

SUMMARY

*Revolutionising a Museum,
Musealisation of the Revolution:
Staging History in the Museum of the
Revolution of Soviet Lithuania*

The Museum of the Revolution, founded in Lithuania in 1940, shortly after the violent incorporation of the Baltic republic in the USSR, was the most important instrument of the history of politics in the Lithuanian SSR. The work of this museum was supervised by the Central Museum of the Revolution in Moscow. However, apart from the canonised history of the USSR, there was also a locally specific way of integrating Lithuanian history into the official Marxist scheme. The paper deals with the narratives, presented in the Museum of the Revolution in Vilnius. It argues, that the museum's staff attempted to show Lithuanian history as being "national in form, socialist in content". For this reason, the fates of Lithuanian communists during the Revolution, under the conditions of the "bourgeois" years of the Smetona-regime, and during Second World War were strongly emphasised. In presenting the story of the Second World War, the most important task was to stress German brutality against the ethnic Lithuanians (whereas the tragic fate of the Jewish population during the German occupation was minimised) and the heroism of Lithuanians in the struggle against fascism.

The paper traces the establishment of the Museum of the Revolution in the context of the cultural politics of the first soviet years. It follows the way that the exhibitions changed during the 1960s and discusses in particular the period of "late socialism", where the propagandistic topic of the "friendship of the peoples" of the USSR became the most important aspect of the items presented to the public. The paper also sheds some light on the establishment of the branches of the central Vilnius museum in other places of historical significance. In the end, the paper analyses the deconstruction of the Museum of the Revolution in the late 1980s during perestroika when it proved to be hopelessly out of date with society's interest in debating the "white spots" of Soviet and Lithuanian history.