

Betrayal! Lithuania and the Neville Chamberlain syndrome

by Konstantin George

The Lithuania crisis exists today, solely because the Kremlin has refused to recognize that country's Declaration of Independence, and thereby to annul the odious 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact. The crisis has been allowed to develop through an appeasement policy by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President George Bush, a repeat of Neville Chamberlain's fatal Munich 1938 appeasement of Adolf Hitler.

There can be no road to European peace and prosperity without support for independent Lithuania, without firm actions to contain Moscow, coupled with offers to Russia to help to meet its legitimate economic security needs, while assisting the Captive Nations in securing independence.

Recognizing Lithuanian independence is the fundamental morality test for the West. Lithuania is not "leaving" the Soviet Union, because it never "joined." The independent Republic of Lithuania, along with the Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia, were given by Adolf Hitler to Josef Stalin in 1939. In the summer of 1940, Lithuania was invaded by the Red Army, occupied, and annexed into the Soviet Union. With Lithuania's Declaration of Independence, the West can no longer play rhetorical games; not recognizing Lithuanian statehood means recognizing the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

The ghost of Neville Chamberlain

Western appeasement and the sellout of Lithuania were denounced in the strongest terms by the President of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, in March 27 interviews with French TV and the BBC: "Because of our history and because of the knowledge we have of those with whom we are dealing, we can suspect that the West is lying to us. . . . I have sensed this feeling of being abandoned by the West. . . . We raise this question to democratic nations: Is the West once again willing to sell Lithuania to the Soviet Union?" In a speech that same day to the Lithuanian Parliament, Landsbergis

had cited a report that U.S. Secretary of State James Baker had sent a "secret telegram" to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, concerning Lithuania. "We do not know if this is a *repeat of new secret protocols* in a scenario reminiscent of 1940," the Lithuanian President said.

Landsbergis's warning of "new secret protocols" was borne out just hours later, when Margaret Thatcher told the House of Commons that her overriding concern was "not to damage Gorbachov." She went on to insult Lithuania, which is committed to securing its independence through exclusively non-violent means, by attacking "the use of force" in general, and, in the next breath, calling on "both sides" to assume a "dialogue." The same policy was reaffirmed on March 27 by the U.S. administration, which called on "both sides" to settle the crisis "peacefully," and stressed that President Bush doesn't "wish to inflame" the situation.

The West's new "new Munich" did not begin March 11, when Lithuania declared independence. The sellout was already agreed to at the December 1989 Malta Summit between Gorbachov and Bush. Its first realization was evident already in January, when Gorbachov ordered the Red Army into Azerbaijan, an invasion which butchered thousands of Azerbaijanis, and which James Baker publicly pronounced "necessary."

Bush and Thatcher are treating Landsbergis and Lithuania as Chamberlain and Daladier once treated pre-war Czechoslovakia and its President, Eduard Benes. The parallels between the 1938 Czechoslovak crisis and the 1990 Lithuania crisis are most striking.

Hitler had claimed that he would respect Czechoslovak independence, that his goals were "only" to satisfy the demand of the Sudeten German minority to secede from the Czechoslovak state, and that Benes be removed as President. Gorbachov today has lied that he is willing to "concede" Lithuania independence over five years, under a different

regime, excluding Landsbergis, and once ethnically non-Lithuanian regions, including the Vilnius region and the militarily sensitive Klaipeda (Memel) port and coastal strip, are detached.

For Gorbachov in 1990, as with Hitler in 1938, the issue is not Lithuania (or Czechoslovakia) as such. Lithuania is only the first of a chain of Soviet republics which will be declaring independence. Gorbachov and the Soviet Military High Command are using every means possible to set a precedent for future cases.

Eastern Europe rallies behind Lithuania

In courageous contrast to the Anglo-American sellout, support for Lithuania has materialized from those nations of Eastern Europe who suffered immeasurable horrors under Hitler and Stalin, notably Czechoslovakia and Poland; from the other two Soviet-occupied Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia; from Moscow's largest Captive Nation, the Ukraine; and from another Baltic country, Denmark. On March 29, several crucial moves took place:

- Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel declared his nation's support for Lithuania's independence, and its right "to join Europe." Havel offered Czechoslovak soil as a neutral ground for talks between Moscow and Lithuania.

- Bronislaw Geremek, heading a Polish Solidarnosc parliamentary delegation to the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, addressed the Lithuanian Parliament: "We welcome the return of Lithuania to the community of free nations. We convey our greetings of friendship and solidarity at a moment of dramatic meaning for Lithuania."

- The new Estonian Parliament convened, and declared its intention to declare Estonia an independent state.

- On March 29, the leadership of the Ukrainian national movement, Rukh, announced that it will defy a ban by the Communist authorities, and stage mass demonstrations in Kiev and other cities on April 1, to support independent Lithuania.

- The Danish Parliament passed a resolution declaring its support for "Lithuania's courageous fight for freedom," and announced that a parliamentary delegation would be visiting Lithuania soon.

- Even Russian support for Lithuanian Independence is materializing, as shown March 29, when a bloc of 70 Russian deputies on the Moscow City Council signed a resolution supporting Lithuania.

An offer Moscow can't refuse

A sane Western policy, recognizing Lithuania and demanding that Moscow respect Lithuanian independence, will not only reverse the road to war, but will allow the creation of a true peace, based on the freedom, dignity, and sovereignty of nations.

At the same time, an independent Lithuania, and sound Western economic assistance for Lithuania and the U.S.S.R.

itself, will greatly contribute to meeting what Soviet leaders call their primary security need—economic security.

Immediately upon Moscow's recognition of Lithuania's independence, and the cessation of all intimidation, threats, and violations of Lithuanian sovereignty, the governments of the West should ensure that all legitimate Soviet economic interests which have been met by Lithuania, continue to be guaranteed. The guarantee would correspond to the pledge made by West German Chancellor Kohl in February to Gorbachov, that, in a united Germany, West Germany would guarantee all current trade accords between East Germany and the Soviet Union, and that future trade would be conducted in hard currency.

In the highly improbable case of a fall in Lithuanian exports to the U.S.S.R., the West should pledge to meet any Lithuanian export shortfalls in agricultural products, above all, meat, milk and dairy products, durable consumer goods, and electronics—i.e., those items for which Moscow absolutely depends on Lithuania.

But this "worst case scenario" is unlikely. The vital national interests of Lithuania dictate continued extensive trade ties with the Soviet Union, provided there are no political strings attached. It is in Lithuania's national interest to continue to purchase crude oil, natural gas, metals, cotton, and other raw materials from the U.S.S.R., as it does now at prices well below world market prices, and, until economic development and modernization programs are implemented, the Soviet Union will remain Lithuania's main export market for its consumer durables and electronics, which are below world standards, but well above Soviet standards.

The benefits of Lithuanian independence to Russia are not confined to goods as such. A nation's most important economic resource is its labor force. Lithuanian independence means, for agriculture, the end of collectivization, the transformation of Lithuania's culturally Western European rural population into highly productive independent farmers. A Western assistance program to modernize Lithuanian farming, and above all to modernize the transport and refrigeration capacity required for increased, hard currency, exports of meat and dairy products to the U.S.S.R., must occur parallel to this. This would be the first vital demonstration to Moscow, that an independent Lithuania, with a work force of free men, as opposed to collective farm serfs, contributes to Soviet economic security.

Western aid will also be required to modernize Lithuania's industry. The increase in production, and in quality of goods, will not be merely a function of new machinery. As industrial workers in their own country, Lithuanian workers will rapidly rise to productivity levels characteristic of Western work forces.

Should Moscow reject such an offer, and proceed to liquidate Lithuania's independence, then the West must end its "business as usual" with Gorbachov, and bury the ghost of Neville Chamberlain, once and for all.

World reactions to the Lithuania crisis

While most world governments followed the Bush-Thatcher line of "not rocking Gorbachov's boat," and refused to recognize the government of independent Lithuania, powerful statements to the contrary appeared from other groups and individuals around the world. We also publish below a provocative statement distributed by the Soviets in Lithuania.

Not even Russian tanks will stop the Baltic quest for freedom, declared **Mavriks Vulfsons**, member of the Lithuanian Parliament and of the Sajudis movement, in a commentary in the West German daily *Die Welt* on March 28.

"With its massing of tanks in Lithuania," he said, "its attacks carried out by paratroopers, and its sabre-rattling threats, the leaders in Moscow—putting aside the moral aspect of this brutal act of violence for a moment—fell victim to a dangerous mistake. They haven't looked at the calendar. We are living in 1990, not 1940. Or, 1956, or 1968.

"You can still suppress with tanks. But you can no longer intimidate. . . . The rattling of the tanks, the noise of the helicopters and transport aircraft, only have an acoustical effect. It cannot alter the course of events.

"Nobody can tell, for the time being, what will happen next, and what will be caused by it. The worst provocations, eventually even the storming of the parliamentary building in Vilnius—all of this is still possible. But what will be the price of such an experiment for the Kremlin? What profit, after all, do they think they can draw from that?

"The Kremlin leadership, as much as it strives to link up to the new times, is still living in the past, in this respect. In former times, an intervention and sabre-rattling sufficed to create fear and submission. That is because the commitment was behind it to launch mass deportation, mass murder. But today? Does Gorbachov seriously intend to threaten with the methods of Stalin? . . .

"The weapons of the Lithuanians are calm, restraint, self-control; they are avoiding responding with provocations to provocations. . . . The Lithuanians don't even have to call

for a general labor strike. They can do their work, proclaim and reaffirm their freedom. Does Gorbachov intend to roll over them with tanks? Does he intend to stand before the eyes of the world like the Chinese regime after the Beijing massacre of June 4, 1989? What effects would that have on the morals of his army, his party, his own population in Moscow?

"And, every moment, new crisis hot spots may be sparked off in the Caucasus, in Central Georgia, in very Russia itself. . . .

"The world is waiting for a clear word. It is waiting for clear action, for policy instead of cabinet diplomacy."

Elena Bonner, the widow of Soviet human rights activist, physicist Andrei Sakharov, called on President Bush on March 20 to immediately recognize Lithuania as an independent nation and establish diplomatic relations with it.

In a statement reported by Reuters, she said that Soviet mistakes "must not be paid for with the blood of the Lithuanian people, who at the hands of Stalin, have lost about a third of their population in the concentration camps and Siberian deportations."

She said the United States had for 50 years considered the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic states as unlawful. "That was in line with U.S. democratic traditions. It was a moral statement on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, or to be exact, the bargain struck between Stalin and Hitler. Was such a statement just empty words that deceived the American people and the whole world?

"Only actions can answer this question—by immediate recognition of the Republic of Lithuania and the establishment of diplomatic ties with it. The U.S., because of its unique role in the world, and you, Mr. President, have a grave historic responsibility.

"I am addressing you, because I know that Andrei Sakharov would have done it."

Pope John Paul II appealed for a dialogue to ease the crisis, in his blessing to pilgrims in St. Peter's Square on March 25. "May the Lithuanian question find a just and peaceful solution through sincere dialogue in the framework of the international order," the Pope said. "Today Lithuania finds itself at the center of the attention of Europe and the world. . . . May God grant light and strength to all those upon whom this solution depends."

Gorbachov's ultimatum to Lithuania sounds as if the Molotov of 1939-40 were still alive, the West German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* charged in its lead editorial on March 26.

The Lithuanians, rejecting membership in the Soviet Union on grounds that they have been occupied by the Red Army for the past 50 years, are right, the paper said. Gorbachov's claim over Lithuania and the other two Baltic states

is based on the policy of Stalin and Molotov.

Gorbachov recognized this when he visited Vilnius several weeks back, where he was confronted by a worker with the question whether he knew how many Lithuanians had fallen victim to the Soviet occupation. "I don't want to talk to this man any longer," said Gorbachov. "If the people in Lithuania take such positions and present such slogans, they'll be faced with hard times."

"The Lithuanians have taken such positions, indeed—are they faced with hard times, now?" asked the editorial.

"Realism is what many a politician in the West is demanding of the Lithuanians, now. [But] he who demands realism of others, should show it himself. This means also that those realities of a time, many eyewitnesses of which are still alive, be acknowledged and not wiped out or silenced.

"For the Lithuanians, dominating reality of the past five decades was that their nation was deprived of its freedom by the Soviets, tortured, that one-third of the nation died in Soviet mass-extinction operations.

"But words of good will from the West won't have much of an effect, sanctions must be threatened. Commitment to do so is still low. The statesmen of the democratically governed world want, and they are right, to help Gorbachov. But violence against Lithuania will lead back into tyranny."

A Kremlin hard line toward Lithuania is made all the more possible by an attitude in the West which is identical to that which "led democracies to appease undemocratic opponents a half-century ago," the *Times* of London editorialized on March 27. It warned that the West is completely unprepared for the possibility of a "Soviet putsch in Vilnius" over the coming days.

The paper noted that "British mandarins tried long and hard to make excuses for Stalin" decades ago. "Behind Mikhail Gorbachov, the ghost of Uncle Joe can still be seen stalking the Kremlin, and haunting some corridors in Whitehall." The paper stressed that Britain's attitude toward Lithuania would be very different, if the original arrangement in the Hitler-Stalin Pact had prevailed, and Lithuania were under German control today. If that is so, why is Britain so soft on Moscow?

Special responsibility lies with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, since she has always boasted of her relationship to Gorbachov, the editorial charged. Beyond this, during her recent meeting with Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel in London, she promised to "exorcise the spirit of Munich." Now, she must "dispose of the demon" of the Baltic and the Hitler-Stalin Pact, too.

Soviet helicopters distributed the following leaflet over the Lithuanian capital city of Vilnius on March 26. The helicopters' military markings had been painted over, and the leaflets were signed by **Interfront/Yedinstvo**, the fascist grouping led by retired Red Army officers.

"Citizens of Lithuania:

"Leaders of Sajudis, having seized the government in Lithuania in the name of the achievements of their arrogance and anti-people goals, are pushing the people of Lithuania into an abyss of the unknown. They are promising us a rapid national miracle, wealth and freedom.

"Let us think:

"Is it worth believing those promises that are based on naked declarations and political adventurism?

"Is it worth believing in a government that promises its people that the West will not let them starve?

"Let us ask the new leaders:

"Where is the world's recognition of the sovereignty of the republic that has been promised?

"Where are the promised credits and Western markets that were supposed to have welcomed Lithuania with open arms?

"Whose natural resources will Lithuania's economy use tomorrow? Against whom are we closing our borders?

"Why are defense platoons needed, to which our children, sons, and friends are being called to join?

"What are they supposed to defend? and against whom?

"Let us think:

"Will we be free in a 'free state' where the right to property will once again fall into foreign hands?

"Citizens of Lithuania:

"We must decide for ourselves whether we need this kind of freedom. We invite you to come to a rally at 4 p.m. on March 27th of this year."

"Popular Front of Latvia Fears Another Azerbaijan in Lithuania," was the headline of a March 23 press release put out by the **Popular Front of Latvia** Information Center in Riga.

"According to Dennis Ivans, chairman of the Popular Front of Latvia (LTF), the Soviet government is trying to artificially create a crisis atmosphere in Lithuania," the release said. "Speeches by Gorbachov and others in the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., as well as the speeches by leaders of the reactionary organization 'Yedinstvo' in a demonstration in Vilnius, paint a false situation in Lithuania. They create the impression that the Lithuanian declaration of independence has led to an unstable or even potentially violent situation there. In fact, the situation is calm. However, the possibility exists that the Soviet government will use its artificially created tensions as an excuse for armed intervention, thus making Lithuania a second Azerbaijan. The true goal of any such intervention would be the suppression of Lithuania's peaceful moves toward complete independence.

"The Popular Front of Latvia has sent a telegram to the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, expressing its support for Lithuania in this difficult situation. It has also sent a telegram to the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachov, supporting Lithuania and appealing to him not to use force."