



# Baltic Bulletin

THE VOICE OF THE BALTIC AMERICAN FREEDOM LEAGUE

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## Baltic-Americans Speak Through New United Voice

In June, 1981 Baltic-American leaders in California came together to form the Baltic-American Freedom League (BAFL) to support a broad-based, unified national program to publicize human rights violations and religious persecution in the three Soviet-occupied Baltic nations, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

In a short time, The Baltic-American Freedom League has gained recognition and support from many prominent Balts in the United States and Canada and from a number of national organizations.

### Conspiracy leads to pact

In 1939, Nazi Germany and the U.S.S.R. signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which paved the way for a Russian invasion of the Baltic nations. In a secret amendment to the Pact, they were placed in the "sphere of influence" of the U.S.S.R. Soon after, the Soviets occupied the Baltic states and, against their will, incorporated them into the U.S.S.R.

Members of the League of Nations at the time of the Soviet invasion, the Baltic nations were denied the right of self-determination, and are the only countries belonging to the League of Nations that did not become members of the United Nations after World War II.

The American general public is relatively unaware of the plight and history of the Baltic people. As if there were a conspiracy of silence, the free world has had little information of events taking place in the Baltic countries. In June, 1941 the Russians carried out mass deportations of

hundreds of thousands of Balts from their homelands to Siberia. Deportations continued in later years.

"Russification" — in the form of Russian efforts to discourage the use of native Baltic languages, along with attempts at discouraging religious practice and imposing Russian as a language — continues to this day.

### Russification opposed

Despite "Russification", resistance to the Soviet system from within the Baltic nations has intensified in recent years. The Lithuanian Catholic church is fighting oppression; an underground press is active and, for the last two months, worker leaflets urging half-hour work stoppages on the first Monday of each month have been distributed in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Since the 17th century, when the first Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians began emigrating to America, the Baltic people have contributed greatly to American society in business, education, the arts, government, medicine and technology. The Baltic contribution in America, however, has been overshadowed by the vanishing identity of the Baltic nations since the Soviet occupation in 1940.

The Baltic-American Freedom League is committed to the principle of self-determination for the Baltic states. For 40 years, the United States policy has been consistent with this principle. The U.S. government has refused to recognize the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries. The Baltic-American



BAFL Chairman, Tony Mazeika answers questions from the media at the Los Angeles demonstration in support of President Reagan's sanctions against the Soviet Union.

Freedom League is seen as more than a unified Baltic public information program. It has become a catalyst, sparking new interest among the younger generation of Baltic-Americans who want to express their heritage with concern for those in their ancestral homelands.

### Public education needed

Among the League's activities are a speakers' bureau; interviews on television, radio and community programs; a grassroots program to mobilize support from elected officials on urgent Baltic dissident matters; development of a program to place maps of the Baltic Region — depicting the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian borders — in newspapers and on television; supplying national and local print and broadcast news media with information about Baltic-American cultural activities and underground dissident news.

The Baltic-American Freedom League is making an appeal to American government officials, the academic community and to all people of goodwill to support the Baltic peoples' quest to regain their independence and freedom.▲