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## Conference Report

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# Latvian opposition gathers in Riga

by Malte Vasaukas

Not far from the Latvian freedom monument in Riga, the capital of Latvia, stands a segment of the Berlin Wall. Every day groups of people gather nearby, to discuss the fate of their country and the freedom movement. These citizens proudly point out that it was from this freedom monument—built when Latvia was a sovereign state—that in 1987 the peaceful revolution against Moscow's oppression took its first step. Joy over German reunification is very great among Latvians, yet there is also widespread fear, that the struggle of the Baltic states for their sovereignty may be forgotten in Germany and that financial help to Moscow, unconditionally granted, could lead to the restoration of the Soviet empire's central power, rather than to supporting the freedom of the peoples in the Soviet republics.

The Latvian Popular Front, which was founded in 1988, therefore released a statement *à propos* of German reunification, in which alongside their good wishes toward all Germans they tendered an invitation to France, Great Britain, the U.S.A., and the U.S.S.R. They asked that along the lines of the "two plus four" talks that arranged the treaty conditions for German unity with foreign powers, there might now begin a "four plus three" conference, to negotiate full sovereignty of the three Baltic states.

### Congress of the Latvian Popular Front

This statement was also circulated at the Third Congress of the Latvian Popular Front, which took place in Riga on Oct. 6-7. At this annual convention a very ambitious program was passed, proclaiming the struggle toward complete independence and the construction of a democratic state, in which the dignity of man is untouchable. The Latvians want to finally return to the community of nations as a sovereign state.

For the Latvian Popular Front, political independence is directly linked to economic independence. Private property should be again thoroughly attainable for everyone. The transportation and communications infrastructure has to be modernized, in order to make trade relations with other countries possible. Right now, Latvia has only 12 foreign telephone lines, of which 10 connect to Moscow.

Businesses must return to private hands and be technical-

ly modernized. In order to crank up the economy, the Front also demands sovereignty over financial and credit policies. The bureaucracy and centralism must be dismantled and replaced by local self-government. Also, in cultural and education policy, the desire is expressed that the development of the individual be fostered again, rather than put under the guardianship of the state. Latvia must become a hub of world trade.

### The 'Productive Triangle'

In discussions with congress participants as well as spokesmen of other popular fronts from the U.S.S.R., who attended as guests, it became very clear that after decades of isolation a close affinity to the Western European economy is desired. There were intense discussions about Lyndon LaRouche's proposal for a "Productive Triangle" joining Vienna, Berlin, and Paris with high-speed rail connections, to build up the industrial heartland with spiral arms radiating into the rest of Europe. In that proposal, the question of how to complete the infrastructural links between the Baltic and Western Europe is clearly answered. The discussion raised questions about whether Siberia is considered in this plan, and whether West European governments are actively interested in such ambitious projects.

Many Latvian problems are identical to the problems that unified Germany has to solve in its six new states. But the Baltic has no "West Baltic," which can provide vigorous economic and financial assistance for the overhaul. Western Europe therefore must take up the sponsorship for all the Eastern European countries that aspire to sovereignty.

For the representatives of the democratic movements in the Soviet republics, Western Europe's backing is a question of life or death, since economic and social catastrophe stalks all of their efforts for freedom and democracy, and could annihilate them. In great chunks of the U.S.S.R., anxiety is endemic over the coming winter of famine, and even if the Baltic is seen as better off than other republics in the Soviet Union, it is threatened by a further worsening in the supply situation, which would lead to sharper social conflict. Already most goods in the Baltic can only be gotten with ration cards and after standing in long queues.

Despite all this, citizens are showing an astonishing degree of optimism. Memories of better times are still vivid. In the days of independence in the 1920s and 1930s, Latvia lagged behind few European states in per capita Gross National Product. The cathedral with its magnificent pipe organ, the theater, the opera house, and the old guild houses in Latvia's cities, recall the earlier golden era of the Baltic. The Russian *Nomenklatura*, as things are seen here, is waging its last fight.

The Western European and German strategy should be to forge the infrastructural links to the Baltic through the "Productive Triangle," and to support the freedom struggle of the Baltic people with economic development.