

ENVIRONMENT

Lithuania - Public Incensed Over Pollution

The first mass demonstrations in defence of the environment and human health were organized in Lithuania last summer. The participants in the ecological protest march against selected enterprises (including the Klaipeda Pulp and Paperboard Combine and the Sovetskii and Nemanskii cement and concrete plants - polluters of the unique Kurisches Haff (lagoon)), the "circle of life" formed by the pickets which surrounded the Ignalina nuclear power station for days on end and the ecological demands voiced at meetings all showed that people are no longer prepared to play the role of passive observers in matters affecting each one of them.

From the very first, the local authorities reacted cautiously to the ecological demonstrations. They even attempted to portray the participants of the informal groupings who initiated them as rabble-rousers. Today, however, the indiscriminate dangling of labels doesn't pass muster. If people feel strongly about the uses being made of our national riches, which after all, are a gift of Nature, if they are prepared to "go to battle" in defence of them, it means that after decades of silent obedience the feeling of being in charge has been awakened in people. In this we can only rejoice.

Our "Grigishkes" Association has also become the object of public scrutiny. It hurts when one's own enterprise is put under the microscope. It hurts doubly when it is found guilty and in reality the fault lies elsewhere. Let me explain what happened.