

## Baltic showdown a test for East-West relations

by Hartmut Cramer

Once again the Baltic region has become a test case for East-West relations as a whole. In view of the provocations in recent weeks on the one hand, and the extraordinary silence in Western capitals on the other, it was to be expected that the Soviet rulers would make a new coup try in Lithuania. Although the immediate events and the short duration of the nighttime military action on June 3-4 in Vilnius, which fell on exactly the second anniversary of the bloody massacre on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, lead one to assume that it was a "trial balloon," in view of the overall international situation this escalation must be taken very, very seriously.

After units of the notorious Black Berets, directly run by the Soviet Internal Affairs Ministry, had for several weeks been assaulting Baltic border posts and burning them down, regular units of the Red Army on June 3 sealed the Lithuanian-Belorusian border; in late evening Soviet soldiers suddenly erupted into the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, seizing strategically important bridges, ringing the Parliament and the Interior Ministry, and stopping passersby at machine-gunpoint and searching them at the airport, train station, and on major streets. When asked, the Soviet officers either gave the pretext that they were looking for "deserters," or that they had come to protect Lithuanian citizens from the excesses of the Black Berets.

Among the Soviet soldiers were specialists whose job was to get an exact profile of the Lithuanian people's response. They filmed the whole proceeding, especially noting the time it took to organize the defense around the Parliament. The result must have given the Soviet regime quite a headache, since only 15 minutes after the call for help by President Landsbergis, beamed over Lithuanian television, the square before Parliament was filled. Significantly, the Soviet soldiers, who up until that point had been very rude to the Parliament guards and arrested some of them without stating

any reason, changed their attitude as the throng grew; they became quite defensive, and a few hours later, the military action broke off as fast as it had begun.

Beyond the "profiling" of the Lithuanian reaction to the military encroachment, the reactions of the Soviet leaders make it clear that this nocturnal spree was a well-planned, top-down operation. As during the Jan. 13 massacre (which according to the official Soviet Attorney General Trubin's report, released precisely on June 3 in Vilnius, was entirely the fault of the Lithuanian government!) President Landsbergis could reach no one at the upper echelons during the critical hours. As he explained on June 4 to the Parliament, the Soviet military commander in Vilnius "could not be awakened," Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov "had no time," President Gorbachov "was not available," and the leader of Soviet troops in the Baltic, General Belousov, who finally said he would take a telephone inquiry, spoke merely of an "exercise" and a "regular patrol," which was being carried out in the republics in accordance with Gorbachov's decree.

The public statements of the Soviet government allow a deeper look. President Gorbachov himself denied, during a June 5 press conference in Oslo, that a military action had just occurred in Vilnius, and referred to "exaggerated press reports." His spokesman Vitaly Ignatenko on the same day claimed that the whole affair was once again nothing but a "provocation by Landsbergis," who was trying thereby to compromise Gorbachov in internationally critical situations. (How Landsbergis, President of the minuscule Lithuanian republic, could have the power, from Vilnius, to deploy units of the huge, rigidly centrally controlled Soviet Army, Ignatenko did not even try to explain.)

The political background is obvious. Time is running out on the Soviet central regime, which does not want the Baltic

republics it forcibly annexed in 1941 to gain independence, and is trying by all means to break the Balts' resistance. Since the London and Washington governments want to distract from enormous economic and social tensions at home with foreign adventures ("new world order") and therefore have an interest in a condominium with Moscow, Gorbachov has no scruples about using force. Hence the Baltic situation is the more dangerous, the "better" the superpowers get along. As soon as Bush and Gorbachov agreed on the terms of a new summit for the end of June, the show of force in Lithuanian was as good as foreordained. Lithuania's President, moreover, probably realized this when he last met with President Bush in early May in Washington.

### Three reasons

There are three main reasons why the situation in the Baltics, and especially Lithuania, is coming to a head:

1) The Lithuanian government has had its first breakthrough in relations with Germany, whose economic and political aid is vital, if not decisive, for the independence fight to succeed. President Landsbergis just voiced to a group of parliamentary visitors from the German state of Rhineland Palatinate on June 5 in Vilnius his displeasure that Bonn was silent in view of Moscow's violent actions, and that Gorbachov was awarded billions of marks in credit with no conditions (such as renunciation of force and recognition of international law, i.e., Lithuania's independence). But his own visit to Bonn in mid-May has borne fruit. A Bonn Foreign Ministry spokesman said that while no official statement will be put out, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had received his three Baltic colleagues already, relations will be continued, and that Bonn stands for dialogue and non-use of force in the solution of the "Baltic question."

Even if Bonn in this, as in other key political issues, is hedging—with one eye on Moscow and the other over the Channel and the Atlantic—behind the scenes *EIR* has learned that German-Lithuanian relations will intensify: Offices will be set up, and economic contacts, as well as parliamentary exchanges, will increase. Though limited, it is a first step. Another good sign is that Landsbergis had a chance, in an interview May 26 on German TV, to eloquently present his government's view ("If we insist that the past injustice done to us by the Soviets must be reversed, then we are doing our duty; and one must do one's duty.")

2) The second reason for a major panic by communist *nomenklatura* is the upcoming election in Russia. If the forces represented by Boris Yeltsin win the vote, as expected, there will be a shift in power in Moscow. For the Baltic states that means the near-term endorsement of important accords with the Russian republic, which are ripe for signing for some time, and mutual recognition of sovereignty, renunciation of force, as well as close economic cooperation. Once these accords take effect it will be much harder, if not impossible, for the *nomenklatura* to solve the "Baltic question" by force.

Hence the coming weeks (in Vilnius they say until the end of July) will be full of tension, since the "cement heads" in the Kremlin are not going to easily give up as long as there is no obstacle in their way from the West.

3) The third reason is probably the most important: the positive political explosion which the June 1-9 visit to Poland of Pope John Paul II is detonating in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in Lithuania. Not just because the Pope, in the border city of Lomza, spoke bluntly of the Hitler-Stalin Pact (and hence of the annexation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union as part of that pact) as a "historic injustice" and before tens of thousands Lithuanians warmly backed the independence struggle ("Lithuania has, like every other country, the right to freedom"), but above all because he has created with his latest social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, a basis for solving the enormous economic, political, and social problems of this region—including the Soviet Union.

In Lomza the Pope received a high-level Lithuanian government delegation (because of the dangerous situation in Vilnius, President Landsbergis could not come, as originally planned); he told them he would stand up for their independence in Moscow and promised to visit their land soon. No head of state has yet shown the same courage.

### A just new world economic order

If we now look at the reports of the seminars held in Moscow at the end of May, in which Vatican and Soviet government representatives discussed a way out of the world economic catastrophe, and note with amazement that even some of the Soviet spokesmen found *Centesimus Annus* to be a sound basis for a new world economic policy, then we can clearly see what is at stake internationally.

Were, for example, the West, Central, and Eastern European governments (note that Vilnius is the geographic midpoint of Europe) to accept *Centesimus Annus* as their general economic-philosophical foundation and Lyndon LaRouche's "Productive Triangle" as their concrete economic program, then the seemingly unsolvable conflict between the freedom struggles of the Baltic countries, the interests of Moscow, and those of the Western states, could be easily solved.

This means defending the unity of politics, economics, and morality, and those who stand up for it, like Lithuania's President Landsbergis. Not surprisingly, an international media campaign, especially in the British press, blames Landsbergis for Moscow's actions against his country. The left-liberal London *Guardian* on June 6, calling him the "inexperienced music professor," said he had provoked the Soviet troop reaction because of his open letter to Gorbachov. The *Berliner Zeitung*, a paper which belonged to the East German communist state before the revolution, and which was bought up early this year by British media czar and ardent Gorbachov fan Robert Maxwell, sneered that the armed incursion into Vilnius only benefited "the nationalist faction in Parliament, led by Landsbergis."