

Human resources of post-war Lithuania and their role in the rebuilding of Klaipeda

Kretinin, Gennady V.

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kretinin, G. V. (2014). Human resources of post-war Lithuania and their role in the rebuilding of Klaipeda. *Baltic Region*, 2, 113-120. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2013-2-9>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den DiPP-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence. For more information see:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

HUMAN RESOURCES

HUMAN RESOURCES OF POST-WAR LITHUANIA AND THEIR ROLE IN THE REBUILDING OF KLAIPEDA

G. Kretinin*



This article focuses on the issues of post-WWII economic restoration effort in the Soviet Lithuania. German occupation of the republic caused significant damage to its industry and agriculture. Pre-war Lithuania was an agrarian state aspiring to embark on an industrial-agrarian path of development. After the war, this aspiration did not only persist, but was intensified. To reach this objective, however, Lithuania required qualified workforce. Before the war, hardly any attention was paid to the training of workers for industrial-scale production and construction. Then, a considerable decrease in population during the war aggravated the already substantial labour shortage. The attempts of the republic's leadership to solve the problems of labour shortage through organised labour migration and labour mobilisation yielded no significant results. The appeals to the Centre with the request to send a substantial number of specialists and workers to Lithuania were heard, but a state ravaged by war did not have sufficient human resources. One of the solutions was the use of labour of German prisoners of war. A network of prisoner-of-war camps was established in Lithuania. In a matter of two to three years, PWs completed a significant amount of work aimed at the rebuilding of important infrastructural objects. The case of Klaipeda is used to demonstrate the opportunities of the region and Centre in organising workforce in the Lithuanian SSR.

The study uses the data obtained by modern historiography and documents kept in the Lithuanian State Central Archive.

Key words: war, national economy, rebuilding, workforce, prisoners of war, construction, qualification, production, personnel

The problem of providing the national economy of Lithuania with workforce became more acute after the transition to the socialist methods of management in

* Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University
14 A. Nevski Str., Kaliningrad,
236041, Russia

Submitted on December 30, 2013.

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2013-2-9

© Kretinin G., 2014

the summer of 1940. The Union Centre decides on the overall development of the national economy, and the backward agrarian country, as a result, was to become a strong industrial republic.

The rich sources of raw materials became available to Lithuania, fears of overproduction of products disappeared, prospects of unlimited growth opened before the industry and agriculture of the Republic. For the first time in the interwar period, Lithuanian industry could develop at full capacity, factories and plants began to work in two or three shifts. As a result, existing equipment started working at full capacity. In 1940—1941, construction of large industrial enterprises (cement, machine-tool, sugar refineries, powerful brickyards, etc.) was launched; the construction of the Tournish hydropower station was begun, about 50 million roubles were assigned to electrification and municipal economy. A significant number of citizens were involved in the industry.

It was Russia's second attempt to move Lithuania to industrial rails. The first one related to the pre-revolutionary period, when large industrial enterprises were appearing in Lithuania. As a result, in 1913 in the Kovno province 9 large metal working plants with 3,300 workers were functioning. In the interwar period the concept of 'big business' changed: in 1926 in Lithuania there were 10 enterprises of the mentioned industry which were considered to be large but each of all told employed less than 700 workers. The similar situation could be observed in other areas of industry. For example, in 1913 the number of workers in the leather industry was 2,500, and in 1939—1,600 people [1, p. 7].

The Lithuanian experts of that time noted: '...about 6% of the population are employed in the industry, while in prewar Russia already 17% of the population was occupied in the industry' (quoted: [2, p. 216]).

In particular, in the first quarter of 1941 the number of workers in the industry increased to 80,000 people, but according to the plan for 1941, this growth was going to be even more significant: up to 137,000 people, which five times exceeded the number of workers employed in the industry of pre-war Lithuania [3, l. 123].

The plans were reasonable enough. By the second half of October, 1940 the labour reserve fund of the republic amounted to 109,000 people. This number included 37,000 unemployed recorded at the labour exchange, 27,000 employed in public work of seasonal nature, 5,000 people deprived of former source of income in connection with the nationalization of industrial and commercial enterprises, 20,000 refugees from the Polish territory, 8,000 employed for a temporary construction of the railway, land and waterways, 2,000 people in logging and 10,000 people in urban and other types of construction. At that, 60% of the total number of the fund were residents of Vilnius and the Vilnius region [4, l. 97].

It should be noted that the industrial enterprises (branches) and the whole economy needed workers of certain professions and qualifications. Lithuanian experts reported that 80% of the entire mass of the unemployed were unskilled unemployed (labourers) (see, e.g. [5, p. 8]).

In the Republic of Lithuania preparation of skilled labour was not carried out, the personnel resources of Lithuania were scarce. In March 1945, the total number of blue collars and white collars were 175,831 people, of which about 60,000 were employed in industry and construction [6, l. 11]. The situation changed very little after the war. In the autumn of 1945, the total number of blue collars and white collars was 176,229 people, but in industry and construction reduced to 50,000 (see *ibid.*, October 1945 [l. 30]).

It is noteworthy that all people's commissariats and departments of the Lithuanian SSR had to restore and reconstruct the factories, plants, ports, other enterprises, that is, to run primarily construction work. Therefore, in 1945—1946 building trades were extremely scarce. Meanwhile, Republican Statistical Office reported that from February to October 1945 the number of workers of the construction and assembly professions in Lithuania was 5,000 to 11,500 people. Experts from the Union republics began to arrive in the summer of 1945, and much more actively in the autumn and winter the same year.

In April 1945, the republic's government attempted to streamline the flow of workers by sending them in the first place to the most important objects of reconstruction. With that end in view, on 26 April 1945 in Lithuania labour mobilisation was declared according to which cities and counties had to send workers to certain departments and organisations under the order of the Soviet Council of the Lithuanian SSR. In all, it was expected to mobilise 11,900 people (for managing railways — 5,500 people, for managing construction and building materials industry — 2,950 people, for the department of the municipal economy — 1,700 people, for local and light industry — 400 people for each, and so on). However, mobilisation went wrong. Only about 1,500 people were mobilised. At the same time, as it turned out, only one-third of them were skilled workers. The workers' living conditions, conditions of work and catering were such that the mobilised soon simply 'ran away home' [7, l. 31, 33].

In fact, the situation with regard to the Klaipeda region, newly acquired by Lithuania, was becoming insoluble. After the war, it was completely without people: at the end of the war the local residents managed to emigrate west. Lithuania's government had to solve the problem of transmigration in the time of the overall population deficit; besides, we must note that during the Second World War, the population of the republic declined by more than significant. The documents report that in 1940 the total number of residents of Lithuania was 2 million 879,000 people [8, p. 54], but at the beginning of 1946 in the Lithuanian SSR the total number of residents was 2 million 296,000 people [9, l. 148].

A certain way out of the situation was to use labour of prisoners of war at restoration work — there were 35,000 of them on the territory of Lithuania [10, l. 30]. The following solution was made: to build a POW camp for 6,000 people in Klaipeda including 1,500 prisoners of war for work at the seaport.

However, Klaipeda did not get such a large number of prisoners of war. The documents report that the number of them in some periods reached 4,500 people. In May 1946 in the Klaipeda camp there were 4,100 prisoners of war [11, l. 59].

Both the German prisoners of war and the soldiers of the Red Army serving in Klaipeda, played a significant role in the restoration of the city. Thus, while the sea trading port was being organised, it was planned that its staff would consist of about 3,000 workers and office workers. However, according to the accountable number the staff in 1945 was just 778 people. But the port capacity was not adjusted to the number of workers. But at the same time it was also necessary to carry out cleaning of the port and its harbour from marks of the war. In September 1945, in the 16th Lithuanian infantry division there was created a working battalion of 1,000 people and sent to work in the port. Then 950 prisoners of war were sent there too.

The employment of the latest had also the second side of the coin. There was some assistance to the national economy of the city, but the actual performance of a prisoner of war was only 67% of the target. Naturally, that could not affect the turnover of the port which was able to fulfil the planned tasks only for 40%. In addition, there was not enough skilled work force as well as specialists of engineering and technical staff [12, l. 18—20].

It should be noted that the employment of prisoners of war was favourable for the city: it was not bearing any costs for their alimentation. Security, transfer, catering, health care and public service — all this was assigned to the NKVD of the USSR.

To restore the city's infrastructure, to build new industrial enterprises, just to develop Klaipeda labour resources from outside were needed, namely from the outside republic sources. It became clear that nobody except the Union republics could help Klaipeda, especially in specific sectors of the economy, such as the marine industry.

It is natural to assume that there were many migrants from other regions of the USSR to Klaipeda. But there was no mass migration similar to that to the Kaliningrad region. Only specialists (of course, with families) from the soviet republics came to the Klaipeda region. Is it possible to speak about their quantitative structure?

Even if we admit that the influx of specialists to Klaipeda could be about 5,000 people per year (similar to Titlist, where during the first year after the war 3,000 to 5,000 migrants came from different regions), Russians, Byelorrussians and other nationalities could not become the overwhelming majority of the population of the city. By 1 June 1946 in Klaipeda, there had been 20,440 residents, in November of the same year there were 26 314, but in December — 29,090 people [13, l. 129; 14, l.105].

It is noteworthy that in their correspondence with the departments of the Union Centre, local authorities, agencies and organisations sent a request for specialists, graduates of vocational schools, young workers recruited by Komsomol and others to almost all the Union Commissariats.

For instance, the General Department of Labour Reserves in the Council of People's Commissars were 'within August-September to send 1,000 skil-

led workers (600 builders, 300 metalworkers and woodworkers 100) to the disposal of the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR from among the graduates of vocational schools, including for the Klaipeda seaport: metalworkers of various specialities — 50 people, builders — 150 people' [15, l. 74—81].

In turn, the People's Commissariat of Trade of the USSR was to 'provide loaders, machine operators, operatives and warehouse workers, workers of industrial and construction workers, also port engineers and technicians in Klaipeda with food products according to the norms ... for the employees of enterprises according to the special list; allocate additional main dish for these groups of workers increasing limits for the People's Commissariat of Fleet for 1,500 people; allocate limit dinners of B type for executives of the Klaipeda port up to 25 people, packed lunches for 25 people according to the norms of the special list, dinners at special dining cards for 75 people' [15, l. 80].

Naturally, the newcomers were provided with accommodation on favourable terms. All this displeased the Lithuanian population not employed in enterprises like the seaport because of the lack of necessary skills.

The vital task facing the new region of Lithuania in the first months of the Soviet rule, as the leadership understood it, — was preparation work for spring agricultural season. It was supposed that in the spring of 1945 in the Klaipėda region there would be organised 30 state farms having three branches each. The People's Commissariat of Agriculture was given two weeks to develop plans for a network of state farms, machine and tractor stations, research stations and other institutions. By February 15 the regional administrative unit was to be staffed with agricultural specialists: 30 state farms directors, 30 chief accountants, 30 agronomists; 90 managers of departments had to come to new places of work. The People's Commissariat of Agriculture had another month for selecting and sending 3,000 peasant families to the counties of Klaipėda who had to become the basis of the new network of agricultural enterprises in rural areas. About 20 hectares of land was planned to allocate to each family. In addition, the new settlers were charged with the task of carrying out supervision of neighbouring neglected areas [15, l. 36—37].

However, the campaign of 1945 to integrate the Klaipeda regional lands into agricultural use from the very beginning failed. Lithuanian peasants did not thrive for the resettlement. People's Commissars of the USSR, worried about the slow peopling of Klaipeda and its surroundings, on 12 June 1945 ordered the Lithuanian authorities to resettle there 9600 peasant families from other counties of Lithuania within June-July [16, l. 284]. The Moscow decree of June 20 was duplicated with the decree of the People's Commissariat of the Lithuanian SSR and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Lithuania [17, l. 179]. It seemed that original resettlement of 3,000 peasant families planned by the party leadership of the

republic was even overfulfilled. By 20 July 3584 families moved to the region. However, such amount of the population, even with the 2,436 local families, residents not evacuated by Germans, did not solve the general problem of restoration of the agricultural economy.

At the end of the autumn of 1945 the People's Commissariat of the Lithuanian SSR was forced to state that the executive committees of the republic fulfil the Resolution of the People's Commissariat and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Lithuania of 20 June unsatisfactorily [18, l. 179—180].

The resolution noted that on 1 November 1945 the plan of moving peasants and farm workers was carried out only by 64.2% (from 9,600 families or households resettled all 5,399). Especially behind of the schedule were the following counties: the Ukmerge County, in which the percentage was 10.8%, Alytus — 13.7%, Utena — 14.5%, Lazdiyay — 20%. It was said about it without giving reasons: either negligence or intention it was, or bad work of local executive bodies. In particular, in addition to farmers also teachers, agricultural specialists, medical experts and others were supposed to go to a new place of residence in the Klaipeda region according to the order of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR. But this did not take place. Allocation of one-time dowries to resettled peasants and workers of state farms was delayed (by 1 November 1945 only 1,223 households of the 5,399 moved farms received cash loans). Sale of heifers to migrants who did not have cattle in their former places of residence, did not take place (but it was the most significant item in the list of benefits in the post-war hungry time) [18].

The mentioned above and other drawbacks of the resettlement policy (to say nothing of the fact that it was launched late) led to an actual disruption of the agricultural year in the Klaipeda region. It turned out that Lithuania could not solve its agricultural problem with simple moving peasants there. At least in short time. Assistance from the Centre was needed.

References

1. Meshkauskas, K. 1956, *Podem jekonomiki Sovetskoj Litvy* [Economic growth of Soviet Lithuania], Vilnius.
2. Shadzhyus, G. 1972, *Istorija Litvy 1918—1940 gg. v burzhuznoj istoriografii* [History of Lithuania in 1918—1940. in bourgeois historiography]. *Istorija SSSR* [History of the USSR], no. 5.
3. Pjatiletie Sovetskoj Litvy [Five years of Soviet Lithuania], *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 34.
4. Balans trudovyh rezervov v LSSR [Balance of labor reserves in the Lithuanian SSR], *LCVA*, F, R-755. Ap. 2, b. 143.
5. Shadzhyus, G. 1970, K voprosu o likvidacii bezraboticy v Sovetskoj Litve v 1940—1941 gg. [On the question of the elimination of unemployment in Soviet Lithuania in 1940—1941], *Pribaltijskim sovetskim respublikam tridcat' let* [Baltic Soviet republics thirty years], Proceeding of the Conference of Academies of Sciences Institutes of History of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian SSR, 1970, 20—21 October, Vilnius.

6. Svodnyj otchet CSU Litovskoj SSR o chislenosti i zarabotnoj plate rabochih i sluzhashhikh po otrasljam narodnogo hozjajstva za aprel' mesjac 1945 g. [Summary Report of the Lithuanian SSR CSO on the number and wages of workers and employees by industry for the month of April 1945], 1945, *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 35.

7. Raspredelenie pribyvshih rabochih po narkomatam i vedomstvam [Distribution of the People's Commissariat of workers arrived and agencies], *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 35.

8. SSSR i Litva v gody Vtoroj mirovoj vojny [USSR and Lithuania during the Second World War], 2006, *SSSR i Litovskaja Respublika (mart 1939 — avgust 1940 g.)* [The USSR and the Republic of Lithuania (March 1939 — August 1940)], T. 1, Vilnius.

9. Kopija pravitel'stvennoj telegrammy zamestitelja upolnomochennogo Gosplana SSSR Kaspirovicha iz Vil'njusa v Moskvu, v upravlenie statistiki, 22 janvarja 1946 g. [A copy of a government telegram deputy commissioner of Gosplan Kaspirovich from Vilnius to Moscow, to Department of Statistics, January 22, 1946], 1946, *LCVA*, F, R-363, Ap.1, b. 162.

10. Pis'mo A. Snechkusa narkomu vnutrennih del SSSR Kruglovu ob ispol'zovanii voennosluzhashhikh na vosstanovitel'no-stroitel'nyh rabotah [Letter A. Snechkus People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Kruglov on the use of military personnel for the restoration and construction work], *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 159.

11. Pis'mo predsedatelja Gosplana Litovskoj SSR M. Shumauskasa A. Snechkusu o vypolnenii postanovlenija Sovmina Litvy ot 8 maja 1946 g. «Ob ispol'zovanii voennoplennyh na stroitel'no-montazhnyh rabotah» v Klajpede [Letter from the Chairman of the State Planning Commission of the Lithuanian SSR M. Shumauskasa A. Snieckus on the implementation of the Council of Ministers of Lithuania Resolution on May 8, 1946, "On the use of prisoners of war on the construction and installation works" in Klaipeda], 1946, *LCVA*, F., R-754, Ap. 13, b. 68.

12. Dokladnaja zapiska zamestitelja sekretarja CK KP(b) Litvy Rimshelisa A. Snechkusu o rabote Klajpedskogo morskogo torgovogo porta [Memorandum from Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Lithuania Rimshelisa A. Snieckus of the commercial seaport of Klaipeda], *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 159.

13. Spravka CSU Soveta Ministrov Litovskoj SSR «Chislenost' gorodskogo naselenija po Litovskoj SSR na 1 ijunja 1946 g.» [Help CSO Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR "The urban population of the Lithuanian SSR on June 1, 1946"], 1946, *LCVA*, F, R-363, Ap. 1, b. 162.

14. Otchet CSU Litovskoj SSR CSU Gosplana SSSR ob itogah registracii aktov grazhdanskogo sostojanija za 1946 g., dekabr' 1946 g. [Report CSB CSB Lithuanian SSR Gosplan on the outcome of civil registration in 1946, December 1946], 1946, *LCVA*, F, R-363, Ap. 1, b. 162.

15. O pervoocherednyh merah po vosstanovleniju narodnogo hozjajstva Klajpedy: postanovlenie SNK Litovskoj SSR i bjuro CK KP (b) Litvy, fevral' 1945 g. [On urgent measures to restore the national economy of Klaipeda: SNK decree of the Lithuanian SSR and the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CP (B) of Lithuania, February 1945], 1945, *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 34.

16. Spravka o zaselenii uezdov Klajpedskogo kraja po sostojaniju na 20 ijulja 1945 g. [Part of the settlement counties Klaipeda region as of July 20, 1945], 1945, *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 34.

17. O pereselenii krest'janskikh hozjajstv i rabochih sovhozov v Klajpedskij, Shilutskij i Pagegajskij uezdy iz drugih uezdov Litovskoj SSR: postanovlenie SNK Litovskoj SSR i CK KP(b) Litvy, 20 ijunja 1945 g. [On the resettlement farms and



state farm workers in Klaipeda, Šilutė Pagegyaysky counties and other districts of the Lithuanian SSR: Decision of the CPC Central Committee of the Lithuanian SSR and the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Lithuania, June 20, 1945], 1945, *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 124.

18. O vypolnenii postanovlenija SNK Litovskoj SSR i CK KP(b) Litvy ot 20 ijunja 1945 g. №128 o zaselenii Klajpedskogo kraja: postanovlenie SNK Litovskoj SSR [On the implementation of Decision of the CPC Central Committee of the Lithuanian SSR and the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Lithuania on June 20, 1945 №128 on the settlement of the Klaipeda Region: Decision of the CPC of the Lithuanian SSR], 1945, *LCVA*, F, R-755, Ap. 2, b. 124.

About the author

Prof Gennady Kretinin, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University; Head of the Baltic Information Analysis Centre of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies.

E-mail: baltrisi@baltnet.ru