

# Will Gorbachov's 'national' experiment in the Baltic succeed?

by Luba George

"In the view of leading Western specialists . . . the realm of inter-ethnic relations is the biggest problem facing our country. That is true, it is our biggest problem. We must be careful that *glasnost* and "democratization" not prevent discipline and order from being maintained." That quote is from a speech given by Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of KGB intelligence 1974-88, and since Sept. 30, 1988, head of the KGB. The speech was delivered at the end of July at a Moscow conference on foreign policy, and was first published in the October edition of the Foreign Ministry's *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn (International Affairs)*.

Under the KGB's direction, the Soviet leadership has developed different strategies for dealing with growing national unrest among the Captive Nations of the Soviet Empire. Regarding the three Baltic Republics, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the scene of repeated nationalist mass demonstrations from August 1987 on, Moscow has elected to gamble. Under KGB guidance, an elaborate, and exceedingly risky, plan has emerged, to *coopt* the nationalist ferment, and channel it in directions useful to Moscow.

Thus, in the Baltic republics, Moscow has allowed and indeed fostered the creation of mass movements for "autonomy," which are called "Popular Fronts." Founding congresses for the "Popular Fronts" of Estonia and Latvia were held in September and early October, respectively, and a Lithuanian "Popular Front," was founded at a congress on the weekend of Oct. 22-23.

There are two wrong ways to analyze this picture. The most typical blunder in the Western coverage of events in the Baltic is euphoria over the "Popular Fronts." Unlike the genuine nationalist resistance movements, the Popular Front is a catch basin for every political shade existing in the Baltic; they include true nationalists and patriots, who will use "anything in motion," to build anti-Moscow forces; but also Communist Party members, and, of course, numerous KGB operatives.

To conclude, however, that Moscow's creation of the mass membership Popular Fronts means that the KGB "runs the opposition" in the Baltic republics, is equally nonsensical. The KGB did not create the mass protest movement in the Baltic republics. The mass anti-Russian protests and the

threat that they will go out of control, *forced* the KGB to proceed with the Popular Front "experiment."

Ironically, the answer to whether the KGB "experiment" will succeed or not, lies outside those republics. Namely, can Moscow prevent national explosions in the Ukraine (population 50 million) and in Poland. Events in those two places would rapidly terminate Moscow's counterinsurgency experiment in the Baltic.

## The ferment

The mass protests in the Baltic continue to increase in intensity, with Catholic Lithuania now spearheading the ferment. In the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, on the weekend of Oct. 22-23, over 200,000 people gathered around the assembly hall on the bank of the Neris, where the Lithuanian Reform Movement, or *Sajudis*, held its inaugural congress. The demonstration was authorized. It was, after all, the founding of the Lithuanian Popular Front. But, the overwhelming majority of those marching were anti-Russian Lithuanian patriots and supporters of Pope John Paul II.

After the march, some 20,000 people gathered before the entrance of the now-reopened Roman Catholic cathedral, closed under Stalin, and for 40 years used as a picture gallery. Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevicius celebrated his first Mass, and Vatican and Lithuanian flags flew in the background. The demonstrations in Lithuania followed similar such demonstrations during September in Estonia and Latvia, the other two Baltic states sacrificed to the Russians under the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

The Popular Fronts have been demanding an autonomous administration and economy for each republic, with each also having its "own currency." Moscow would "only" be responsible for the defense and foreign policy of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Lithuanian *Sajudis* is also demanding that Lithuanian conscripts fulfill their service in the Soviet Army only on Lithuanian soil.

Moscow is very concerned about Lithuania, bordering on Poland. In sharp contrast to Latvia and Estonia, where Russians comprise, respectively, 50% and 40% of the population, the Lithuanians make up over 80% of their republic's 3.64 million population. The brutality of the Stalin era has

never been forgotten. Between 1940 and 1948, some 300,000 Lithuanians (well over 10% of the population) were deported to Siberia. Few returned. The deportees included nearly all the non-communist intelligentsia, Catholic clergy, and prosperous farmers.

The decision to extend the Popular Front movement to Lithuania reflects Moscow's extreme concern over the national unrest. On the eve of the Popular Front congress, Lithuania's First Secretary was unceremoniously dumped, and an amenable counterinsurgency tool, Algirdas Brazauskas, was installed as new party boss.

A year ago, the phenomenon of such authorized mass movements could not have been possible. Why are the Russians now taking such risks in dealing with the outright anti-Russian sentiments that have come to the fore? The Baltic has become a theater for an experiment which may have a huge bearing on the fate of Gorbachov's *perestroika*.

### **The Baltic and perestroika**

The "secret" to the KGB's experiment lies in the fact that the industrial and agricultural workforce of the Baltic republics is by far the most productive workforce in the Soviet Union, and the Baltic contains a substantial portion of Soviet electronics and other crucial military-related high-tech industry. Poor performance by the Baltic workforce, which has a Western cultural tradition and is actually a European workforce, is thus not a cultural problem, as in the case of the Russian worker or peasant. The Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian high-tech industry worker lags in performance because he refuses to work hard for Russia. Convince the same worker that he is working for an "autonomous" Baltic republic, all of whose internal decisions are in its "own" hands, and labor productivity, so vital for the Ogarkov war plan code-named *perestroika*, will skyrocket—or so reasons the KGB.

Moscow's new policy surfaced in August, when Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev visited Latvia Aug. 8-11, and Lithuania Aug. 11-13. In meetings with the local party leaderships, Yakovlev demanded that they "take an active role in shaping events," avoid an inflexible stance toward the nationalist opposition, and above all, "make the national factor" an "impetus for *perestroika*."

Beginning in June, Moscow has moved ruthlessly to ensure that precisely such party leaderships, who can make "the national factor" work for *perestroika*, have been installed in the Baltic. On June 23, Vaino Vyalyas, a KGB official with an ambassadorial background to cover his KGB functions, was named Estonian First Secretary. In Latvia, when First Secretary Boris Pugo (a KGB general and former head of the KGB in Latvia) was promoted at the Sept. 30 Soviet Central Committee plenum to head the Party Control Commission, a KGB-directed succession was instituted in that republic as well. In fact, it was 19th Party Conference speeches of Vyalyas and Pugo that contained the solid evidence that Moscow

was embarking on the Popular Front and "economic autonomy" strategy for the Baltic.

Following Yakovlev's visit, the "national factor" began to be enlisted in earnest for the cause of *perestroika*. On Aug. 18, a commission attached to the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet had concluded that national symbols, such as flags, heraldry, and the national colors, could be displayed and the national anthem of independent Lithuania sung. On Aug. 23, rallies throughout the entire Baltic were held (an estimated 200,000 attended in Lithuania alone) on the anniversary the Hitler-

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Stalin Pact. In contrast to Aug. 23, 1987, this time, all speakers, party leaders included, condemned the pact, and many spoke openly of secret protocols and the millions of dollars that Stalin paid to Hitler for a strip of Lithuanian territory.

The U.S.S.R. is in deep economic trouble, and the Baltic republics are already considerably more efficient than most Soviet republics. The aim of the reforms was visible in an article in the Aug. 23 edition of the weekly *Sovetskaya Kultura*. Two Estonian economists, E. Savisaar and I. Raig, called for "full self-financing at republican level" so that Estonia could specialize in the production of export goods and the acquisition of hard currency, required for mass food imports. Here, for the first time, the "idea" was floated of creating "free economic zones" in the Baltic, to lure Western capital into "joint ventures," especially in the realm of high-tech industry.

Gorbachov and the Soviet leadership have to move quickly. In Lithuania, as in the rest of the Baltic, because of an increased shortage of food and consumer goods, the population is bitter about the non-existent benefits of *perestroika*. The situation regarding food production will get worse, because of the reduced use of fertilizers. The growth of private enterprise and cooperatives might somewhat alleviate the shortages, but will not solve the problem. Thus, Moscow's strategy is to realize through national "concessions" the added labor discipline required to ensure that the increased production demands it is placing on the Baltic can be fulfilled. The KGB plan is clear. Whether the gamble succeeds is an open question.