

THE SINGING REVOLUTION

AN OPEN LETTER TO MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

Below is an open letter to Mikhail Gorbachev written by Estonians in Estonia, whose main communication pipeline was to publicize the letter to the outside world through the worldwide Estonian Diaspora. They had little hope of releasing this letter within the Soviet Union.

This letter was smuggled out to the West, with hopes that it could be printed and publicized.

An Open Letter to M. S. Gorbachev

30.11.87

One of the basic principles of the "new political thinking" you have introduced is the irrefutable right of all peoples to self-determination and independent development, unhampered by forceful intervention from outside -- i.e. the right to exist independently and be master of one's own national territory, and to independently choose and determine one's socio-political order and social system. This principle must be perceived as being an unconditional recognition of the right of every nationality to exist as a separate people in a sovereign nation-state, and the unconditional condemnation of every attempt to subordinate such a sovereign nation-state to foreign rule -- regardless of pretext -- including interference in internal affairs for the purpose of changing the socio-political order, i.e. by "exporting" revolution or counter-revolution. We accept the fact that equal rights for all nations, friendly co-operation between nations, and a world free of violence and war could not be conceivable on any other basis.

However, if this is truly your honest and sincere standpoint, as you'd like the world to believe, then why do you categorically refuse to apply it to the Estonian people (as well as the other non-Russian peoples included in the Soviet Union)?

If you truly acknowledged the Estonians' right to self-determination, then you'd have to agree that the organization of a national referendum -- which would decide on the reinstatement of Estonian national sovereignty and Estonia's secession from the Soviet Union -- is an inalienable right of the Estonian people, just as secession from the Union is the constitutional right of every Union republic! This would not necessarily signal the changing of our socialist order to a capitalist one, but simply the establishment of national sovereignty for a socialist state -- like that which exists in Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania or any other European socialist state. If you truly acknowledged the Estonian people's right to self-determination, then you would have to concede that any decision on national sovereignty belongs solely to the competence of the Estonian people, and not to an all-Union organ of government, an all-Union representative body, or Party organ; neither could it be determined by an all-Union referendum.

However, your personal position, the decisions of the Politburo and Central Committee, and the directives passed by the 27th Congress indicate the Soviet Union's nationalities policies toward non-Russian peoples to be just the opposite.

Despite your campaign of restructuring, which includes the new policy of openness, the disclosure of the whole truth, and freedom to criticize, the so-called "nationality issue," i.e. the Party's nationalities policy regarding non-Russian peoples, is a topic which is as taboo as ever -- a topic which may not be

the subject of open-minded discussion or criticism. On the contrary: the Party's position on the "nationality issue" comes from you in its final form, as definitive dogma, which is then enacted with an iron fist. The Soviet Union, in Lenin's words, is the equal and voluntary union of sovereign socialist nation-states. In reality, however, there exists a plan to transform the Soviet Union into a "unified multi-national socialist state" made up of a unified Soviet "multi-national" people (in internationalized Union-republics, no longer national republics), who will eventually merge into one nation on a base of Russian language and Russian nationality. Such a plan is intolerant of criticism, since it openly and unashamedly foresees the liquidation of the Estonian people, first as a nation and, in the long term, as a nationality. Such a plan refuses to acknowledge the national existence and the right to sovereign self-determination of the Estonian people.

But you have labeled all attempts to defend the Estonians' national rights, interests, and right to existence as "manifestations of nationalism" which must be suppressed by any means, without any kind of discussion.

Because the Estonians are but an insignificant minority in this "unified multi-national state" – the Russian Soviet empire – their people (and nationality) are destined for systematic liquidation, essentially under the guise of "friendship between peoples." The Estonian people (or any other people who want to endure) cannot accept this under any circumstances. Moreover, such a "nationalities policy" is totally inconsistent with the new political thinking you have introduced. How can the Estonian people take the principles of international relations in your restructuring policies seriously?

The only hope for the preservation of the Estonian people lies in its secession from the "unified multi-national state" and the reinstatement of its national sovereignty. In theory, you should have nothing against this. But in reality...?

Since the powers over which you preside still prohibit open discussion of these questions in Estonia, and since all attempts to do so are accompanied by the immediate repression of the involved parties, then we must present the following questions to you by way of Estonian organizations abroad and the international news media, in hopes that you will not avoid answering them. Your replies will be made known to the world.

Questions

1. Do you recognize the existence of the Estonian people as an independent people, a unit deserving of national self-determination, a people with the right to a sovereign state on its national territory? Or do you feel that the Estonian people no longer exist? Instead, do you see merely some Soviet citizens of Estonian descent, of whom most belong to the "international population" of the Estonian S.S.R., and who are therefore just part of the "unified Soviet people?"

If you do not recognize the existence of the Estonians as an independent group, then where did the Estonian people, whose rights were fixed in the Declaration of Rights for Russian Peoples and in the Peace Treaty of Tartu, disappear? Who liquidated the Estonian people? Who will accept responsibility for this act?

2. If you recognize the existence and right to self-determination of the Estonian people, then will you permit the open and legalized operation of the Initiative Group – the group working for the restoration of Estonian national sovereignty? Will you permit the organization of a national referendum to resolve this question – and if the referendum so decides by a 2/3 majority of votes,

will you permit the secession of Estonia from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a sovereign socialist state, as outlined by the Constitution?

3. If, however, you will not recognize the Estonian people's right to self-determination, and regard her fate to be predetermined as part of the Soviet Union – actually the Russian Soviet Empire – then explain to us and to the world:

- What "exalted principle" can substantiate a nationalities policy which provides for the liquidation of entire nationalities without their consent? What other reason can there be for such a policy besides great-Russian imperialism?
- How are the Estonian people inferior to the Russian, Hungarian, Finnish or any other people, whose national existence is protected within a sovereign state, irrespective of their socio-political system?
- Who can possibly believe in your exalted plans for friendship between nations and a world without violence, when you use force in national relations where you are not compelled to do so – in your own country?

Initiative Group