

Denmark stands by Lithuania—alone

by Poul Rasmussen

Alone among Western nations, Denmark has come to the defense of Lithuania, denouncing the Soviet sabre-rattling there and taking steps toward diplomatic recognition of the new republic.

On March 23, the President of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, was asked by Danish television what he would say if he were talking directly to Danish Prime Minister Poul Schlüter. President Landsbergis answered: "I would ask him to go out in the forest alone, all by himself, and there in the silence look deeply into his own heart—and then make a decision."

The next day, as the Soviet military pressure against the small Lithuanian republic steadily increased, the Danish government took its first steps to render political and moral support for the embattled republic. Until then, Denmark had fully participated in the Western world's conspiracy of silence in the face of the desperate calls from the Lithuanian government to recognize the new sovereign state. Since Lithuania's Declaration of Independence on March 11, the Danish government, along with the other Western European countries, had repeatedly stated that "the time was not yet right" for full diplomatic recognition.

Long historical ties

But Denmark is a Baltic state, too. Lithuania is a close neighbor, only a few hundred miles across the sea from the Danish island of Bornholm. Historical ties between Denmark and Lithuania go back hundreds of years, and Denmark officially recognized the new Lithuanian state in 1921. Denmark never accepted the validity of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, nor the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in 1940.

Therefore, it was with great uneasiness, that the Danish government followed the Western world's line of "keeping a low profile," giving the Soviets "a chance for peaceful negotiations." Lithuanian disappointment about this was expressed openly, and the leading Danish conservative newspapers *Jyllandsposten* and *Berlingske Tidende* began to call for immediate establishment of diplomatic relations with free Lithuania. On March 23, *Jyllandsposten* published a letter from the Danish chapter of the Schiller Institute, calling for relations to be established before it is too late.

Then on March 24, Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Uffe Ellemann-Jensen expressed "disappointment with the

Soviet failure to use the opportunity of negotiations toward peaceful establishment of Lithuanian sovereignty." He also announced that the Danish government would send two diplomats to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, to establish contacts with the new Lithuanian parliament. The chairman of the Danish Parliament, H.P. Clausen, announced that a cross-party parliamentary delegation would soon travel to all three Baltic states to establish official parliamentary relations.

On March 23, the Danish Navy positioned the corvette *Peder Tordenskjold* along the coast of Lithuania to closely monitor Soviet military communications and movements. The electronic surveillance command on the Danish island of Bornholm was put on alert.

The next day, when the news of the movement of Soviet tanks and armored cars onto the streets of Vilnius reached the world, and the Soviets began to expel foreign diplomats and journalists from Lithuania, Prime Minister Schlüter called for an international denunciation of the Soviet actions. Schlüter said: "Denmark is a small country, and most likely our influence is limited, but someone has to take the lead. No one should doubt where Denmark stands in this. Lithuania is our neighbor across the Baltic Sea, and we will not accept being disconnected from it. I call upon other countries to support us in this."

The same day, at the European Council's meeting of foreign ministers in Lisbon, Portugal, Ellemann-Jensen directly attacked the Soviet delegate, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Yuri Kasyev, who had brazenly stated at the meeting that "use of military power belongs to history." The Danish foreign minister immediately took the floor to remind Kasyev, "This also goes for the threat of use of weapons and the kind of intimidation we now see in Lithuania." Ellemann-Jensen was backed up by Norway, Belgium, and Iceland. Earlier in the day, Denmark sent a letter to the other European Community countries calling for joint condemnation of the Soviet actions in Lithuania.

On March 25, Ellemann-Jensen summoned the Soviet ambassador to Copenhagen, Gennadi Vedernikov, to receive an official verbal protest concerning the Soviet threats against Lithuania.

Afterwards, at a press conference, the Danish foreign minister said, "It is annoying that the Soviets did not use the opportunity of reaching a solution when the West delivered a very soft reaction during the first days. They knew where we stood. Now we have to go public with our very strong protest." As for Danish efforts to organize a common European protest against the Soviet actions, he said, "We have been extremely active. Our attitude is more sharp and clear than the others. We are now seeing the first results coming. There is growing pressure on Moscow, and I am convinced that they will show restraint. I don't believe that the Soviet Union can live with the bill that will be written out. They risk a serious breakdown of East-West relations."