

It is generally agreed that the Soviet response to Lithuania's declaration of independence was conditioned in part by fear of similar independence movements elsewhere in the Soviet Union, perhaps particularly in the Ukraine. In meeting with representatives of the RUKH—the People's Movement of the Ukraine—we were struck by the care and finesse with which they approached the subject of Ukrainian independence. One of the senior figures in the movement complained that the current USSR law on secession was written in such a way that republics could never secede but nonetheless stressed the need to proceed carefully. "The situation is very complex so you cannot just declare independence one day. There are many economic relations and you would have to reorient the republic. The RUKH favours a confederation in the USSR. After a period of trying that, we would decide whether a total split was desirable. There are many everyday problems that must be carefully managed. We must not cause a civil war."

There is no subject more sensitive in the Soviet Union than the fate of the union itself and therefore none more likely to provoke anger at foreign intervention or interference. It should be recognized, however, that even in an era of vastly improved relations, there will be sharp differences from time to time between the West and the Soviet Union. We should regard that as normal and not be afraid to express our criticisms on the grounds that it might weaken Soviet leadership. Our sense is that the Soviet Union is more impervious to international public opinion than that. How then should Canada react to the issue of nationalism in the Soviet Union? We suggest the following:

*The Special Case of the Baltics.* The Committee believes that the independence of the Baltics is inevitable, the only question being how to achieve that goal peacefully. Canada has consistently and unequivocally refused to recognize the annexation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union and supported the right of Baltic independence. The Committee recommends, as do all members of parliament, that Canada should continue to do so. The point must be pressed upon the Soviet Union that the Baltics are a special case and will not be treated by Canada as an exclusively internal matter of the Soviet Union. It is an international issue, whether the Soviet Union likes it or not, which means that it has special potential to retard the development of closer economic and other relations between the Soviet Union and the West. The case should be made that a special procedure should be established for the achievement of Baltic independence, involving, for example, less onerous and faster procedures than will be applied to the other republics.

*The Other Republics.* The international community recognizes the other republics as parts of the USSR and, therefore, treats their relations with the Union as internal matters, [] subject to universal standards of human rights. Far greater decentralization of power to the republics would seem inevitable but the West has a major stake in Mr Gorbachev—or his successors—piloting a soft constitutional landing rather than crashing into civil war. Were that to occur in a country littered with nuclear weapons, the fallout in every sense of