

Estonian activist seeks U.S. support

by William Jones

Speaking at the National Press Club on Sept. 11, Tunne Kelam of the Estonian National Independence Party compared present Soviet relations with the Baltic states to that of a rapist who has ravished a woman, beat her, and then claims that he wants to do the honest thing and marry her. Before any such "marriage" can be consummated, said Kelam, "normal conditions must be restored. . . . And normal conditions mean an independent Estonia." Kelam was referring to the fact that Estonia, the northernmost of the Baltic states, was an independent nation until 1939, when it was forcibly annexed by the Soviet Union as a result of the secret protocols of the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

Kelman is on a whirlwind tour of the United States and Canada to drum up support for the independence movement in Estonia. It is his first time out of the country since World War II. "The Gorbachov dictatorship has already rocked the boat," Kelam said, "and now people are starting to leave it." Kelam was referring to the increasing strength of the independence movements in the Baltic countries and among the Soviet republics generally.

Estonia is one of the three Baltic states, now provinces of the Soviet Union, which border the Baltic Sea. It has its own language, which is somewhat similar to Finnish, and, according to the 1934 census, the majority of Estonians were Lutherans. Until recently, the Soviet Union has denied the very existence of any secret protocols, in spite of the massive documentation of the protocols which has been published in the West. With the revision of Soviet history during the *glasnost* era, the Soviets have been forced to admit that the secret protocols did in fact exist.

If the Soviets were to repudiate the treaty, however, they would thereby admit the illegitimate nature of their control over the Baltic states, thus requiring that they establish a new relationship with the Baltic states as independent nations. But that, the Soviets have not been prepared to do, even though the overwhelming desire of the peoples of these nations is to be independent. At the end of August, when the banner of independence began to wave in the Baltic republics, the Soviet Central Committee warned that any attempt by any of the republics of the Soviet Union to secede, would

not be tolerated.

Nevertheless, the Estonians continue to put forward their demands for independence. Even if there were a clampdown in the Soviet Union, Kelam said, "we would continue our passive resistance. . . . We lost one-fourth of our population during this last century to Soviet and Nazi terror. We must have our independence back." Although the Soviets attempted to "Russify" the area after the war by a mass influx of native Russians into Estonia, 51.3% of the population of the country are still Estonians. Kelam stressed that although some people had talked of armed resistance, the Baltic independence movements were committed to the methods of non-violent resistance of M.K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King as the only feasible way of attaining their goals.

U.S. policy, official and otherwise

Officially the United States has never accepted the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Empire, and still recognizes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as independent states, with their own legations in Washington. But now in the era of *glasnost* and "good feelings" toward the Soviets, the Bush administration has shown little interest in supporting any real move by the Baltic nations to actually achieve their independence. Mr. Kelam was somewhat disappointed that he was unable to get any high-level meetings at the State Department.

During the Reagan administration, the Estonian independence movement had received strong moral support from the administration. According to Mari-Ann Rikken, an Estonian-American activist who helped organize Kelam's trip, whenever visitors previously arrived from Estonia, she was always able to pull together at the State Department a group of people interested in getting a briefing on the situation in Estonia. This time, however, only a low-level researcher was assigned to meet with Kelam. Kelam was also scheduled for discussions on Capitol Hill, where he hopes to meet with a more positive response.

"Soviet soldiers have to leave Estonia," Kelam stressed in his remarks at the National Press Club. "The Estonian Communist Party is not the national party of Estonia. It has only 4-5% support from the Estonian people." In response to a question about the Estonian Popular Front, the major political umbrella organization, Kelam explained how the Popular Front is split over whether or not to move for independence. "There are members of the Communist Party within the Popular Front. There are more differences within the Popular Front itself than there are between the independence movement and the Popular Front."

Kelam also expressed disappointment with the ambiguous Soviet position on the Hitler-Stalin Pact. "The only thing that has changed," he said, "is that the Soviets now admit that there were secret protocols. But there is no concrete proof that the Soviet government is prepared to repudiate any of the fruits of this agreement."