INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

ILN - 9

Turniškių 10-1
Vilnius 232016
Lithuania
May 7, 1991

Mr. Peter Bird Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA

"April 30, 1991: One Day in the Life of Vytautas Landsbergis"

by Ina Navazelskis

For months, Vytautas Landsbergis hasn't lived at home. As a result of Soviet attempts to topple the Lithuanian government last January 13, the President of the Lithuanian Supreme Council (aka Parliament) now sleeps where he works, in a small room behind his third floor office in Parliament. And Parliament, that modern four story building at the end of Gediminas Boulevard, is still barricaded like a besieged fortress.

Since the failed coup, which left 13 unarmed civilians and one Soviet soldier dead, life has not really returned to normal here. Access to Parliament is still severely restricted -- three of four roads leading to it remain blocked by concrete slabs, concrete blocks and boulders. (And that fourth road does not provide unhindered access. A wooden booth stands near a makeshift barrier of concrete blocks at the end of an open field several hundred meters behind Parliament. Security guards lift a hand-operated bar only for cars with passes -- belonging to members of Parliament, workers in the building, sometimes press. Everyone else must get special permission. Taxis are not allowed through at all.)

Because of the barricades, Gediminas Boulevard --- Vilnius' main thoroughfare -- has become a dead end street. Parliament and the Mažvydas State Library next door sit in the center of this artificial enclave, surrounded by vast open spaces. Four and five story apartment buildings with shops on the ground floor make up the outer walls of this modern-day barricade system, with the gaps inbetween them filled in by all that concrete. Windows in these surrounding buildings are still criss-crossed with masking tape, to protect them against shattering from the boom of tanks.

Ina Navazelskis, a journalist, has written extensively about East European and Soviet affairs. She is the author of biographies about Alexander Dubcek and Leonid Brezhnev.

Parliament itself is still a fortress-within-a-fortress. Adorned with graffitti, flyers, and crude caricatures (usually of Mikhail Gorbachev) concrete slabs still lean against three sides of the building, while a row of concrete blocks filled with dirt still blocks off a fourth side. Barbed wire coils are still stretched on the roof and on the grass below. Steel grates still block the front courtyard, sandbags are still stacked against windows and along staircases. Young men -- volunteers in the Lithuanian National Defense Department -- now clad in dark olive green uniforms, still wander through the corridors and stand rigid at attention at entrances.

It is this small area, a makeshift island in the middle of the city, which is the heart of the Republic of Lithuania. And Vytautas Landsbergis is the undisputed boss.

Life outside Parliament: Winter, 1991. The campfires are gone; the barricades, graffitti and people remain. Parliament has become a tourist attraction.

Before January 13, Landsbergis was already famous for his long hours at the office, rarely calling it quits before 2.30 A.M. His driver remembers him frequently returning home -- a five minute ride across the river -- at four and five in the morning. Today, the long hours are still the rule, but the trips home have become the exception. Landsbergis has no days off.

His staff find it hard to keep up with him -- the former music professor is tireless. Four secretaries work in shifts seven days a week, from 8:30 in the morning to well past midnight. Two regular drivers, covering alternate days, are on call 24 hours a day. Landsbergis' personal staff consists of one aide, three advisors, four administrative assistants, and two typists. Most are in their early 30's -- a generation younger than the 58 year old Landsbergis. This is both a plus and a minus, another Lithuanian official told me. The minus is obvious -- lack of life experience. But the plus is just as telling --the younger the staff member, the less chance that he/she has already been damaged by the Soviet system into becoming simply a bureaucratic automaton. (Less chance, too, I think to myself, of challenging the boss.)

Two or three young men in conservative business suits -- Landsbergis' personal bodyguards -- are always in his front office. (They, of course, declined to tell me how many bodyguards there are in total.) Sometimes, when an unknown person has an appointment with Landsbergis, a bodyguard will join the two of them in the President's office. He will stand in a corner of the room, maintaining a strict poker face the whole while. Be it on excursions outside the building or simply to the central chamber one flight below, bodyguards accompany Landsbergis everywhere.

Landsbergis is famous for another thing -- wreaking havoc with set appointments. "I'll write you down," said the secretary of the day when I called a week and a half ago to make one. "But I can't guarantee that this will really mean anything." I knew what she was talking about. Landsbergis has been known to keep journalists waiting for hours -- last year I had a taste of that honor, when I cooled my heels in his front office for six hours -- sometimes only finally granting an interview after midnight. Sometimes he takes on several groups of journalists, speaking several different languages, at once.

But four days before a ten day trip to the United States, I was spared all that. Landsbergis granted my request to follow him around for one entire day. So on Tuesday, April 30, from 9:30 A.M. to 11:40 P.M., I was almost constantly with him. I was allowed to sit in on all meetings, and listened in on almost all conversations. Landsbergis himself was open, engaging, friendly. He addressed me in the familiar "tu" form, and in between the many appointments of the day, chatted about matters mundane and lofty.

ILN - 9

Tuesday, April 30, 1991

9:30 A.M. Landsbergis' front office is buzzing. Secretary Gene Kuriliene is on the phone, putting through a call to Tel Aviv. Bodyguards chat among themselves or read the morning newspapers. Artūras Skučas, a bearded hefty man responsible for Landsbergis' personal security, comes out of the office. A few minutes later, the head of the National Civil Defense Department, Audrius Butkevičius, a slim blond 30 year old former physician, also emerges from behind the oak-colored double doors. Both are responsible for keeping Landsbergis informed on any disturbances that might have occurred throughout the night. Both have regular morning briefings with him. Last night, there was only one incident worth mention -- at ten minutes to midnight, a drunken Soviet officer starting shooting his gun near a children's toy store in downtown Vilnius. He was subdued by the police and returned to his base.

The secretary ushers me in. We walk through Landsbergis' long formal office, with floor to ceiling windows on both sides. To the left is a view of Parliament's empty blocked off front courtyard; to the right, the Neris River, a Russian Orthodox Church in the distance. An upright piano stands tucked away in the corner, with musical scores by Landsbergis' favorite composer, Lithuanian Constantine Čiurlionis, resting on top. A statue of Mary stands in the middle of the twelve seat conference table to the left, and three wooden carvings of seated Christ figures with sorrowful demeanors, heads propped up on one arm (the statues are called Rūpintojėliai, or Worriers, and are a particularly Lithuanian form of iconography) are scattered around the room. There are two black and white photos on the back wall -- one of a smiling Vaclav Havel, the other of a lone man, his back turned to the camera, standing in front of a tank. (It was taken the night of January 13th) Two cartoons -- chosen personally by Landsbergis from among some fifteen that were sent to him by Western cartoonists -- are hung closeby.

On a small side table to the right is a silver-toned disc, the plaque representing the Norwegian People's Peace Prize given to Landsbergis last March 11. Underneath is the an enlarged facsimile of a check for 2,850,000 Norweigan kroner (roughly $475,000) donations from ordinary Norwegian citizens. (Landsbergis said the money will go to disabled people in Lithuania.) Half a dozen phones are to the right of his desk.

One of two cartoons hanging in Landsbergis' office

Papers are neatly stacked on a side table to the left as well as on top of his desk itself. The secretaries joke that in addition to himself, Landsbergis allows only one other person -- an administrative assistant -- to put them in order.

We pass through two more small rooms, one with a coffee table laden with books, to a small dining room. The brown curtains, hiding the view of the Neris River outside, are still drawn. The table is covered by a square pink linen place mat, and breakfast china. A plate with some slices of bread stand to one side. Two extra large Thermoses stand in an opposite corner.

Landsbergis sits at one corner of the dining room table, sipping a cup of coffee. He wears a grey suit with faint charcoal stripes, a light blue shirt and light grey cardigan sweater underneath his suit jacket, black loafers. He looks very professorial.

Press spokesman Audrius Ažubalis, 33, a tall blond fellow with chiseled features, who meets with Landsbergis from 15 minutes to half an hour every morning, stands in front of him. As I enter the room, Ažubalis is wrapping up his summary of the wire reports (Tass), the morning newspapers (when he gets to them in time, he admits to me sheepishly; papers sometimes get delivered very late in the A.M.) and news events that have occurred in Lithuania over the past day. He also coordinates with Landsbergis what information will be released to journalists during a daily 10:00 A.M. press briefing.

Landsbergis offers me coffee. Ažubalis tells Landsbergis of a Tass account of interviews given by ex-Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene to the German press the previous weekend. What does she say? I ask.

"Oh, the usual," Landsbergis answers a bit wearily as he glances down at the photocopied Tass report in front of him. "Landsbergis' right-wing extremism, with which she could not agree. That she has been accused of being a traitor and that's why she was toppled, and that we demand the immediate withdrawal of the Soviet army."

"Of course," he adds, "Tass can also lie. They sometimes throw in an extra sentence or two, which the interviewee never said." The only way to counteract that, says Landsbergis, is if the one who gave the interview speaks up. (I later check the Tass account against the original interview with Prunskiene in Frankfurter Allgemeine (FA) on April 26. Tass did not

throw in any extra sentences -- if anything, the official Soviet wire service was guilty of a sin of omission rather than of commision. In the FA interview, Prunskiene clearly blasted Soviet policies as much as Landsbergis'-- but Tass focussed only on her criticisms of the latter. She also came out with this intriguing statement: "Gorbachev is very sensitive," said Prunskiene. "When he hears irony (Note: one of Landsbergis favorite ways of expressing himself) then his partner in discussion becomes a political corpse. Gorbachev likes being the world's darling. He would be happy if he could also solve our problems in a way that would be beneficial for both sides. When I value my discussion partner, that is when obligations start on his side. With distrust one only gets hostile conditions. We can't afford that." Does that mean that sensitive Gorbachev would never have dreamed of sending tanks into Lithuania if Landsbergis had only been more polite?

When did you retire last night, I ask Landsbergis. "At about 2:30," he says. "I read a book by Stefan Zweig, on Erasmus. It is rare that I have the chance to read these days." He laughs a little. "I didn't prepare any documents, edit the draft treaty with Armenia or work on my speeches for America next week -- but I read through Erasmus! This morning I got up rather late -- 8:30. They (the secretaries and staff) let me sleep."

Leader of the Independence Party, Virgilijus Čepaitis, walks in and pours himself a cup of coffee. "He's here to see if his influence hasn't weakened during the past night," Landsbergis jokes. Čepaitis does not smile back. (Čepaitis, representing the more nationalist, right-wing forces in Parliament, has been accused of being the real power behind the throne here. He has also been accused of trying to control Lithuanian television and press. Prunskiene holds him, even more than Landsbergis, responsible for her downfall.) He sits down opposite Landsbergis; they chat about an Icelandic official who has just been appointed to a new post. (Iceland is the first country to have recognized the Lithuanian government.)

10.07 Landsbergis, preceded by a bodyguard, enters the central chamber of Parliament. The first plenary session of the week begins. For the half hour that he will be there, Landsbergis sits up at the podium, writing. He speaks only once, when member of Parliament Justas Paleckis (once a member of the Lithuanian Communist Party's Central Committee responsible for ideology; considered a reform Communist, now a member

of the Democratic Labor Party, the renamed independent Lithuanian Communist Party) asks him to explain to Parliament why he is going to the United States.

"It is not difficult for me to talk about the purpose of next week's trip, and at the same time, to talk about how I see the situation here in Lithuania," Landsbergis answers slowly, pausing in his writing. "But we already speak about that during other occasions. I believe that we will have the opportunity to discuss (all this)... this Saturday, during the Sajudis rally. Maybe it will also be broadcast. But it depends on you (parliamentarians) whether we should set aside time during a plenary session so that my thoughts on the current situation could be explained."

Two other parliamentarians back Paleckis' request, one of them commenting that in general, he knows very little about what the Presidium (and by inference, Landsbergis) is doing. In two days, during the next plenary session (Thursday, May 2) Landsbergis will talk about his trip.

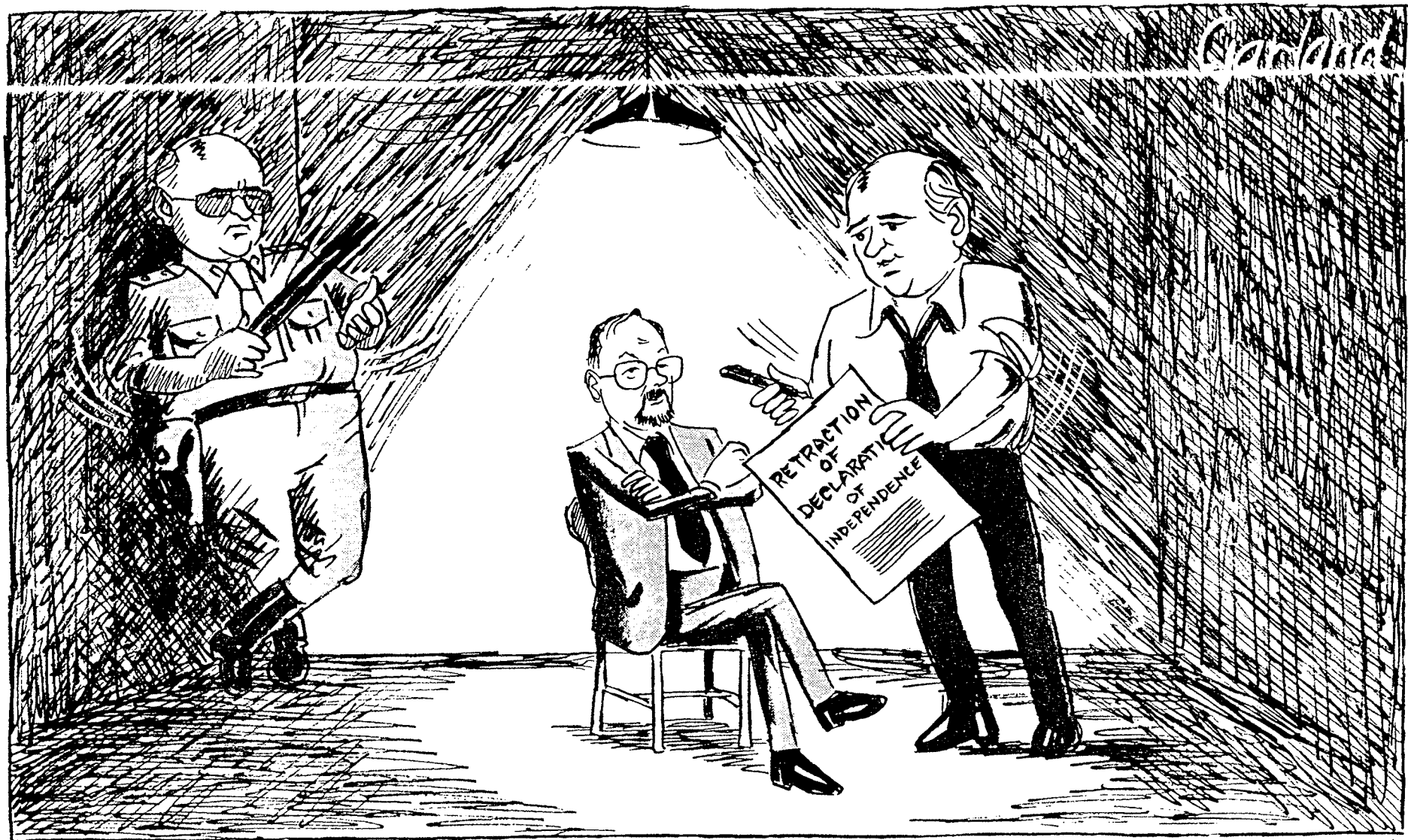
The first half hour of today's plenary session is taken up with confirming the weekly as well as daily agenda. Draft laws to be debated are rather heavy duty. The morning session is taken up by the question of whether classes in religion, which are already offered in public grade schools and high schools, should be mandatary or elective. (I see two priests, both dissidents who had spent several years in labor camps, are in the hall. They have been strong advocates of bringing religion -- specifically, the Catholic religion -- into the schools.) The afternoon session will be devoted to a continuing debate on the return of property to those individuals it belonged to before Soviet nationalisation, and whether persons living in communal apartments (ie. dormitories -- those famous places that we all hear about where a four person family lives squished together in one room, sharing bath and kitchen facilities with other equally squished families) and whether persons living in apartments belonging to enterprises (ie, the Lithuanian version of company flats) should have the right to buy them.

10.32 Landsbergis' secretary appears in the central chamber, signalling that it is time to go to his next appointment, a meeting with Mr. Feodor Vadimovich Shelov-Kovedayev, one of the members of the Russian parliament, and a representative of Boris Yeltsin. One week earlier, on April 23, Yeltsin formed an alliance with Gorbachev, when nine of the 15 Soviet republics

reached an agreement to sign an all-Union treaty. Six republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldavia, Armenia and Georgia) declined to participate. Having flown in the night before, Shelov-Kovedayev is in town to get the Lithuanian reaction to these developments.

Landsbergis, with bodyguard on one side and me on the other, returns to his office. He greets Shelov-Kovedayev, and 54 year old Česlovas Stankevičius, one of the three deputy vice-presidents in the Lithuanian Parliament and the head of the Lithuanian delegation for negotiations with the Russian republic. Shelov-Kovedayev makes a favorable first impression. He looks to be in his mid-to-late 30's. a tall, bearded, fair-skinned, open-faced man with thinning blond hair, wearing a too-short suit jacket with a tiny Soviet flag pinned in his lapel -- and diplomatically, a Lithuanian tri-color pin above. (I was unable to find out his political affiliations, but was told that he definitely was not a member of the Communist Party.)

Although I am allowed to sit in on this meeting, it is the only one where Landsbergis asks me outright not to disclose what is discussed. So for the next hour, I content myself with watching the three of them go back and forth. The discussion is friendly. They sit in the "living room section" of Landsbergis' office, a U-shaped area of comfortable velveteen covered sectional sofas, Shelov-Kovedayev sandwiched inbetween Landsbergis and Stankevičius. First the Lithuanians speak, then he does. Sometimes Landsbergis leans forward, making a point. Sometimes he makes a joke; the others smile. Occasionally Shelov-Kovedayev glances at me sitting at the conference table across the room, a quizzical look on his face. Why am I there? What am I doing? Neither Landsbergis nor Stankevičius (who himself only finds out later in the day) explain. As I watch the three of them, their discussion looks as if three arm-chair philosophers are debating some fine points of an esoteric question, rather than that the groundwork for future Russian-Lithuanian relations is being laid -- the success or failure of which could have ramifications far beyond just these two nations. I am reminded of a poem I once read by W.H. Auden, called "The Embassy". The first verse goes something like this: "As evening fell, the day's oppression lifed, Far peaks came into focus -- it had rained. Across wide lawns and... there drifted, the conversation of the highly trained."



"HE CAN GET A BIT NASTY SOMETIMES, IT'S BEST TO JUST CO-OPERATE!"

One of two cartoons hanging inLandsbergis' office

Earlier, Landsbergis had told me his reaction to that agreement by the nine republics to join the all-new Soviet Union. Reading parts of it from a Tass report, which he had already highlighted with a pink magic marker, Landsbergis had said, "It is open to interpretation. On the one hand, there are plusses -- on the other, minuses...As all Soviet documents, it has a double meaning" and could be used to justify "any force necessary to require us to follow the Soviet Constitution...Look, here is one section where they acknowledge the right of six republics who don't want to be part of the union to determine their own future. Then there is another section that says the sternest measures should be taken to re-establish (Soviet) Consitutional order. Does that include these six republics?"

Relations BETWEEN the Russian republic and Lithuania, says Landsbergis, have remained friendly despite Yeltsin's recent alliance with Gorbachev. The Lithuanians are pressing the Russians to sign a treaty. The Russians are hedging, says Landsbergis, not so much because they don't want to, but because elections for the presidency of the Russian republic are coming up, and they don't want a treaty with the Lithuanians to become a card the conservative Soviet forces could use against Yeltsin.

11.33 Press spokesman Ažubalis walks into the office, to bring Landsbergis to his next meeting -- with some 30 members of the Berlin branch of the Aspen Institute. Accompanied by his bodyguard, Landsbergis turns a corner outside his office and walks a few yards to the Presidium conference room on the same floor. The Aspen group arrived from Riga the day before, and will be leaving for Moscow the following morning. It is a multi-national group -- questions are asked by Germans, Americans, British, Poles. Aside from the group leader whom I had met in Berlin -- a talented young East German with the unlikely first name of Mario who speaks English, Russian, German and probably several other languages fluently, and who was once thrown out of a diplomatic school in Moscow -- and the Countess Marion von Doenhoff (one of the original publishers of the weekly West German newspaper Die Zeit) I do not recognize anyone else here. But it strikes me as a no-nonsense group, as the questions are straightforward and precise. Landsbergis says a few words in English as an introduction, and then reverts to Lithuanian. For the next half hour, he is peppered with the following -- what is the current state of negotiations with the Soviet Union (at a standstill, says Landsbergis, the Soviets are not interested in meeting with the

Lithuanians. "Our position," says Landsbergis, is not that we leave the Soviet Union. Our position is that we do not intend to join the Soviet Union."); what are his views on the status of the Soviet army in Lithuania, (contrary to what Prunskiene maintained in her Frankfurter Allgemeine article, Landsbergis does not call for an immediate withdrawal but says that some kind of treaty should be drawn up regulating their presence and eventual withdrawal); what are Lithuania's relations with other Eastern European nations (could be more forthcoming on support for Lithuania, says Landsbergis, but he realizes that they too have to watch what the Soviet Union is doing); what are his expectations from the West. (It would be nice, Landsbergis says, if the support from the West were "clearer and stronger". Western governments, he says, should look "critically at their own strivings to reach consensus" with the Soviet Union, even when the latter behaves "unjustly and illegally. To reach consensus with a criminal means that all become criminal." Landsbergis pauses, looking at the group, and smiles slightly. "Here I have touched a sore spot, which earns me a bad reputation.") Note: Last year, when President Bush did not apply trade sanctions to the Soviet Union for Lithuania's economic blockade, Landsbergis likened that decision to another Munich, when the Western governments sought to appease Hitler in 1938 by letting him occupy Czechoslovakia.

12.10 Darius Sužiedelis, a American in his mid-20's on Landsbergis' staff (he analyzes the foreign press and is Landsbergis' official translator) comes to take him to lunch with United States Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) and his delegation. Landsbergis' aides tell me that there is a constant stream of visitors, whether representatives from the European Parliament or officials of various political stripes from individual European nations, East as well as West. Western diplomats -- particularly the Scandinavians -- also regularly drop in. Since January 13th, American diplomats from Leningrad and Moscow have upped their presence. (I heard that the current policy -- whether it is official or unofficial I don't know --is that there be an American presence in the Baltic region at all times.) Lugar is the fourth high-level official American visitor in Lithuania this year. The first two were Congressmen Stephen Solarz and Gary Ackerman in mid-February, followed by ex-President Richard Nixon in late March.

Senator Lugar is already in Landsbergis' front office. He passes along greetings from Richard Nixon and

mentions the difficulty the delegation had in getting here. Until 4 p.m. yesterday -- when they were still in Czechoslovakia -- says the Senator, it was uncertain whether they would get visas to come to Vilnius at all. In addition to his wife and an aide (possibly two aides, I don't remember) Lugar is accompanied by an officer from the American consulate in Leningrad. In addition to Landsbergis, there are five other Lithuanians who join the party for lunch: head of Parliament's foreign relations committee Emanuelis Zingeris, 33; parliamentarian and foreign relations committee member Laima Andrikiene, 33, and Landsbergis' advisor for foreign relations, Ramūnas Bogdanas, also in his late 20's or early 30's. In addition, there are three Lithuanian - Americans: Rita Dapkus, who heads up the Information Bureau in Parliament (late 20's or early 30's), Sužiedelis, and myself.

Lunch is held in the same dining room where Landsbergis ate breakfast. The talk is friendly. There is none of the sharpness that Landsbergis exhibited to the Aspen group about striving to reach consensus with criminals. But Landsbergis does comment on the failure of Congress to ratify aid to Lithuania last year. "We didn't look at it as an economic loss but as a political mistake," he tells Lugar. The Senator responds," You have been infinitely patient as is probably wise" And then Landsbergis says, "We look with satisifaction on the increasing United States policy not to see us as part of the Soviet Union."

12.45 National Defense Department chief Butkevičius interrupts lunch to tell Landsbergis the latest news about a planned demonstration for 4 p.m. by trade unions belonging to all-Union enterprises. It will be the first demonstration with some pro-Moscow elements allowed near the Parliament since last January. Lugar asks about what Landsbergis anticipates for the following day, May 1st, the traditional worker's holiday -- and also a major Soviet one. Landsbergis answers that he doesn't know, but that today's demonstrations could well be a prelude to larger ones on May 1st.

Earlier, Landsbergis had said to me that at this time in Lithuania "the current situation is in many ways similar to last December and early January when almost every day we were subject to yet another Soviet military action and (constant) threats from Moscow." In the past few months, that has usually meant low-level harassment; the takeover of more buildings that were in Lithuanian hands by Soviet military forces, and the

random harassment of civilians -- ie., searches of private vehicles. Landsbergis says that today, although there are "fewer political ultimatums, there are more economic ones."

Butkevičius leaves. Scheduled to last until about 2 p.m., lunch ends earlier, at about ten past one.

13.40 Press spokesman Ažubalis informs Landsbergis that barricades near Lukiškes Square, a short distance behind Parliament, have begun to be taken down by suspicious looking "construction workers" and that quite a few drunkards are gathering near the site. Ažubalis wonders if this might not have something to do with the planned trade union demonstration at 4 p.m.

13.50 Foreign Affairs advisor Ramūnas Bogdanas and Landsbergis discuss that day's issue of Respublika, a Lithuanian tabloid whose editor in chief was one of the original 35 members of the reform movement Sajudis. For over a year, Landsbergis and Respublika have been at odds -- Landsbergis maintaining that Respublika's interest is to take sly swipes at the government, often falsifying seemingly innocuous details, or presenting information in very tendential ways. (He has some cause for complaint: Impartiality and a striving for objectivity are sorely lacking in the Lithuanian press in general, regardless of political leanings.) Respublika's editor, on the other hand, who became famous for exposes of Soviet corruption in the early 80's, sees himself as a champion upholding the freedom of the press from encroaching control by the new masters in Lithuania. Neither position is so black-and-white. Like all governments, Landsbergis' would like to only have positive stories printed about it, gets irked when negative ones come out, and tries to muzzle such voices. (But there is no official censorship -- yet.) On the other hand, Respublika is not such a great champion that it makes itself out to be. Its articles often have a sneering, cheap quality about them, with criticisms aimed at petty things, rather than essential ones. It is true to its identity -- an honest to goodness tabloid.

The article that raises Landsbergis' ire today is not so much a direct attack on him, as it is on the atmosphere of witch-hunting in general, with the implication that because he is Lithuania's leader, he is ultimately responsible for this atmosphere. Written by one of the leaders of the new opposition coalition, Lithuanian Forum for the Future, the article is a tirade against "nine political groups" which, in

leaflets pasted throughout the city, condemned the authors of Lithuania's educational reform program as being "leftist" and "atheistic." Like so many articles in the Lithuanian press, it is infuriating for its lack of information. The gist is what an awful thing it is that this handful of elderly intellectual professors, all women, with reputations of the highest calibre, are now being pilloried as enemies of the people. But the leaflets being pasted around town are not quoted (though the fact that there were such leaflets is not disputed; I had heard of this from other sources), the author does not say whether the authors of the reform program are mentioned by name in those leaflets, and only three of the "nine political groups" are identified. Still, the article's purpose is to sound all the alarms. There are statements such as "Individual persons and whole communities -- nations, states -- sometimes begin to destroy themselves...In 1991 in Lithuania, it is demanded to sacrifice a whole group of the intelligentsia which in the past few years has created an original concept of (what) Lithuanian education (should be)...Is everything repeating itself once more? Will we once more be forced to defend the freedom of one's conscience?...A frightening precedent is emerging: a physcial attack against the mind, the intolerance of the masses towards personalities, ideologies -- with the highest qualifications."

Landsbergis reads the article, and out comes the pink highlighter again. "Oh, Jesus Maria, this is professionally done," he sighs wearily, underlining the section in particular about "a physical attack against the mind". To Landsbergis, this is one more example of attempts to incite discontent and further destabilize the society. "Can you imagine that today (meaning that the demonstration in front of parliament by the trade union could turn into a riot) they have to come out with an article like this," he asks, his voice rising just a little, betraying his anger.

"How should one understand Respublika?" I ask him. "It's perfectly clear what Respublika is," he answers without spelling it out for me. (I am given to understand anything from an outright KGB front to a naive KGB tool, unaware of the destructive role it is playing in society.)

Although there are no set appointments for the afternoon, Landsbergis' anteroom is filled with some half dozen people waiting to see him. He himself asks the secretary to find the leader of the trade union meeting, Marijonas Visakavičius, asks for Butkevičius

again. The afternoon parade begins.

13.55 General Secretary of the Lithuanian State Bank Vilius Baldišis, 31, walks in. He wishes to coordinate a response to the central council of the Soviet State Bank which keeps inviting the Lithuanians to conferences in Moscow. Landsbergis later tells me, "We write that we will be happy to have ties between two banks, but not as an affiliate of one bank." Such invitations, he says, are one more way that the Soviets try to underline Lithuania's subordinate status. (Gorbachev's office keeps sending them to him, for example, to participate in conferences as the leader of one of the fifteen Soviet republics).

While meeting with Baldišis, Landsbergis's secretary brings him a business card, explaining, "This person says she is an acquaintance of yours and would like to see you. " Yes, says Landsbergis, this is a relative, but I will have no time today." A second later, he changes his mind. Let her come up to the office, he says, but she might have to wait.

14.10 A member of Parliament, by profession a writer-playwright, comes in, obviously upset. He shows Landsbergis a folder of papers. This should have been taken care of half a year ago, he says. His annoyance has to do with an administrative matter -- the lack of ordering a bus to bring some sort of official delegation to Poland. Those administrators who should have authorized that bus didn't do so and are now out of the country on business trips. The delegation is all set to go today and -- no bus. Landsbergis takes the folder, tries to calm the parliamentarian down, and tells him to ask get the Secretary of Parliament, Liudvikas Sabutis, to come in -- he'll straighten things out.

After the parliamentarian leaves, under his breath, I hear Landsbergis mutter something about all the goofs made by one's own people. I ask him, "Don't you ever want to just chuck it all and send everyone to the devil?"

He paces the office, stops, turns to me, and allows himself to let off a little steam. "We live in such a system where you have to check (someone's work) every day. I will say, tell him that he should do thus and such. And later, the next day, I have to ask, did you tell him and did he do it? And if I don't ask, and after three days I remember, it turns out that nothing was done. So go ahead and go crazy, because that's the

way it is at every step!"

I persist. But doesn't this ever get you to that point, I say, where you really wonder whether it is all worth it? Something must keep you going -- what is that? Landsbergis looks straight at me, and now I hear a different kind of answer.

There are noises, he says, that he is not the right person for this job, noises that started on March 11, 1990 when he was elected President of Parliament. Such noises come in waves -- sometimes sounded louder, sometimes softer. The thinking, he said, goes something like this. "A great many problems result from the fact that Landsbergis is in this post. If there would be a person who had not insulted Gorbachev," things would be different... but "because Landsbergis behaves the way he does, Gorbachev refuses to talk with him. So that if we want to talk with Moscow, we have to get rid of Landsbergis." The line, Landsbergis says, was very strongly accented for two months last year during the economic blockade. "But later, we talked (Landsbergis and Gorbachev) very cordially...and for several hours. So that bubble burst...it was empty." Now the same is being done. "There are all these well-meaning suggestions, from very good people, who stand on the side and observe, and who, in the end, even appeal to my conscience that I should not be that ambitious, that I should step aside, why do I absolutely have to be in this job? You understand how easy it would be for me to just spit on the whole thing and send everyone to the devil. And so they (do this) on purpose, to make it easier for me to spit."

14.20 The distant relative, a middle-aged woman, is brought into Landsbergis' office. She brings a present, a graphic arts drawing with her. After thanking her for the gift, Landsbergis takes her by the arm and brings her to one of the back rooms. "I want to show you that the last painting you brought really is hung up here," he says. "So that you would see it with your own eyes and not think that we've stuck it in storage somewhere."

The purpose of her visit soon becomes clear. Her daughter, living in Riga, has been invited to participate in a conference in London, but there is no way that her visa will be processed in time. Does Landsbergis have any contacts at the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry? Couldn't he help move things along a bit? Of course he has contacts, Landsbergis answers, but he can't use them to take care of a personal affair like

this. Moreover, if the daughter is registered in Riga, then her request must go through the Latvian Foreign Ministry. There is no way that he can intercede there. But the woman pleads, and making no promises, Landsbergis agrees to call the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry.

14.30 Phone call to the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry. Landsbergis asks to be informed if anyone is planning a trip to the British Embassy in Moscow in the next few days, he might have a special request to tack on to other matters. But, he emphasizes, no special trip should be made for this in and of itself.

Marijonas Visakavičius, the head of the all-Union affiliated trade unions, comes in. A thin wiry man of medium stature, he tells Landsbergis of how the plans for the demonstration took shape the night before, explaining that with all the price rises, the workers needed to let off some steam. In the middle of this talk, Secretary of parliament Sabutis walks in and Landsbergis asks him to take care of the bus to Poland business.

After Visakavičius leaves, I ask if it isn't ironic that the leader of all-Union trade unions would be on such friendly terms with Landsbergis. Not at all, answers Landsbergis. Visakavičius and he share some history. The trade union leader was an early member of the Sajudis affiliate in his enterprise, and together with Landsbergis, was elected as one of 42 representatives from Lithuania to the all-Union Congress of People's Deputies in 1989.

The trade union system itself is in flux these days, Landsbergis goes on to explain. There used to be only one kind -- those that were connected to central bodies in Moscow. Workers in various professions automatically had a percentage of their pay go to these trade unions. But when new, local trade unions, unrelated to Moscow, started springing up in Lithuania, the Lithuanian government halted that practice of automatically slicing off that percentage and sending it to the old trade unions, leaving it up to the workers themselves to choose where they wanted to send their dues. In the meantime, the assets of the all-Union trade unions are frozen, until an inventory can be made and an agreement is reached as to who gets what. In summing up, Landsbergis says, there are elements in these Moscow connected trade unions that are anti-Lithuanian and pro-Soviet, and Visakavičius has to deal with them. "Ivanov and his bandits (the leader of the pro-Moscow

Jedintsvo organization) always want to turn these things into the proletariat international against the bourgeois nationalists. They are always preparing for a physical confrontation." But Visakavičius, even though he probably represents "their interests as much as ours", is not of that ilk and so his presence in Parliament and meetings with Landsbergis should not do him any harm.

15.00 The next visitor is a businessman, or rather, a Lithuanian intermediary for a very wealthy American businessman. The intermediary tells Landsbergis that the American would like to invest in Lithuania's future. He is stocky, medium height, blond, looks to be in his forties, and very obsequious. He would like to introduce both the millionaire would-be investor to Landsbergis and Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius. The intermediary paints a rosy picture of the role the investor could play in Lithuania's economic future, saying that having spent two years investigating the infrastructure of Lithuania's economy, the investor is ready to risk his money in anything from developing television components to furs to porcellain. He lives in Hollywood, says the intermediary, and is neighbors with luminaries such as Sylvestor Stallone... Landsbergis looks a little quizzical at some of what the intermediary tells him, but decides that it might be a matter worth exploring and telephones Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius, asking him to join the two for a second meeting later on that evening, at 8.30.

15.15 Another member of Parliament, formerly an actress, comes in to ask for Landsbergis' help. A new self-help group -- families with many children -- is trying to find office space. They need a base to set up a network for cottage industry type activities to bring in some extra income for those families. Being a voluntary, non-profit organization, the group approached the Vilnius city mayor to allow certain offices to be rented out. He refused, saying that office space in downtown Vilnius will be going for $6.00 a square meter in half a year. The parliamentarian wants Landsbergis' help to twist a few arms and help the group help itself. Landsbergis asks her to write up the specific budget the group needs to have allocated, and promises to get on the back of the Vilnius city mayor.

15.32 Landsbergis decides to sit in on part of the afternoon session of Parliament. The bodyguard escorts him downstairs, I follow behind.

In the central chamber of Parliament, Landsbergis chats with several parliamentarians sitting in the front row. Shortly before 16.00, he leaves the auditorium. On the way back upstairs, he comments to me that it seems Visakavičius indeed is working hand in glove with Ivanov -- the pro-Moscow activist -- in planning strikes. This is what a very reliable source "whom I cannot not believe" just told Landsbergis...

16.00 Landsbergis says that he wishes to lay down for a little while. He asks the secretary to wake him in half an hour, no later. For the first few minutes, I hear the sounds of the piano coming from behind the double oak doors. Then all is quiet.

By now, it is raining outside. I walk to the other end of Parliament and look outside to see how large the demonstration by the all-Union trade union has turned out to be. It is negligible, perhaps a couple of hundred people standing underneath a multi-colored canopy of umbrellas. A row of speakers stands on top of a stone embankment. A small strip of grass separates the demonstrators from a smaller, second group. From the third floor window, I see members of this group -- mostly middle-aged women -- shaking their fists at the demonstrators and shouting "Shame!" But other than that -- nothing. The demonstration is a non-event.

17.15 The secretary lets Landsbergis sleep for longer than the prescribed half hour. He tells me later that he has left her a scolding note for this. With his bodyguard, Landsbergis returns to the central chamber of Parliament. Under discussion is the right to buy one's own dormitory room or company apartment. No final decision is reached.

18.43 Parliament's plenary session for the day ends. Landsbergis, bodyguard in tow, returns to his office.

18.50 Landsbergis takes a call from a Western reporter based in Moscow; the phone interview lasts about ten minutes.

After the interview, we begin talking about the nascent opposition movement, the Lithuanian Forum for the Future (see ILN - 10)

19.07 Advisor for Foreign Relations Ramunas Bogdanas brings in two draft telegrams, in English, to send to the Swedish king and queen (for some occasion or other) Landsbergis edits the telegrams carefully, crossing out tautologies, analysing each word. Bogdanas then reminds Landsbergis that a Japanese group, whose purpose is to

explore the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, will be showing up at 20.30. They will want to talk about Chernobyl victims in Lithuania, of which there are about 8000. Landsbergis realizes that he will have a conflict in scheduling, because he asked the American millionaire's intermediary to return at that time. No matter; someone will simply have to wait.

When Bogdanas leaves, I resume a conversation with Landsbergis about the atmosphere of suspicion in Lithuania today. Earlier, I had asked him, "There are some people who have worked with you over a number of years who see you now, sleeping four hours a night, editing everything from telegrams to draft treaties, who say that in the end, you feel that there is really no one else you can trust except yourself. Some have the impression that you are a lonely person. Is that so?" Landsbergis answered, "I have a weakness in that I am more inclined to trust too much rather than too little." Associates tell him, for example to be wary of this or another colleague, and he is disinclined to listen, he says, until he has overwhelming proof. (Note: I know such warnings have reached Landsbergis both about his close associate Virgilijus Cepaitis and ex-Prime Minister Prunskiene. Both have been accused of working for the KGB in the past.) (for the rest of our interview, see ILN-10).

19.50 A Sajudis activist, a middle-aged man with a lined face, comes to discuss plans for thousands of people to cross the Polish-Lithuanian border in early June, when the Pope will be in a town in the northeast corner of Poland.

20.07 Head of Information bureau Rita Dapkus comes in to complain about a procedural matter; is it necessary, she asks, that the speaker of Parliament endorse bulletins prepared by her office that deal with what was discussed in Parliament on certain days? Do you want to sit there all day long yourself to check that all the information is correct? Landsbergis asks her. Since the speaker has to be in the plenary session anyway, he knows what has gone on and can confirm that information. The rule stays.

20.20 A Swedish journalist, based in Warsaw, had been scheduled for an interview at 20.00. He gets ten minutes.

20.30 Landsbergis takes a call from his father; it goes something like this: "Last year, Dad, you didn't remember where you put that key. The only key that is

available is downstairs with at Kačergine (a resort about 100 kilometers west of Vilnius). I myself don't have one." Pause. "But you aren't even going there yet, Dad, so that until it's time to go, we'll make another key." Pause. "Yes, there is one key, with the neighbor." Pause. "Okay, okay, Dad, I'll come by."

As we leave his office, Landsbergis smiles, shakes his head, and whispers to me, "It's absolutely clear -- I am bad."

20.34 With bodyguard, Landsbergis returns to the Presidium conference hall around the corner from his office for the second time today. Together with a parliamentarian and the Lithuanian Minister of Health, Juozas Olekas, he addresses the Japanese Chernobyl group, some 23 people. Landsbergis speaks in Russian, and one Japanese man translates into Japanese. At the end of Landsbergis' talk, there are no questions.

21.20 Landsbergis meets with the intermediary for the wealthy would-be American investor again; ten minutes later, Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius, 33, arrives. The intermediary goes into further detail about the possible fields the investor could develop; he flips through of folder of faxes detailing individual contracts ready to be signed, and leaves the investor's business card, adding that the man has business interests in the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Great Britain. An arrangement is made to bring all of them together in a number of weeks. (Where is the investor's glossy brochure, I wonder, telling the world what a great business he runs? Where is the annual report of the investor's company (companies), the financial information from independent sources to confirm his financial standing?) But although they agreed to meet with him, neither Landsbergis nor Vagnorius seem to have been taken in by the glowing words of the intermediary. He said, for example, that the investor was of the opinion that a great many of Lithuania's products could compete successfully on the world market. (It was the first time I had heard that.) "If one-tenth of what he promises will come to pass," says Vagnorius, "then that will already be something."

21.30 Landsbergis takes a call from his daughter: "How are the kiddies?" he asks. "When I will come by later, will you all already be snoring? I might be able to make it in about an hour and a half."

After businessman leaves, Landsbergis continues to chat with Vagnorius, and at one point asks him to look into

a complaint by a poultry farm that cannot sell its chickens to local distributors. Because of the recent price rises in food, people are not buying poultry anymore in the stores. Knowing this, the distributors also refuse to buy the birds from the collective farms, who are then in danger of going bankrupt.

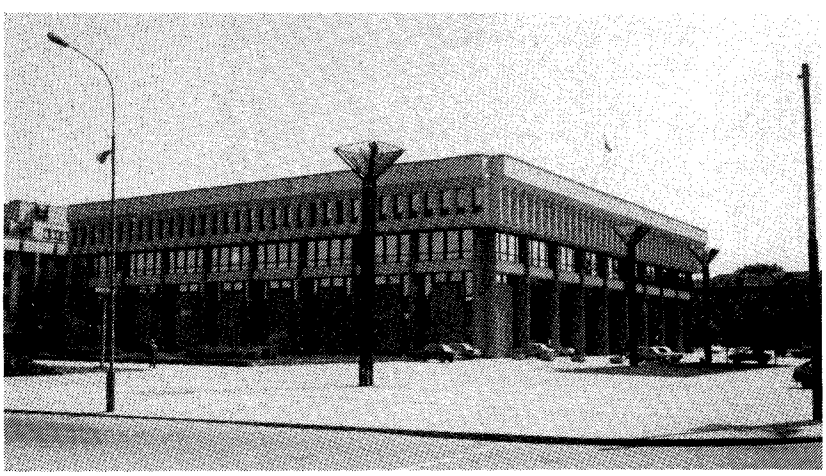
23.10 A young worker from the Information Bureau comes in with some news that he says was just received from Moscow. Should he pass in on to Lithuanian television, he asks? The information is about two Armenian villages, each with over 3000 inhabitants, which have just begun to be liquidated by Azerbaijani police, with the help of the Soviet Union Interior Ministry troops. There are already 27 dead. Landsbergis tells him that one can maintain that the source of the information -- the Armeninian consulate/representation in Moscow -- is official, and therefore the information can be released. Then he turns to me and says, "One must understand all this is the context of nine plus six." (The nine republics that agree to be part of the all-new Union, and the six that don't.) Armenia is one that doesn't want to sign up, says Landsbergis, so this is the Soviet response -- to give the Azerbaijanis free reign.

23.30 Landsbergis invites me to go along with him to meet his daughter and grandchildren. He plans to stay there a little while, and then return to the pile of papers waiting for him here in the office. Two cars drive us to Landsbergis home -- a two story apartment across the river. Now the bodyguards who accompany us carry rifles. Another bodyguard sits in a booth outside the front entrance to Landsbergis' apartment. The house is quiet -- all are asleep. Landsbergis' wife, pianist Grazina Rucyte, is on tour in the United States. Landsbergis brings me into the living room, where a baby grand piano takes up half the room. Later, we tiptoe across the hall into a darkened room where his grandchildren lie sleeping. Landsbergis opens a china cabinet, and takes a piece of paper from a crystal bowl where, in a childish scrawl, are the following words, "Even though I am still little I love you very much". Landsbergis decides not to return to Parliament -- this will be one of the rare occasions that he will spend the night at home.

23.40 Landsbergis tells his bodyguards of his plans. Armed with rifles, they will stay outside the apartment all night. Ending as it did before midnight, it is considered to have been an easy day.

-0-

With wife Gražina Ručyte preceding him, and with bodyguards following, Landsbergis passes through a barricade entrance near Parliament. Winter, 1991.



Parliament in the good old days, when it was just another sleepy, boring building

Received in Hanover 5/22/91