

**The "Memel Problem:"**  
**German Memelland in the History of**  
**World War II with an Aim to its Proper Placement.**  
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Source: New York Times, 21 March, 1939, p8.

*The Memel operation and its background though dismissed in a sentence by many historians, is worthy of study –as*

*something of a microcosm of its more celebrated predecessors.*<sup>82</sup>

An integral part of the eastern German and Prussian social and economic landscape for 700 years, the region known as Memel was stripped from direct German rule according to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I. The Memel territory, alternatively known as ‘Memelland’<sup>83</sup> to the Germans and the “Klaipeda Region” to the Lithuanians, included the city of Memel and a swath of surrounding former Prussian territory north of the Niemen River.<sup>84</sup> The fate of the territory and its 141,000 people was initially left to a relatively disorganized and poorly-established council meant to maintain it similar to a Danzig-style League of Nations mandate “free city,” with the objective of providing port access to the port-less and newly-created state of Lithuania.<sup>85</sup> This move, as well as other decisions made by the authors of the Paris Peace agreements, ignited political wrangling and inflamed tensions throughout Europe as a whole in the 1920s and 1930s.

Memel returned on the world stage after the Nazi rise to power in Germany in 1933. As Adolf Hitler chipped away at

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<sup>82</sup> Christopher Thorne, *The Approach of War, 1938–39* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1967), 106. “Predecessors” references the *Anschluß* of Austria in March 1938, and the acquisition of the Sudetenland in September 1938.

<sup>83</sup> My best effort to be consistent in the use of “Memelland” will still result in using that term, “Memel territory” and “Memel” rather interchangeably, except where it is obvious that “Memel” refers to the city.

<sup>84</sup> See map included in Appendix C

<sup>85</sup> Treaty of Versailles, Part XII, Ch. 3.

what he claimed were the restrictions and unjustified aspects of the Treaty of Versailles, he also included Memel as one of the unjustified seizures of territory, labeling it as a "lost province."<sup>86</sup> But in Hitler's early years, Memel was not his priority: he was biding his time while he alternately pursued his other goals of *Anschluß* with Austria and the dismemberment and occupation of Czechoslovakia. Ultimately, through a mix of opportunism and orchestration, the Nazi government intentionally delayed obtaining Memel until they organized a series of major international events, and subsequently issued a hurried ultimatum and transfer of Memelland over the period of five days in March, 1939.

This sequence of events concerning Memel during the Nazi period have been persistently underreported in both contemporary and historical accounts; contemporary English-language documents, articles and news outlets, as well as subsequent historical accounts have paid little attention to Memel other than merely a mention. In contrast to press and academic coverage, debate and discussion previous to 1938–39, the Nazi government's actions then received only the slightest fleeting attention. On the surface this lack of attention may be seen as a result of the muted response of the international community in March, 1939, little consideration has been given to Memel in the historical record as part of the lead up to, and outbreak of war in September 1939. Consequently, Memel and these surrounding events are often slated as rather insignificant and simply another passing example of Hitler's aggression. Yet contrary to this belief these

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<sup>86</sup> Max Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932–1945* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 1997), 1595.

events of 1938–39 are of greater significance to the unfolding immediate causes of World War II, providing insight into Hitler's actions and intentions. It is precisely these events that reveal Hitler's calculation and orchestration. Memel became not only a target of re-incorporation, but a vehicle through which to achieve several other of his goals. And it is this orchestration that prompts us to ascribe to Memel better and fairer scholarship by greater inclusion into the war narrative.

Memel was established in 1252 by the Livonian branch of the Order of the Teutonic Knights – a German monastic order of Medieval knights – as part of the Northern Crusades. Originally established as a castle, Memel received the Lübeck Law in 1254 and became an important regional center as a base for the Order, a diocese for the Catholic Church, and the local economic hub.<sup>87</sup> During the wars of the Northern Crusades much of the population fled, was killed or eventually was assimilated as German settlers moved into the new frontier lands. Similar to much of the rest of the coastal Baltic territory conquered and administered by the German crusader knights, the population became predominantly German. The small city that grew up around the castle Memelburg was no exception. Throughout the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods of European history Memel was part of the territory of Prussia in its various states of governance, and was one of most important cities behind the capital, Königsberg.<sup>88</sup>

There are few notable events concerning Memelland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it was not until the conclusion

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<sup>87</sup> Hienrich A. Kurschat, *Das Buch vom Memelland; Heimatkunde eines deutschen Grenzlandes* (Oldenburg: F. W. Siebert Verlag, 1968), 151–152.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 157–159.

of the First World War that it gained prominence, as a controversy began. This controversy, often referred to as the “Memel Problem,” “Memel Controversy” or “Memel Question” throughout the 1920s and 1930s, began with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles that dealt the Allied peace terms to the new German government in 1919.<sup>89</sup> While Versailles is widely recognized today as being flawed, the authors of the treaty – the major Allied victors of Britain, France, Italy and the USA – could not have entirely foreseen the consequences of their actions. While the Allied representatives came to the Paris Peace Conference with different agendas and goals – some very noble and freeing – their often unjust or arbitrary, and even hypocritical or greedy actions directly and indirectly caused tensions in the post-war world. The peace of World War I was meant to be the “war to end all wars,” yet the decision made by the victors unknowingly ensured that conflict would continue. Memel was one of those decisions.<sup>90</sup>

While there were many aspects of the Treaty that were good, the sheer fact that the phrase “Memel Problem” arose indicated a questionable decision there. Despite the territory’s mixed population of 45 percent Germans, 29 percent “Memellanders” and 26 percent Lithuanians, Articles 28–30, followed by Article 99 of the Treaty exacted new boundaries for East Prussia and Germany’s renunciation of Memelland,

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<sup>89</sup> David Stephens, “The German Problem in Memel,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 14, no. 41 (Jan. 1936): 321; Alfonsas Eidintas and Vytautas Zalys, *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918–1940* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 322.

<sup>90</sup> Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 14–25.

allocating to it international status.<sup>91</sup> That the Allies went against their stated objectives of national self-determination in this particular situation, and without a stated objective for this action, the dissociation of Memelland from Germany was one of the rather arbitrary and unjust actions of the terms of Versailles.<sup>92</sup>

Consequently Memelland was governed by a League of Nations Commission and French representative. Lithuania had been given special privileged use of the port facilities as Memel was the only established port on the Baltic coast in that vicinity. As such, Memel was of vital economic interest to have as a

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<sup>91</sup> Vygasantas Vareikis, "Memellander/Klaipediskiai Identity and German-Lithuanian Relations in Lithuania Minor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Sociologija: Mintis ir Veiksmas* 6 (2001): 63; The ethnic identity of the "Memellander" or "Klaipediskiai" has been the subject of debate since it is not a specific language, but are generally accepted as ethnic Lithuanians who chose neither German nor Lithuanian as their language identity on the censuses of the 1920s and 1930s. Generally the people of this region could and would speak both German and Lithuanian languages, possibly preferring the former as evidenced by the overwhelming support for the German List parties from 1935 onwards (+80percent), with the Lithuanian People's Party never received more than 22percent of the votes and declined to 12percent by 1938. (Vareikis 54-64; *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 1938).

<sup>92</sup> Clemenceau was a major proponent of giving Memel to Lithuania; Allies offered the region in exchange for Lithuania dropping its claim to Vilnius as its historic capital, and which the newly-recreated Poland had occupied on the basis of its Polish ethnic majority. (Eidintas, *Lithuania*, 87)

Lithuanian possession and the Kaunas government launched a staged revolt of Lithuanians there in early 1923. The territory was then attached to Lithuania in a *fait accompli*.<sup>93</sup> The League's response to this action was to launch an investigation by a special commission – the Davis Commission – and despite the obvious farce of a popularly-supported revolt the League concluded an agreement in May 1924 known as the *Convention Concerning the Territory of Memel*.<sup>94</sup> Within this agreement the League recognized Lithuanian sovereignty of Memelland, while establishing Memellander autonomous self-governance: autonomy in legislative, judicial, administrative and financial affairs.<sup>95</sup> As well, the Memel Statute was to be guaranteed by an oversight committee made up of representatives from Britain, France, Italy and Japan.<sup>96</sup> The fact that this process of creating a framework for Memellander autonomy within Lithuanian sovereignty took more than a year to conclude is evidence that a problem existed and would continue to persist beyond the agreement. Thus was Lithuania's illegal, treaty-breaking seizure of Memelland legitimized.

The inherent weakness of the agreement made in 1924 was that it gave no specific guarantee of Memel's autonomous rights nor its right to have redress of grievances. Furthermore, the statute provided no right to Memellanders to report violations of the agreement, and only members of the League

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<sup>93</sup> Eidintas, *Lithuania*, 90–99; Kurschat, *Memelland*, 166–177.

<sup>94</sup> Also known as the “Memel Statute,” which will be the most commonly used term throughout this essay.

<sup>95</sup> Thorsten Kalijarvi, “The Problem of Memel,” *The American Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (April 1936): 207.

<sup>96</sup> Stephens, “German Problem”: 326–329.

of Nations Council could call for an investigation. Memel was therefore unprotected, disadvantaged and robbed of security.<sup>97</sup>

The fact that Memel had to retain autonomy is itself evidence that it was a created problem rather than a natural one. In one sense, Memel was always going to be a larger issue as time marched on. Several outcomes could have been possible. First, that the territory would retain its autonomy and continue as a separate region within Lithuania, thereby generating division. Second, this legal separation could potentially cause the Lithuanian government to eventually disestablish the Memel Statute and fully incorporate the territory into the state, which would again violate international law. Third, the slow and gradual replacement of the majority German population by the forces of education and immigration – which would require, again, a renunciation of the Memel Statute that provided official status to the German language and local government control of education. The Lithuanian government opted for a combination of the violation of the Statute and attempts to Lithuanize the German population. First, following President Antanas Smetona's coup d'état in the capital, Kaunas in 1926, martial law had been declared throughout Lithuania, and including Memelland. The period of 1926–1938 was one of repression for the Memel Germans, who, while not experiencing violence per se, saw their League-protected rights violated on a regular basis.<sup>98</sup> Much academic and official discussion and debate arose over these violations, and Hitler also in 1935 began contributing to the charges

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<sup>97</sup> Kalijarvi, "Problem of Memel": 214–215.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 207–208.



against Lithuania citing that the “Memel Problem” was another evidence of the “crimes of Versailles.”<sup>99</sup>

By the end of 1938 the Memel situation became more fraught and more aligned with happenings in Germany. Protests against the Lithuanian regime cited continued encroachment of Lithuanian Government on Memellander autonomy. As well there was a marked increase in typical Nazi acts, including vandalism of Jewish synagogues, supporters donning the brown shirt Nazi uniform, forming the Hitler Youth and other clubs, and performing the “Heil Hitler” greeting.<sup>100</sup> Support for local Nazi organizations also increased, led by a local doctor-turned-political activist, Ernst Neumann. As a result of the events leading up to the so-called Great Treason Trial of 1935, Neumann had spent 1934–1938 in prison as the Lithuanian government cracked down and imposed martial law across the country and Memel.<sup>101</sup> Upon his release he took up the reins of leadership once again and had frequent contact with Nazi leaders in the Reich, but often found it difficult to effectively control or corral the local Nazi movement.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Domarus, *Hitler*, vol. 2, 673–674, 705, 777. Interestingly enough, Domarus claims that these early speeches aimed at these other ‘crime[s] of Versailles’ were meant to deflect public thought away from the imposition of universal conscription

<sup>100</sup> Sarunas Liekis, *1939: The Year That Changed Everything in Lithuania's History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 76.

<sup>101</sup> Stephens, “German Problem”: 330.

<sup>102</sup> *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945*, Series C, Vol. IV (Washington: United States Government Printing Press, 1962), 476–479, 482–3, 488, 491, 494–495. Hereafter referenced as “*DGFP*”

Recognizing defeat in their policy of assimilation, the government in Kaunas backtracked so as not to offend the German government.<sup>103</sup> Concurrently, Nazi actions in Czechoslovakia, as well as Lithuania's 1938 capitulation to Polish military-backed demands for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, had convinced Kaunas that its options were limited and that its own form of appeasement was necessary to maintain friendship with its larger, more powerful neighbors. In the election of December 1938 the entire Memelland District voted overwhelmingly for the German parties: 82% in Memel city, and between 85–94% in the rest of the district, resulting in 25 of 29 seats in the Memel Landtag going to German parties, and 4 going to Lithuanian parties.<sup>104</sup> Effectively, Lithuanian government ability to dominate in Memel had ended.

The new Memel set about establishing its government based on national socialist principles, while the Lithuanian government looked on, responding with hope that the new system based on national socialist ideology “can be conducted without conflict to the fundamental interests of the Lithuanian state and the Lithuanian nation, and hopes that autonomous institutions will try to avoid such conflicts.”<sup>105</sup> The German government, however, moved slowly and attempted to control or temper the actions of Memel's Nazi agitators as Hitler did not want to alienate Lithuania over an acquisition of the territory, as well as risk the possibility of heightened

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<sup>103</sup> Liekis, *1939*, 77.

<sup>104</sup> *DGFP*, Series D, Vol. V, 501; “Nazis in Memel Got 87% of the Ballots,” *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 1938.

<sup>105</sup> Liekis, *1939*, 78.

international reaction due to its proximity to Czechoslovak events.<sup>106</sup>

From December 1938 to March, 1939, the European situation had changed drastically; it had changed from a scene of conciliation and understanding to one of disappointment and rising belligerency. Suddenly, amidst a flurry of Nazi territorial grabs in March, 1939, a virtual ultimatum was presented to the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juozas Urbšys that demanded a settlement of the Memel situation, in which there were two possibilities. If Lithuania replied with a peaceful solution friendly relations could be restored and Germany would grant Lithuania free access to Memel port. Alternatively, a rejection would most likely cause uprising in Memel, at which point "Germany could not idly look on. The Führer would act with lightning speed and the situation would slip from the hands of the politicians and be decided by the military."<sup>107</sup> Urbšys consulted his government, and within two days returned to sign a hurriedly-compiled, relatively short yet open-ended treaty of reunification to the Reich: while the treaty established the transfer of sovereignty it left several economic and legal details to be worked out by later agreements or annexes.<sup>108</sup> Anticipating the signing of this document on March 22, Hitler had made his way to the Baltic and sailed through the night to arrive in Memel by morning to welcome the Memellanders back into the Reich.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 92

<sup>107</sup> *DGFP*, 524–526

<sup>108</sup> *DGFP*, 531–531.

<sup>109</sup> Immediately following the events of March, 1939, two very noteworthy pieces of propaganda were published and circulated throughout Germany commemorating these events: a

Although *early* post-war German-Lithuanian relations had been quite amiable, even very good – as witnessed by steady trade between the two – the sequence of events in the 1920s and 1930s brought on by the Kaunas government's actions brought on a slow but steady deterioration.<sup>110</sup> The obvious violations of the Memel Statute and the abuse of the German population there did not endear Lithuania to Germany. However, neither did it strain relations to a breaking point. Even under the Nazi government relations between the two countries remained relatively peaceful as Hitler bided his time in accomplishing his goals. Hitler understood, in fact, that the Allies' inaction in enforcing the Memel Statute would be useful in propagating claims on the Memel territory, and while paying lip service to the issue and threatening possible action he took none until the opportune moment.

Several articles published in the mid-1930s highlighted the "problem" of Memel. A surge in coverage followed the Lithuanian roundup of German activists of 1935, all giving perspectives and commentary on how the problem arose, why the situation flared up and potential solutions. Most take the perspective that while both sides may be at fault, it was in large part due to Lithuania's flagrant violations of international law, first in 1923 with the seizure of Memel, followed by the persistent infringement of the Memel Statute.

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pamphlet titled "Memel ist Frei!" decried Lithuanian abuses and praised the territory's return to the Reich, and a photo book, *Hitler in Böhmen, Mähren, Memel*, which lauded the gains Germany had made and photo-documented Hitler's travels to these territories.

<sup>110</sup> Gustainis, "The First Twenty Years": 614–615.

The British journal *The Economist*, one of Europe's premier trade journals, seems to have taken special interest in Memel and Lithuania. It published several short articles in 1935 regarding the precarious internal and international situation created by the roundup of the German activists. In late March, "The Memel Treason Trial" reported on the arrest of 126 Memel Germans being prosecuted in Kaunas for "conspiracy to detach Memel-land from Lithuania by armed insurrection."<sup>111</sup> The article called into question both the lack of evidence of a clear German plot – and if so, it was by sheer provocation – as well as the ability and right of the Kaunas government to prosecute such a trial because of its violations of the various treaties. Using terms as "*coup de main*", "audacious" and "lawless," Lithuania's actions were presented as similar to the flouting of the Paris Peace accords by Poland in its land-grabs in the early 1920s.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, even though the Allies "bowed to a lawlessly achieved *fait accompli*,"<sup>113</sup> future Nazi attempts to retake Memelland by means of force would be no different than what Lithuania had done and would even potentially right the wrong.

In June 1935 *The Economist* featured a short piece, "Memel, Lithuania and the Powers," which placed significant blame on Lithuania – first by creating the problem in 1923 and by continued violation of the terms of the 1924 Memel Statute. Because the Allied Powers had not acted on their behalf, the German population had reacted to Lithuania's constant violation of their law – including meddling in their

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<sup>111</sup> "The Memel Treason Trial," *The Economist* no. 4779 (March 30, 1935): 716.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

governmental affairs. Most significantly, *The Economist* concluded that if nothing was done by the Allied Powers to secure the genuine observance of the Memel Statute, a German *Putsch* would almost be certain, possibly leading to wider war in the Baltic and beyond. The Allied Powers could avert this possibility if they were “determined to fulfill their duties towards the Germans in Lithuania. A firm attitude now may save Europe much trouble later on.”<sup>114</sup>

In response to these events and Lithuania’s actions, Hitler gave a speech in which he railed that Lithuania had “failed to respect the most primitive laws of human coexistence,” and that the Memel Germans were being “persecuted, tortured and maltreated in the most barbaric way” simply because they were German. However, in his massive compilation and editing of Hitler’s speeches, historian Max Domarus claims that rather than stating a simple claim against Lithuania’s abuses of the Germans in Memel, Hitler used Lithuania as a vehicle to achieve many of his larger goals, and in particular to hide his own violations of international treaties.<sup>115</sup> Using Memelland for his own purposes would be a common tactic of the Führer in many respects in the coming years as Hitler pursued his many other objectives. Hitler knew that Germany’s claim to the territory grew stronger as the Reich grew stronger and the list of Lithuania’s abuses piled up, creating the monster of major opposition amongst the populace.<sup>116</sup> This can be seen by the several references in

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<sup>114</sup> “Memel, Lithuania and the Powers,” *The Economist* no. 4788 (June 1, 1935): 1241.

<sup>115</sup> Domarus, *Hitler*, 673.

<sup>116</sup> Thorne, *Approach of War*, 107.

regards to Memel that Hitler brought forth in speeches during the first few years of his regime.

Despite the relative lack of attention Hitler later paid to Memel, he gave short air to his grievances against Lithuania once again in a speech before the Reichstag on September 15, 1935. In the speech, some two and a half hours long he gave only a brief reference to Memel. This speech was given in advance of the local Memelland election scheduled for September 29. In his address Hitler referred to the theft of the territory from Germany, the legalization of this illegal act by the League of Nations, and the subsequent abuse of the German population by the Kaunas government. Using language similar to family members helplessly watching the violation of another, Hitler stated that all cries for help to the League of Nations had gone unaided, and this refusal to act had resultantly created bitterness toward both League and Lithuania. Then, turning to the election and the autonomy of German Memelland, Hitler issued a veiled threat: "It would be a laudable undertaking were the League of Nations to turn its attention to the respect due to the autonomy of the Memel territory and see to it that it is put into practice, before here, too, the events begin to take on forms which could one day but be regretted by all those involved. The preparations for the election which are now taking place there constitute a mockery of both law and obligation!"<sup>117</sup>

Articles for *The Economist* following in September and October 1935 were written in reference to Memel Territory elections taking place at the end of September. With Hitler's speech in mind, these articles echoed much the same sentiments as those articles published earlier in the year, yet

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Domarus, *Hitler*, 704–705.

they brought a warning. This warning was that the Memel elections must be free and fair and observed by the Guarantor Powers of the Memel Statute so that the status quo can be preserved; elections without issue would help clear Lithuania's marred human rights record and give little provocation to any *real* subversive plots to bring Memel back into the Reich. They recognized that Lithuania had a difficult situation with a "Nazified German minority," the government's consistent encroachment in Memel, the "monster" treason trial. New electoral laws had the potential effect of disenfranchising a significant portion of the German populace and *made* Memel ripe for revolt or seizure by the Reich.<sup>118</sup> In fact, one article echoes Hitler's assertion in his Reichstag speech that the elections must go off without a hitch or action by the Reich would almost be a certainty:

Vast mischief will have been done, however, if there is even a colourable pretext for the charge that these Memel elections have been "rigged" with the guarantor Powers' acquiescence. For Germany will then have a pretext for declaring that no remedy remains, except direct action on her part, for righting the wrongs of an oppressed German minority. And, of all places in Europe, the Memelland is, of course, the one place where a German Putsch could be made with a prospect of impunity . . . .<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> "And Now Memel!" *The Economist* no. 4804 (Sept. 21, 1935): 555; "The Memel Elections," *The Economist* no. 4805 (Sept. 28, 1935): 603.

<sup>119</sup> "And Now Memel!" *The Economist* no. 4804 (Sept. 21, 1935): 555. Because the Guarantors of the Memel Statute participated in the election, there was no significant irregularity



In 1936 two journal articles appeared attempting to understand and evaluate the “Memel Problem.” Somewhat different than those of 1935, the authors’ intentions were to elaborate on the “why” of the situation. Although with different intentions, both authors came to the same conclusion that – regardless of the justification of Versailles – the issues in Memel had been perpetuated by the poor structure of the Memel Convention of 1924 and subsequent action – rather, inaction – of the League of Nations.

“The Problem of Memel,” written by Thorsten Kalijarvi, addressed how Memel had been recently cast into the international limelight as a potential flash point, yet so little was known about it. Many questions were being asked about Memel, so the article presented a basic background and an account of the governmental structure within the Memel Statute under Lithuanian sovereignty, including the reasons for its troubles. Following that was a list of abuses by the Lithuanian government, and League of Nations’ inept attempts to deal with the issue, for as issues were discussed they were often submitted to committees that issued non-binding statements.<sup>120</sup> The one major binding statement to come from a complaint before the League had been submitted to the Permanent Court of International Justice in 1932. Rather than condemning Lithuania’s overthrow of the local German leader

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other than those few dozen instances of disqualified voters at the polls. The total numbers whose vote was revoked who never went to the polls is unknown.

<sup>120</sup> Thorsten Kalijarvi, “The Problem of Memel,” *The American Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (April 1936): 204–210.

of the Directorate, the court instead legitimized Lithuania's ability to dismiss the president of the Directorate in Memel. This decision was interpreted by Kaunas "as a *carte blanche* approval of such acts as she might undertake in Memel."<sup>121</sup> Like the documents of 1935, and with the benefit of a relatively-free election behind him, Kalijarvi concluded that the inherent structure of Memel Statute was unreliable, had created confusion and hardship and threatened to "rob the Memellanders of their last vestige of security."<sup>122</sup> The only action to remedy the Problem of Memel was for the Guarantor Powers to enforce or rebuild the convention.

While Kalijarvi very much followed the track of previous writings on the Memelland's woes, another writer, David Stephens assigned blame to more than simply the Lithuanians. Firstly, he took issue with Hitler's assertion in his Reichstag speech that Memel was stolen from Germany, when, if it was stolen from anyone at all, it would have been the Allies of the World War and, subsequently, the League of Nations in 1923.<sup>123</sup> However, he recognized that while both the Memellanders and the Lithuanian government were somewhat at fault for "the present situation" as the constitutional framework was flawed. Stephens asserted that Lithuania - an authoritarian regime under Antanas Smetona - having neither a democratic government nor a culture or history of democracy, was entirely unable to protect the democratic framework of the Memel territory. Referencing the Memel Statute he asked the question: "how, for instance, could elections in Memel Territory

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>123</sup> Stephens, "The German Problem": 326.

take place 'in conformity with the Lithuanian Electoral Law,' when in Lithuania itself no elections were ever held?"<sup>124</sup>

Evidently, amidst all of the political and economic turmoil that characterized Europe in the 1930s, the "Memel Problem" had elicited interest. Not least of the reasons were Lithuania's flagrant violations of international agreements and abuses of the rights of the Memel population, which, unlike many of the justifications for his other claims, gave Hitler a legitimate claim and justification for reacquiring Memel. However, when the ultimate moment arrived with the overwhelming election of a solid Nazi party bloc in the Memel Landtag in December 1938, and a real potential for a vote to join the Reich became a possible political reality, it had become nearly a non-issue among the larger powers. The Nazi annexation of the territory was met with some press and some diplomatic discussion, but discussion is all that occurred, and it subsequently subsided. This begs another unanswered question: if the "Memel Problem" had existed for so long and was so often a topic of international discussion and scholarship, why was it subsequently so downplayed in 1938-39 and so readily forgotten?

There are several possible reasons why Memelland faded from prominence in news, scholarship and discussion, not the least of which was the aggression and growth of Nazi power. It is obvious that European governments throughout 1938 were treading softly around Hitler, as his rhetoric ramped up and several grabs on territory of the Reich's "lost provinces" ended in embarrassment for the League and the Allies. However, while Lithuania, Poland, France, Czechoslovakia and others certainly did not want to provoke Hitler, this one factor of fear

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

and appeasement – while a major factor – is not the only explanation why Memel suddenly receded from the news right up until the ultimatum to Lithuania in March, 1939. In terms of official communiqués the same was true for much of the communication within the both British and German foreign services, yet much less so in the former.

Several significant reasons for this decline in discussion Memel was, firstly, that Lithuania began to right the wrongs of previous years in regards to the Memel Statute, becoming increasingly tolerant and yielding to the German Memellanders.<sup>125</sup> While this can partly be attributed to fear of Nazi Germany as it expanded and flouted the treaties of the post-war period, it signifies that those greater issues of violations of the Memel Statute and the abuses of individual rights were dwindling, and therefore, the urgency and international disputation was becoming less prominent. Evidence of this can be seen in the Lithuanian government's lifting of martial law in 1938, and the release of the imprisoned rebels of Great Treason Trial of 1935, many of whom would go on to be elected at the end of that year to the Landtag as leaders of the Nazi effort.<sup>126</sup> However, these moves proved problematic for Lithuanian control of Memel, as the pro-Nazi factions wasted no time in exploiting their new freedoms. Furthermore, the government entered into negotiations with Germany about the rights of Memellanders eventually granting a much broader interpretation of the Memel Statute.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Valentine Gustainis, "Lithuania: The First Twenty Years," *The Slavonic & East European Review* 17, no. 51 (April 1939): 616.

<sup>126</sup> Kurschat, *Memelland*, 199–202.

<sup>127</sup> Eidintas, *Lithuania*, 162–3.

A second reason was that after all of the debate and difficulty Germany actually had a legitimate claim to Memelland as a historic and cultural center of East Prussia, unlike many other territories that Hitler claimed were “lost provinces” of the Reich. Memel was the sole acquisition that Hitler made in the pre-war peace that could be categorized as a “province robbed [from the Reich] in 1919.”<sup>128</sup> The fact remains that for all his rhetoric, provocation and saber-rattling Hitler’s claims for reincorporation of Memel as a stolen or “lost” territory had some justification. As previously stated, this was aided by the consistent violation of rights of the German Memellanders, who, in a mark of independent self-determination elected a Nazi government in late 1938, preferring Hitler’s Reich over the

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<sup>128</sup> Domarus, *Hitler*. Vol. 3, p. 2218. Note 495 states: “Hitler’s claim that he had ‘returned to the Reich the provinces robbed in 1919’ had no foundation whatsoever since neither Austria nor the Sudetenland had belonged to the Reich proper in 1919. The Memel territory was the only region he did in truth ‘restore’ to the Reich. The remaining ‘lost provinces’ belonged to the Reich no more in April 1939 than they had twenty years earlier. These provinces were: West Prussia, Poznan, parts of Upper Silesia, Alsace-Lorraine, the area Eupen-Malmédy-Moresnet, and North Schleswig.” While Domarus is technically correct to point this out, this seems rather more semantics about the year 1919, as even though the other two pre-war acquisitions – Austria and the Sudetenland – were never part of what Hitler claimed was the ‘Second Reich,’ the German Empire of 1871–1918, both territories had been part of the First Reich, the Holy Roman Empire, a loose confederation which was headed by the Hapsburg Emperors.

constrictions of martial law.<sup>129</sup> Thirdly the failure of Versailles, the League of Nations and the interwar peace was becoming increasingly apparent. While the Allied powers had hoped to maintain much of the structure of Versailles and the authority of the League of Nations, both institutions had been severely abused, usurped and abandoned as a means of pursuing foreign policy. Hitler's actions furthered this demise, but not just Poland, Italy and Hungary had made agreements outside of these institutions, Britain and France had done so as well: in the pursuit of continued peace and collective security the Allies were willing to sidestep their own systems and conclude various agreements outside of the system that they had created. These agreements were, essentially, the "death" of the League, as Hitler could have his way because of the demise of its authority.<sup>130</sup>

Fourthly, European governments somewhat expected Memel to be annexed by the Reich at some point. The terminology Europe and the U.S. used in referencing the German move on Memel in 1939 is very telling. While certainly referred to as a "seizure," "cession," or "surrender," it was also referred to as "returned" and "reunited."<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, a *New York Times* front-page article on March 22, 1939 titled "Lithuania Yields Memel to Hitler," reported that "the Lithuanian Government has been preparing for the return of Memel to Germany for some time and has even started the construction of a new harbor at Sventojl, at present a fishing village."<sup>132</sup> The

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.; Kurschat, *Memelland*, 200.

<sup>130</sup> Liekis, *1939*, 65.

<sup>131</sup> "Lithuania Yields Memel to Hitler," *New York Times*, 22 March, 1939, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 2.

same could be said for the Polish government, as “the cession of Memel was not altogether unexpected in Poland . . . .”<sup>133</sup> Other evidence shows that the British and the French had previously hoped that Memel would maintain its sovereignty, yet they recognized their inability or unwillingness to stop it if it were to occur.<sup>134</sup> In December 1938, British Foreign Secretary E. F. L. Wood, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Halifax, circulated a draft response to communicate to the German government concerning the unrest of the Nazi groups in Memel due to the new Landtag elections to be held on the eleventh of that month. In principle, the French accepted the text of a proposal for Memel, dated December 10, 1938, but maintained that in their communication with the German government they should merely “mention Memel quite casually amongst other subjects.”<sup>135</sup> In the subsequent joint *note verbale* given to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding Memel, Britain and France asked the German government to “use their influence with the Memellanders to ensure respect for the *status quo*.”<sup>136</sup> The British ambassador to Germany, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes unconfidently admitted that “whatever action we take about Memel I fear we will receive a rebuff.”<sup>137</sup> A communiqué from Sir Ronald Campbell, the British Minister to France sent to Lord Halifax dated March 22, 1939, sums up

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<sup>133</sup> “Next German Move,” *The Times*. 23 March, 1939, 15.

<sup>134</sup> E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds. *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1945*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. IV (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1951 ), 638–64. Hereafter referenced as “*DBFP*.”

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 644.

<sup>136</sup> *DBFP*, 645.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 645.

both the Allied attitude toward and expectation of the impending annexation of Memelland:

Saying that I was not doing so on instructions, I asked the Secretary-General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs this afternoon whether he could give me an indication of the French Government's views on the subject of Memel. M. Léger said that he could not give me the views of his Government, by whom no decision had been taken so far, but that in his own opinion the seizure of Memel by Germany did not call for action on the part of France and Great Britain. We now found ourselves on the basis of the preservation of the balance in Europe, and it was incumbent upon us to concern ourselves in the first place with matters which definitely affected that balance and, therefore, our vital interests. He did not consider that Memel fell into this category. Its possession by Germany would not materially increase her strength or her capacity to wage war against France and Great Britain. It was because Roumania could supply Germany with the means of carrying on such a war (means which she at present lacked), that it was necessary to protect the country. If the Germans proceeded from Memel into Lithuania, the matter might begin to be a cause for preoccupation. But even then, I gathered, he doubted whether action would be called for. The German seizure of Memel might have some advantage in disquieting Poland and inclining her to take position with the Western Powers.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.



Concurrent with these events the British military attaché to Poland, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Sword, wrote a four-page memorandum on the strategic-military assessment of Poland, its allies, neighbors and military, yet only devoted two sentences to Latvia and Lithuania, including one on Memel: "The recent German *coup* in Memelland makes little difference to Poland from a strategic point of view, beyond internally weakening an improbable ally, as no common frontier with Poland is involved."<sup>139</sup> As such, Memel had been abandoned in favor of larger issues, geopolitical considerations and the preservation of a balance of power.

Fifthly, the Nazi government in Berlin downplayed Memel seemingly in pursuit of other objectives. After Dr. Neumann was released from his sentence in July 1938, and once again became the leader of the Memel Nazi Party, he was soon directly instructed to instate stricter control over the younger men who wanted to force reunification immediately.<sup>140</sup> Hitler did not want to waste the goodwill of the international community or upset the delicate balance immediately on Memelland, which he knew he would get back eventually, stating that all that was required was a registered letter to the government of Lithuania.<sup>141</sup> Instead of immediately pursuing Memel, biding his time, he annexed the Sudetenland and Austria. Meanwhile he built the Danzig Nazi movement, extradited economic concessions from Romania, and wrote a number of treaties of friendship and non-aggression. Before and after its 1938 elections Memel, like Danzig, was expected

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 477-481.

<sup>140</sup> Thorne, *Approach of War*, 106-107; Kurschat, *Memelland*, 200.

<sup>141</sup> Hitler, quoted in Thorne, *Approach of War*, 107.

by many in Europe to adopt many Nazi policies and possibly even vote for their own *Anschluß* to the Reich with support from, but little or no direct intervention by, the government in Berlin. Contrary to the desires of the Memel Nazi movement the government in Berlin ordered that nothing move ahead with Memel. In fact, a directive was issued on December 5, 1938, that in the days leading up to the election on December 10, Neumann was to maintain complete silence on the issue of reunification, that Lithuania was to be “kept in the dark” regarding the status of the territory and no progress was to be made, and also that the German press was to avoid discussions regarding the future settlement of the territory.<sup>142</sup>

Despite the overwhelming pro-Nazi and pro-unification results of the election,<sup>143</sup> Hitler according to his long-term plan avoided action on Memel until just the precise moment. He gave instructions to delay convening the Landtag which assuredly would immediately vote for *Anschluß* and to delay any further political developments until given further instructions.<sup>144</sup> Prussian Gauleiter Erich Koch even threatened Neumann that he would be shot if he did not follow the Führer’s orders. Hitler was orchestrating precise conditions in which to finish all of his unfinished business.<sup>145</sup> However he did promise Neumann and the Memel Nazis that “the matter

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<sup>142</sup> *DGFP*, D, Vol. 5, 496–7; Leonidas Hill, “Three Crises, 1938–39,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 no. 1 (Jan. 1968): 124.

<sup>143</sup> The German party list won 25 of 29 seats in the Landtag with 87 percent of the vote. *DGFP*, 501; “Nazis in Memel Got 87% of the Ballots,” *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 1938.

<sup>144</sup> *DGFP*, 519, 515.

<sup>145</sup> *DGFP*, 500–501.

would be settled in that year . . . the end of March or, even better, the middle of April was set as the desired date.”<sup>146</sup>

Finally, with directives from Berlin to push back any action toward unification and to suppress any major unrest or demonstration, Memel became simply sidelined and overshadowed by larger events involving much larger territories and populations across the European stage. While Lithuania–Memellander problems in Memel were diminishing and it was becoming less of an international dispute, obviously made much more so by the Nazi government, many other flash points were cropping up as a result of Hitler’s demands. These well-known and researched events are worthy of study, but the details of each case are less important to this study than *how* each of them influenced or took away from the spotlight or debate on Memelland.

According to testimony given at the Nuremberg Trials in 1946, after he was appointed German Foreign Minister in 1938 Joachim von Ribbentrop was told by Hitler that his main “problems to solve” were Austria, Sudetenland, Memel and Danzig, implying that military force might be necessary.<sup>147</sup> As Hitler set about these goals one by one, beginning with the two largest, and then the easier and more logical of those two, both Memel and Danzi, which had fallen in line with overwhelmingly pro-Nazi governments, became minor issues in the immediate, and were to be settled at later, more convenient dates. Yet time was an issue. Although he had managed to delay the convening of the Memel Landtag by two months, Hitler felt the pressure and understood the potential danger of putting off the Memellanders much longer: if he waited too long and the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 506–507.

<sup>147</sup> Nuremberg Trial Proceedings, Vol. 22, 529.

Landtag forced the issue, once again Memel would be cast into the international limelight, potentially damaging Hitler's other immediate designs.<sup>148</sup> This pot getting ready to boil over very possibly even pushed him to move ahead quickly with his plans with Czecho-Slovakia and Romania.<sup>149</sup> Thus, many major Nazi "acts of aggression" all took place within a week in March, 1939.

The major overshadowing events of March, 1939 began with rumors of a German ultimatum to Romania early in the month, which were eventually confirmed by March 18.<sup>150</sup> The ultimate dismemberment and occupation of the rest of Czecho-Slovakia quickly followed. European reaction to the quick succession of events in Czecho-Slovakia, the declaration of independence of Slovakia from Bohemia and Moravia by Slovak president Jozef Tiso on March 14, and the 'invitation' of both new states to Germany as the protector of both states on March 15 was shock and bitterness.<sup>151</sup> Hitler had broken the hard-won terms of appeasement from just six months before, and his actions threatened to cast Europe into crisis and instability once again. Major world newspapers reported

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<sup>148</sup> *DGFP*, 496–497.

<sup>149</sup> By this point in 1939 developments in Czechoslovakia the previous year had created a pseudo-separated country with two relatively autonomous governments, which therefore had restyled the country as Czecho-Slovakia. This is made it much easier for Hitler to force the events of March 14–15, 1939, and "accept" protectorates on each one individually.

<sup>150</sup> *DGFP*, 360, 400; "Germany & Rumania: Drastic Demands," *The Times*, 18 March, 1939, 12.

<sup>151</sup> "A Shock to France: 'Hideous Drama of Czechs,'" *The Times*, 16 March, 1939, 15.

continuously on these ominous developments with both the subjects receiving steady press through the rest of March.<sup>152</sup> However, while the Lithuanian agreement did receive some attention, it garnered headlines for a mere three days in *The Times* of London – for March 22–24. Even then, with the first announcement of the cession, the title was among five other similar headlines, and one glaring headline announcing the arrival of the French president on a visit to England.<sup>153</sup> Thereafter Memel appeared only in intermittent and short pieces. The *New York Times* announced the treaty with more gusto – as is probably more typical of Americans – with a large headline on March 23, declaring: “Lithuania Yields Memel to Hitler; Britain Presses for 4–Power Action; Fascist Council Backs Reich Policy.”<sup>154</sup> By March 30, Memel was gone from the news headlines, with Japanese actions and battles in China having received even more attention than Memel.<sup>155</sup> Focus in Europe shifted quickly toward strengthening resolve against Axis aggression.

The immediate consequences of March, 1939 were to force Europe to drop consideration of territories already lost, and to focus on preserving the integrity of those states that were left. Small Nazified territories like Memel, according to Hitler’s best intentions and hopes, had become the least of their concerns. For Britain’s part negotiations began immediately on 24 March to determine a potential declaration

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<sup>152</sup> See: *New York Times* and *The Times* of London, March 16–31 March, 1939.

<sup>153</sup> See Appendix B; *The Times*, 22 March, 1939, 14.

<sup>154</sup> *New York Times*, 22 March, 1939, 1.

<sup>155</sup> *Times*, 18–29 March, 1939.

of security or even an alliance with Poland.<sup>156</sup> Appeasement had failed as a policy, and Britain, France and Poland began to move towards protection and self-preservation. By March 31 these three had concluded what has been called the British guarantee to Poland, which was aimed at mutual support and banding together. Revealed in the House of Commons on March 31, the guarantee promised that “any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty’s Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.”<sup>157</sup> France had committed to the same statement, and both were now, in one way or another, attached to the fate of Poland.

Although not yet Prime Minister at the time, an examination of the writings and correspondence of Winston Churchill would seem appropriate. Yet when we get to Churchill’s letters, major speeches, and appearances of March and April of 1939, there is little or no trace of Memelland to be found. What *is* found are numerous references to the failure of Europe to uphold the integrity of an independent Czechoslovakia and the need to uphold the territorial integrity of Poland. Indeed, Churchill was very involved in the attempts to reassure and secure Poland, and was part of the process which produced the British guarantee to Poland. As well, he took the line that the British government must finally take a firm stand against Nazi aggression, with or without major allies. In a speech in mid-April, after the conclusion of the

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<sup>156</sup> *DBFP*, 492–503.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

bond with Poland, Churchill stated that “now that we have embarked on this new policy of alliances of peace-seeking powers, a great peace *bloc* against further aggression, let us give it a fair chance, and go forward with vigour.”<sup>158</sup> With this emphasis it is no surprise that beyond the war itself, in his famous works of history Churchill continued to neglect Memel as a factor in this series of events, becoming part of a trend that minimized the experience and importance of Memelland in leading up to the war.

As if taking a cue from the events of 1938–39, most post-war histories dealing with topics surrounding World War II have simply left Memel out: just as the issue faded quickly from the minds and memories of those involved at the time, so it also has faded from memory or prominence in the historical narrative. Undoubtedly, this is because of the reasons stated previously: events in Memelland were downplayed by the major powers involved, especially by Hitler himself, and it became quickly forgotten. Subsequently it was relegated to the dusty bookshelves of the past.

Although some historians do mention Memel, it is typically just that: mentioned then moved over. Historian Christopher Thorne recognized this in 1967, noticing that “the Memel operation and its background, though dismissed in a sentence by many historians, is worthy of study as something of a microcosm of its more celebrated predecessors.”<sup>159</sup> While correct for the first assertion – noticing this gap in scholarship as early as 1967! – Thorne missed out on the “why” of the

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<sup>158</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897–1963*, Vol VI (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), 6097.

<sup>159</sup> Thorne, *Approach of War*, 106.

issue: Memel was not simply a mini-event compared to Czechoslovakia or Austria, but rather a very intentional and designed acquisition. As well, even within several other works that look specifically at Lithuania, or the Baltics or Memelland itself, the period from 1919–1939 is only a small part of the equation. Furthermore, most of these historians, like Thorne, miss the bigger picture of the Nazi seizure of Memel, consigning it to simply another territory grab, and decidedly missing Hitler's planning and timing of those 10 days in March, 1939. Historian Norman Rich does make the timing connection in *Hitler's War Aims*, but with the same effect of minimizing the intricate path woven to get there. He mentions that the peaceful acquisition of Austria and the Sudetenland strengthened Hitler's and Germany's position, "which undoubtedly had a decisive influence on the Nazi leader's subsequent calculations about the timing and future course of his expansionist policies."<sup>160</sup> Hitler's last bloodless coup was anything but "more of the same," and Memel must be recast into that light; by missing the connection, we not only miss the importance of Memel, but unknowingly fall prey to the deceptive design that Hitler set for the world in 1938–39.

In 1938–39 the Memel Territory, after enjoying some few years in the attentions of the European theater, abruptly exited the stage. Consistent violations of the international agreements concerning Memelland, brought to the attention of the international community by both the Weimar and Nazi governments in the 1920s and 1930s, had been a topic of some debate and discussion throughout the academic world and within intergovernmental organizations. Hitler's Nazi government had made a specific case against Lithuania in its

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<sup>160</sup> Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, 13–14.



violations of the autonomy of the territory, its imposition of martial law since 1926, and the treatment of the German majority there. Ramping up the rhetoric and consistently addressing the “Memel Problem” from 1935 to early 1938, the Nazi government abruptly hit the brakes on Memel. According to Hitler’s own stated objectives it can be determined that he was not dropping the issue and that his government was fully committed to the reacquisition of Memel into the Reich. Hitler, the ultimate opportunist, prioritized his territorial goals in 1938 to the following order: Austria, Sudetenland, Memel then Danzig. He had hoped to cajole each one of these without causing an outbreak of war but would have welcomed it had it arrived.

Memel seems like it certainly would have been the easiest target to pursue for many reasons: it had a long history and connection with Germany, which neither Austria or the Sudetenland had directly. The territory had been rather unjustifiably and arbitrarily dislodged by the Treaty of Versailles despite an obvious super-majority of German population. Furthered by the Lithuanian government’s illegal seizure of the territory in 1923 and the consistent and well-known violations of its obligations and duties, including 12 years of martial law, Hitler had the best, most justifiable claim to Memelland.

By 1938 nearly all governments had even come to expect that the territory would be “returned” to Germany. However, just at this moment of seeming triumph, Memel virtually disappeared from the world stage in 1938. With the exception of a few instances of discussion, Memel was sidelined and overshadowed by the larger events of the next year including the *Anschluss* in Austria, the September Crisis and subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia. While foreign secretaries did

discuss concerns about and potential outcomes of the December 1938 election in the Memel Landtag, they ultimately relegated Memel a lost cause not worth fighting for. Failure to act on the part fit a pattern which played into Hitler's hands. His intentional sidelining of the Memel issue from 1938 onwards achieved his ambitions toward Memelland without raising international awareness or ire: he masterfully had not only achieved his designs for Austria and Czechoslovakia, but *used them* to divert the attentions of the rest of the world from his designs on Memel. Although seemingly the easiest target and the most justifiable to seize outright, Hitler had pulled off one of history's greatest magic tricks: in spending years creating the right conditions Hitler found the most opportune moment when, within the furor of the other major events of March, 1939 that *he* orchestrated, he made Memel disappear from the view of the world, and of history.

## Appendix A

### Memel Timeline:

1919 – Memelland detached from Germany and internationalized by Article 28 of the Treaty of Versailles.

1923 – Lithuania seizes Memel in a staged ethnic-Lithuanian revolt

1924 – Lithuania and the Guarantor Powers sign the Memel Convention (aka “Memel Statute”) recognizing Lithuanian sovereignty over Memelland while instituting autonomous self-governance for the territory.

1926 – Imposition of martial law in Memelland, and throughout Lithuania, as a result of the centralization of the Smetonas regime

- Complaint lodged with League of Nations

1932 – Lithuanian coup in Directorate: dismissal of Herr Böttcher as President of the Memel Landtag

- Permanent Court of International Justice issues verdict of interpretation on the Memel Statute: the Lithuanian government has right to appoint President of Memel Directorate

1933 – Founding of two National-Socialist parties in Memelland

1934 – Three no-confidence votes on Lithuania-appointed Governors

- Governor adjourns Landtag for 'lack of quorum'; rules directly through Directorate
- Lithuanian crackdown on German agitators: 126 arrested

1935 – Dr. Ernst Neumann & others put on trial for treason: "Great Treason Trial"

- Elections held on September 29: Memel German list gains 24 of 29 seats in the Landtag; remaining 5 are Lithuanian list

1938 – Lithuania eases up constrictions and in July releases Nazi leaders – including Dr. Neumann – imprisoned in 1935.

- Lithuania lifts martial law at the end of October after 12 years.
- Landtag elections are held on December 10, resulting in overwhelming vote for Nazi parties: 87% of the vote, 25 of 29 seats in the Landtag.

1939 – Ultimatum given to Foreign Minister Urbšys on March 20; Kaunas government agrees to cede Memel on March 21.

- Urbšys & Ribbentrop draft a treaty agreeing to the transfer of Sovereignty on March 22.
- Hitler arrives in Memel to welcome the territory back to the Reich on March 23.



## Appendix C



"Memel Map," The Times, 23 March, 1939, 15.