

*Behind
The
Headlines*

Volume 47, No. 3 Spring 1990

**Perestroika
in the
Baltic Republics**

TOIVO MILJAN

Behind The Headlines

Editor: David Stafford Associate

Editor: Gayle Fraser

Contributions on topical issues in international affairs that will be of interest to members of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs should be addressed to the Editor, CIA, 1₅ King's College Circle, Toronto, Canada, M5S 2V9. Tel: 416-979-1851/Fax: 4.16-979- 8575.

Submissions, typed double spaced, with a minimum number of endnotes, must not exceed 7,500 words.

The mission of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs is to promote an understanding of international affairs by providing interested Canadians with a non-partisan, nation-wide forum for informed discussion, analysis, and debate. The Institute as such is precluded by its constitution from expressing an official opinion on any aspect of world affairs. The views expressed in *Behind the Headlines* are therefore those of the authors alone.

Canadian Institute of
International Affairs 1990
\$3.00 per single issue
\$12.00 per year/\$10.00 for
subscriptions placed direct

Spring 1990
(Date of issue - March 1990)
Second-class mail registration
number 2578
ISSN 0005-7983

Perestroika in the Baltic Republics

TOIVO MILJAN

Although Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania appear similar to the outside observer, not least because they are often lumped together as the Baltic republics, they are very different ethnically and linguistically. Their histories, though linked, are also different, and in the pursuit of perestroika, glasnost, and, finally, independence over the past three years, each has followed a different path and timetable, with sometimes one and sometimes another taking the lead.

These countries also differ on almost all of several vital socio-economic structural elements crucial to the conduct of cultural, economic, and political activity. Demographically, in 1989 there were 1.4 million Latvians, 900,000 Great Russians, and 300,000 others, mostly non-Latvian speaking, in Latvia. Prior to the Soviet annexation in 1935, Russians accounted for only 10.6 per cent of the population. In Riga, the capital region and home to almost half the population, the pressure of Russian culture and language is overwhelming – in 1979 only 38.3 per cent of the inhabitants were Latvians and 46.1 per cent were Russians.

Lithuania is at the other extreme. In 1989 only 18 per cent of the population was non-Lithuanian, a figure virtually unchanged since the Second World War. Even this small percentage is split: 7 per cent is Polish-speaking and 11 per cent Russian-speaking. Vilnius, the capital and by far the largest urban concentration, has only 600,000 people or 15 per cent of the population. In contrast to Latvia, which is heavily urbanized and concentrated on Riga, Lithuania is largely rural and small-town in make-up.

Estonia falls between the two. Its 1989 population of 1.6 million is 61 per cent Estonian and 30 per cent Russian-speaking, with a residue of 9 per cent from other parts of the Soviet Union. In 1934, only 8.7 per cent of

the population was Russian-speaking with another 3.1 per cent in the 'others' category. A half-century ago independent Estonia was thus ethnically even more homogeneous than Lithuania. Tallinn, the capital, today contains 30 per cent of the population, only half of whom are Estonian. In addition, the country's northeastern corner, nearest to Leningrad, is completely russified, industrialized, and urbanized, in contrast to the prewar period when it was rural and Estonian. Only 3 per cent of the people in the border city of Narva, Estonia's second largest city, are Estonian.'

Over half of the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia and Estonia are migrants, unskilled labour imported during the past 20 years in a deliberate attempt at russification through expanding labour-intensive heavy industry and importing large amounts of raw materials and labour. Moreover, as much as two-thirds of the labour brought in leaves within seven years. Recent data showed that between 1960 and 1989, 678,106 of 897,618 officially registered migrants in Estonia eventually left.² However, these figures do not include the illegal immigrants who have flocked to Estonia and Latvia because of high living standards, or the natural increase resulting from the high birth rate of the migrant population, or the apparently large numbers of dependents that the out-migrants leave behind. The main problem, according to Estonians and Latvians, is that the migrants do not want to assimilate or learn the language. And until 1988 when the Estonians and Latvians began to assert their national identity under glasnost, most did not even recognize that they were in Estonia or Latvia rather than a region of Russia. Hence, as one Estonian commentator put it, Tallinn resembles a railway station where seven million transient foreign travellers have left their detritus. The palpable resentment of 'Russians'³ accompanying this uninvited migration (especially in Estonia) or the russification of Riga and of the governmental institutions of Latvia is not found to the same extent in Lithuania where political, economic, and cultural institutions have remained in Lithuanian hands.

Another major difference between Lithuania and the others is that virtually its entire population is Roman Catholic. With contacts through neighbouring Poland, the clergy have maintained a Western orientation and became the repository of national values and culture during the years of active Sovietization and repression by the Lithuanian Communist party. Thus repression created a strong bond of faith and nationalism in the church. In contrast, Latvians and Estonians, nominally Lutheran, lost both their faith and their church, which they replaced with such nationally oriented folk/cultural activities as folk dancing and singing as well as a search for local ethno-cultural artifacts and symbols ruthlessly destroyed and driven underground in the 1940s and 1950s by the Soviet regime. The Khrushchev thaw (1959-64) allowed a revival of officially

sanctioned, but censored, song festivals held roughly every five years since 1869 in Estonia, with massed choirs of 25,000 on an enormous stage on the Song Festival Grounds in Tallinn. Inspired by their neighbour, the Latvians also organized local cultural societies and national song and folk dance festivals in the early 1960s.

Of the three countries, Estonia has enjoyed the greatest access to the West, mainly through Finnish television. Helsinki, only 75 kilometres across the Gulf of Finland, has beamed commercial broadcasting to northern Estonia since 1956. Because Estonian and Finnish are closely related languages, most northern Estonians, exposed to Finnish television since early childhood, are fluent in Finnish. In addition, as Finland grew wealthy, weekend trips to Tallinn increased to such proportions that Finns crowded out other Western tourists; in contrast, fewer than 4,000 Estonians visited Finland, even in 1988. In 1989, however, over 40,000 descended on Finland. Neither Latvia nor Lithuania had access to Western television or direct contact with a neighbouring Western country. In November 1989, Scandinavian Airlines and Aeroflot began flights to Tallinn four times a week. Riga is scheduled to be connected by air to Stockholm on 25 March 1990, and air service between Tallinn and Helsinki (a twenty-minute flight) will begin the following day.

Catalysts of National : Awakening

The process towards independence in the Baltic states was set in motion unintentionally by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 when he proclaimed glasnost and democratization. His objective was to gain the co-operation of the man in the street in his struggle against a recalcitrant state bureaucracy (then numbering some 18 million) who were actively subverting his proposed reconstruction of the Soviet economic system in an attempt to save their jobs and their privileged access to goods and services. Gorbachev and other Soviet reformers had also long been unhappy with the open corruption of the Communist party bosses across the country. (In 1986 an astonishing 200,000 party members were prosecuted!) Glasnost was intended to encourage the people to expose corruption, inefficient bureaucrats, and lazy party leaders openly and without fear. Within a year newspapers in Moscow were full of stories of red tape, bureaucratic stupidity, and organized large-scale corruption. Gorbachev quickly used this publicity to replace long-serving and aged party leaders and senior bureaucrats across the Soviet Union with those more in tune with his own thinking. By 1987 the bureaucracy was well on the way to being pared to 16 million, and popular pressure had led to the replacement of old-line authoritarian party leaders in much of the country.

In the Baltic republics, however, there was little evidence of glasnost. The newspapers, radio, and television censored criticism as rigorously as ever, and the tired old party leaders appointed by Leonid Brezhnev remained in office. The first glimmer of openness appeared in Latvia late in 1986 and in Estonia a few months later as young intellectuals became incensed over environmental issues. Under the influence of the vocal West European ecology movement, they discovered that the pollution of air and water in many Baltic areas had reached dangerously high levels. (In the Soviet Union in 1989 there were over 100 cities where the air and water were 'dangerous to life'.⁴)

In Latvia the protestors united around the struggle to stop construction of an unnecessary hydroelectric power station on the Daugava River which threatened to destroy the ecological balance in a large part of Latvia. On 14 October 1988 Latvia's main literary newspaper published a thoroughly researched article by two young intellectuals — one of whom later became president of the Latvian popular front — criticizing the ecological insensitivity and economic stupidity of the proposed dam. In response thousands were galvanized to write letters and attend meetings and demonstrations. Surprisingly, the Latvian government quickly appointed a commission to study the matter. Even more surprisingly, the commission not only reported by January 1989 but issued a negative evaluation. This assessment, subsequently echoed in a report from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, led to a halt in construction in November 1989. For the first time since Khrushchev's days, Latvians experienced the power of public protest.

In Estonia, the protest focussed on halting the open-pit mining of phosphate deposits which would produce a chemical reaction leading to radioactive contamination of a large part of Estonia's ground water reserves. The phosphate mines, proposed for the same site as an expansion to the enormous and environmentally damaging Baltic Power Plant which operates on oil shales, was attacked on a popular television programme on ecology by its youthful host journalist (currently an elected member of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow) on 25 February 1989. A visit to Tallinn by Gorbachev two days later offered an opportunity for direct protest, bypassing the multilayered Moscow bureaucracy in charge of fertilizer production and the hierarchy of the Stalinist-style Communist party of Estonia. Within days a grass-roots protest movement had taken shape across Estonia and caused a flurry of government activity in both Tallinn and Moscow, with a moratorium on the mines finally announced on 27 October.

In Lithuania protests did not erupt until 1988, even though equally damaging plant construction was taking place.

After their common ecologically inspired beginnings, the movements for national revival in Estonia and Latvia took different paths. The Latvian

focus was more political, concentrating on such past injustices as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact's secret protocols, signed on 23 August 1939, which granted Stalin the Baltic states, Moldavia, and part of Poland, and the mass deportations of 1941, 1949, and 1952. The Latvians also commemorated their Independence Day - 18 November 1918. In addition to similar political activities (Estonia's Independence Day was 24 February 1918), a group of twelve Estonian intellectuals (all leading members of the Estonian Communist party - ECP) began to prepare a long-term programme for Estonia's economy in the belief that economic survival was necessary to guarantee the country's future political independence. Their talks were carried on in secret during the summer of 1987, and the programme - which came to be known as the Proposal of the Four - was made public on 26 September 1987 in *Edasi*, the party newspaper of the university town of Tartu.

Estonia - The Proposal of : the Four

Over the next eighteen months, the Proposal of the Four - so named because four of its ten authors (two had dropped out), Edgar Savisaar, Mikk Titma, Siim Kailas, and Tiit Made, were judged to be relatively untouchable by the leadership of the ECP and thus had publicly signed the document - was to lead the way to economic 'sovereignty' for the Baltic republics and would prove to be the catalyst for the decentralization, and eventual dismemberment, of the Soviet Union.

The initial response of the ECP's central leadership to the programme was violently to attack and harass the Four, along with the editor of *Edasi*. The people, however, rallied in support of the proposal, with declarations by party groups and collectives across the country pouring in to newspapers. By the end of the year the ECP leadership capitulated to increasingly vocal public pressure and authorized a task force from the Economics Institute of the Estonian Academy of Sciences to study reconstruction. The institute, under the leadership of Rein Otsason (who would create an independent Estonian currency and central bank in 1989-90), declared an open competition for proposals to introduce economic self-government in Estonia. During this time, the winter and early spring of 1988, radio and television broadcasters disregarded the censors in the name of glasnost and became downright abusive of the Stalinist regime in Estonia. The ECP's first secretary, Karl Vaino, a Russian of Estonian parentage who hardly spoke his native language and a Brezhnev appointee, appealed to Moscow for help but was rebuffed after a thorough investigation. At the beginning of April the Estonian Union of Creative Associations (artists, writers, painters, etc) met in plenary and voiced strong support for the

Proposal of the Four as the only means to national salvation. Among those speaking in favour was Indrek Toome, the newly appointed ideology secretary of the party. The editor of the monthly cultural magazine, *Vikerkaar* (also published in Russian as *Raduga*, with a large circulation in the Soviet Union), even suggested that Estonia might have to secede if economic autonomy was impossible within the Soviet Union. (Technically, provision for such a change exists in both the Soviet and Soviet Estonian constitutions.) This meeting enjoyed wide publicity, with all speeches published subsequently in the weekly literary journal, *Sirp ja Vasar* (Hammer and Sickle, renamed *Reede* or Friday in August 1989 in honour of its publication day). Undoubtedly, the meeting crystallized public support for the intellectual leadership of Estonia, as it showed that – save for the few recalcitrant Stalinists at the very top – both those within the party and those outside it were nationalists fighting for a better, independent Estonia.

Events now moved with breath-taking speed. On 13 April, on 'Let's Reconsider,' a live roundtable television show, Edgar Savisaar, the genius behind the economic autonomy initiative, proposed a popular front (Rahva Rinne), ostensibly to support what at the time seemed a faltering of perestroika in Estonia. Within days it had thousands of support groups around the country. By June the Latvians and Lithuanians had copied the initiative and formed their own popular fronts, with Estonian help. In the meantime, all three Baltic Communist parties held open elections for delegates to the 19th Communist Party Conference in Moscow at the end of June 1988. In Estonia, however, Vaino disregarded the election and packed the delegation. Rahva Rinne called for a mass protest rally on 17 June; Vaino asked for military intervention from Moscow; Toome intervened; and on 17 June Gorbachev replaced Vaino with Vaino Valjas, the rival he had bested in 1978. The new first secretary had been a college classmate of Gorbachev and was known to be devoted to Estonia's national interests.

The summer of 1988 was a 'hot summer' of mass expressions of national consciousness in Estonia – rallies at the Song Festival Grounds in Tallinn drew crowds of 100,000 to 350,000 and long-suppressed nationalist songs and the illegal 'bourgeois' blue-black-white tricolour were unofficially omnipresent. Outside Estonia the historically momentous event in Moscow which provided the basis for the deconstruction of the Soviet Union was little noticed at the time and seems to have taken place almost as an afterthought. The Estonian delegation to the party conference, though packed, took the economic autonomy initiative as its programme and pursued it with success. Through astute management on the floor of the committee considering the Resolution on Ethnic Relations, the Estonians with Latvian support managed at the last moment to get the following statement included in the party's perestroika programme: 'The

idea of changing over republics and regions to the principle of economic accountability with a clear-cut definition of the contribution to the accomplishment of all-Union programmes deserves attention.¹⁵ This innocuous statement became the formal anchor for the Estonian drive for economic autonomy in the face of Moscow's reluctance.

In the meantime the economic autonomy proposal gathered momentum at home where it had acquired the mellifluous acronym IME (Isema-jandav Eesti). Not only do the letters denote an economically autonomous Estonia, but they also spell 'miracle.' The various groups working on the competition were organized into a co-operative collective, the Council on IME, which eventually coalesced around a core of 70 who wrote the comprehensive Conceptual Framework for Economic Autonomy. The 78-page report, published in November 1988, lists over 500 participants. A few days earlier the official task force had also completed its report. The reports are remarkably similar, with the latter providing a general framework in 39 pages, whereas the former adds several layers of detail. Both are solidly based on the Proposal of the Four. While the reports were still being developed, their proposals had been published in serial form in newspapers and their content adopted into the programmes of both the Rahva Rinne and the ECP. IME became the suddenly possible improbable 'national dream' of Estonians which would let them become masters in their own house after four decades of Soviet darkness. By November 1988 euphoria was widespread among Estonians who believed that economic deliverance, if not complete independence, was at hand.

Two developments, one low profile, the other visible to the world, quickly disabused the Estonians of the hope that in Gorbachev they had a 'good czar' who, understanding their legitimate demands, would grant them self-government without much ado. On 23 September 1988, after a three-day negotiating session in Riga, the deputy prime ministers of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania signed a common declaration on the principles of republican economic autonomy. Rein Otsason, appointed a deputy prime minister in Estonia only two weeks earlier, convinced his Latvian and Lithuanian colleagues to support the main Estonian demands: a restructuring of the de facto unitary system of government in the Soviet Union into a constitutionally sanctioned loose confederation; the transfer of all-Union state property to the republics; and the right of each republic to establish its own monetary system and to control the circulation of its own currency. The Soviet government responded by condemning this 'anti-Soviet activity' and set up a task force, without Baltic representation, to pre-empt the Estonian initiative and design a centralized version of republican 'economic self-management.' In the face of vehement Baltic protest, this task force was quickly buried and another created, this time with representation from the republics including the Baits, under the direction of Deputy Prime Minister Yuriy Masljukov. The Masljukov

commission met during the winter of 1988 and in February 1989 produced a report diametrically opposed to the Riga principles. Instead, it proposed a mere revision of the centralized economic system with greater local autonomy in implementing central directives. Throughout the meetings of the task force the Estonian members had refused to assent to the various proposals and had consistently argued for the IME.

But the action which shocked Estonians into the realization that they could depend only on their own resources and stubbornness was the wildly abusive reaction of Gorbachev and the Supreme Soviet to Estonia's constitutional resolution of 16 November 1988 declaring that it was a sovereign state (in accordance with the existing Soviet Estonian constitution); that within the borders of Estonia its laws had precedence over those of the Union; and that it had an inalienable right to determine the ownership of all property within its territory, in the air column, below ground, and within the economic zone in the Baltic Sea. Moscow refused to accept these declarations as legal. Its demand to the Estonian parliament to change them was met by a parliamentary resolution simply 'taking note' of the Supreme Soviet's position. Moscow's blustering response to this first challenge to its authority by one of the Baltic republics made it clear to the Estonian political leadership that Gorbachev could not stop the Baltic march towards self-government, provided they moved with due political care, using Gorbachev's own language of perestroika and openly and democratically legalizing all their actions through the Estonian parliament.^o After all, throughout 1987 Gorbachev had made a fetish of 'democratization' and the need to establish a law-bounded state in which Stalinist rule by decree could never recur.

Thus the Estonian parliament pressed ahead. In January 1989 it passed the Language Act, which replaced Russian with Estonian as the country's only official language and established language competence requirements and six levels of proficiency tests for various job classifications. Parliament also resolved to pass enabling laws at its April session to institute economic autonomy on 1 January 1990. To this end it appointed commissions to prepare draft legislation for consideration by parliamentary committees by the middle of March. At this point, however, the parliamentary process came to a standstill, and the enabling legislation was not passed until May 1989.

Economic Autonomy is Forced on Moscow

In March the political focus of the Soviet Union, including the Baltic republics, shifted to the election of deputies to the Peoples' Congress in Moscow – the newly instituted and in part popularly elected assembly of

2250 which would elect the members of the two reconstituted chambers of the Supreme Soviet, which was now to become a true 'parliament,' sitting most of the year to consider and pass legislation proposed by its committees and by the government. The elections became a test demonstration to Moscow that Estonians were united in their struggle for national self-determination at a time when anti-Estonian calumny in the central press was reaching new peaks, abetted by the vocal reaction of the local Russians to the language law who saw it as a first step towards turfing the Russians out of the country. On Independence Day, 24 February, with the now officially recognized tricolour atop the national flag-staff on the mediaeval Pikk Herman castle dominating Tallinn's skyline, the entire party leadership, government, and over 00,000 spectators participated in the celebrations including the singing of the long-forbidden 'bourgeois' national anthem. Such spectacles convinced the anti-Estonian pro-Soviet Russians in Estonia that the republic was about to slide into the capitalist fold if something was not done immediately. Although these elements tried mightily to organize mass demonstrations, the most they managed was a single march of 30,000. Thus, they turned for help to Moscow, whose response has been sufficiently inconsistent and equivocal to lead Estonians to worry about the possibility of a response akin to China's actions in Tiananmen Square. Indeed, the Estonians – and the Latvians with their even larger Russian minority – have consistently cautioned their youth not to be provoked into fights with Russians. For example, a prominent Latvian party member and Supreme Soviet deputy, Mavriks Vulfsons, reported that in June 1989 Gorbachev had told him that before long the Latvians and Estonians would beg Moscow to send in security forces to protect them from local Russians. This view shows that Gorbachev was misinformed both about the cohesion of Baltic Russians and their solidarity with the rest of the Union and about the forbearance of the Latvians and Estonians. (Though some people were hurt in a demonstration in Latvia, there has been not a single casualty of any kind in Estonia since the police stopped attacking demonstrators in 1987.) Gorbachev's comment also supports the widely held belief in the Baltic states that the Russian 'movement' in the republics is led and supported by powerful Moscow forces opposed to any kind of decentralization.

The March elections for the Peoples' Congress thus took place in a strained atmosphere and became a test of national solidarity. In all three republics, the elections were completely democratic and open to any candidate. In all three, candidates endorsed by the popular fronts won not only in all electoral districts with a native majority but also in several with Russian majorities. In Lithuania where Sajudis, the popular front, and the party were at loggerheads, all party-supported candidates opposed by a candidate backed by Sajudis lost. Thus, the Baltic contingent in the

Peoples' Congress is reform-oriented and committed to national self-determination.

Prior to the opening of the Congress on 15 May 1,89, a pinnacle of cooperation among the Baits was achieved: the first joint meeting of the three popular fronts, the Baltic Forum, took place in Tallinn on 10 and 11 May and led to the formation of a nascent Baltic bloc in the Peoples' Congress as the delegates passed a resolution calling for the three republics to be given control over their economies starting on 1 January 1990. Clearly the Communist parties in the three republics were in danger of losing their relevance if they allowed the popular fronts to take the lead in such a vital issue as economic autonomy. Thus driven, the Estonian and Lithuanian parliaments met on 18 May and passed resolutions and enabling laws to institute economic autonomy on 1 January. The result of these &marches and of very astute political manoeuvring on the floor of the Peoples' Congress by the Baits was the formation of a Social and Economic Problems Commission with representatives from all the republics in the USSR and chaired by the Lithuanian economist, Eduardas Vilkas. During the summer the commission deliberated on the Estonian, Lithuanian, and Masljukov⁷ proposals for republican autonomy/self-government and reported in favour of the Baltic proposals. On 27 July, after a heated two-day debate and an intervention by Gorbachev, the Supreme Soviet passed a resolution authorizing the establishment, in principle, of economic self-management for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The resolution was a compromise. Its main clause authorized the Soviet government to begin negotiations with the republican governments with a view to reaching agreement on the details of implementing 'self-management' by October 1989. Tough negotiations continued throughout the autumn, culminating in the Act on Economic Autonomy of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which was passed by the Supreme Soviet on 27 November 1989 amidst stiff opposition from anti-perestroika delegates. With Gorbachev in the speaker's chair and the deputy prime minister, Leonid Abalkin (Gorbachev's alter ego in the implementation of perestroika), on the floor fielding questions, the bill was forced through. Clearly, the success of the Baltic experiment in perestroika was sufficiently important for Gorbachev to resort to the various procedural tactics at the disposal of the speaker of the Supreme Soviet to overcome the opposition. For example, after losing the first vote on a detailed clause-by-clause basis, Gorbachev, as speaker, simply put the whole bill to a vote, which carried 296-67, with 37 abstaining.

The passage of the act, however, is a mere way-station on the road to economic autonomy. Negotiations on transferring all-Union industrial plants are moving slowly. By the end of 1989, only 70 of the 180 centrally owned plants in Estonia, where the negotiations are most advanced, had been turned over. And these are all insignificant. The major industries,

such as electric power, oil-shale mines, chemicals, metals, and machine tools are still in the hands of Moscow ministries. The central ministries argue that to hand over control of such 'nationally vital' industries would destroy the seamless whole of the Soviet economy and thus impede perestroika. The situation is even more confused in the areas of transportation - rail, sea, and air - and communications, because the Act on Economic Autonomy, being a compromise, is deliberately vague. Moreover, the Soviet Union is still far from a law-bounded state. This means, inter alia, that there is no well understood and accepted hierarchy of authority emanating from parliament. Each ministry continues to obey the laws and regulations of the past and disregards any law or regulation that is not directed specifically to it.

Economic Autonomy: : The Estonian Model

In the meantime the Estonian IME project proceeded. During the summer of 1989 a complex procedure was established to write approximately 00 new framework laws to implement economic autonomy. These are necessary because economic autonomy is, in fact, a pseudonym for the radical transformation of the Estonian economy into a market-based capitalist system with private ownership of the means of production and the determination of prices, supply, and demand by market forces. The precondition for this systemic change is the abolition of the controlling apparatus of the state as the chief economic actor. Hence, one of the first laws to be passed on the new 'conveyer-belt' system of law-making was one on the structure of government, reducing the number of ministries from 39 to 17 and providing for ministers without portfolio in the cabinet. It also abolished the planning commission (the Estonian GOSPLAN) and fired its staff. In the interim, until the new ministries are in place (by mid-March 1990 at the latest according to the Act of Government Organization), the commission was turned into the chief co-ordinating, revising, reviewing, and rewriting body responsible for creating the new structure of government and its legislative foundation. The new staff are all contract employees, very much like those of Canadian royal commissions. To encourage them to work long hours and be productive, they are paid salaries several times higher than those decreed by Moscow.

The creation of new laws entails the wholesale revision of the administrative and economic infrastructures of society and not just the formal governmental superstructure. For example, the system of local government, abolished in 1941, has to be recreated, as have such virtually invisible but crucially important institutions as the Central Statistical Bureau. But which model should be used? After all, it is not possible

merely to return to the structures of the 1930s, if one wants to join contemporary Western Europe. Yet, few Western models can be imposed on a society that has endured over four decades of Soviet rule and education. Hence, the task of the drafters of the legislation is philosophical and anthropological as well as legislative and political. If the laws are to create a law-bounded society, then they must be understood by those who are governed by them. In the end, it was decided that the laws would be Western at least to the extent that they would be under constant review and subject to amendment as conditions and public needs and pressures warrant. Although the search for models went as far afield as Portugal, much has been based on the laws of Estonia's neighbours, Sweden and Finland, which are regarded as the most successful capitalist democracies, providing in equal measure for the creation of economic wealth and its equitable distribution.

From a Western perspective, one of the greatest problems is the lack of Western input into the law-making process, except in a sporadic and unsystematic manner. The original intent was to have Western experts review all stages of the process, but a fear that this would lead to endless revisions, the extremely tight time-frame of less than nine months to restructure the whole society, and the dearth of hard currency to pay Western experts led to the abandonment of that idea. As a result, the legislation is more transitional than it need have been. But it is definitely un-Soviet in both form and content. For example, the new Estonian Act on Enterprises in only six pages establishes the rights, operating conditions, relations with labour, and so on of all kinds of enterprises in Estonia, including those owned by individual Estonians and foreigners. Contrast this with the detailed, confusing, and contradictory 22-page Soviet Act on State Enterprises, which strictly limits ownership to state organs and other collectives.⁹

Lithuania - The Politics : Of Independence

During the spring of 1988 a viable link was forged in Estonia between the reform leadership of the Estonian Communist party under Vaino Valjas and the intelligentsia outside, mainly through the Rahva Rinne. In Lithuania, in contrast, the party remained in the hands of an old-line Stalinist leadership until the autumn of 1988; even after Algirdas Brazauskas took over as first secretary on 20 October, the Lithuanian party continued to oppose the nationalist thrust of the popular front. The conflict became so serious that Sajudis ran its own candidates in opposition to the party in the March 1989 elections for the Peoples' Congress and won 36 of the 40 seats

it contested. It did not oppose Brazauskas or the second secretary, Vladimir Berezov.

Increasingly isolated from the vocal and nationalist popular front, the party attempted to pre-empt it by giving in to nationalist demands piecemeal. Thus, on 18 August 1988, Lithuania was the first of the Baltic states to have its old flag and national anthem reinstated as 'national' symbols alongside Soviet Lithuanian ones; on 20 August educational reform reversed decades of russification and made Lithuanian the language of instruction; on 23 August the expansion of the Ingalina nuclear power plant was stopped; on 21 October the deportees of 1941-52 were rehabilitated and granted 'economic' damages; on 18 November the old flag and anthem replaced the Soviet ones as the official state symbols of Lithuania; on 19 November a language decree required all state employees to learn Lithuanian within two years; and on 25 January 1989, Independence Day – 16 February – was decreed a legal holiday. But it should be noted that most of these actions were taken by government decree and not by parliamentary resolution. The hoped-for declaration of sovereignty on 18 November by the Lithuanian parliament did not materialize and was widely decried as a 'stab in the back of Estonia.' Thus, instead of assuaging the people, the party drove them ever deeper into the nationalist arms of Sajudis.

Then the dismal electoral results of March 1989 so shocked the party that it did an about-face, embraced the nationalist credo of Sajudis with a vengeance, and became the most independent Communist party in the Soviet Union. In June 1989 its youth wing declared itself independent of its Soviet parent, and the party itself rewrote its constitution and accepted a multi-party system. On 24 November 1989 the Lithuanian parliament (still composed of the party members elected five years ago) appointed a Commission to Regain Independence with Brazauskas as chairman; and on 12 December it passed a constitutional resolution creating a multi-party system. And at its congress on 20 December, the party resolved to reconstitute itself as a separate party, independent of the Soviet party. This final break created such consternation in Moscow that the Soviet party convened a two-day session of the Central Committee on 25-26 December to decry the Lithuanian action as the beginning of the break-up of the Soviet Union. It refused to accept the Lithuanian decision as legal under the Soviet party's constitution and asked Gorbachev to reason with the Lithuanians. Gorbachev invited all nineteen members of the Lithuanian party's politburo to Moscow and went himself to Lithuania in early January 1990. All to no avail. The Lithuanians remained steadfastly independent national communists. An opinion poll in Lithuania showed that 69 per cent of respondents supported a separate national Communist

party and 12 per cent a Lithuanian party as an autonomous wing of the Soviet party, with only 4 per cent in favour of the status quo."

But even this late conversion to nationalism will not save the Lithuanian Communist party. It is so discredited in the eyes of Lithuanians that the best it can hope for in the general elections for the Lithuanian parliament on 24 February 1990 is a minority sufficiently large to warrant inclusion in a coalition government. During December a number of democratic parties were officially registered and began their election campaigns.

The Radicalization : of Latvia

While Latvian activists were the first to act (protesting the Daugava River dam) and to organize regular public demonstrations on the anniversaries of various Soviet crimes, the Latvian Communist party and government trailed behind Estonia and Lithuania in more concrete moves towards democratization and the support of nationalism. This clearly arose from the russification of the party elite and the large number of Russians in Latvia. The cautious and conservative party leadership simply did not want to alienate either the local Russian populace or Moscow. The open conflict between Latvians and Russians during the plenary meeting of the Latvian party on 18 June 1988 made the leadership even more cautious.

In consequence, Latvians turned to alternatives in search of national salvation. On the one hand, there was the Latvian popular front, the Tautas Fronte, but in attempting to be all things to all people it was only marginally radical. That vacuum was quickly filled by the radical Latvian National Movement, founded on 17 June 1988, with Eduards Berka's as president. The irony is that the leadership of the Tautas Fronte was composed of younger cautious men while Berkays was older and a former leading figure in the party who had been dismissed after the Khrushchev period as too nationalist. It was Berkays and his movement that radicalized the Tautas Fronte, bringing it to accept Latvia's independence as its goal in its revised programme published on 11 September 1989. By the beginning of 1990 the Latvian Communist party, facing oblivion among the Latvian-speaking population at the general elections scheduled for 18 March, had been 'radicalized' enough to pass a resolution to follow the Lithuanians in establishing a multi-party system. This was brought about by the solidarity that the Latvians showed in supporting the Tautas Fronte and the near universal demand for regaining Latvia's independence.

The cross-fertilization of ideas among the popular fronts of the three Baltic republics, mainly through the co-operative Baltic Council, which had been established at the Baltic Forum conference in May 1989, was an

important factor in the developments in Latvia. The Baltic Council succeeded in activating real co-operation among the three governments as well, as shown by the joint Council-governments meeting on 8-9 September 1989 at which the three countries agreed to establish a common market by 1993. Calculations provided by the economics institutes of the three countries showed that sufficient domestic resources exist to allow their economies eventually to supply about 60 per cent of the internal demand for goods and services. There is a long way to go to reach this goal, however: at present all three economies are still directed by Moscow and trade among them amounts to perhaps 3 per cent of each other's exports.

The Future

The light at the end of the tunnel is generated by the new-found confidence that the Balts developed as Soviet politics 'democratized' during 1989. No longer can the Soviet leadership demand blind obedience; nor can it send in the tanks to enforce acquiescence to central dictates. Central decisions – whether issuing from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (including the formerly all-powerful politburo and the 'authoritative' Central Committee) or the Council of Ministers (the Soviet cabinet) or even the Supreme Soviet – are more ephemeral than real because no one in the Baltic accepts them as authoritative. First evident in November-December 1988 when the Estonian parliament refused to accept the authority of the Supreme Soviet, the powerlessness of the Kremlin in the Baltic was demonstrated with increasing frequency throughout 1989 as the Estonians defied Moscow's formal demand in August-September to revise the residency requirements that they had established for voters in the local elections to be held on to December 1989. After discussions with a conciliation commission from Moscow, the Estonians thanked them for a good discussion and reaffirmed their new law. These discussions took place against the backdrop of a protest strike at up to 50 centrally directed plants in Estonia which employ 50,000 workers, mostly recent Russian migrants. The strike committee was organized by management, including the director of the largest defence plant in Estonia which is also the largest employer of unskilled migrant labour. (The director, parachuted into his present job by Moscow less than four years ago, is an elected member of the Supreme Soviet.) The strike committee appealed to Moscow for direct action including the removal of the entire leadership of the Estonian Communist party and the government.

Similar, though less extensive, strikes and demonstrations were organized in Latvia, and to an even lesser extent in Lithuania, by migrant Russians *in an* attempt to prevent local nationalism from either cutting

them off from Mother Russia or expelling them, as the West Germans and the Swiss have done with their surplus 'guest workers.' That these actions are directed from Moscow by bureaucratic and political elements wanting to preserve the Soviet Union and the status quo of its social, political, and economic organization is demonstrated by the campaign of vilification against 'fascist-nationalist' anti-Soviet elements in the Baltic carried on by *Pravda*, Tass, and the central television news throughout 1989. The difficulty that Gorbachev and Abalkin have had in getting approval from the Supreme Soviet for even such elementary economic instruments as price increases and private ownership of means of production shows the power of the reactionary forces in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's willingness to use his personal prestige to force through the Act on Economic Autonomy on 27 November 1989 supports the view of those leading Baltic politicians who claim that Gorbachev so desperately needs to demonstrate the workability of perestroika that he will allow the Balts to do whatever is necessary, including turning their economies into capitalist ones, as long as they do not leave the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Gorbachev is under enormous daily pressure from both reactionaries and populists to deliver on his promises of a renewed 'communism' and a better and more plentiful supply of goods and services, none of which has materialized. Hence, he has to cater daily to conservative demands, popular discontent, and the radical reformers' multi-faceted proposals. It is thus no wonder that to Western observers of the rough-and-tumble of democratic politics he seems to speak out of both sides of his mouth as he tries to maintain some kind of forward momentum while stabilizing the conflicting demands of diverse groups in a badly segmented and economically declining superpower undergoing economic and political democratization. However, to the Balts, the roller-coaster of emotions accompanying central 'democratizing' politics, combined with the large foreign Sovietized and demoralized populations within their borders is creating tremendous emotional stresses. Moreover, the whole of the Soviet Union is only five years removed from the Stalinistic repression of the Brezhnev years. No one in the Baltic states is emotionally prepared either to return to the Soviet fold or to believe that the Soviet colossus really has proceeded sufficiently far along the road towards democracy that a military solution is unthinkable. Hence, the impotence that the Central Committee of the Soviet party demonstrated at year-end over the Lithuanian party's decision to become independent (the worst punishment proposed was expulsion of the Lithuanian party leadership!), instead of providing comic relief, raised tensions to new heights in all three Baltic states.

At the same time, the frustrations over perestroika experienced by both Gorbachev and the Baltic delegates in the Supreme Soviet are so great that the Balts have become convinced that they must cut themselves

off from the Soviet Union as soon as possible so as not to be dragged down by a crashing Soviet economy. (The decision to pass a new five-year centrally managed economic plan in November 1989 appears to have been the last straw.) Thus, the Estonian delegates will all be back home during the week leading up to the election of delegates to a constituent assembly on 25 February 1990. This process of voluntary registration of Estonians to vote for delegates was pursued by the anti-communist nationalists in Estonia for almost a year against the wishes of the Rahva Rinne. However, as the frustrations with Moscow grew during the autumn of 1989, all Estonians, including leading party members, gradually came to accept it as the only alternative for true Estonian political action untainted by Russia. Thus, Moscow will be facing its most serious dilemma in the Baltic to date sometime during the spring and summer of 1990. The outcome of the constituent assembly, scheduled to meet on 11 March, is a foregone conclusion - a declaration of independence. As matters now stand, the Estonian and Latvian parliaments have declared the 1941 annexation to the Soviet union illegal. Thus, constitutionally and in international customary law, the two states have already established de jure independence. Their parliaments and governments exist in a state of mutual legal limbo vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, whose Supreme Soviet has refused to recognize the illegality of the annexation, although it did finally recognize the existence of the protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as a historical fact in late November 1989 and declared them null and void from the beginning. The Lithuanian situation is different. Because the current borders of Lithuania encompass Vilnius and territory belonging to Poland before the war, Lithuanians cannot pursue the international legal route to restoration of the status quo ante. Thus, they are emphasizing the right of secession of union republics from the Soviet Union. The first step in this process was the formal separation of the Lithuanian Communist party from the Soviet Party.

Political developments in Eastern Europe during the three last months of 1989 make it clear that forecasting about societies bent on change is foolhardy; trends do not move predictably in revolutionary situations. Of the three possible alternative developments in the Baltic states in 1990 - military repression, sovereignty association, and independence - it would be foolhardy to opt for military repression, since the Western economic contacts that Gorbachev desperately needs and has assiduously cultivated would be quickly curtailed, and Western Europe would turn wholly to rebuilding Eastern Europe at Soviet expense. Of the remaining alternatives, the logical one for Moscow is sovereignty association. With the Baltic states as the initial experiment, this choice would over the long term restructure the Soviet Union into a confederation of independent states akin to the European Community. The problem with this proposal is that it has yet to get off the ground. Only generalities were discussed at the first

meeting of the Constitutional Commission of the Supreme Soviet in November 1989. As Canadians well know, constitutional reform, even in a stable and wealthy law-bounded society, takes years of discussion, negotiation, and conflict resolution. In the meantime, Baltic frustration with Muscovite inefficiency and Russian recalcitrance to reform is increasingly felt throughout their societies. The elections to the constituent assembly in Estonia and the general elections in all three countries will increase the differences in evolution between the Russians and the Baits. The highly visible defeat of the Communist parties in multi-party democracies in the Baltic states will make remaining ties to a reactionary communist state unbearable for the majority of Baits. As a result, the most likely scenario, unbelievable as it may now seem, is that by the end of 1990 the Baltic states will be well on their way to sovereign independence, with face-saving treaties (called agreements by Moscow) signed to maintain a fictional Soviet unity. For the Balts it has become absolutely necessary to cut themselves off from the sinking economy of the Soviet Union, politically and administratively, so that they can begin restructuring their own economies in concert with the East European states and prepare to rejoin Western Europe.

Notes

- 1 Soviet statistics are suspect, partly because the methods of collection and aggregation are very different from Western ones. Moreover, ethnic statistics have always been sensitive and have often been deliberately distorted to serve political ends. Even in the present era of glasnost, ethnic data are sensitive and the 1989 census results have not yet been released. However, the Estonians have published some data relating to the ethnic composition. The current figures used here come from an Estonian source (*Rahva Haul*, 19 September 1989, reported in full in English in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Soviet Union*, 17 November 1989, 102-4) and unofficial pre-publication data on the 1989 census from the Latvian Statistical Office or have been adumbrated from this and other Baltic sources.
- 2 *Rahva Haul*, 8 December 1989, 4.
- 3 When Baits refer to 'Russians' they tend to lump all Sla's together, including Belorussians and Ukrainians. In addition, all 'others' except Baits are ordinarily referred to as 'Russians,' mainly because these migrants are usually Russian speakers.
- 4 Personal communication, 11 June 1989, in Leningrad: Vladimir L. Alexeev, Institute of Limnology, USSR Academy of Sciences.
- 5 *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 11:37 (1988), 12: Resolution on Ethnic Relations, article 3, paragraph 2.

- 6 The Lithuanian parliament passed an identical sovereignty declaration on 18 May 1989 and the Latvians followed suit on 29 July 1989.
- 7 The Latvians did not produce an economic autonomy proposal until after the first session of the Peoples' Congress.
- 8 See *Rahva Haul*, 6 December 1989.
- 9 Reported in *ibid*, 16 November 1989, 2.

TOIVO MILJAN is

Professor of Political Science at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. He was the resource person on the Institute's study trip to the Baltic states in June 1989.

CANADIAN
INSTITUTE OF
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

INSTITUT
CANADIEN DES
AFFAIRES
INTERNATIONALES

CIIA/ICAI