

Captive nations protest against Soviet oppression

by Luba George

The crisis of national unrest sweeping the Russian Empire is rapidly coming to a head. Parallel to the late-August strike wave spreading across Poland, mass anti-Soviet eruptions broke out in the three Baltic republics and the Ukraine, the regions inside the U.S.S.R. bordering on Poland. Moscow's headaches are multiple: The Polish crisis has been joined by a full-fledged Baltic crisis, and a smoldering crisis in the Ukraine. On top of all that, the month-long deceptive "calm" in the Transcaucasus has been shattered. On Aug. 24, thousands of Armenians took to the streets in Stepanakert, the capital of Karabakh, the Armenian-inhabited region of Azerbaijan, demanding that Karabakh come under Armenian rule.

By far the most dramatic developments are occurring in the Baltic region. Well over 300,000 people gathered at mass rallies on Aug. 23 in the capitals of the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to mark the 49th anniversary of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact, which led to the annexation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union. Demonstrators carried flags of their previously independent countries, and banners denouncing the accord between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, and the continuing Russian occupation.

According to Lithuanian exile sources, 200,000 people demonstrated in the capital of Vilnius, and another 50,000 in Kaunas, the republic's second largest city. In Riga, the capital of Latvia, 30-50,000 gathered at a rally.

In the Estonian capital of Tallinn, some 10,000 people gathered in the city's Hirve Park, carrying black, white, and blue Estonian flags and placards with both the Nazi swastika and the Communist hammer and sickle crossed out. Lagle Parek, an Estonian activist and member of the Estonian Group for Publication of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the group which organized the rally, told the crowd, "It is not enough to recognize the Soviet occupation of 1940. We have to

restore our independence." At the demonstrations it was announced that a new Estonian National Independence Party has been founded. The depth of popular support behind the independence demand was shown by the fact that even a leader of the Estonian Popular Front (a "pro-autonomy mass organization" created through the Estonian Communist Party in June, in an attempt to coopt the rising ferment), Edgar Savisaar, in his address to the rally, employed the following rhetoric, "Either we remain the servant or become the sovereign master of our land."

Later, another large gathering of over 5,000 packed Tallinn's concert hall and 3,000 more crowded into a hockey rink next door. Thousands rallied and called for independence in the ancient university town of Tartu.

Erik Udam, one of the 100-plus founding members of the Estonian National Independence Party, addressing the Tallinn crowd, spoke against immigration of ethnic Russians to Estonia in recent years—part of Moscow's "Russification" policy. "The Estonian people is in great danger of dying out," he said. Estonia is the Soviet Union's least populous republic, where Estonians make up only 60% of the 1.5 million population. In Tallinn itself, half of the city's 500,000 inhabitants are ethnic Russians. With these demographic trends, the Russians hope that the goal of the Estonians to restore their independence will not be realized.

Call to repeal Hitler-Stalin Pact

Settling the Polish crisis is Moscow's top priority. For this, no means will be excluded, including military intervention. Moscow must now try to prevent, at all costs, an out-of-control situation from materializing in the Baltic and the Ukraine. This dilemma has produced a two-track counterinsurgent approach for the western regions of the Soviet Union.

In the Baltic, where the protests have already reached mass proportions, the policy for the short term is to “ride the wave,” to attempt to coopt and channel the mass movement, and (at least as long as Poland remains explosive) to avoid, if possible, harsh police measures. This apparent, and totally deceptive, leniency only holds true for the relatively tiny Baltic republics. For the Ukraine, with its 50 million population, and bordering on Poland, Moscow’s response to the first flickers of national ferment has been brutal. For the Baltic, particularly Estonia, the signs of the cooptation policy that began in June with the creation of the Popular Front, abounded during August.

Just two weeks prior to the planned rallies, an Estonian-language paper on Aug. 10 published, for the first time ever inside the Soviet Union, the text of the “Non-Aggression Pact” signed by the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, including the secret protocols. The rest of the Estonian press was soon to follow, with excerpts from the secret protocols. Revelations of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact are a particularly sensitive issue to Moscow, because the pact’s secret protocols fully discredit official claims that the Baltic states were incorporated into the U.S.S.R. in 1940 by their own volition.

Moscow sent to the Tallinn rally the “liberal” Russian historian Yuri Afanasyev, who told the crowd, “The signing of the pact resulted in the occupation of Estonia,” and added that the old version about the voluntary adherence of the Baltic countries to the U.S.S.R. was “not serious.” “We are speaking of historical injustices,” he said. “We have no right to be silent about it. In no other country has history been falsified to the extent it has been in the Soviet Union. . . . The secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact have been published in the West and all Western scholars know about it, but we continue to deny its existence.” He called for publishing the pact protocols.

That was in Estonia. Back in Moscow, nothing had changed in Russia’s position. That same day in Moscow, Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov repeated that the Soviet archives contained no copies of the secret protocols, that the original did not exist, and that the only copies of the document were in the West. One week earlier, Valentin Falin, head of Soviet news agency Novosti and former ambassador to West Germany, denied that the secret protocols were held in the Soviet archives. This was Moscow’s answer to the Riga rally, where one person read out loud a letter to Mikhail Gorbachov, calling for repeal of the pact.

On Aug. 24, the definitive proof was provided that Soviet policy will continue to be a defense of the pact. One day after the demonstrations, the Russian Republic’s party daily *Sovetskaya Rossiya* published a detailed account of the secret protocols of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the first time this had ever been done in Russia proper. The full-page article, written by Lithuanian historian Robertas Zhyuzhda, provided the first

opportunity for many Soviet citizens to learn details of the accord, which led to the invasion and partition of Poland, Moscow’s grabbing of the western part of the Ukraine, and the 1940 takeover of the Baltic republics. But he repeated the official line that Moscow’s actions and concerns were “understandable” in the tense atmosphere on the eve of World War II, allowing the Russians to “buy time” to prepare for an attack by Germany.

On the same day, the TASS news agency defended the pact as a “necessary measure” and, referring to the Tallinn demonstration, where “one could hear . . . nationalistic calls” that all non-Estonians leave Estonia, and for Estonia’s “secession” from the Soviet Union, warned that *glasnost* must not be used for “destructive nationalist passions.”

Moscow’s dilemma

Gorbachov’s attempts to coopt nationalist ferment is a very risky proposition, which must backfire, if not soon, then over the longer term. The most anti-Russian mood inside the U.S.S.R. has always existed among Poland’s neighbors, along the Baltic and in the Ukraine.

As we have seen, in the Baltic, and especially in Estonia, Moscow has been willing to take some risks by adopting a more “liberal” approach to the confrontation. Under Vaino Vyalas, the new Estonian leader since June, the Communist Party has approved the holding of rallies by the government-sanctioned Popular Front, whose platform calls for a “sovereign” Estonia “inside a federated Soviet Union.” On June 25, Estonia’s government permitted the display of the blue, black, and white flag, banned since the annexation in 1940, to fly from public buildings. (On Aug. 24, a similar decree was announced concerning Latvia and Lithuania). Another Popular Front demand is that Estonian become the republic’s official language, and that Estonia be granted “full economic autonomy.”

Gorbachov’s phony “liberalism,” however, has never reached, and never will reach the Ukraine, with a population of over 50 million. Moscow’s brutal course during July against Armenian national aspirations has now been repeated in the Ukraine, where mass rallies and demonstrations have been met with arrests and brutal crackdowns.

On Aug. 4, over 5,000 protesters took part in a rally in Lvov, in the western Ukraine, in defiance of the Supreme Soviet decree calling for an end to street protests. As people gathered at the Lvov State University, demonstrating for national autonomy and an end to Russification, shouting “Freedom for the Ukraine,” van-loads of militia—drawn from the KGB and a new Interior Ministry unit called the Sixth Special Task Force, consisting of reservist *spetsnaz* troops—began to brutally disperse the demonstrators using dogs and batons. People shouted “Fascists! Fascists!” as militia set dogs on the demonstrators and dragged them off to cars by their hair or feet. Scores of young people and women were severely beaten and arrested. Not one word of this

outrage has yet to appear in any Western newspaper, except for a belated report in the London *Times*, although eyewitness documentation has been made available to the West in press release form by the Independent Press Service of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, operating out of Lvov and Kiev.

These events mark the first confirmed use of Interior Ministry *spetsnaz* units, created late last year and composed of Afghan War veteran Army *spetsnaz* troops whose period of active service had ended. These units were created specifically to intervene against national unrest.

The events of August followed a series of arrests and intimidations by the KGB and police of Ukrainian activists, after mass demonstrations and a bus drivers' strike in June and July. On July 20, the KGB arrested one of the leaders of the Helsinki Union, Vyecheslav Chornovil, and warned him to stop "attempts to incite hostility among nationalities . . . supplying Western subversive centers with information which is used against the Soviet system, and organizing mass demonstrations which violate public order." Soviet and Ukrainian official press have been demanding that an end be put to "activities of extremists." They have named five dissidents: Mikhail Chornovil, Bogdan Horyn, Ivan Makar, and Yaroslav Putko. All fear that the same fate is awaiting them that happened to Armenian leader Airikyan, who was deported to the West.

These warnings were followed on July 24, by arrests of 16 members of a cultural club in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. The club has been campaigning against Russification and petitioning for the release of "prisoners of conscience." On July 27, the newspaper *Lvov Pravda* announced that the Lvov Executive Committee had forbidden all meetings and demonstrations organized by the Lvov Initiative group which they accused of "anti-Soviet agitation and provocation."

Throughout late July and early August, dozens of Ukrainian national activists were seized by the KGB, thrown at gunpoint into waiting cars, and driven into forests outside Lvov and Kiev. There they were threatened with execution by pistol or drowning, and after being severely beaten, were left half-conscious in the forest, to find their way back to the city.

In Moscow itself, Interior Ministry *spetsnaz* units were used to break up an Aug. 20 demonstration. Five hundred protesters, members of the Democratic Union—the illegal opposition political party set up in May—gathered near Pushkin Square to protest the 20th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. They distributed leaflets denouncing the 1968 invasion as a "crime." Police with loudspeakers ordered the protesters to disperse or face "legal consequences." The police, KGB, and Interior Ministry *spetsnaz* units charged into the crowd with clubs and dogs. Passers-by, shocked by the brutality, shouted "Fascists!" at the police, as they watched about 100 protesters being dragged into police buses. Some women were pulled by the hair, while men were punched or kicked as they were bundled into buses.

Polish crisis: more

by Konstantin George

The course of the strike wave that began in Poland on Aug. 16 confirms that, no matter what happens in the immediate period ahead, the Polish crisis of 1988 is of a dimension far more grave than that of 1980-81. This was already *EIR*'s reading when the first strikes erupted in April and May of this year. At the time, we alerted our readers that the next explosion would likely occur in August.

In the current situation, anything can happen.

As of Aug. 25, the strikes had shut down at least 11 coal mines in Upper Silesia, and brought all activity in Poland's two main ports, Szczecin and Gdansk, to a halt.

The government cannot allow such a state of affairs to prevail much longer without taking direct and brutal action on a large scale, or else ending the strikes through successfully intimidating the workers. A showdown is inevitable, with two possible results: Either the strike is broken, or government violence triggers a nationwide strike and an all-out crisis, with a growing danger of Soviet military intervention.

Most knowledgeable observers expect the government to succeed, through the use of pressure and blackmail tactics, in stopping the strike wave. However, the strikes may end, but the crisis will not only remain, but intensify. It was only in May that the government had apparently "won" against the strikers, only to find itself confronted with a far worse eruption three months later. Should the government again "win" in August, it will only have ensured an even briefer interval of "calm" before the next and worse explosion occurs in the fall.

This is why both the opposition and the government agree on one point, the enormous gravity of the situation, comparing it to 1980 (when the crisis produced the fall of the Edward Gierek regime and the imposition of martial law by Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski).

Bronislaw Geremek, an adviser to Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa, declared on Aug. 23, "The situation in Poland is exactly as explosive as it was during the strikes in the summer of 1980, and the dangers are also exactly as great." On the evening of Aug. 22, in a speech broadcast on Polish TV, General Kiszczak, the interior minister, announced that the wave of "illegal strikes . . . the open violations of peace and order . . . has called forth the specter of anarchy. . . . It's the duty of the leadership to prevent a return to the