

When, in the beginning of February, Arne Gunnarsson, a member of the Icelandic Parliament, for the first time publicly suggested that Iceland should extend full diplomatic relations to Lithuania, Moscow again reacted promptly. A strongly worded protest note was handed to the Icelandic government, and Moscow announced that trade relations with Iceland would be "downgraded." The Soviet Union is among the top five trading partners of Iceland. A multimillion-dollar export of Icelandic fish goes to the Soviet Union every year. The Soviets pay well for low-quality fish for industrial use, and almost the entirety of Iceland's exports of herring goes to the Soviet Union. Also, a significant quantity of Icelandic furs and wool is exported to the Soviet Union.

On Feb. 7, the Soviets put action behind their threats and canceled a million-dollar order for Icelandic wool. The next day, all six political parties represented in the Icelandic Parliament's Foreign Policy Committee answered by announcing that diplomatic relations with Lithuania will be established.

Iceland fights back

Why would a small country like Iceland risk a significant portion of its vital exports and national economy in order to support Lithuania, when not even a superpower like the United States has the courage to endanger its "good relations" with the Soviet empire? Part of the answer lies in Iceland's own history. Situated in the middle of the Atlantic, with a population of only 250,000, Iceland knows all too well what it means for a small country to fight for its existence. In the year A.D. 920, Iceland established the first parliament in the world, and the country remained a sovereign nation until 1262. Then, centuries of Norwegian and Danish rule followed until 1944, when Iceland again proclaimed itself a sovereign republic.

But already in 1952, the young republic had to face the first threat to its existence. In a bitter dispute over fishing rights, Iceland came close to war with Great Britain, and the situation repeated itself in 1958, 1972, and 1975. Each time, the tiny Icelandic Coast Guard stood face to face with the mighty naval power of the British Empire. But despite several skirmishes at sea, Iceland was not to be intimidated by threats or force, and the Englishmen had to back down.

When the fanatical Greenpeace organization launched an international campaign against Icelandic fish exports in the late 1980s, Iceland did what other countries had never dared to do to so-called environmental organizations: It went on a furious counterattack. Government officials and journalists effectively exposed Greenpeace's distortion of reality concerning the hunting of whales, and the blatant run for profits behind the Greenpeace campaign to "save" baby seals.

If Washington pleaded with Iceland not to "rock the boat" on the Baltic issue in the midst of "Desert Storm," this may explain why the government turned a deaf ear. Icelandic support for the Baltic freedom fight is genuine.

French public opinion deeply shaken by war

by Jacques Cheminade

A profound change in French public opinion is now taking shape, after four weeks of war in the Persian Gulf.

Before the bombing by the Anglo-American dominated "coalition," which includes French forces, started on Jan. 17, a vast majority in France were declaring themselves anti-war; immediately afterward, out of loyalty to institutions and in the absence of any organized opposition, this majority became pro-war. But now, as the moment of ground war approaches and it is clear that the bombing of Iraq has created tens of thousands of civilian victims, an opposition movement, more determined than at the outset, is reappearing. Nearly 10,000 petitions against the war have so far been circulated, and hundreds of thousands of signatures collected.

Within the ruling Socialist Party, after the courageous declarations of former Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson, who is currently chairman of his group in the European Parliament, the resignation of Defense Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement touched off an uproar on Jan. 29. Discussions we were able to hold with certain among Chevènement's friends have revealed a total opposition to the Bush administration, and a quite correct comprehension of the reasons that caused the American President to go to war. One of these sources stated that Prime Minister Michel Rocard, in his arguments, was no better than the Americans, because he had justified the idea of going to die for oil. The more and more open anti-war protest has won over much more than just the Chevènement faction; many partisans of Jean-Marie Poperen and of Laurent Fabius, who head two other factions of the Socialists, are now agreeing with the analysis of none other than Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) president Yasser Arafat.

Arafat, in an interview with the Catholic daily *La Croix*, denounced the "Americans, who are using us as guinea pigs for their newest weapons," and pointed out that "what they are attempting to do today is to build a new Rome." Even parliamentarian Michel Vauzelle, who is close to President François Mitterrand, felt compelled to contradict Pierre Mauroy, who, while on a trip to Israel, let slip that the "PLO had lost its position as representative [of the Palestinians] by

allying with Saddam Hussein.” Vauzelle chalked up Mauroy’s statement to “ignorance of the problem” (on the part of the secretary general of the Socialist Party!) and his “too great sensitivity to the view of his Israeli hosts.”

Many appeals to stop the war

The base of the Socialist Party is even more furious, and openly challenges its leadership at local meetings. They are taking part in the various anti-war appeals. The principal ones are the Appeal of the 75, inspired by the Communists and the Trotskyists; the Appeal of the 30, signed by various non-Communist leftists; the Peace, Democracy and Development Appeal, published by French Muslims and leading figures from the Maghreb; *No to War*, led by Christian figures; a declaration of Pax Christi and of the Missions of France; a declaration of scientists calling for the use of science and technology for development and not for destruction; and even an appeal from Harlem Wish and from SOS Racism, which have caused various pro-Israel people to leave the anti-war movement. Longstanding political categories are breaking up: “Pacifist” Marek Halter suddenly became a hawk, perhaps because the American translation of his latest book is prefaced by—Henry Kissinger.

The anti-war call of the Schiller Institute in France has, so far, been signed by associations from Africa, the Antilles, and the Maghreb, who view the call as presenting the clearest definition of the means to make peace through development. Several French figures are circulating this call, although they still are afraid to demonstrate in public for it. In Tunis, in Algiers, and in Niamey, Niger, small groups of readers of the weekly Schiller Institute-allied newspaper *Nouvelle Solidarité* are forming, some of them into study circles of physicians, attorneys, and human rights organizations.

Hence, a peace movement is emerging with very diverse facets, beyond the self-interested ideological pacifism of the Communists, the ecology movement, and the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen. (Le Pen issued an emphatic anti-war statement on Feb. 11, calling it the “last of the Anglo-American colonial wars,” warning that it would create problems for France, which has millions of Arab inhabitants, and also stressing that it is “wrong to make the southern front hostile,” while “the eastern front is totally disarmed, at a time when the Soviet Army is fully armed.”)

Some observers say they see an “anti-war cartel” outside party labels taking shape, of the same sort as the one which in 1953 caused the Anglo-American project for a European Defense Community to founder. At the same time, everyone understands the nature of the Bush-Gorbachov deal, and both television and radio are constantly comparing what is happening in the Gulf and in the Baltic republics today, with what took place in 1956 in Budapest during the Suez crisis, when the dictators in Moscow took advantage of the Western expedition to the Middle East to crush the freedom fighters of Hungary.

A small group of deputies of Christian orientation from the Centrist and Union of French Democracy (UDF) electoral coalitions, is currently organizing numerous missions to Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. These men, even those who voted for war on Jan. 16, are shaken by the turn the war is taking, and are looking for the exit. Especially active among them is the once very pro-American and pro-Israel Bernard Stasi, whose eyes have now been opened by the American and Israeli attitude toward Lebanon. Of these deputies, three, inspired by the message of the Pope, had voted against the war, solely on the basis of their consciences.

‘Top Guns’ earn disgust

Another issue that has created a shock in France (which was bombed in 1944-45 by American flyers) has been reports of the way in which U.S. pilots too often act. “They are bombing from far away and high up, not seeking ways to save human lives” is one thought often heard. The weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* published a report of “American pilots who play ‘Top Gun’ ” or those who take off for combat with “heavy metal rock” going full blast in their helmets, and return saying that “Baghdad is prettier than Christmas, better than Fourth of July fireworks.”

It is very important that, in the United States and elsewhere in the world, this deeply-felt sentiment which is coming to the surface among the French, be understood. More than 70% of the French people think, according to a poll published in all the press, that this conflict threatens to degenerate into a world war. The televised speech of President François Mitterrand on Feb. 7, saying the opposite—“there is no foundation to the fears of risking a Third World War”—convinced no one. And it was under pressure of deep public opinion that the President had to announce that France “rules out chemical, bacteriological, and nuclear weapons”—a position that George Bush has not taken.

However, despite these efforts to appear “original,” the Mitterrand-Rocard policy remains to follow George Bush, whatever happens. When, with his usual stoneface, President Mitterrand announces that the ground war will be “inevitable,” “harsh,” a “cruel test of truth,” the French take it with ill grace. They say that even Churchill had more real emotion in his voice, in announcing “blood, sweat, and tears.”

Moreover, many observers of the French political scene are wondering if what happened to Prime Minister Guy Mollet after Suez might not also happen to François Mitterrand. (After 1956, Guy Mollet became more and more unpopular, attacked as much from the right as from the left, and this process led to the return to power of Charles de Gaulle in 1958.) Some think that the President will try to make Premier Rocard pay for his coming unpopularity. The major problem is, however, that there is no de Gaulle—no figure on the official political scene who could rise to the occasion, when there is such an urgency, both for France and for the world.