

**An Original Source Interview with / Interviu su:**

**Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis**

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## Transcription

***Professor V. Landsbergis, what was it that made you and other members of the government and the people decide that you were actually going to push forward the freedom of Lithuania at that time? What was going on?***

It was not a special deliberation and decision, but rather a participation in the overwhelming movement of spiritual content at first. Much first to the reasonable decision how to build buddies of this movement for liberation of Lithuania. Spirit of liberty and strive, conscious strive to do something, to change unlawful, inhuman system and situation, endangering entire society to degeneration. There were sources of many smaller movements, more specialized for environment, for saving Lithuania language, for true history, for truth about our past, fighting the soviet official lies and propaganda teaching in schools. Of course, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, and there were also special, special moves and groups involved even longer time before Sąjūdis movement appeared. So dissidence of those fighters for freedom of belief with a movement and organization of enormous importance of underground publication of the Chronicle of Lithuania Catholic church, which KGB could not stop, could not find, who is doing it. There were various, to say smaller sources and creeks joining in one river. And river, which was breaking the ice and pushing forward to the, to say in metaphor, sea of freedom. So as we appeared, me and my friends into the mainstream of events. We were happy that we may act, and we had a feeling that we were not a single person or small group but greater and greater grass movement is going on. Of course, we encouraged, we worked to build this great movement as Communist party tried to stop and insisted to us not to build a great movement, come to us, be advisers, we will work together. So, we remember very well those suggestions and proposals. So, I was among those, who could be called activists before building of Sąjūdis, movement of liberation, and then it was created.

As you asked about decision, decision could be only negative. If someone could have said "oh it's enough for me, I'm going back to my homework, to my professional career". There were such decisions, especially after we won elections to parliament and established proclaimed extorting the independence and went to build new structures of independent state. Then I used to meet positions which I could not condemn. Not so few of them used to say: "The main job is done, I have my own book, my own research, my own profession. I will support you but I'm not going to be a minister or ambassador or public service man". There were decisions but as for positive it was very natural to be in, not out.

***Was there a sense of excitement as you were going through all of this, you were at the cutting edge of a great movement that whole world was watching, what was it like locally and inside for those of you who were involved in this?***

I cannot say that we expected that the whole world would be watching and supporting us. We had an understanding and feeling that is something what we have to do. Without any knowledge about final result in some predictable time, but being firm in the final result in a long time.

Finally Lithuania will be free, finally. Maybe not in our time, but as in our times we have a chance to do something, to move ahead, we cannot avoid it. We have to catch the momentum and to use the chance.

***Was it dangerous for you, were you ever in danger at this point?***

It was out of mind, essentially. Of course our relatives, families could be concerned but they did not have to stop from it. I was asked many times about the feeling of danger and only then I used to go back and to be rather surprised by myself, that it was no feeling of danger. Of course, we should be concerned under our responsibility about danger for many other people. If they are following our ideas and calls to act, carefully, very carefully insisting, educating, explaining, instructing that our movement is absolutely nonviolent. We are not going into any clashes or unrests or rebellions. Insurgency, spiritual insurgency. We are going to not obey the Soviet system, the Soviet law, imposed unlawfully over Lithuania. It was nonviolent spiritual resistance with some, maybe even unique positions as they were documented, as declaration of moral independence by Sajūdis.

***Could you describe your own personal encounter with Soviet power and terror, and oppression?***

Of course. When Soviets invaded and imposed on their own regime and incorporation of Lithuania into foreign country, Soviet Union, I was a boy. I remember Soviet tanks on the streets of my native city Kaunas. My elder brother of me, took me to show, as he said, Mongols. And it was characteristic. Much later I realized that troops, used for occupation of Lithuania and later for the terrible red terror over Lithuania people, were collected probably from Asian people of Soviet Union. Maybe on purpose, can't say exactly, but they have been Soviets: very wise and evil. And if they had an idea to get invading troops from the most distant civilization and culture, maybe it could be one more idea to confront the people.

***I find it striking that if you look at the tanks at TV terror, the drivers were all from Eastern Union, they did not look Russian.***

Well, but as you asked me about those first impressions and earliest memories, of course in my environment, there were no other ideas, that it is great misfortune, lost freedom, country captive and foreign brutal power and feeling of terror was introduced. What was never seen before as I was coming to primary school, but there appeared some pupils and one of them I remember very strange person and much older than others, but the teacher feared him, feared this pupil. He could do everything what he wanted, to destroy lessons, to not making any what teacher was insisting, and she feared even to blame him. And then of course deportations, mass deportations of 1941 and executions. I have seen young people executed by flank out Russian troops in our country side, village, Kačerginė near to Kaunas. We have heard and seen about deportations because some families were taken at the night, in neighborhood, even one very old woman, whom we know because she was our neighbour, she was Polish, she from some real estate, so class enemy, she was taken at night and her relatives, and relatives were probably those who fled out Poland to Lithuania. Lithuania appreciated those refugees but when Soviets came, they treated them as enemies because they were enemies of Hitler and Stalin was an ally of Hitler

then. Many of Jews were also deported because they belonged to the class of riches or to the parties, not the Communist party, other Jewish parties. Of course most Lithuanians were deported and so many among them were teachers of schools. My own uncle was executed. He was imprisoned in Kaunas, but when Soviets fled they took all prisoners and executed them on the way, in Belarus. As in Lithuania, they used to execute sometimes even in the most terrible torturing of the prisoners. Expressing this way, some bestial hatred. You may see one of such massacres in this book.

***You speak of moral and spiritual genocide. Could you expand on this in a way in which, do you believe that what the Soviets carried out really was an intended genocide?***

Yes, it was not so often treated as another side or additional side of genocide beyond the physical extermination of people and sometimes in masses- as in, what I call, death chambers of cold and hunger in most distant corners of northern Siberia. You'll see it here in this book of memories, how it was terrible to see around the people, dying without any hope and without any mercy. So cultural genocide was called, and would be called more politely sovietization. It was sort of a renewed russification from czarist times, and it what our grandparents used to oppose and to fight also by peaceful means. Only by printing and smuggling forbidden Lithuanian press, Lithuanian prayer books because it was high crime to have prayer book in Lithuania at czarist times. And it went back in Soviet/Stalinist form of ban of everything what could remind independence of Lithuania. Dignity, national dignity in our history. Everything should be reversed and perverted in mentality, in education and under terror to speak the truth. To say the truth was a crime. Especially to write and to distribute it was high treason in Soviet state. This way they intended to change a mind, to deprive the people their national identity, their western root of culture, Christian roots of our culture. All it was treated as wrong and anti-Soviet.

***You speak also about a kind of slavery in USSR that the world still doesn't understand. Could you describe what that terrible slavery was and that it was common in Soviet Union?***

It was a slavery on different levels. In general, it is a slavery if you cannot leave and act as a free person, in spiritual sense to express yourself, to build yourself, to be a person with your own beliefs, but you have to obey rules and norms, norms of thinking. It was dangerous to think independently because sometimes you could unexpectedly say what you are thinking. So it was a mechanism to enforce, to change your mind and to comply with demand and then to be more secure. And people used to live with dual mentality- official, talking publicly only according to this official mentality, and keeping their genuine mentality, individual mentality in a secrecy. In a secrecy, and even suppressing it by themselves as a self-control or self-censorship. It was a system of spiritual slavery in a social-economy sphere. You had to obey the system and rules, and not to protest any injustice, because you could be punished very simple way, being deprived of your job or not given anything better, left without any chance to get even the smallest flat for living. All it was a great authority, and authority was looking over those economic slaves and social slaves how they do behave. And in very direct sense there were camps of slave labors. Tens of thousands, hundreds of thousand from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were taken out from their native land to distant far and hostile sides to work sometime before dying. KGB, having in mind that this name was changed in years most recent from their best known names-

first it was NKVD, NKGB and other names for this organization which under independent Lithuania law is described as a criminal organization, acted in Lithuania. Most exposed terror was execution, killing, burning of villages, burning of farms and exposure of unpunishment of those putative actions. They could do anything what they wanted, being a military force over helpless people and therefore they hated resistance because they feared resistance. Resistance sometimes could fight and beat those oppressors and punitive troops. They sometimes had heavy losses in Lithuania and therefore their hatred should be expressed on unarmed civil population and also on those captured or killed in a battle and they used to expose the corpses of killed enemy in humiliated mutilated form on the streets, on the squares of towns in Lithuania to show everybody that this is your future destiny if you dare to stand against us. And the same was used in Čėčėnija of course, there is no change in mind and culture of this organization in Russia under Communists.

So it was very open form of terror and another forms were of course of that almighty presence on our land because they were able to take families, to take entire villages into cattle wagons and to bring them to Siberia forever from your own land, it was very terrible. And of course people feared, people had to comply, or not, or to resist, atleast in mind, waiting for something better. Many, many people, especially villages then waited for a new war. That is very important to understand. The peace in commas was much more terrible than any possible war, again between the west and Soviets. People waited and waited, listening radio about conflicts in Berlin, in Korea, maybe this war is already coming. What it will mean- the liberation and the end of Soviet terror.

***We know in the West that the partisans, their resistance was eventually crushed. But it's still seen as, even though it was crushed, important. What was the symbolic importance of the armed resistance to the rest of the country, both then and now?***

Resistance was significant and symbolized a way of freedom, therefore so many people, young people, young men and girls were ready to die as a free, as a free people. Maybe with a hope of liberation, maybe without any hope but to surrender, to kneel facing the terrible and degraded enemy - it was so unacceptable. They preferred to fight to the end. And this was testified in variety of occasions and legacy. I have here small partisan prayer book, it was published already in our times of liberation. It is a facsimile copy. Original is from 1943. I could quote what were the prayers of them and sometimes they are surprising by interpretation of common and basic truth of Christianity. In one of those prayer books, maybe in this or not, they apply to Jesus Christ as our brother. Jesus Christ our brother. God Father, you gave the people freedom.. No, God Father, you created the nations giving them desire for freedom. So it was God's gift - freedom. And they had a feeling they are fighting for something sacred and here is a small prayer: "Forgive them as they don't know what they are doing. Is it indeed my God that man does not know what he's doing?". And then also folksongs. Lithuanians have a very rich folklore from ancient times but also up to newest times. And in special opportunities of great spiritual importance especially when it cannot be expressed in any other way, feelings, hopes, prayers. They were expressed in new songs, new folk songs and during this period of resistance there are a lot of folk songs about partisans and also songs of deportees, about their longing, about their

hope and belief that they will go back to their homeland. It is a rich legacy. And not one song was noticed about collaborators or about KGB fighters. I called it once it was a referendum of a nation, they won singing.

***Why is it important for people in the West to know what happened in the Baltics and in Lithuania under the Soviets? Because a lot of what happened here is not well known as it could be. Why is it important for this to be known in the West?***

Yes, in general the limited knowledge and lack of knowledge may be even dangerous, because people without the knowledge are much more easier manipulated, confused by sophisticated propaganda means. When despite denials of the facts and the truth, some falsified picture of the past is introduced in today's mind to get them acting appropriately today. Being manipulated because this vacuum of knowledge is fulfilled by a false knowledge. And it is one of the ways how to make policies manipulating not only common people but also educated and intelligent people. It is the first task of Communist propaganda of those times to get even prominent western intelligent people, sympathetic and praising achievements of Soviet Union without any knowledge about terror and millions of those in slavery camps, or millions executed without any mercy. So it is continued, it is continued even after Soviet Union was dissolved. As today, Russia under President Putin is turned absolutely back to Stalinist mentality, to getting the same values and understanding that perfect and mighty Soviet Union was badly effected and weakened by enemies. Now it should be restored on any possible territory but in the force threatening the world because surrounding world is enemy again. It was called 'Comrade Wolf' by president Putin, because 'Comrade Wolf' is listening but not obeying what we are saying. Leading back, their efforts to keep a false picture of the past or introduce more confusion in the mind - are very evident and lots of money are spent on it again. Therefore what you are doing I appreciate it very much. You may present some knowledge based on the truth, on the facts, the reality of the past as well as the present.

***Could you talk about the importance of the resistance contributing to Lithuania's ultimate liberation?***

It contributed in various ways. First, what I have told about, it was an example of having highest values or not having them. Those people did have. They were ready to die for freedom. And we used in our side of this movement, I remember myself saying sometimes, what we have to fear? If they could do it, why not we? And in more practical way this struggle which endured at least 10 years was a mean to stop a more effective colonization of Lithuania. Because Lithuania was not colonized in such a great extend as for example Latvia and Estonia. Maybe, it was also chance for future. And when times became a little bit more liberal, it was Gorbachev's liberalism, yes, commemoration of this struggle of resistance was again expressed publicly by building monuments, by making an order with their graves, reburials with sermons of freedom fighters, they came back into honors being under Soviets deprived. They were called bandits, called worst people because they fought the nice Soviet regime. And now they went today posthumous dignity and their honors. It was again a process effecting the mind of masses of people and helpful to consolidate Lithuanians for a sake of the historical truth and, of course, in understanding of dignity of struggle for freedom.