

EDITORIAL

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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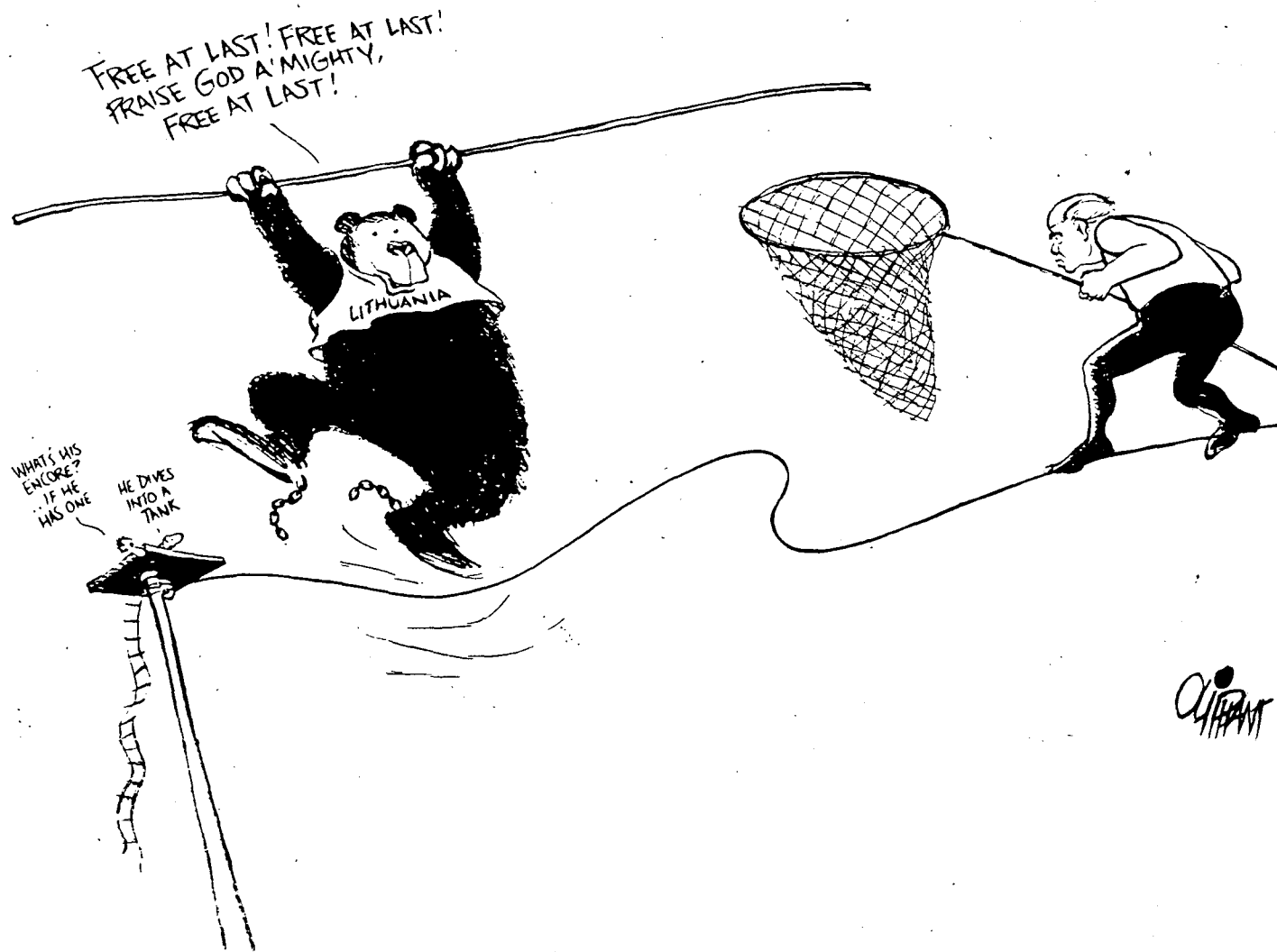
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Lithuania challenges Gorbachov to match principles with actions

Lithuania's declaration of independence is the boldest and most profound test so far of *perestroika* and Mikhail Gorbachov's commitment to democracy and a society of law. It is also a potentially dangerous act, one that could threaten Gorbachov's power and the Soviet Union's integrity—not to mention Lithuania's future. How Gorbachov deals with this situation, and how the Lithuanians respond, will therefore have a profound impact on the course of the Soviet Union's movement toward a genuinely pluralist democracy.

Fortunately, both sides seem to understand the need not to act precipitously, even while strongly defending their respective positions. While Gorbachov's response has at times been heavyhanded, he appears to be groping, along with the Lithuanians, toward a resolution that will be acceptable to both parties.

In this regard, the secession bill that overwhelmingly passed both houses of the Supreme Soviet last week, while unnecessarily harsh in some respects, is a step toward an accommodation with Lithuania that should also help keep the Union essentially intact. The measure gives substance to the Soviet Constitution's provision of a right to secede while also devising a procedure to protect against a stampede of secessionist movements. Under the bill, a republic wishing to become independent must meet the following requirements:

- The republic must hold a referendum in which all permanent residents are eligible to vote, and it must be passed by a two-thirds majority.
- The Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, the Soviets' expanded parliament, must then set a five-year transition period during which questions of state property and debt to the USSR are considered.
- A recall petition signed by 10 percent of the republic's permanent residents can force a repeat vote on secession, which also must receive a two-thirds majority.
- When all requirements are met, a final vote is put to the Con-

gress of People's Deputies.

Not surprisingly, Lithuanian leaders eager for a clean break were not pleased with the Supreme Soviet's bill. As Nikolai Medvedev, an ethnic Russian member of the Lithuanian parliament, complained, "This isn't a law of secession; it's a law against secession." But Lithuanian representatives in Moscow, confident of the result, are already suggesting that a referendum might be agreeable. And although five years seems a long time in the present context of lightninglike developments, negotiations over property and debt settlements will not be easy and may well take a few years. The 10-percent recall provision, on the other hand, seems designed to be a form of harassment that can only frustrate popular desires. One might argue that its purpose is to protect against decisions made in the heat of momentary passion or crisis, but it calls into question the sincerity of the government's commitment to the right embodied in the Soviet Constitution.

The Baltic States' sense of urgency is understandable. Aside from the republic of Georgia, which was forcibly incorporated into Soviet Russia in 1920, they are the only republics whose status was forced upon them. And unlike Georgia, which was incorporated during the turbulent days of civil war, the Baltic States were illegally seized—as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact—in 1940, and they have smarted under Soviet rule ever since.

But no matter how territory is acquired, secession is always difficult for a nation to accept—and dangerous for the government that allows it. Abraham Lincoln did not take kindly to the secession of the states that made up the Confederacy, and civil war ensued. And a threat of secession today by California, Arizona or New Mexico—all of which were illegally taken from Mexico as a result of the Mexican-American war—would cause a constitutional crisis in the U.S. But, of course, each nation has its own history and circumstances, and in the current situation, the Baltic States have both the moral and political high ground.

The problem facing Gorbachov is twofold: how to let the Baltic States go without facing a politically fatal backlash among Russian nationalists, and how to avoid encouraging republics that are more integral parts of the Union to follow suit. In a country that has few legal norms and a history of using brute force to solve problems of this nature, Gorbachov's is no easy task.

LETTERS

News from nowhere

I QUESTION WHETHER JOHN JUDIS, IN WRITING "U.S. automakers ride on rough terrain" (ITT, March 28) talked to many rank-and-file auto-workers.

Judis states that in the last decade U.S. car makers "have worked with the [United Auto Workers] to create a strange but welcome hybrid of Japanese 'teamism' and American industrial democracy. The shop-floor culture of American factories has been radically transformed, giving unionized auto-workers a far greater voice than ever before in determining their working conditions."

The autoworkers whom I know at GM Lordstown lack the most elementary democratic rights. Take free speech. In January 1988 management prohibited leafleting in the plant parking lot unless the leaflet had first been approved by GM labor relations. We filed a National Labor Relations Board charge and got that rule declared unlawful. Recently the controversy has resurfaced. GM workers got an annual bonus of only \$50, in contrast to the thousands of dollars received by workers at other auto companies. There was circulated on the shop floor a leaflet showing three \$50 bills—with GM Chairman of the Board Roger Smith's face in the center of each bill—and a leaflet that began "When things go wrong, as they usually will, and your daily road seems all uphill. When funds are low and debts are high. When you try to smile and can only cry, and you really feel you'd like to quit," and continued (when one turned the page), "Don't come to me, I don't give a shit. ROGER SMITH."

In response, Mike Cubbin, Lordstown complex manager, issued an information bulletin:

To: All Employees—The language of Shop Rule No. 29 has been modified as shown below to clarify the intended administration of the rule.

"The making or publishing of malicious statements concerning any employee, the company or its products."

Violation of the above rule or any other shop rules constitutes misconduct subjecting the violator to disciplinary action by management.

Where is the transformation of the shop-floor culture?

Judis also states in conclusion: "The government may eventually have to step in as it did with Chrysler—demanding higher performance in exchange for loan guarantees or trade and investment protection."

What happened to socialism? In my view, the profit-maximizing conduct by corporations like GM can be changed in one way only: by taking the plants out of the hands of their present owners and letting workers and community representatives run them in the public interest. Strategies that stop short of socialism end up multiplying existing contradictions. Thus the innovative strategy of threatening a boycott of GM products at Van Nuys, Calif., ended in management closing the Norwood, Ohio, plant that made the same car. As long as GM owns the plants, it will continue to put plants in the U.S. in competition with one another and move production out of the U.S. to low-wage factories in Mexico and overseas.

Staughton Lynd
Niles, Ohio

Looking ahead

J OHN JUDIS' CLAIMS (ITT, MARCH 28) THAT FUEL-economy standards are harmful to the domestic automobile industry and that the domestics cannot make cars that are both efficient and profitable are insupportable.

The fuel-economy standards passed by Congress in 1975 actually helped the domestics by forcing them to design the types of cars that were going to be demanded by the market in the '80s. Absent the standards, the domestics would have lost greater market share.

While I strongly agree with Judis that higher gasoline taxes would increase future demand for efficient cars, there has been good demand for efficient cars for quite some time, even for low-quality domestic models such as the Chevette and Escort. The reason the domestics have not made profits on efficient cars is primarily that the industry has never committed to making cars that are both efficient and attractive. Now that the Japanese automakers are beginning to compete in the luxury-car market, the domestics will no longer be able to live off their monopoly in this segment and will have to compete across the model spectrum.

Judis misses the point. Future cars will have to be much more fuel-efficient, whether because of another oil price shock or controls to ameliorate global warming. The history of the domestic industry suggests that it will ignore this reality as long as it can and continue down its path to short-term profits and long-term self-destruction. Judis' claims aside, the only way for the industry to survive is not to keep its collective head in the sand but rather to produce the types of cars that will be necessary in the 21st century. In this context, higher fuel-economy standards may be the best way to protect the long-term interests of autoworkers and the cities that depend on them. As shown in *Roger and Me*, relying on the Big Three for such security is hopeless.

Jeffrey A. Alson
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Revisionist chastity

T HIS IS IN REGARDS TO YOUR ARTICLE "SEX RESPECT tells teens to 'pet dogs, not dates'" (ITT, March 21).

I see the Morality Enforcers are at it again. Sex Respect wants to lick the problem of teenage promiscuity, pregnancies, etc., the same way that Nancy Reagan wanted to lick the "drug problem"—by telling us to "just say no." Granted, there is legitimate cause for action in both areas. But, as usual, the conservative approach is to blame the victim.

In this case, it is admonishing youngsters to not engage in sex while living in a culture replete with sexual salivating and innuendo. We are bombarded with sexual messages in the media; products don't sell without covert or subliminal sexual come-ons. (Aren't I more attractive to women for drinking Beer X? Don't I enhance my sex appeal with Lipstick Y?) In this light, I submit a revised "chastity pledge":

I choose chastity. I'll refrain from sex. I'll be celibate like a good girl boy should. Only if advertisers for Close-Up, Beck's, Quaker Oats, Nissan, Ford and General Foods L'Oreal, Maybelline, Budweiser, Chex. Kindly stop using it to hawk their goods.

Darryl Tahirali
El Toro, Calif.

Half-sane

I F MOST IN THESE TIMES READERS ARE SOCIALISTS and if the letters (ITT, Feb. 28) defending "New Age" twaddle are typical of those readers' thoughts, then, sisters and brothers, we're in deep trouble.

Michael Cerkowski, for example, is capable of writing and, presumably, regarding with satisfaction the phrase "a lot more harmless." Does he mean "a lot less harmful"? Anyway, this man's cerebrum has clearly been invaded by a large quantity of tapioca from outer space. He says that the New Age stuff can be portrayed as an expression of ignorance and irrationality ... only if one is willing to say the same of *all* religion and mysticism" (his italics). Well exactly, Michael; those of us who are still more than half-sane are not only willing to say so but do say so. Judaism Christianity Islam have certainly been bloodier, so far, but the intellectual, moral and emotional rot engendered by the New Age movement is no less pernicious for being less blatant.

By the way, *Reader's Digest* is as likely to publish an exposé of the New Age as it is to publish a critique of capitalism.

Robert Allen
Philadelphia

Turnabout

M AGGIE GARB'S ARTICLE ON CIVIL RIGHTS OF pregnant drug users (ITT, Feb. 7) notes the argument that a fetus possesses civil rights apart from those of the pregnant woman, rights that may conflict with the woman's.

Persons who accept that argument may also advocate that a pregnant woman's activities be limited in order to benefit the fetus. Less common, however, is advocacy of societal intervention to enrich the woman's life in order to benefit the fetus. For example, Reagan and Bush administration officials decried the effect of illicit

drugs on fetuses. Those same administrations, however, worked hard to reduce food programs that nourished pregnant women, prenatal care opportunities and neonatal care availability.

If an anti-drug zealot advocates societal intervention to limit a pregnant woman's life in order to benefit a fetus yet also opposes societal intervention to benefit a fetus by expanding a woman's life, "drugs" and "fetuses" are simply being used as an excuse to implement a wider social agenda intended to limit citizens' lives.

Richard Lawrence Miller
Kansas City, Mo.

Disposable society

ALEXANDER COCKBURN'S ARTICLE "THE POGO Fallacy" (ITT, March 21) is a logical fallacy. The analogy he used to compare the inadequacy of a study that showed higher tuberculosis rates among blacks and the environment makes no sense. In fact, it's dangerous to the planet. While fault cannot be laid upon the black population for genetics—or for the racism involved in the study—fault can be laid upon the U.S. population (or any other wasteful society) for the ecological blight we are now facing.

Large corporations and banks (through lending policies) have helped to create the current environmental crisis through bottom-line business practices (greed), but they could not have accomplished the level of destruction we currently enjoy without a docile consumer population. People must realize that when they buy something packed in styrofoam they are contributing to the degradation of the ozone layer; we must realize that when we buy chemical cleaners we are polluting our water. If people wouldn't buy the stuff, companies wouldn't make it. If we would hold companies and the government truly responsible for environmental atrocities, we wouldn't be in the dire straits we're in.

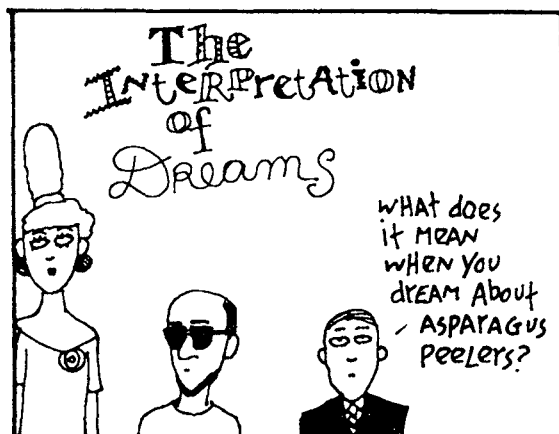
Cockburn also criticizes the need to change our values. Let's face it: we don't know what living with nature means. This is a disposable society. Our houses and businesses are built with the least possible care for conservation and with the least possible use of solar power.

As long as we view our planet as a resource to be plundered and as a dumping ground we are not going to live in harmony with it.

A final message to Cockburn: we cannot go around blaming others and sit back feeling smug while the problem remains. Empowerment is the key to grass-roots action and real social change.

Gary L. Quay
State College, Pa.

SYLVIA



Nicole Hollander 4-22