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Lithuania and Mass Emigration during 1868-2020

What is this book about?

Since the 19th century, the Lithuanian nation has lived in a backward region whose economy has not been able to guarantee employment for a constantly growing population. During the 20th century, the Lithuanian people suffered from foreign pressure and national oppression as well as two world wars and occupations; they lost their most capable personalities and most energetic, best-educated citizens. The last thirty years of restored independence finally allowed the nation to work creatively, but the freedom to travel, a receptive European common market, and the free movement of labor gave people many opportunities to choose. Regrettably, for many these opportunities turned out to be much better in foreign countries than at home.

Lithuania and her emigrants were and continue to be two parts of the same nation. We should consider ourselves as such. During 1868-1914, when we did not have our own state, about 300,000 Lithuanians emigrated from the Russian Empire to the United States, Brazil, and England, including economic migrants to the cities of the Russian Empire. During 1919-1940, during our first independence, 100,000 people emigrated; after the war, we had a political emigration of about 70,000 people; during 1991-2020, during a second wave of mass emigration, about 750,000 of our citizens left. And perhaps even more. If we continue living without a policy that deals with demography and emigration, we will surely all disappear as Lithuanians. For now, we can be proud that there are no fewer than 1,500,000 Lithuanians and people of Lithuanian ancestry living in other countries and that they still care about Lithuania, that they think about their country. And since they are thinking about their native land, perhaps they will think to return – with contacts, experience, the fruits of their labors, and their creative achievements. Perhaps even with their businesses and companies. And (let us dream!) – with their children and grandchildren.

The Author