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BALTIC NEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS REPORT FROM ESTONIA, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA (THE BALTIC STATES)
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June, 1990



Lithuania: A tough road to freedom

'Dear Mr Hawke ...'

Since the restoration of independent Lithuania on March 11, the President of the Republic's Supreme Council, Dr Landsbergis, has repeatedly written to the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon Bob Hawke, seeking diplomatic recognition. We reproduce below a substantial part of the letter Dr Landsbergis sent on April 16, 1990. It was co-signed by Mrs Kazimiera Prunskienė, Lithuania's Prime Minister.

Dear Mr Hawke,

On February 24, 1990, after a fairly contested, multi-party election campaign, the people of Lithuania went to the polls to elect national representatives for the first time since foreign occupation in 1940. By March 10, 1990, the demand of the people of Lithuania was clear and overwhelming — immediate restoration of the Republic of Lithuania (first recognised by Australia in 1921) and of the fundamental human rights proclaimed in the first Lithuanian Constitution of May 15, 1920.

On March 11, 1990, the representatives of the Lithuanian people solemnly proclaimed the restoration of the Republic of Lithuania on the basis of its *de jure* continuity since 1940 ... The 1977 USSR Constitution and other Soviet laws were annulled, insofar as they applied to Lithuania.

I have been asked by the Supreme Council of Lithuania to convey to you and the people of Australia the most significant legislation documents enacted on March 11, 1990. In particular, you will observe that the Lithuanian state emphasises its adherence to universally accepted principles of international law, recognises the provisions of the Helsinki final act with respect to international frontiers, and guarantees the rights of all peoples and ethnic communities living in Lithuania.

Mr Prime Minister, it has been nearly five decades since oppression and darkness descended upon the land and people of Lithuania. Hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians of all ages, professions and backgrounds were deported to the USSR; our schools and churches closed; our farms and property laid waste; our environment poisoned by industries over which we had little control; and our sons laid to rest on battlefields far beyond our frontiers.

In spite of these heavy burdens, and an unrelenting effort to destroy the religious and moral values of the

Cover Photo: "We are free!" shouted the crowds everywhere, as the newly elected Lithuanian Parliament re-established Lithuania's independence on March 11, 1990. Moscow reacted with a cruel economic blockade, reminiscent of Stalin's Ukrainian Famine in the 1930s. What does the future hold for these people?

— Photo: A. Sutkus.

Lithuanian people, the Lithuanian nation endured. In every Lithuanian heart burned a desire for freedom, justice and peace.

Many of our people have taken great hope and courage from the fact that Australia, like many other nations, has repeatedly stressed its non-recognition of the 1940 annexation and occupation of Lithuania by the USSR. Today, with increasing freedoms and liberties a reality for most Lithuanians, **the people of Lithuania are hoping for your nation's support.**

In our peaceful quest for independence we rely on our moral rights and the support of the democratic governments of other nations of the world.

Especially at this point do we need your concrete help. The Soviets continue using their military force and political pressure on other countries to not recognise Lithuania. And now, there is the threat of an economic blockade as a new iron curtain is drawn around Lithuania. This aggression must be recognised for what it is.

Mr Prime Minister, the people of Lithuania, the Supreme Council and the Government have asked us to convey to you and to the people of Australia their warmest greetings and best wishes. To all the peoples of the Soviet Union and Europe our nation extends only the hand of friendship. We sincerely hope that the people of Australia will continue to reaffirm and support the right of the people of Lithuania to freedom and dignity and their right to take their own path in building an independent democratic state.



● Dr Vytautas Landsbergis.



● Mr Bob Hawke, Australia's Prime Minister.

We would also like to use this opportunity to advise you that we have asked Prof A. P. Kabaila, the representative in Australia of the Lithuanian Reform Movement 'Sajudis,' to act as liaison to the Australian Government on matters related to the Republic of Lithuania.

Very truly yours,

Vytautas LANDSBERGIS

President, Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania.

Kazimiera PRUNSKIENE

Prime Minister,
Republic of Lithuania.

Australia's Response

As this issue went to print, Australia had not yet recognised the freely elected Landsbergis government in Lithuania.

However, Mr Philip Ruddock, MHR for Dundas, gave a "Notice of Motion" supporting the Baltic States, in the Australian House of Representatives on May 15, 1990. Mr Ruddock is the Shadow Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

He moved — "That the House:

- (1) supports an independent and free Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia;
- (2) condemns the Soviet Union for its campaign of intimidation specifically against Lithuania;
- (3) calls on the Soviet authorities to abandon their blockade of vital raw materials to Lithuania and to allow the immediate resumption of oil, gas, food and medical supplies;
- (4) calls on the Soviet Union to accept the declarations of independence by the Baltic Republics and to facilitate a peaceful transition to their full autonomy; and
- (5) calls on the Australian Government to ensure that the Australian people's support for the people of the Baltic Republics is heard in Moscow."

● **Give generously to the Lithuanian Relief Fund** — see Page 3 for details.

Steps toward Freedom — but at what Cost?

During the past three months, historic changes have swept across the east coast of the Baltic Sea. Free elections were held in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for the first time in 50 years. And in all three countries, the majority of people voted for the candidates who had campaigned for national independence.

On March 11, Lithuania's newly elected parliament declared the restoration of their country's independence. Lithuanian President Dr Vytautas Landsbergis appealed to the West for moral support, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

Soviet President Gorbachev waited for two weeks, then unleashed his fury. Additional Soviet tanks and paratroopers were sent into Lithuania. Buildings were seized, conscientious objectors were rounded up and deported to remote Asian outposts.

Mr Gorbachev reassured the rest of the world that Moscow would not use military force in Lithuania "unless civilian lives were endangered." The promise was soon broken. Soviet crack troops raided hospitals in Vilnius and Kaunas at dawn on March 26, wounding a number of Lithuanians, abducting others and leaving a trail of blood.

Heartless Blockade

As the next step, Moscow imposed a harsh economic embargo on Lithuania. Supplies of oil, natural gas, raw materials and other imports were stopped. Hundreds of Lithuanian factories closed down and municipal hot water stopped flowing to city homes. Even worse, Lithuania was left without antibiotics, life-saving drugs, bandages and essential medical supplies.

The Lithuanian government has repeatedly asked the Kremlin to negotiate, but Mr Gorbachev refuses to talk unless the March 11 declaration is thrown out. In an emergency session on May 23, the Lithuanian supreme council offered to freeze for the duration of talks any laws passed after March 11 which "could be defined by both parties as matters for negotiation." The offer was not accepted.

Two Lithuanian parliamentarians, Valdas Katkus and Stasys Kasauskas, visited Australia in May. Mr Katkus is Lithuania's assistant minister for foreign affairs. During their stay here, the visitors met a



● A message from Latvia: "Get out!"

number of Australian politicians and community leaders.

It is significant that the breakaway Lithuanian republic has so far received more recognition and support from the East than from the West. Large meetings in support of Lithuania have been held so far in Leningrad, Moscow, Chernivtsi, Dnipropetrovsk, Rivno, Kiev, Kryvyi Rih, Donetsk, Charkiv, Poltava, Lviv, Chust, Riga, Tallinn, Tartu and other cities. Some Lithuanian factories have reportedly managed small freelance deals with neighbouring Soviet republics. According to the Moldavian Popular Front, the Moldavian parliament has voted 194-29 for an end to Kremlin economic sanctions against Lithuania.

Estonia and Latvia have followed Lithuania's example, but more cautiously. In their later declarations of independence, the two republics adopted a step-by-step approach to full sovereignty, but did not specify the date when this was to be achieved. They have kept on their Communist presidents — in Estonia, Mr Arnold Ruutel, and in Latvia, Mr Anatolijs Gorbunovs.

To date, they have not been subjected to the same sanctions as Lithuania.

Estonia has been hit by strikes organised by the Inter-Movement, an organisation dominated by minority Russian-speaking colonists who are opposed to independence.



● On March 31, thousands of Australians throughout Australia demonstrated in support of freedom for the Baltic States. This photograph shows a section of the crowd in Melbourne.

You Can Help, Too

Australians have been quick to come to the blockaded Lithuanians' help. A Lithuanian Relief Fund was launched in Melbourne recently, under the patronage of Sir Edward Dunlop, AC, CMG, OBE, KCSJ.

Donations have been flowing in from all states of Australia; but more money is still needed to buy medicines, bandages and other essential supplies.

You can make your donation at any branch of the ANZ Bank in Australia: please mention Lithuanian Relief Fund current account 013-165: 295.461.719. Or you may post your contribution directly to the Fund headquarters, PO Box 128, North Melbourne, Vic 3051.

Baltic Gold: "A Squalid Story"

Missing: at least 20 tonnes of gold, the property of independent Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian treasuries. And certain Western democracies are responsible for its disappearance.

The story starts in June 1940, when Russian tanks rolled into Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The governments of these three countries decided to leave some of their gold reserves on safe deposit with the Bank of England and with several other Western Banks. Now, 50 years later, most of this gold has vanished.

Apart from its monetary worth, the missing treasure also has an irreplaceable sentimental value for the Baltic people. Many items were donated by their grandfathers and grandmothers after World War I, when the three Baltic States declared their independence and the people rallied to rebuild their ruined economies. Ordinary people gave gold and other assets, some in the form of jewellery and treasured heirlooms. They were held in the Bank of England and elsewhere in Europe and America.

Assurances of Safety

When the shadow of another war loomed, in 1939, the central Baltic banks suggested that their gold should be moved out of Europe. However, assurances of safety from the Bank of England (later to be proved false) prevented such a move.

In 1940 the three countries were annexed by the Soviet Union. Mass murders and deportations ensued; all traces of freedom were removed.

Almost immediately the Soviets started demanding that all Baltic gold in the West be handed over to Moscow. Switzerland and Sweden complied. Others held off, for a while.

When Germany occupied the Baltic territories a year later, Britain at once impounded the Baltic assets by invoking the "Trading with the Enemy Act." All assets deposited with the Bank of England were vested in the Custodian of Enemy Property.

No Legal Title

In 1944, when Germany was finally driven out of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union again seized the three Baltic countries. The Soviets repeatedly insisted that Britain and her allies should recognise *de jure* the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic States and hand over the assets of the Baltic Central Banks. Successive British governments refused to do either, on the grounds that the USSR had violated the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Charter. The Soviets therefore had no legal title to the Baltic assets.

Since 1942, however, Britain had been quietly negotiating with Moscow, in an effort to compensate the British owners of Baltic property and bonds.

A UK commission was established in 1959 to register the claims from both sides. This process lasted for six years until 1965 when Harold Wilson's Labour Government began direct talks with the Kremlin, following the demise of Khrushchev. These talks ended in failure, as neither side would recognise the full range of the other's claims.

It was not until the visit to London by Premier Kosygin that the impasse was suddenly resolved. The fate of the Baltic gold was decided by an agreement signed by Great Britain and the USSR on February 21, 1967. This led to the Foreign Compensation (USSR)



● The Bank of England: Baltic trust misplaced.

Order which had a rather difficult passage through the House of Commons.

The Conservative Opposition branded it a "squalid story" and a financially bad bargain for Britain as well as for any future governments of the Baltic States.

Sold without Owners' Permission

Russia abandoned all direct claims to the gold which was sold by the Bank of England on June 29, 1967 for 5,803,122 pounds and 13 shillings. The present value of the 14 tonnes of gold would be approximately US \$180 million, plus a huge compound interest earned over the past 50 years.

By February, 1970, all the money raised from the sale of the gold was transferred to the Compensation Commission for disbursement to the claimants. The funds were sufficient to recompense claimants in Britain and Israel for 7.5% of the value of their claims.

According to Agris Krumins, a writer for the Latvian newspaper *Atmoda*, the British payouts covered claims for lost investments not only in the Baltic States, but also in Czechoslovakia, Finland, Poland and Romania.

A further 500,000 pounds from the Baltic gold proceeds were used to purchase British-made consumer goods which were then shipped to the Soviet Union.

France: More Reliable

It seems that only the French have steadfastly refused to hand over Baltic gold to the Soviets. According to the Paris newspaper *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 3.5 tonnes of Baltic gold are still held in the cellars of the Banque de France.

The Banque's officials recently told Lithuania's Prime Minister, Mrs Kazimiera Prunskiene, that they would hand over Lithuania's share (2.2 tonnes) as soon as France recognised the present Lithuanian government.

YOU can speed up the process by writing to President Francois Mitterand TODAY (Palais de l'Elysée, Paris 75008, France). Ask him to grant full diplomatic recognition to the democratically elected government of independent Lithuania, led by Dr Landsbergis.

— ELTA/Speak Up/Agris Krumins, ATMODA/eom.

Incentives for Russians to Go Home

The City Council of Tallinn, Estonia's capital city, has decided to pay compensation to any persons who vacate their living quarters and leave Estonia for permanent settlement in the Soviet Union.

The decision came after the government of the Russian republic appealed to people to return to their native places in the European part of Russia. Some of those regions are now very thinly populated, as a result of the massive post-war migration to the more prosperous Baltic States and to big Russian cities.

The Russian republican government has issued orders to pay cash grants and render other help to all who come to settle in these abandoned rural parts of Russia.

Since Estonia has received a large share of its Russian population from these areas, the Tallinn City Council stepped in and responded to the Russian authorities' appeals.

The Estonian offer guarantees that every person who relocates to the Soviet Union and leaves behind a state-owned apartment, is entitled to a certain sum of money. The exact amount will be determined by the council this month.

The measure is intended to improve the critical housing situation in Tallinn. Many local people live in dilapidated wooden houses with no running water, while new housing has been allocated to Soviet immigrants. This has been part of the re-settlement and russification policy of the Soviet government over the past 50 years.

In the wake of the major recent changes in the Baltic States and elsewhere, many Soviet immigrants may feel like returning to Russia. The compensation scheme, the Tallinn City Council hopes, will make it easier for them to find housing if they do return to Russia.

— Based on a report in *The Estonian Independent*.

A Friend in Need . . .

Latvia is to receive badly needed medical supplies from the American Medical Resources Foundation, according to Mr David Harrington, a spokesman for the Foundation (AMRF).

Mr Harrington told a press conference in Riga that AMRF's goodwill fund has traditionally helped Third World and developing countries in Africa, South America and Eastern Asia — Vietnam, Cambodia, etc. Recently this fund has been expanded to include projects giving aid to Eastern Europe, on a trial basis. Latvia is the first in this group of countries which will receive help from the AMRF.

Mr Harrington visited Latvia in March to become acquainted with the medical situation there and to clearly define the problems that will be solved with the AMRF's aid.

As it stands, the plan is for \$2 million to be donated every year. The first shipment containing medical technology worth \$500,000 was sent on April 24. This container included medical apparatus and instruments: cardiac monitors, electrocardiographs, ultrasound diagnostic instruments and x-ray machines.

The first stage of forming an educational programme includes the sending of doctors, nurses and engineers to the US to gain knowledge and to learn how to operate the new machinery. All costs will be covered by AMRF.

In answer to the question, "If Moscow starts an economic blockade when Latvia declares independence, will AMRF be able to extend any help?" Mr Harrington replied that it would only be possible for the AMRF to guarantee the continuation of the medication used in the most life threatening situations.

— Based on a report in *Atmoda* (Awakening).

Correction

Mr Greg J. CRAFTER's name was spelt incorrectly as "Craster" in our 1990 Baltic Honours List, published in the March 1990 issue of *Baltic News*. We apologise for this unfortunate error.

Mr Crafter (Labor) is the South Australian Minister of Education and Minister of Children's Services. He has been one of the first Australian statesmen to organise tangible relief for the reawakening Baltic States, in the form of books and educational materials.



Mr Crafter is now exploring the possibilities of academic and teacher exchanges between Lithuania and Australia. A South Australian representative is visiting Lithuania now, and is having talks with independent Lithuania's educationalists.

● We are planning to publish our next *Baltic Honours List* in March, 1991. Written nominations will be received until Christmas, 1990.

WANTED: Editor. May reside in any State of Australia. The position is honorary. Write to: *Baltic News*, PO Box 272, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005.

(Advertisement)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

On Breaking Free from Russia

Although the March events in Lithuania are often called "a declaration of independence", it was in fact a **restoration of the independent state** of Lithuania which was temporarily occupied and annexed by the USSR.

The use of the word "secession" in this context is also incorrect and illogical.

The present Lithuanian Council has a clear mandate from the nation, having been democratically elected on a platform "to restore the independent democratic state of Lithuania and its return to the European and world communities."

A *de facto* recognition is now sought from other governments. The Lithuanian Prime Minister, Mrs Prunskiene, has also expressed another approach to *de facto* recognition. "They (foreign governments) could now take various steps giving our government *de facto* endorsement: Not diplomatic recognition perhaps, but co-operative agreements of different sorts. Various reciprocal institutions could be set up, implying a certain level of links between our countries."

Any country acts only in its national interest. What have the Western countries, including Australia, to gain from recognising the democratically elected government of the Republic of Lithuania?

Quite a lot. A peacefully negotiated implementation of independence in Lithuania (also in Latvia and Estonia)

will strengthen the democratisation of the Soviet Union. It will establish Mr Gorbachev as a truly great reformist leader, and improve the economical situation in the USSR.

A reformed and democratic Soviet Union, consisting of republics which are not coerced into a union, is of national interest to every country in the world. The recognised and viable independence of the Baltic States is thus a cornerstone to the peaceful and profitable coexistence between what is now known as the "East and West" — but should be known as "Our World".

Melbourne, Vic.

G. ŽEMKALNIS.

Baltic Nations

I respect the people of the three Baltic nations as civilized, honourable people. It infuriates me what has happened to them, and to all victims of the Soviets.

What infuriates me even more is that none of it need have happened. I blame Roosevelt and Churchill and US policy since 1933. It is inexcusable.

I am fairly confident that we are seeing the beginning of the end of the Soviet system. At 70, I sure hope I live to see it.

Gulfport, MS (USA). Frank WALLACE.



"Just hang on, mate: the food will be here any minute now."

Thank You

For 14 years, BALTIC NEWS was one of the very few "lone voices in the wilderness," while the mass media chose to remain silent on the Baltic plight. Now, the tables have turned: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are in the news almost daily.

Does this mean that BALTIC NEWS has fulfilled its task and may go into oblivion? A recent straw vote among our readers has returned an almost unanimous answer, "Don't stop; keep going."

If it is to continue, however, BALTIC NEWS needs more than mere words of encouragement. It needs cash (over \$4,000 per issue at present) to pay the ever-rising costs of production and postage.

We thank you, our subscribers and supporters, for the following contributions received since our last issue:

To: BALTIC NEWS,
PO Box 272, SANDY BAY, Tasmania 7005 (Australia).

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NSW and ACT: Anonymous, \$100; Estonian Society of Sydney, \$125; V. Venclovas, \$50; Mrs A. Skene, \$30; P. Randma, \$25; P. Penkaitiene, J. & V. Ramanauskas, A. Silken, Mrs G. Stefanovic, \$20 each; Miss G. Grybas, R. A. M. Lasaitis, M. Migeveciene, Rev E. F. O'Gorman, \$10 each; N. Celkiene, Mrs V. Nrusis, B. Sidariene, \$5 each; V. Mieziis, \$2. **Total \$447.**

Vic: Q. King, \$200; Sale Lithuanian Community, \$142; Baltic Council of Victoria, Lithuanian National Foundation, Melbourne Lithuanian Community, "Zidynys" Geelong, \$100 each; Latvian Combined Sororities, V. Matisons, \$50 each; Mrs Morkunas, \$30; J. Sniras, \$25; Rev W. Butler, D. & H. Kalade, V. Lielkajs, I. O'Dwyer, J. Sedlorius, O. Silina, P. Strungs, M. Teichmann, V. Vaitiekuniene, \$20 each; J. Barkiene, B. & Z. Leite, \$15 each; Anonymous, A. Bajoras, V. Bindokas, P. Mazylis, J. Miglis, K. Miglis, P. Miglis, A. Raadik, V. Ramoskis, V. Sidabra, \$10 each; Anonymous, \$8; S. Adamovskis, L. Celms, R. Celms, D. Cirulis, A. Hochbergs, J. Kruminis, A. Liepins, L. Nobelius, A. Ozols, A. Puke, L. Stolniks, N. Vairogs, \$5 each. **Total \$1,270.**

Various: Lithuanian Pensioners' Club "Paguoda" (ACT), \$110; Lithuanian Community of Latrobe Valley (Vic), \$106; Baltic Women's Association of SA, \$100; Rev P. Bees, SJ (NSW), "Friend from Victoria," Lithuanian Community in Hobart, P. Siaucinas (Tas), \$50 each; J. Cyzas (WA), G. Kazokas (Tas), \$40 each; D. Hancock (SA), M. Manning-Lobb (UK), \$30 each; L. Fuller (ACT), J. Krupavicius (WA), Latvian Relief Soc Inc (SA), L. Looever (NSW), B. Repecka (USA), G. W. Wall (Vic), \$25 each; Anonymous (Tas), G. Cornwell (ACT), P. O. Cotter, C. Ford (NSW), V. Joseph, S. Katinas (Qld), J. Krauklis (NSW), V. R. Mezaks (SA), L. Mortimer (Vic), A. Pomerings (Qld), J. B. Rice jnr, A. Tymkow (USA), B. Zilberts (Tas), \$20 each; City of Belmont Library (WA), A. Kantvilas (Tas), A. P. Simkus (Vic), \$15 each; N. Bizyte, R. Chambers (NSW), E. Jagus (Qld), B. Liepins (Vic), V. Navickas (Tas), C. Nowak, V. Pilius (USA), M. M. & Z. Strazds (Qld), J. Terry (Tas), \$10 each; L. Braniska (Vic), F. Bulger (NSW), M. Johnson (NT), A. W. Pitts (Qld), \$5 each. **Total \$1,221.**

TOTAL DONATIONS and subscriptions received during the past quarter: \$2,938.

Let's Restore the Latvian Spirit

by Karlis Streips

When Latvia regains its independence, some graduate students in sociology will descend upon this country to study the effects which half a century of occupation have left on the Latvian people. I would offer a central thesis: that occupation by the Russians has polluted the Latvian spirit.

When I got on the bus this morning, a little old lady behind me started to complain about the fact that people weren't moving toward the back of the bus to give her more room. She went on and on, until someone asked her to please "stop that foolishness." Without missing a beat, she shouted an obscenity, and went right on complaining.

At the restaurant in one of Riga's larger hotels a few nights ago, the waiter sent me to the cloakroom to hang up my coat, and in the cloakroom the attendant read me a long and angry lecture about the fact that there was another cloakroom in the hotel, and why couldn't I hang my bloody coat there?

Nobody Smiles

And a few months ago, three young Latvian women from Canada spent a few days working in a Riga cafeteria. They did something absolutely unseen in Riga cafeterias; they smiled at their customers. They might as well have been from Uranus.

There is nothing pleasant about being occupied by a foreign army. I would imagine that the people off Syrian-controlled Beirut or British-occupied Northern Ireland tend to be testy on the bus, too. But what has happened in Latvia is a complete collapse of common civility. And I fear for this country's future if the instinct of politeness isn't regained — and quickly.

The root cause of this crabbiness is the Communist system which has ruled this country for the last 50 years. The grand poobahs in Moscow don't want to admit that yes, Virginia, there is unemployment in the Soviet Union.

So the basic rule is that unless you murder your supervisor with a pickaxe, you keep your job until you retire or keel over. Something as minor as the fact that you behave like Atilla the Hun toward your customers is hardly cause for dismissal here.

Couldn't Care Less

Morover, in a non-competitive economics system, it doesn't matter whether you sell more pickles than the guy down the street, because usually there isn't any guy down the street. Again — no incentive to treat your customer like something better than a pickle. For that matter — no incentive to show up for work at all.



Karlis STREIPS (29) is a first-generation Latvian American who has worked in the US as a television journalist. This year he is living in Latvia and teaching English at the University of Latvia. He is also a frequent contributor and translator of *Awakening* (Atmoda), an English-language current affairs newspaper published in Latvia. This year's subscription is only US\$18. The paper's address is: Atmoda, Vecpilsētas 13/15 RIGA, 226250 Latvia. Fax (013) 2-213978. Telephone 21 3978 or 21 0452.



Capitalism, for all of its shortcomings, encourages people to be all that they can be for the simple reason that if they don't someone else will. There's no threat of that in the Soviet Union, so here many people try to be all that they feel like being. And usually that isn't very much.

This kind of thing breeds. When I am told that there is no table free in the restaurant even though I can see six empty tables around the corner, I am inclined to be snappish.

And when, hungry, I instead go to the next-door pickle shop and am faced with some churlish Russian who doesn't speak Latvian and who couldn't possibly care less whether I do or do not buy his pickles. I feel the strong urge to bop the next bitchy old lady on the bus with my briefcase. And I've only been here for four months . . . think of the people who have lived in this system for their whole lives!!

Free Market Economy

There is much talk in Latvia these days about a return to the free market economy. But what people seem to forget is that the free market economy is no robot. It requires free market people to operate it. And what we've got in the Soviet Union right now is people whose sensibilities have been dulled by fifty years of an inane economic system and fifty years of military dictatorship.

I have no solution for restoring the Latvian spirit. And moreover, I am inclined to believe that the pictures of independent Latvia painted by some old-timers in which all the healthy, well-fed residents sang triumphant folk songs while plowing the verdant fields under the glowing sun of freedom are a little exaggerated, there must have been a few people even in those days who were a big pain in the neck.

But I do know that regaining independence is more than just signing a piece of paper. It involves bringing a whole nation along for the ride. And it's not going to be much of a ride if the people on the bus are beating each other up over who's taking up more room than he should.

— Reprinted from *Atmoda* (Awakening).

Hobart Commemoration

Baltic deportations will be commemorated at an ecumenical service in St Joseph's Church, corner Macquarie and Harrington Streets, Hobart, on FRIDAY night, June 15, 1990 at 7.30 pm.

The service has been organised by Help the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian People's Association (HELLP). All are welcome.

A candlelight vigil will be held outside the church, from 7 pm to 7.30 pm. Please make sure your candles are in glass jars or similar wind-proof containers.

Virumaa: Estonia's Disaster Area

Remember the shocking sights of war movies? Devastated land and ruins? Poisoned soil, water, air? Sick and frightened people?

Well, you don't need a war. Come to Virumaa, Estonia's north-eastern county, and you will witness similar man-made destruction. All in the name of Soviet industrialisation, "flourishing socialism".

The Soviet colonial policy over the past 50 years has allowed unlimited exploitation of Estonia's natural resources and encouraged production at any cost. The damage to the environment was ignored completely.

A considerable part of the industrial enterprises in Virumaa are not accountable to the Estonian government, but take their orders directly from Moscow.

Moscow's special interest in Virumaa is quite understandable. 50 per cent of known oil shale reserves of the Soviet Union are located in this region, plus rich deposits of phosphorite, limestone, dolomite, clay and peat.

Virumaa county produces 94 per cent of Estonia's fuel, 89% electric energy, 42% building materials and 41% light industry products.

Until recently, environmental considerations could be ignored by most enterprises. Eight out of Estonia's ten major sources of air pollution are situated in Virumaa.

The level of pollution can be judged by the health of the local people. Estonia has one of the highest death rates in the world, caused by heart and coronary diseases. In the mining regions of Kohtla-Järve, this figure is even greater than the Estonian average.

It was the situation in Virumaa that led to the birth of the Popular Front of Estonia, according to Marju Lauristin, one of the Front's leaders and former lecturer of journalism at Tartu University.

Children Affected

192 children in the north-eastern Estonian town of Sillamäe lost their hair in the first five months of 1989. The real cause has not yet been established, but radioactive pollution is most likely.

The equipment at the local chemical-metallurgical plant is outdated. Nobody knows how safely the plant's radioactive wastes are disposed of.

Scientific tests have since revealed that the soil in and around Sillamäe contained 15 to 50 times more radium than normal. In some places the figure exceeded the permitted radiation levels 1,000 times. Measurements showed alarming results near the kindergarten were the largest number of hair-loss cases had been reported.

Yuri Yevstigneyev, the mayor of Sillamäe, brushes the problem of radiation aside. Yet he ordered the basement of the kindergarten to be covered with concrete. "Just a precaution," he explained.



● The ongoing environmental campaign in Estonia: A Narva rally; in June 1989 displays the banner, "Stop Damaging Land and Fields!" — TASS from Sovfoto/POC.

In the spring of 1987, Estonian TV disclosed far-reaching plans by the Soviet Ministry of Mineral Fertilisers Production to start phosphorite mining in Virumaa. The new industry was environmentally unsafe. It would have badly affected the ground water resources of Estonia, and wells would have dried up in a territory of 320 square kilometres. Pollution of the Baltic Sea would have increased dramatically.

The Estonian people vigorously opposed the phosphorite mining project. Massive signature drives, protest campaigns, and restrained pressure on authorities finally brought results. On December 6, 1988, the Estonian Supreme Soviet rejected the project.

Estonians are also worried by the intensive colonisation of the Virumaa region by Russians. Since the Soviet occupation in 1940, the region was shamelessly overdeveloped. Industrial towns, such as Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järve, sprang up everywhere.

This expansion attracted vast numbers of migrant labourers from all over the Soviet Union. One reason behind the setting up of such artificial centres can be found in the Stalinist doctrine of "mixing the nationalities".

Today, the Estonians constitute only 2% of the population in Sillamäe, 6% in Narva and 32% in Kohtla-Järve. The situation is better in the Rakvere rural district where the population is 97 per cent Estonian.

Rein Sikk, the editor of *Virumaa Teataja* (Virumaa Herald), sums up, "Virumaa is a disaster area of Estonia. Devastation has not touched every single village there as yet, but warning signs can be seen in the water, soil, air, people, economy and culture."

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