
Interview: Aleksandras Abisalas

Lithuanians have faith in people who are educated

Aleksandras Abisalas, a deputy of the Lithuanian Supreme Council for the Sajudis Lithuanian Independence Party, talked with William Jones of the EIR Washington bureau on March 20. Abisalas is expected to become the next Speaker of the Lithuanian Supreme Council.

EIR: The reaction from Moscow has been somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, there are certain statements from the Soviet leadership that they would be willing to negotiate on the question of Lithuanian independence, while on the other hand, and with increased intensity in the last few days, there have been quite violent reactions, very emotional reactions, to the Lithuanian declaration of independence. What do you think Moscow's orientation is after the Soviet government statement yesterday signed by Premier Ryzhkov?

Abisalas: I can see no sign from Moscow that negotiations will begin in the very near future, although the statement made by the government of the U.S.S.R. is not threatening. It looks, however, that there will be a road opened up for negotiations.

EIR: The Supreme Council is now moving to place control of the borders under the control of the Lithuanian government. There have also been moves by the Soviets to strengthen security at some of the industrial enterprises in Lithuania. Is there any possibility that these enterprises would be placed under Lithuanian control in the near future?

Abisalas: Today the Supreme Council of Lithuania ratified a resolution which directed the Council of Ministers to now begin physically taking over the border checkpoints. The Council of Ministers has got to take this question under their wing as of now. The same borders that exist now will exist in the future. The real issue is the economic control of those borders to prevent materials and valuables from being taken out of Lithuania. This is the issue of border control which is being focused on.

EIR: Has the delegation which was sent to Moscow on Monday March 19 completed their mission, or are discussions still ongoing?

Abisalas: I can't really tell you, since I don't know what

their status is at this moment.

EIR: What about the possibility of a Soviet economic blockade? Are there any indications that the Soviets would respond to the Lithuanian declaration of independence with an economic blockade? If that happens, what are the options for the Lithuanian government?

Abisalas: At the moment there are no physical signs of the beginning of any blockade, although there has been a real crisis in the entire Soviet economy for some time now. And this is being felt everywhere, including here. But that started before political developments in Lithuania took the present direction. Of course, there is the fear that the Soviets might implement a blockade, but at the moment there are no concrete signs of it. In the communiqué which Ryzhkov had issued from the Supreme Soviet, there was a statement saying that the fulfillment of contracts must be guaranteed by both parties. So there is a possibility that economic ties with the Soviets would even improve in the near future.

EIR: What kind of response have you received from other nations, from Western Europe, Japan, or from the newly independent countries of Eastern Europe, with regard to the declaration of independence? Has there been any concrete support forthcoming, either formally or economically?

Abisalas: I might know of one or two instances of support, but there is nothing officially stated as of now. Except for the fact that France has said that they have gold belonging to Lithuania which was placed there before World War II, and that they are prepared to release it once the French government recognizes an independent Lithuania.

EIR: The revolutions in Eastern Europe have called forth a somewhat unique leadership. In Czechoslovakia, the new President is a former dramatist. President Landsbergis of Lithuania is a musician by profession. It seems that persons deeply rooted in cultural activity have now been pushed to the fore in these dramatic political developments in Eastern Europe. This indicates to me that this is a definite sign that we are not dealing with politics as we normally understand the term, but with a process which has much deeper sources, from which this development emanates. How do you think this will affect the shaping of the Lithuanian nation?

Abisalas: While Lithuania was in the political system of the Soviet Union, there were no politicians. There were only people who carried out orders. There could not be any politicians. I don't believe that a politician is necessarily a person who is educated in politics, but rather it is a person who thinks soberly and who is very energetic. We had the same type of situation in 1918, and it was then proven that it is possible to survive quite well with such politicians. All the developments in Eastern Europe indicate that political leaders are being brought forth, who are in fact not educated in the political field. I see no problem in that, especially since the Lithuanian Independence

Movement, Sajudis, has educated people to be politicians—a certain type of politician—simply because of the situation in which they have been placed.

EIR: There must have been very deep-going changes in the psychology of the Lithuanian people during this period of dramatic upheaval. Undoubtedly this affected the process through which political leaders emerged, that something more than simple political expertise was required from a political leadership in such a situation. Could it not be the case that the leaders who are now being brought forth represent the deeper aspirations of the people at this important historical moment?

Abisalas: I see no big difference which would make them different from anyone else. If I went into this question in depth, this could possibly turn into a novel, or at least into a very long article. But briefly, the difference between the Lithuanians and the Russians is that the Lithuanians have faith in people who are educated, who are part of the intelligentsia. That is the difference with the Russian people. Another difference is the memory among the Lithuanians of having been a free and independent state. This also distinguishes us from the peoples of Russia.

EIR: Is there not also a real cultural difference here with the Russians, because of the role of the Catholic Church in Lithuania? That in spite of its geographical proximity to Moscow, Lithuania has been, historically and culturally, a part of the mainstream of Western civilization.

Abisalas: I think there is a twofold aspect to this question. I believe the reason that people here haven't been totally destroyed morally is due to the Catholic Church. Secondly, the Catholic Church has been given a great deal of credit because it upheld the historical memory of Lithuania as an independent nation. Now that isn't characteristic of the Catholic Church itself, but it is characteristic of the Catholic Church in Lithuania.

EIR: Lastly, let me ask you, what message would you like to get across to the U.S. administration and to the members of the U.S. Congress with regard to what they should do for Lithuania?

Abisalas: Let me warn you that I'm not prepared to answer a question like that. However, I believe that the U.S. administration could use their personal contacts in Moscow to influence the government there, perhaps behind closed doors. As regards the Congress, they could be more specific in their support of the movement here. Secondly, there should be a specific statement of when the administration, under what conditions, it will recognize Lithuania as an independent state. Of course, those conditions shouldn't be impossible to fulfill. Afterwards, Lithuania will need economic support, although we're not expecting a great deal of economic help from the West. We tend to trust in our own ability to maintain ourselves economically.

Independence votes sweep the U.S.S.R.

by Konstantin George

The results of the March 18 parliamentary elections in the Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia, and the runoff elections in the three Slavic core republics of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia demonstrate—in the immediate wake of Lithuania's declaration of independence—show the depth of support for independence in the non-Russian republics, and the positive effect of the East European democratic revolutions on the Russian urban electorate itself.

Estonia and Latvia

The pro-independence candidates of the Popular Front and allied groups were victorious in the elections in Estonia and Latvia, the two nations illegally annexed, along with Lithuania, by the U.S.S.R. in 1940.

Of the 201 seats in the new Latvian parliament, the Latvian Popular Front won at least 119 of the 170 seats decided in the first round, thus already gaining a pro-independence majority. The Latvian Popular Front is within reach of attaining, in the runoffs for the remaining 31 seats, the two-thirds majority needed to abolish Latvia's Soviet constitution and reinstate the pre-1940 constitution of independent Latvia. The scope of the Popular Front's victory is doubly impressive, given that Slavs (for the most part Russians) form half of Latvia's population, in stark contrast to Lithuania, where native Lithuanians comprise 80% of the population.

In short, by conservative estimates, between one quarter and one-third of Latvia's Russian population joined in voting for Latvia's independence. A high percentage of the remaining Russians, while opposed to total independence, do favor Latvia attaining "maximum sovereignty" within the U.S.S.R. federation. These results, which tear to shreds the stereotype of the pro-independence Latvian confronting a monolithic bloc of Russian chauvinists, are not as surprising as they may seem at first glance.

One cannot underestimate the effect on the Russians living in the Baltic republics of the collapse of living standards in the Russian Federation. Whatever problems Russians may have in Latvia and Estonia, they are far better off in these republics, than back in Russia. Many of them see independence, or full domestic sovereignty, as attaching these republics, complete with their Russian inhabitants, to a Western standard of living and lifestyle.

The same voting pattern was seen in Estonia, where Russians constitute 39% of the population. The Popular Front