstybės apsaugos įstatai*), passed on 7 February 1919. Article 14 authorised the use of capital punishment for various activities against the state, including political agitation, the disruption of communications, spying, the illegal possession of arms, and armed resistance.³⁴

²⁸ For 'warlordism' during the Russian Civil War, see SANBORN, J. The Genesis of Russian Warlordism: Violence and Governance during the First World War and the Civil War. *Contemporary European History*, August 2010, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 195–213.

²⁹ JURGĖLA, P. Op. cit., p. 225.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 224, 225–232; VAITKEVIČIUS, B. Op. cit., pp. 644–645.

³² JURGAIČIENĖ, V. *Nebuvo kada drobelių austi: atsiminimai*. Vilnius, 1963, p. 52.

³³ JURGĖLA, P. Op. cit., p. 231.

³⁴ Ypatingi valstybės apsaugos įstatai. *Laikinosios vyriausybės žinios*, 1919 03 05, Nr. 4, p. 1.

For example, the Joniškėlis council formed a military court which sentenced to death and executed a local Bolshevik leader.³⁵ In the span of three days (18 to 20 February 1919), local Lithuanian units executed 16 Bolshevik supporters in the Kėdainiai area alone.³⁶ According to one estimate, the total number of victims of the White terror in Lithuania may have reached about 300.³⁷ Not only were armed paramilitary bands involved in the killings, some Lithuanian army units (such as the 2nd detachment of Vincas Grigaliūnas-Glovackis) also took part in the campaign of terror. So far, little research has been done on the reasons for the killings, but the main cause that prompted the anti-Bolshevik terror seems to be the inability to combat communist agitation and activism by other means.³⁸ Terror was also used in order to intimidate and punish locals who were unwilling to cooperate, or who were perceived as elements that needed to be purged from local communities.

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On the other side, the Bolsheviks also used terror against their political opponents. In Panevėžys, they brutally executed a local teacher Jonas Skvireckas for his involvement with anti-Bolshevik partisans.³⁹ In mid-February, they shot three people in Telšiai.⁴⁰ In the summer of 1919, they executed four members of the Polish Military Organisation in Daugavpils.⁴¹ On 26 April 1919, the Kapsukas government officially authorised a Red terror campaign, largely as a response to the White terror and the complete failure of the Bolshevik advance into Lithuania.⁴² A local Bolshevik committee declared its own 'Red proletarian terror' in Ukmergė.⁴³ There is no information on how many victims fell during the Red terror. However, their numbers were smaller than during the White campaign, a pattern that repeated itself in the other Baltic States and in Finland. In Lithuania, the Bolsheviks seemed to prefer taking hostages to straightforward executions, since it helped them to put pressure on their opponents, and also to exchange them for their captured comrades. Between April and July 1919, there was a series of hostage exchanges between the Kapsukas and the Lithuanian governments.⁴⁴

³⁵ NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 77.

³⁶ *Komunistas*, 1919 03 14, Nr. 35, p. 3.

³⁷ VAITKEVIČIUS, B., Op. cit., p. 644–645.

³⁸ The draft of the article by LAURINAVIČIUS, Č. On Political Terror during the Soviet Expansion into Lithuania, 1918–1919. *Journal of Baltic Studies. Special Issue: War, Revolution and Terror in the Baltic States and Finland after the Great War*, p. 6 (to be published in 2015).

³⁹ See NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 99.

⁴⁰ *Lietuva*, 1919 02 20, Nr. 35, p. 4.

⁴¹ VAITKEVIČIUS, B. Op. cit., p. 626.

⁴² Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania and Belarus of 26 April 1919. *Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas* [LYA, *Lithuanian Special Archives*], f. 77, ap. 2, b. 5, l. 121.

⁴³ *Komunistas*, 1919 04 11, Nr. 46, p. 2.

⁴⁴ VAITKEVIČIUS, B. Op. cit., p. 627.

Self-government

As has been mentioned, initially all five paramilitary formations operated independently of the national and Bolshevik governments in Lithuania. As a result, they were also very involved in self-government. They provided security, dispensed justice, and controlled the economy, and sometimes even the morals of their local communities. Since for the first few months of 1919 this process took place without any significant central control, numerous semi-autonomous territories emerged all over peripheral areas of Lithuania. One of the leaders of the Joniškėlis group, Jonas Navakas, writes in his memoir: 'In 1918, the whole of Lithuania was divided into "republics", similar to the one that we had in Joniškėlis.'⁴⁵ The Joniškėlis council was able to build an entire network of parish councils and defence militias in local villages and towns. These bands numbered about 1,500 armed men in early spring in 1919.⁴⁶ They successfully infiltrated and disbanded the remnants of the Žemaičių pulkas, and cooperated actively with the Lithuanian army in a series of battles against the Red Army in the Panevėžys area. Eventually, on 14 May, they were incorporated into the Lithuanian army as the Separate Partisan Battalion.⁴⁷

But the most notorious and radical case of paramilitary self-government occurred in Perloja, where the locals held power from late 1918 to early May 1919, by resisting all warring sides except the Bolsheviks. On 13 November 1918, the townspeople elected a government independently of the Kaunas government, and organised a defensive group of about 50 armed men.⁴⁸ During its short but eventful life, the Perloja 'republic' regulated trade, guarded forest resources, paid salaries to its employees, provided support to the poor, and passed various community laws (for example, a law on observing all Catholic feast days). The community also dispensed justice, by setting up a local court not only for the town but also for a dozen of the neighbouring villages. The court dealt with both criminal and civil cases, including property disputes, land issues, defamation and even extra-marital affairs.⁴⁹ The Lithuanian government disarmed the Perloja group by force after it attacked an advancing military unit on 2 May 1919. Several of the most active members were arrested and

⁴⁵ In his memoir, he mentions some other 'republics', including Red ones in Šiauliai and Biržai. See NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 41–42.

⁴⁶ NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 103.

⁴⁷ GUDELIS, P. *Joniškėlio apskrities...*, p. 181.

⁴⁸ The Lithuanian government issued a call for the establishment of local municipal councils on the same day. The activists of Perloja learned about this later. See ČESNULEVIČIŪTĖ, P. Op. cit., p. 16–17.

⁴⁹ In one case, by the decision of a court, a court envoy threatened with a gun a married man who had an extra-marital affair. See AKIRAS-BIRŽYS, [P.] *Lietuvos miestai ir miesteliai: Alytaus apskritis*. T. 1. Kaunas, 1931, p. 538.

jailed in Kaunas.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Perloja was incorporated into the administrative unit of Alytus.

Sometimes the shifting fortunes in the military struggle between the nationalists and the Bolsheviks did not prevent these defensive groups from surviving. Sometimes, as in Perloja and Joniškėlis, they were also able to operate under Bolshevik rule. The Perloja parish committee simply changed its name to *revkom* (*revoliucionij komitet*) after the arrival of the Reds. One of its members later wrote: 'The Bolsheviks did not hinder us, they left us our arms, and did not influence our self-government.'⁵¹ In Joniškėlis, many former members of the group switched sides by joining a local Bolshevik militia and *revkoms*.⁵² In this way, they were able to retain their influence, and to pursue their political agendas. As the boundaries between the warring sides were initially quite blurred, these defence organisations were able to operate without major disruptions.

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The Military Revolutionary Committee of Žemaitija, led by Budinas, attracted some criticism from the Kapsukas government for its independence. When on 27 January 1919 it issued a manifesto calling for the communist takeover of the whole of Žemaitija, it was publicly reproached by the Bolshevik government in Vilnius, for totally ignoring the key manifesto of the Communist Party of Lithuania, which had earlier proclaimed Soviet rule in Lithuania.⁵³ Meanwhile, the Committee was pressurised not only by the Kapsukas government, but also by armed cells of socialist revolutionaries that had formed in Kretinga, Plungė and Salantai.⁵⁴ The latter saw the Bolsheviks as competitors for the struggle for power in Lithuania.

Tension also emerged between Baltušis-Žemaitis, the commander of the Žemaičių pulkas, and the leadership of the 2nd Latvian Division of the Red Army. After its arrival in Šiauliai in late February, the Red Army took away an armoured train that belonged to the Žemaičių pulkas. It also tried to appropriate its best horses and a car belonging personally to Baltušis-Žemaitis. The latter refused to cooperate, which led to the involvement of Leon Trotsky himself in the dispute. Unhappy at the attitude of the Red Army, Baltušis-Žemaitis later admitted that after the arrival of Red Latvians, his unit suddenly lost the support of the local population. His hopes that the Lithuanians could establish their own Red rule in the country were completely dashed.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ AKIRAS-BIRŽYS, [P.] Op. cit., p. 541.

⁵¹ ČESNULEVIČIŪTĖ, P. Op. cit., p. 35.

⁵² NAVAKAS, J. Op. cit., p. 47; GUDELIS, P. *Joniškėlio apskrities...*, p. 150.

⁵³ The manifesto of the Committee is published in *Lietuvos TSR istorijos šaltiniai*. T. 3. Sud. J. ŽIUGŽDA. Vilnius, 1958, p. 137. For its criticism see *Komunistas*, 1919, Nr. 30, p. 2.

⁵⁴ VAITKEVIČIUS, B. Op. cit., p. 431.

⁵⁵ Note of 10 November 1919 from Feliksas Baltušis-Žemaitis, the leader of the Žemaičių pulkas, to Rapolas Rasikas, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania and Byelorussia, about the organisation of the regiment and the unsuccessful struggle against Lithuanian and German volunteers (in Russian). *LYA*, f. 77, ap. 2, b. 56, l. 7–8.

Conclusion

This article has looked at one of the most notable features of the post-First World War conflict that made it so different to the Great War, the proliferation of different paramilitary groups. Lithuania was a typical zone of this paramilitary culture that emerged in the wake of the Great War. It included a full spectrum of participants: Lithuanian troops, home guards (*šauliai*), German Freikorps, Polish paramilitaries, and revolutionary and nationalist defence groups. Most of them were formed by or were made up of Great War veterans who wanted to continue fighting, for a variety of patriotic, ideological or simply pragmatic reasons. Their presence in these formations testifies to the close link between the demobilisation of imperial troops and the remobilisation that followed after the Great War. In this context, demobilisation is best understood as a political and cultural process, rather than a purely military and economic process, because it involved a possible refusal to demobilise.⁵⁶

The paramilitary formations that emerged in Lithuania during 1918 and 1919 were not simply products of the collapse (or weakness) of all forms of government in the region, but also an expression of the feverish civil activism and militarism that exploded as a result of the nationalist and Bolshevik revolutions. The return of hundreds of thousands of war refugees and demobilised soldiers fuelled this activism in local communities that were already brutalised by the massive displacement of the population and the years of occupation. As restless veterans were eagerly joined by a generation of young males, they were all unified by the desire to cleanse their local communities of undesirable elements, whether class, ethnic or foreign enemies. The paramilitaries actively mobilised local people, and were actively involved in the processes of forming a community and nation and state-building. Their strategies ranged from political agitation, the redistribution of local economic resources, providing security, and dispensing justice, to the use of terror when their goals were not achievable by other means.

The paramilitary formations also showed a degree of operational freedom, by controlling certain peripheral regions for considerable periods of time. In doing so, they had to rely on the military experience of their leaders, local warlords, and on their ability to adapt to all political regimes that demanded their loyalty. But the state was able to share its monopoly on legal violence with them only for as long as its own survival required the mobilisation of all economic and human resources for the war. The development of paramilitary organisations that declared allegiance to the nation, the local community or one of its leaders, rather than the state, generated suspicion in the state's political establishment and led to their subordination.

⁵⁶ It also included a possible refusal to be remobilised. I borrowed the concept of 'demobilisation as a cultural phenomenon' from: *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence...*, p. 4.

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LIETUVIŠKI PARAMILITARINIAI BŪRIAI:

NUO SAVIGYNOS IKI REVOLIUCIJOS, 1918–1919 M.

Tomas Balkelis

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos sąsajos tarp Pirmojo pasaulinio karo sukeltos prievartos bangos ir pokariu Lietuvoje vykusio konflikto. Nagrinėjami klausimai, kiek Lietuvos visuomenė buvo militarizuota Nepriklausomybės karų laikotarpiu ir kokie buvo tos militarizacijos bruožai?

Daroma prielaida, kad Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metu krašto visuomenė patyrė tam tikrą *brutalizaciją* (šiuo atveju taikomas istoriko George'o Mosse'o pasiūlytas „brutalizacijos argumentas“), kuri tapo palankia dirva naujai paramilitarinei kultūrai formuotis. Okupacija,

imperijų griūtis ir revoliucija Lietuvoje, kaip ir kitose Rytų Europos šalyse, sugriovė tradicines valdžios struktūras bei įžiebė naują karinį konfliktą dėl krašto kontrolės, kas sukūrė palankias aplinkybes įvairiausioms paramilitarinėms grupuotėms atsirasti. Pastarosios aktyviai dalyvavo kare ir revoliucijoje, valstybės ir tautos formavimo procesuose bei vietos bendruomenių politiniame ir ekonominiame gyvenime.

Nors nustatyti tikslaus šių grupuočių skaičiaus neįmanoma, yra pakankamai duomenų, rodančių, kad Lietuvoje 1918–1919 m. veikė keliasdešimt ginkluotų įvairių politinių pakraipų formuočių. Tautiniai partizanų būriai (dažnai vadinami šauliais) formavosi periferiniuose Lietuvos rajonuose: šiaurės vakaruose (Skuode, Sedoje, Mažeikiuose, Kuršėnuose, Telšiuose, Šiauliuose), šiaurės rytuose (Panevėžyje, Joniškėlyje, Pasvalyje, Joniškėje) ir pietryčiuose (Perlojoje, Valkininkuose, Alytuje, Širvintose, Giedraičiuose). Aktyviausias jų veiklos laikotarpis buvo 1919 m. rudenį. Tuo tarpu raudonieji ginkluoti būriai aktyviausiai veikė 1919 m. sausį ir vasarį. Jie susiformavo Mažeikiuose, Sedoje, Kuršėnuose, Panevėžyje, Kupiškėje, Rokiškėje, Švenčionyse, Joniškėlyje, Šiauliuose, Joniškėje, Kretingoje ir kitose vietovėse. Šios formuotės turėjo nuo keliolikos iki kelių šimtų ginkluotų narių, o jų gyvavimo trukmė buvo keli mėnesiai.

Autorius straipsnyje tyrinėja penkias pačias gausiausias, stipriausias ir savarankiškiausias paramilitarines formuotes: 1) pulkininko Povilo Plechavičiaus ginkluotą būrį, veikusį Sedos, Skuodo ir Mažeikių apylinkėse; 2) Joniškėlio partizanus; 3) Perlojos savignyos būrį; 4) raudonąjį *žemaičių pulką*, vadovaujamą F. Baltušio-Žemaičio; ir 5) Žemaitijos karinio revoliucinio komiteto būrį, veikusį Sedoje ir Kuršėnuose. Aptariama šių būrių kilmė, struktūra, veikla, motyvacijos kautis, santykiai su vietos bendruomenėmis ir jų vykdytas teroras prieš civilius gyventojus.

Autorius teigia, kad šios pusiau karinės struktūros prisidėjo prie krašto gyvenimo militarizacijos. Jos turėjo kelis tipiškus bruožus. Buvo daugiausia sudarytos iš tų vietovių gyventojų, kuriose jos veikė. Tik *žemaičių pulkas* turėjo didesnį nelietuvių skaičių: jame buvo nemažai rusų karo belaisvių ir sentikių. Visi ginkluotieji būriai buvo išlaikomi vietos bendruomenių arba prievarta naudojosi jų ekonominiais ištekliais. Daugeliui šių formuočių vadovavo Pirmojo pasaulinio karo veteranai arba iš Rusijos sugrįžę karo pabėgėliai. Šie būriai turėjo charizmatiškus lyderius, kurie buvo jų karo vadai. Jie turėjo bent jau dalies vietos gyventojų paramą ir buvo gerbiami (arba jų buvo baiminamasi) už savo karinę ar revoliucinę patirtį ar drąsą. Paprastai šie karo vadai galėjo veikti praktiškai nevaržomi jokios civilinės valdžios ir turėjo visišką galios monopolį savo veiklos rajonuose.

Tiek tautiniai, tiek bolševikiniai paramilitariniai būriai vykdė terorą prieš civilius gyventojus, nors šio teroro mastai buvo gerokai mažesni nei kitose Baltijos šalyse. Pagrindinė antikomunistinio teroro Lietuvoje priežastis buvo nesugebėjimas sėkmingai kovoti su bolševikų agitacija kitomis priemonėmis. Tačiau teroras buvo naudojamas ir prieš tuos, kurie atsakydavo bendradarbiauti, dalyvavo sunkiuose kriminaliniuose nusikaltimuose arba prieš tuos bendruomenių narius, kurie buvo laikomi žalingais, todėl šalintiniais elementais. Raudonasis teroras prasidėjo kaip atsakas „baltajam terorui“, tačiau irgi buvo nukreiptas į ideologinių priešų naikinimą. Vis dėlto Lietuvoje bolševikai buvo labiau linkę naudoti ne teroro, o įkaitų ėmimo strategiją.

Visos penkios grupuotės kurį laiką veikė savarankiškai nuo nepriklausomos Lietuvos Respublikos ir komunistinės V. Kapsuko-Mickevičiaus vyriausybės. Jos aktyviai dalyvavo ats-

kirų vietovių savivaldoje, vykdė savo teisingumą, kontroliavo vietos ekonominį gyvenimą, o kartais net ir moralinį gyventojų elgesį. Kadangi pirmoje 1919 m. pusėje centro valdžia buvo silpna, Lietuvos periferijose susiformavo kelios pusiau nepriklausomos teritorijos, kurias kontroliavo šie ginkluoti būriai. Tačiau valstybė su jais dalijosi legalios prievartos monopoliu tik tol, kol jos išlikimui reikėjo mobilizuoti visus ekonominius ir žmogiškuosius išteklius. Pasikeitus politinėms aplinkybėms, šios formuotės arba buvo sunaikintos, arba integruotos į įvairius valstybinius darinius (savivaldos įstaigas, Šaulių sąjungą ar kariuomenę). Taigi krašte susiformavusi paramilitarinė kultūra buvo integruota į tarpukario Lietuvos gyvenimą ir toliau veikė jos politinio, socialinio ir kultūrinio gyvenimo procesus.