Łastoŭski as Politician

BY

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In the tenth issue of the Kaunas-based Byelorussian language journal *Kryvič*, which appeared in 1925, Łastoŭski is described in the following terms: 'Hram. Łastoŭski pa svajmu perakonańniu naležyć da radykalnych narodnikaŭ-sacyjalistaŭ, i ŭ hetym kirunku jaho praca idzie prostaŭ i česnaj linijaj ad samaha pačatku, h. zn. ad 1902 hodu; takim jaho znaŭe ŭsio kryŭskaje (biełaruskaje) hramadźianstva'.¹ We shall return later to this issue of *Kryvič* and the events to which it reacted. Vasil Zacharka, in his manuscript memoirs, analyses the shortcomings of the BNR cabinet headed by Łastoŭski as 'chvarablivaja ambitnaść, niedachvat revalucyjanizmu i hłybokaha nacyjanalnaha pačućcia, patrabujačaho achviaŭnaści na karyść... Backaŭščyny, as a result of which Łastoŭski, Ladnoŭ and Čvikič came to tread a 'sumny, z nacyjanalnaha pohladu, ślach'.² Anton Łuckievič, in his highly personal memoirs *Za dvadcać piać hadoŭ*, describes Łastoŭski in blunter terms: 'Łastoŭski nia byŭ ani sacyjalistam, ani revalucyjanieram', preferring to waste his talents on the formation of a clerical-conservative party with Baron Schafnagel, Prince Svjatopolk-Mirskij and some priests, 'jakaja ŭ našym ruchu była napierad zasudžana na śmierć'.³

A non-Byelorussian view can be found in the papers of the British Foreign Office. A Secret Intelligence Service Report dated 12 August 1921 has a note saying 'Lastovsky's propaganda is of such liberal character that the Lettish C.E. (?) on occasions have mistaken it for Bolshevik'.⁴ A letter from E.C. Wilton, Minister at the British Legation in Riga, to the British Foreign Minister, dated 15 June 1921, says: 'I have no confidence in either Mr Lastovsky or any of his colleagues whom I have met, and regard them as adventurers out to exploit the White Russian question for their own selfish ends regardless of White Russian or other interests'.⁵

A consistent socialist or never one at all? Ambitious only for his own ends or working solely for the good of the people of his country? Even after an examination of Łastoŭski's political activity, it will be impossible to give a single unambiguous answer to these questions, largely because they arise out of judgements that are individual and subject to the pressures of particular circumstances. We must remember too that it is normal for politicians to be assessed in the light of their influence upon the state, the population of which they claim to represent. For this reason we should consider what a state actually is, es-

pecially in the crucial definition of H.W.V. Temperley, given in vol. 5 of the *History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, subtitled *Economic Reconstruction and Protection of Minorities*. A state must have:

- '(a) a definite territory;
- (b) a population inhabiting this territory;
- (c) sovereignty exercised on this territory, both internally in the sense of being imposed on the inhabitants of the territory by legal measures, and externally in that it is not interfered with and rendered impossible in fact, or irregular in law, by the sovereignty of another state.'

From this definition it follows that the Byelorussian National Republic never was a state with actual existence. It had a definite territory theoretically planned, and there was obviously a population inhabiting that territory, but the BNR government was never able to exercise sovereignty over it without reference to an occupying power. Even in the week between the flight of the Red Army from Minsk on 19 February 1918 and the arrival of the Germans on 25 February, the Executive Committee of the Council of the All-Byelorussian Congress which technically constituted the only authority in the city, was hampered by the activities of Dowbór-Muśnicki's corps, and its writ hardly covered the whole of the territory it claimed as Byelorussia. The actions of Byelorussian national politicians, and of Łastoŭski in particular, must therefore be viewed against the situation of their seeking recognition of a just living space for Byelorussians in the face of challenges from more powerful and predatory neighbours. The primary issue for them was one of orientation towards one of these neighbours: Lithuania, Poland or Soviet Russia. In this connection it is important to bear in mind that Łastoŭski was in Vilna during the war.

Little precise information can be gleaned concerning Łastoŭski's earliest political involvement. The brief article on him in the Byelorussian Soviet Encyclopedia describes him as involved in the Hramada until 1908.⁶ Anton Luckievič, presumably for very strong personal reasons, makes no mention of him in his memoirs until 1915.⁷ On the other hand Łastoŭski was closely involved with *Naša niva*, and the publication in 1910 of his *Karotkaja historyja Bielarusi* shows that he was beyond all doubt a nationally-conscious Byelorussian; there is therefore every reason to suppose that he had taken part in the activities of the Hramada, or at the very least had been much influenced by it.

The outbreak of the First World War and the occupation of Vilna by the Germans in 1915, which subsequently led to extreme difficulties in the formation of a united Byelorussian political front, must have had a profound effect on all the Byelorussian intelligentsia in the city. Suddenly the need arose for aid for Byelorussian refugees, and for someone to approach the occupation authorities for permission to lay the foundations for Byelorussian cultural life. A Byelorussian National Committee was set up to coordinate activities and help to wring cultural concessions from the Germans; permission was granted for the

establishment of a teacher-training college in Śvisloč and Byelorussian became recognized as a language of instruction in the schools. Politically, Łastoŭski became associated with the 'Chryścijanskaja zlučnaść', a group which was later to adopt a pro-Polish stance and develop into the Byelorussian Christian Democratic Party. This is the party about which Anton Łuckievič speaks so scathingly in his memoirs; he and his brother Ivan were at the same time attempting to form a 'Biełaruskaja sacyjał-demakratyčnaja rabotnickaja hrupa' with policies similar to the Hramada. The very fact of war and occupation led to increasing hopes and expectations on the part of small nations that they too could hope to achieve independence; equally war and occupation ensured that these nations could work towards independence only if it fitted the plans of the occupying powers. The idealistic call for the restoration of the multi-national Grand Duchy of Lithuania, put out by the *Kanfederacyja Vialikaha Kniaźstva Litoŭskaha* on 19 December 1915,⁸ seems to have provoked no response from the Germans, and an entirely negative one from the Supreme Lithuanian Committee at its meeting in Kaunas on 6 January 1916; doubtless this was because the inclusion of all Byelorussians in an independent Lithuanian state would have led to the numerical domination of Slavs over Lithuanians, exactly as in the original Grand Duchy. Byelorussian delegations were sent to two conferences of the peoples of Russia in 1916, the first in Stockholm in April, and the second, at which Łastoŭski was present, in Lausanne in June. The outbreak of revolution in Russia and the course of events up to and including the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk inevitably caused a crystallization of German attitudes. Any hope of German support for a federal Byelorussian-Lithuanian state seemed to be lost when on 11 December 1917 the Lithuanian Taryba declared an independent state under German protection. Nevertheless there was still hope that the Germans would recognize Byelorussian national aspirations. These hopes must have been strengthened by the treaty between the Central Powers and the fledgling Ukrainian People's Republic, signed on 9 February 1918, which led to the sending of two Byelorussians, Alaksandr Čvikievič and Symon Rak-Michajłoŭski, to the peace talks in Brest.

The declaration of Lithuanian independence on 11 December 1917 (and again on 16 February 1918)⁹ forced the pace for the Byelorussians on that side of the demarcation line. A congress of Byelorussians from the Vilna and Hrodna provinces elected a Rada under Anton Łuckievič which on 18 February 1918 declared independence for these provinces in a move clearly aimed at proper participation within Lithuania. This Rada did not disband after the formal declaration of independence for all Byelorussia and the establishment of the BNR on 25 March for a very real political reason. The Germans recognized Lithuanian political authority in Vilna, whereas they did not recognize Byelorussian political authority in Minsk. This political reality was emphasized after the defeat of the Germans and their allies and the subsequent annulment of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk by the Bolsheviks. The Lithuanian

government and the Byelorussian Council of the Hrodna and Vilna provinces signed a pact of mutual assistance, with the establishment of a ministerial post for Byelorussian affairs in the cabinet, 25% of the seats in the Taryba and autonomy for the Byelorussian areas. Both Łastoŭski and Ivan Łuckievič were signatories to this agreement. It obviously meant partition and a break with the ideal of a united free Byelorussia, but it made political sense in that at least part of the nation would have adequate representation, and the struggle for unification could (in theory at least) continue from a strong base in Lithuania, with the eventual secession from Lithuania of the Byelorussian areas once a republic had been established. H.A. Grant Watson, British diplomatic representative in the Baltic States, makes it clear in his report to London that this was certainly the intention of, for example, the 'Uprava' of the Hrodna province under a Mr Korlof. He writes: 'It has been agreed that the East boundary of Lithuania should be finally settled in friendly agreement with the White Russians when their country has been cleared of the Bolsheviks'. Elsewhere in the report we can see that the Lithuanians did not regard the union of Hrodna province to the Lithuanian state as a mere temporary expedient (The report is in the Public Record Office, Russia 72907, dated 13 May 1919.)

In the course of the war against Soviet Russia, the Polish army occupied Vilna on 19 April and Minsk on 8 August 1919. Were Piłsudski's promises of federal status for Byelorussians within Poland to be believed? He apparently envisaged a loose federation of states stretching from Finland to Romania, and it seems clear that he did not entertain territorial ambitions in the Ukraine (except Eastern Galicia), but the administrators who entered Byelorussia on the heels of the Polish army certainly behaved as though that country were an integral part of Poland. The Rada of the BNR was disbanded, and Anton Łuckievič who, as Prime and Foreign Minister had been in Paris attempting to have Byelorussia included on the agenda of the Peace Conference, was called to Warsaw for talks with Piłsudski and Paderewski. We shall probably never know precisely what was said at these talks, but Łuckievič returned to Minsk with a policy that meant incorporating Byelorussia into Poland. This led on 13 December to an upheaval in the Rada with the formation of a new presidium under Krečeuški, and a new council of ministers, of which Łastoŭski was appointed chairman.¹⁰ Pobog-Malinowski refers to a 'swoisty zamach stanu',¹¹ Zacharka describes the new council of ministers as 'revalucyjna ūtvoran'.¹² Łuckievic took with him 37 members of the original Rada and formed what was in effect a rival government, the 'Najvyšejšaja Rada', in the hope that genuine cooperation was still possible with the Polish authorities. The 'revolutionarily constituted' new Narodnaja Rada called for armed resistance to the Poles and, not surprisingly, was dealt with harshly; Łastoŭski himself was arrested on 17 December.¹³ Krečeuški and Zacharka fled to Berlin and made their way from there to Riga in February 1920, where they were eventually joined by

Łastoŭski in May. Nationally-minded Byelorussians were now being courted by both sides in the Polish-Russian conflict. In March 1920 Pilsudski's special envoy Leon Wasilewski arrived in Minsk for talks with Łuckievič,¹⁴ Zacharka was invited to Moscow for talks with Chicherin, the Soviet Foreign Minister. (The talks were called off when the tide of war turned in Russia's favour.) Łastoŭski sought to put Byelorussia's case to the Paris Peace Conference though Col. Ładnoŭ, whom he had appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and head of the Byelorussian delegation.¹⁵

By mid-1920 it appeared that Poland was on the verge of defeat. The Lithuanians profited from the Polish retreat and, under the terms of the treaty of 12 June between them and Soviet Russia, the provinces of Vilna and Hrodna were supposed to become part of the Lithuanian state. Ładnoŭ forcibly protested against these terms in Paris, but ultimately to no avail. Łastoŭski himself signed a strong appeal 'aux gouvernements de la Russie de (*sic*) Soviets, de Lithuanie, à la Conférence de la Paix à Paris et à toutes Puissances et Nations civilisées du Monde', dated August 1920, demanding a plebiscite for the area handed by Russia to Lithuania. By the autumn of this year he and his cabinet had settled in Kaunas and entered into close contact with the Lithuanian government. The war between Poland and Russia had now miraculously turned into a triumphant Polish counter-attack. This inevitably led to a weakening of the Lithuanian position because their ally, Soviet Russia, was no longer able to guarantee the territorial offerings of the Moscow Treaty. The Poles occupied Hrodna and Vilna in October, and peace talks began in Riga. A Byelorussian political conference was convened in Riga on 20 October in an attempt to bring unity under the leadership of Socialist Revolutionaries into the struggle for independence.¹⁶ The 'Najvyšejšaja Rada' voluntarily ceased to exist, but Łuckievič never surrendered his personal animosity towards Łastoŭski.¹⁷

Zacharka, writing from a position of hostility to Łastoŭski's pro-Lithuanian stance,¹⁸ points out that the Lithuanians had never been entirely straightforward in their dealings with the Byelorussians. Negotiations early in 1919 had led to the election by the Byelorussians of Hrodna and Vilna provinces of Jazep Varonka as their minister on the Lithuanian cabinet. Once these areas had been lost to Poland the Lithuanian Prime Minister Voldemaras evidently saw no need to curry favour with a Byelorussian population no longer under his control; Varonka¹⁹ was replaced by Siemaška, an appointee of the Lithuanian government. By the autumn of 1920 the Lithuanians needed Byelorussian support again if their demands for a plebiscite in the disputed provinces were to be successful. The outcome of the talks with Łastoŭski and of a change in Lithuanian policy was the treaty of 12 November between Lithuania and the BNR. This treaty must be regarded as the culmination of Łastoŭski's pro-Lithuanian policy and is therefore worth examining in some detail. The signatories are in themselves evidence that the Lithuanian side did not regard this as a treaty between equals. For the Byelorussians Łastoŭski signed as

Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Čvikievič as Minister of Justice; the chief Lithuanian signatory was Petras Klimas, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, followed by Bronius Balutis, the Director of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Article 1 of the treaty makes specific reference to a plebiscite:

‘The Government of the People’s Republic of White-Russia promises to make every effort so that the White-Russian inhabitants of those places where a plebiscite will be held between Lithuania and Poland, will vote for the Lithuanian side. Since this plebiscite has only to do with the relations between Lithuania and Poland, it does not determine in advance the frontier question between Lithuania and White-Russia; this question of the frontier is to be decided according to the sixth paragraph of this treaty.’

Article 6 reads:

‘All the questions regarding the relations between the States of Lithuania and White-Russia are to be amicably settled by agreement between the two Governments. The question of the frontier between the two States is to be pacifically settled after convocation of a legal Constituent Assembly of the representatives of the People’s Republic of White-Russia.

Until then, the places in which the majority of the inhabitants are White-Russians, and which form a part of the Republic of Lithuania, are to be governed according to the principle of national territorial autonomy.’

The Lithuanians must have realized that the convocation of a legal Constituent Assembly within a People’s Republic of White Russia was quite impossible, given that the territory claimed for the republic was then in the hands of the Poles and Moscow, and that any attempt to establish such a republic by force of arms would bring Lithuania into conflict with both Poland and Russia. Such a possibility must have been foreseen by the drafters of the treaty, for Article 7 robs it of any international force it may have possessed:

‘Should any one of the paragraphs of this treaty menace one of the parties with an armed conflict with a third State, that paragraph is not obligatory to the parties.’

The implications of the treaty became clearer when a Byelorussian representative, A. Aūšianik, called on E.C. Wilton in Kaunas on 16 December to inform him of the treaty and of the Byelorussian plan that followed logically, for them, from it:

‘the Lithuanian government should allot to the White-Russian Republic the share of the Vilna district inhabited by White-Russians, which would then form the nucleus of a state: demands would then be made by the White-Russian population in Soviet Russia and in Poland to join this State, and a general rebellion would follow if their demands were refused’.²⁰

Aūšianik confessed that little financial support had been forthcoming from the 750,000 White Russians in the USA,²¹ and that the Republic had neither arms or money. Article 2 of the treaty allows the BNR government to raise soldiers on Lithuanian territory, and we do know that a Byelorussian detachment had been formed, led, according to

Pobóg-Malinowski,²¹ by a Lithuanian, Major Rosmanas. An article in *Bielaruski Holas*²³ gives more detail: the detachment was based at Šauliai, consisted of 300 men and was commanded by a captain Razumovič; it was used for partisan raids inside the Hrodna province.

Puryckis, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, candidly admitted to Wilton that the sole purpose of the treaty was to gain Byelorussian support in any forthcoming plebiscite. When told by Wilton of complaints made against Łastoŭski and his cabinet by the Bolshevik representative in Kaunas, Puryckis is quoted as having replied: 'the Lithuanian Government would not permit any intrigues of that nature and, if proofs to that effect were furnished, it would be necessary for Mr Łastoŭski to leave Lithuania'. Wilton unfortunately does not specify the nature of the Bolshevik complaints, or of the 'intrigues' to which Puryckis refers. There can be no doubt, however, that the Soviet government would have interpreted Article 6 of the Treaty with the BNR as hostile, given that, in their view, a Byelorussian state had already been established in Minsk, and that they probably believed that Łastoŭski was involved in some way in the Śluck uprising of October. The Lithuanian government must have known of the existence of an armed Byelorussian detachment based on its territory, and that if that detachment could be used for cross-border raids against Poland, then it was only the lack of a common border that prevented its being used in a similar way against the Soviet state.

Aŭsianik saw Wilton again in February 1921, submitting to him a background document dated 14 February which sought a preliminary loan from the British government of £15,000 in order to send a delegation to London to arrange a larger loan 'for our war of independence'; in return the British would be offered forestry concessions in Byelorussia and a fixed period trade monopoly. Clearly such a war of independence would have to involve both Poland and Soviet Russia; it is not surprising, therefore, that Wilton refused to forward the request to London. Later that year Wilton learned²⁴ that a secret addition to the treaty had been made by Puryckis and Łastoŭski on 13 November 1920, in which the Lithuanian government agreed to loan the BNR government 1 million ostmarks (about £4000), payable in five instalments, the last payment to be made on 5 July 1921. Balutis confessed that this too had been done to ensure the Byelorussian vote in any plebiscite held in Vilna, but that no more loans would be made. The Lithuanian government was already paying £200 per month to the Byelorussians, although Wilton does not say whether the money was paid direct to Łastoŭski's cabinet or through Siemaška at the Byelorussian ministry.

On 27 May Wilton informed London that Łastoŭski and Minister Gitovski (Żytkoŭski?)²⁵ had applied for visas to come to Britain to put their case to the British government. This request, too, was refused. Łastoŭski himself called on Wilton in Riga on 14 June,²⁶ accompanied by a Mr Grountof who described himself as Secretary for White Russian affairs attached to the Lithuanian Legation. Łastoŭski made what Wilton describes as a 'long and rambling statement' of the position of

his government, and then asked Wilton why he had not placed Aūšianik's plan before the British government. Wilton explained that the 'scheme contemplated the stirring up of rebellion among the White Russian peasantry living in territory occupied by Poland, a State with whom England was on friendly terms'. Lastoūski asked if an amended version scheme 'disclaiming aggressive hostility towards Poland' would be acceptable, to which Wilton replied that Lastoūski had already put the Byelorussian issue before the League of Nations (to be put 'on the same footing as East Galicia'), and that the League's decision would have to come first. Wilton's report to London concludes with some interesting additional information. The Byelorussian representatives in Kaunas were supposed to have approached the Bolsheviks some months earlier with an offer of assistance in return for a payment of £40,000. Advances had also been made to the Germans in March. Aūšianik was now in Vilna and Lastoūski had had difficulties in defining his (Aūšianik's) position there to Wilton. Aūšianik, or some member of his staff (the phrase is Wilton's) had divulged the contents of the secret agreements between Lithuania and the BNR to a Polish secret agent. All in all Lastoūski made a negative impression on Wilton,⁴ because it is in this report that Wilton describes him so unfavourably.

Lastoūski continued in his attempts to gain proper Byelorussian participation in the Riga talks, but his financial position was becoming worse. A political conference was held in Prague²⁷ in September 1921 with the aim of planning future activities after Byelorussia had been effectively divided by the Treaty of Riga. Zacharka²⁸ also suspected that the Poles were attempting to subvert Byelorussian nationalist politicians, so that such a conference, ideally, ought to have provided an opportunity for establishing a clear line of working only for the independence of Byelorussia on the basis of the declaration of 25 March 1918 and the treaty with Lithuania. In terms of practical politics, however, Lastoūski's options were too restricted to allow of a continued struggle for independence. In view of the continuing Vilna crisis his only way forward lay in close cooperation with the Lithuanians, since they at least provided a measure of recognition. As a result of this cooperation Lastoūski and Čvikievič, as foreign minister,²⁹ attended the Genoa conference of April and May 1922. They are not listed as part of the Lithuanian delegation, which consisted of Ernestas Galvanauskas the Prime Minister, and Tomas Naruševičius, chargé d'affaires in London,³⁰ but must have been supported financially by the Lithuanians. The conference had been called largely at the behest of Lloyd George, with the aim of restoring the economic life of Europe³¹ and as a means of bringing Soviet Russia into the orbit of states with which civilized dealings are possible; his main interest in this particular quarter was probably to persuade the Soviet government to honour the tsarist government's debts. Statements were made to the conference by representatives of Eastern Galicia, opposing Polish occupation, and the Ukrainian Democratic Republic protesting Soviet occupation; the fact that these issues were raised is recorded in the British Cabinet papers,³²

even though they were regarded as beyond the brief of the conference. These papers contain no reference to the Byelorussian National Republic; there is no mention in the memoranda of conversations or of the 'prolonged talks' that Łastoŭski claims to have had with members of the British delegation.³³ On the other hand Lloyd George did state very firmly that he regarded the Vilna question as one of the most outstanding threats to peace in Europe; there is clear evidence of French opposition to discussion of the subject, presumably because of the strongly pro-Polish stance of the French government.

It is a measure of Łastoŭski's political astuteness that he realized that the only way forward was by offering complete support for Lithuania in the international arena. This confirmed Zacharka in his view that Łastoŭski had by now abandoned the struggle for an independent Byelorussia.³⁴ Internal dissensions within his cabinet eventually forced Łastoŭski's resignation on 20 March 1923; he and K. Duŭ-Đušeŭski entered the service of the Byelorussian Ministry of Lithuania, Čvikievič took over as Chairman of the BNR Council of Ministers and the whole cabinet moved to Prague. The orientation towards Lithuania had failed: in March 1923 Poland won international recognition for its eastern frontier as defined in the Treaty of Riga and for its possession of Vilna.

Łastoŭski withdrew from active politics,³⁵ although through his journal *Kryvič* he frequently voiced his political opinions, often aimed at personalities associated with the Byelorussian cause: Bałachovič was a 'bandit', Ładnoŭ, whom Łastoŭski himself had appointed as foreign minister, was a 'spy'. Issue 9 contains his fierce protest against the terms of the Concordat of 10 February 1925 between the Vatican and Poland, which effectively turned priests of the Church into police agents. The tenth issue dealt with the second national 'narada' of 12-16 October 1925 in Berlin, at which a small unrepresentative number of delegates 'dissolved' the Byelorussian National Republic and handed its mandate to the BSSR. Łastoŭski attacked Čvikievič and those like him who decided to return to Minsk, and Krečeŭski for having appointed Čvikievič as his (Łastoŭski's) successor in 1923.

In view of this attack, how can we explain Łastoŭski's own decision to enter the services of the BSSR in 1927? Lithuania's isolation in international affairs as a result of her refusal to accept the *status quo* in Vilna led to increasingly nationalist sentiment at home, with an inevitable growth in hostility towards national minorities. The Jews, numbering 7.6%³⁶ of the population according to the 1923 census, lost their ministry in 1924; the Byelorussians, numbering 0.2%³⁷ of the population, cannot have fared better. Smetona's coup of December 1926 was the logical outcome of this shift to the right. There was no longer any ground on which to fight for Byelorussia's political independence. On the other hand, the addition of more territory to the BSSR in 1924 was a significant gesture to national sentiment. In 1926 Łastoŭski went to Minsk to attend the orthographical conference; while there he would have had the opportunity to witness the very real progress that had been made in the cultural sphere in the BSSR. Soviet Byelorussia must

indeed have seemed at the time the only possible place in which positive work for the Byelorussian people could be accomplished.

Łastoŭski's political activity cannot be assessed in any normal sense as 'party politics'. Ultimately it is not really important whether he was a consistent socialist or not; his political ground shifted with necessary changes in orientation. Against a continually shifting background of war, revolution and new states seeking to establish new frontiers, this is hardly surprising. Kančar in his *Belorusskij vopros* of 1919 refers to Byelorussian nationalist politicians as 'političeskije mladency'. There is considerable justification for this, but the same could be said of many leading politicians in the new post-1918 states. Byelorussia failed in the international arena because of overwhelming odds against which even the most experienced politicians could not have prevailed:

- (i) The Polish question dominated western policy towards the area. The Vilna issue became the first intractable problem to be dealt with, and then abandoned, by the League of Nations;
- (ii) Although the West undoubtedly wished to see an end to Soviet power in Russia, it had no idea as to what should replace it. There was little or no support in official circles for a proliferation of small nation-states;
- (iii) The Lithuanians could count on their claims to nationhood and a state of their own being taken seriously. No one who mattered in the West had any idea who the Byelorussians were. Moreover the Lithuanians had received tremendous support from their compatriots in the USA;
- (iv) There must have been serious reservations as to precisely who was being represented by Łastoŭski and his cabinet, given that no elections had been held (or could have been held) in the country for which recognition was being sought.

These factors led Łastoŭski into making two basically wrong deductions:

- (a) In 1920 and 1921 the Lithuanian government was obviously acting out of pure self-interest in pretending to support the Byelorussian cause, and it was naïve to expect otherwise.
- (b) It was naïve to expect that, because Britain was apparently adopting an anti-Polish stance over Vilna and was opposed to the Soviet regime, it would actively support armed intervention against both countries. Aŭsianik's first visit to Wilton was disastrous.

If it is indeed true that Łastoŭski approached the Bolsheviks for financial support, then we are entitled to ask what he thought he was doing. Would he have been prepared to accept help from any source, provided that that source was anti-Polish? There may indeed be some justification for Wilton's suspicions of Łastoŭski's motives.

After the split of December 1919 Byelorussian nationalist politicians entered a shadowy realm of unreality, of tiny political groupings with

imposing names but insignificant following. They cannot be blamed for this because they were not in charge of the events in which they quite rightly sought to play a part. With the wisdom of hindsight we know that they could not have achieved an independent Byelorussia. What they, and Łastoŭski in particular, did achieve was to ensure an increasing awareness of national identity among Byelorussians themselves; in itself this is no mean achievement. Soviet Byelorussia continues to pay tribute to Łastoŭski and the vision he had of his country's future by suppressing the very fact of his existence. It must therefore be the task of western historians to secure him the place in Byelorussia's history which he truly deserves.

NOTES

1. The author of the article in which this statement appears is given as S. M-ski. The article is apparently a rebuttal to statements made in *Savieckaja Bielaruś*, no. 262, 1925.
2. V. Zacharka, *Halošnyja momenty Bielarskaha ruchu*, ms., 1926, p. 78.
3. A. Łuckievič, *Za dwadcać piać hadoŭ (1903-1928)*, Vilna, 1928, p. 40. Later in the same chapter, referring to the split in the refounded Hramada after the declaration of independence of 25 March 1918 and the subsequent founding of the Byelorussian Socialist Revolutionary Party, Łuckievič says: 'Partyja bielaruskich eseraŭ — pašla niekalkich hadoŭ biazdziejnaści i pustych hutarak dy raźbićcia Rady Respubliki', žniavieryušysia sama ŭ sabie pašla liderstva zdeklaravanaha pracіўnika sacyjalizmu Łastoŭskaha, nieušpadzieŭki zajaviušaha siabie "eseram" i sprytna vykarystaŭšaha "biažludździe" ŭ partyi dziela svaich asabistych metaŭ, — zlikvidavałasia...' (p. 50). * — this is, of course, Łuckievič's own view of the events that led to the split in the Rada after the Polish occupation of Minsk in 1919. I. Kovkel' & N. Staškevič, *Počemu ne sostojalas' BNR?*, Minsk, 1980, p. 66, state that Łastoŭski was deprived of Party membership on 'tactical grounds'.
4. In the Public Record Office, London: N9469/2445/59 (Secret Intelligence Report no. 309, 12 August 1921).
5. Wilton to Lord Curzon, 15 June 1921: N7154/2445/59.
6. Technically the Hramada ceased to exist in 1907; see Łuckievič, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
7. Łuckievič, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
8. Ja. Najdziuk, *Bielaruś učora i siańnia*, Minsk, 1943 (4), p. 161.
9. For the reasons behind the two declarations of Lithuanian independence see A.E. Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania and the Vilna Question*, Leiden, 1966, pp. 9-10. The Germans did not in fact recognize Lithuanian independence until 23 March 1918; this was an important consideration in the declaration of Byelorussian independence two days later.
10. It is difficult to assess whether this was the result of a deliberately anti-Polish stance by Łastoŭski, or of personal animosity towards Łuckievič. W. Pobóg-Malinowski (*Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski*, II, 1914-1939, London, 1967, p. 414, note 35a) says that Łastoŭski initially supported the programme of federation with Poland. Kovkel' and Staškevič, *op. cit.*, p. 59, refer to an offer made by Łastoŭski to Piłsudski in September 1920 of military assistance against Soviet Russia (citing as the source of this information a document in the state archives of the Lithuanian SSR: TsGA LitSSR, f. 582, op. 1, d. 6, 1.12).
11. Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. & loc. cit.*
12. Zacharka, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
13. Along with Ułasau, Badunova, Kozič and Mamoňka: *Časopis Ministerstva bielaruskich spraŭ*, no. 3-4, Koŭna (Kaunas) 1919, p. 16.

14. Pobóg-Malinowski, *op & loc. cit.*
In fact the talks may have been held at a comparatively mundane level. Sir Horace Rumbold (British Ambassador in Warsaw) to Lord Curzon, 1 May 1920: 'The agreement which was recently negotiated at Minsk by Monsieur Wasilewski on behalf of the Polish Government with White Russian representatives is said to deal only with the question of education in White Russia and to leave the political future of that district perfectly open' (Russia 196785).
15. French translation of letters of credence signed by Łastoŭski and dated 29 May 1920 in the British Foreign Office papers FO 371/4044.
Ładnoŭ had been fulfilling the functions of president of the Byelorussian delegation since 28 August 1919 when Łuckievič was called to Warsaw (copy of delegation letter no. 252 in FO 371/4044). A telegram was sent to the Byelorussian delegation on 15 December 1919, signed by Łastoŭski, to inform them of the constitution of the new Narodnaja Rada; Ładnoŭ is listed as Foreign Minister. On the next day Ładnoŭ received a telegram from the 'Rada centrale des socialistes blanc-russiens a l'étranger' congratulating him on his appointment.
16. Kovkel' and Staškevič, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5. Referring to TsGA LitSSR, f.582. op.1. d.11, 1.30, they state that despite disagreement on tactics there was unanimity on the necessity for armed struggle against Soviet power.
FO 371/4044 contains two documents relating to:
(i) a meeting of the Rada Presidium in Riga on 30-31 May 1920, which gave Ładnoŭ full authority to nominate his own delegation to the Paris Conference to continue the struggle for recognition of the BNR;
(ii) a 'conférence des hommes d'Etat et Representants des provinces de la Russie-Blanche á Riga' on 1 June 1920. This appears to be exactly the same kind of meeting as that called later in the year in October to which Kovkel' and Staškevič refer. It was attended by representatives of the Byelorussian Socialist-Revolutionary Party (Badunova), the Byelorussian Socialist Federalist Party (Jezavitau), the Byelorussian Social Democrats (Trasbère — *sic*) and the Cooperative movement (Mamoňka). Full support was given to Łastoŭski's cabinet.
17. cf. Łuckievič's letter to L. Dubiejkaŭski of 8 June 1920:
'...treba jaho (Ładnova — *JD*) painfarmavač ab pałažeñni spravy ŭ kraju, kab jon nie papaŭsia na vudu Łastoŭskamu i komp...'
and again on 3 June 1921:
'Było-b velmi važna, kab Ładnoŭ papaŭ u Bruksielu i tam raźbiŭ kombinacyju Łastaŭskaha: hety bandyt praz Čvikiieviča pieradaŭ litoŭskaj delehacyi — našym zaklatym voraham — abaronu intaresaŭ Bielarusi!' The reference here is to the plebiscite discussions in Brussels with the former Belgian foreign minister Paul Hymans, appointed rapporteur for the Polish-Lithuanian dispute at the 9th session of the Council of the League of Nations in September 1920. The Brussels meetings started on 20 April 1921 and lasted into June. Two Byelorussian delegates, A. Karabač and M. Kachnovič, attended the meetings; both supported union with Lithuania. The Poles used Łuckievič's Najvyšejšaja Rada in a countermanoeuvre on 5 May, claiming that the Kaunas group's views were not shared by the Byelorussian population as a whole. (The extracts from Łuckievič's letters are taken from Ad. Stankievič, *Da historyi bielaruskaha paľityčnaha vyzvañnia*, Vilna, pp. 112-13).
18. Zacharka, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-8.
19. Varonka was still the minister for Byelorussian affairs and a member of the Lithuanian State Council in August 1919. See K. Jezovitov, *Belorussy i Poljaki*, Kaunas, 1919, pp. 110-16.
20. N2445/2445/59 (also contains the text of the treaty) and N2659/2445/59 (contains English translation of Aŭsianik's statement). In N2445 Wilton reports to London that he had warned the Lithuanians of the risks involved in allowing the recruitment of a White-Russian division to be used against the Bolsheviks. He informed both the acting president of Lithuania (Aleksandras Stulginskis) and the foreign minister (Juozas Puryckis) of Aŭsianik's scheme, but they both 'regarded (it) lightly and declared it was one which did not command their support'.

21. This should be contrasted with the active support for the Lithuanian cause given by Lithuanians in the USA, even to the extent of sending a delegate to the Paris Peace Talks (Bronius Kazys Balutis who lived in the USA from 1906 to 1919; from Paris he went to Kaunas where he joined the staff of the Foreign Ministry).
22. Pobóg-Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 627.
23. *Bielaruski Holas*, no. 240, 1976. See also Uł. Ładyseŭ, *Šlach da svabody*, Minsk, 1978, pp. 19-22.
24. N8017/2445/59 (6 July 1921).
25. It is conceivable that Wilton's version of the name hides Żytleŭski. Both Żytleŭski and Duż-Dušeŭski came to London, according to Kovkel and Staškevič (*op. cit.*, p. 89), to seek a loan of \$60 million. They refer to TsGA LitSSR, f. 852, op. 1, d. 45, 1.102. N6206/4541/38 in the Public Record Office, London, mentions only Łastoŭski and 'Gittovski'. N9469/2445/59 (12 August 1921) says: 'His (Łastoŭski's — JD) Minister for Jewish Affairs, S. Zhitlovsky, has gone to Berlin and will go on from there to Paris. In Paris he hopes to obtain a visa for England, where he is to carry on propaganda among the Jews of White Russian extraction, where he hopes to obtain more money. From England, it is proposed Zhitlovsky should go on to America, where preparatory work has already been started'. Kovkel' and Staškevič (*op. cit.*, p. 110) say something rather different. The decision to send Żytleŭski to London was taken by the BNR cabinet on 8 March 1922, in the belief that, because Lloyd George was the prime mover behind the Genoa conference, the British would be sympathetic. There is no mention of Duż-Dušeŭski travelling with him, nor of where Żytleŭski was just before his departure for London, Chaim Weizmann helped him obtain a visa for Great Britain, and he left for London on 11 May 1922.
26. N7154/2445/59.
27. On the growing orientation towards Czechoslovakia see Pobóg-Malinowski, *op.cit.*, p. 627. According to Aleksandra Bergman, *Rzecz o Bronisławie Taraszkiewicz*, Warsaw, 1977, p. 62, Łastoŭski took the initiative in organizing the Prague conference.
28. Zacharka, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
29. Kovkel' and Staškevič, *op. cit.*, p. 111. Ładnoŭ now seemed to be acting as ambassador to the Allied Powers in Paris.
30. All the delegations present at the conference are listed in the British Cabinet papers CAB31/1/BED226.
31. Evidence of Lithuania's increasing isolation is furnished by the meeting held by the delegates of Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Soviet Russia on 29-30 March 1922 to coordinate their actions at the Genoa conference on matters of common economic interest. From CAB31/2/BED312 it emerges that frontier control zones had been set up with mixed commissions to check that no invasion groups were being formed. Lithuania refused to attend the meeting.
32. CAB31/2/BED362.
33. Kovkel' and Staškevič, *op. cit.*, referring to TsGA LitSSR, f. 582, op. 1, d. 40, 1.30. Łastoŭski and Čvikievič apparently also met delegates from Eastern Galicia, Georgia, Azerbajdżan, Kuban and the Ukraine. This seems to imply that they still entertained hopes for the imminent collapse of the Soviet state.
34. Zacharka, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
35. He made one further protest against the Polish occupation of Western Byelorussia at the international level, in a document addressed to the 5th Assembly of the League of Nations, *Mémoire concernant les territoires biélorussiens sous la domination polonaise*, dated 1 September 1924 in Geneva. He signed himself 'ancien président du conseil des ministres de la République biélorussienne'.
36. For a detailed survey of the position of the Jews in independent Lithuania see Dr Mendel Sudarsky, 'Yidn in der umaphengiker Lite (tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes)', in M. Sudarsky and U. Katsenelnbogen, eds, *Lite*, I, New York, 1951, cols 119-53. It is worth pointing out that when Lithuania was accepted into membership of the League of Nations in September 1921, it was required to pledge adherence to the terms of the Minorities Treaty of 1919. According to the census of 1923 Poles numbered 3.2% of the population, yet they never had a ministry of their own.

37. The figure appears in K. Jezavitaŭ, *Bielarusy ŭ Litvie*, Riga, 1932. Jezavitaŭ challenges the accuracy of the census returns, believing the number of Byelorussians in Lithuania to have been artificially depressed to 4,400, and asserting that the real figure should have been 40-45,000, (i.e. 1.8%-2.5% of the total population). He gives a negative assessment of the activities of Łastoŭski and Duŭ-Dušeŭski. By 1925 they were cooperating with the Lithuanian foreign ministry; they prevented the Kaunas Byelorussian National Committee from developing into a cultural organization for Byelorussians of Lithuanian citizenship, insisting that it remain an organization essentially for people who regarded themselves as émigrés. Pranas Čepenas, *Naujujų laikų Lietuvos istorija*, I, Chicago, 1977, p. 47, puts the number of Byelorussians in Lithuania in 1923 at less than $\frac{1}{2}\%$.