

# Lithuanian leader seeks clearer Vatican stand

STUDIO CITY, Calif. (CNS) — Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said a clear Vatican stand on Moscow's efforts to restore central Soviet authority in his country would boost Lithuania's independence bid.

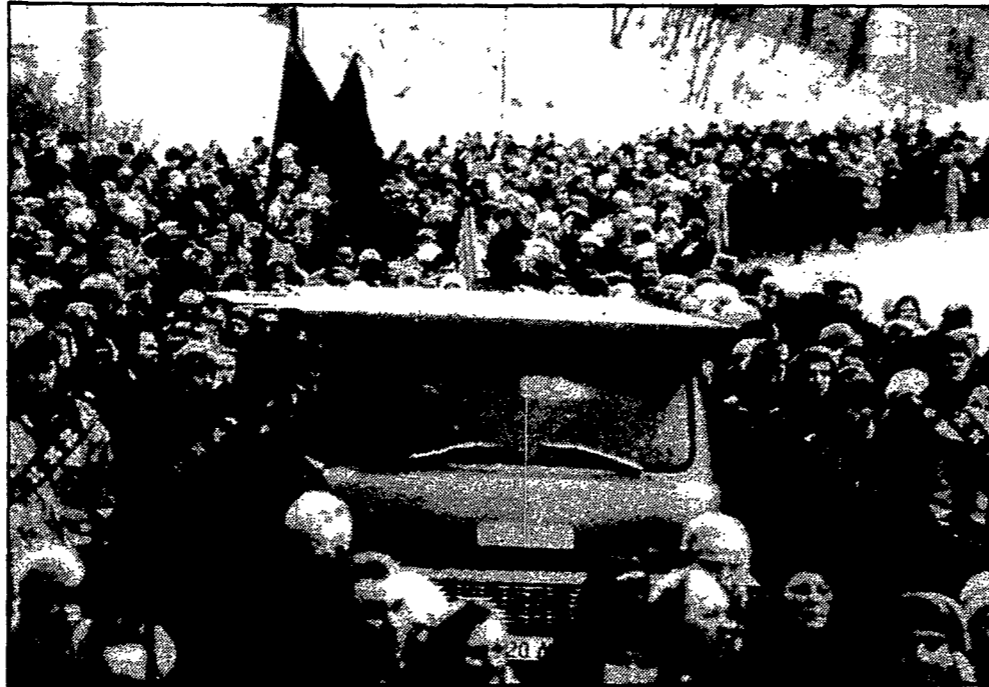
"It would indeed set a good example and give the Vatican a very important role," Landsbergis said in a recent interview with the Studio City-based *National Catholic Register*. The interview was conducted in the barricaded Lithuanian parliament building in Vilnius by the newspaper's Eastern European correspondent Johnathan Luxmoore.

"I know that the pope is backing Lithuania clearly and openly," Landsbergis said. "But of course, he has done so in sacred language — a language comparable in practice to the ways and means of diplomacy."

The Catholic Church in Lithuania also supports "in a very calm manner" the Soviet republic's bid for freedom, the president said. The churches support independence because "it constitutes the best possible future for our people."

"An independent Lithuanian state will protect and guarantee the rights of man without condition," Landsbergis said. "In a democratic state, furthermore, the possibilities for church activity will be much greater too."

In early January, Soviet paratroopers and tanks rolled into Vilnius, ostensibly on a mission to round up draft dodgers. But independence-minded Lithuanians saw in



Thousands march in a funeral procession in Vilnius, Lithuania, Feb. 3 for a young man killed by an army patrol outside the city.

the show of military might a determination by the central government in Moscow to crush their movement.

Fifteen protesters were killed, several people were wounded as troops moved on the television center and main printing plant Jan. 13.

Although fewer deaths occurred, a similar scenario was played out in Latvia.

On Jan. 18, the Vatican released a message from Pope John Paul II to the

apostolic administrator of Riga, Latvia, urging dialogue instead of military muscle as a means of resolving the Moscow-Baltic confrontation.

Soviet forces later pulled back from downtown Vilnius, but remained close by. Landsbergis suggested in February that a reduction in military presence could open the door to negotiations.

Landsbergis spoke with the *National Catholic Register* after Washington's decision to postpone a planned summit between President Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Lithuanian leader said that if the reason for putting off the meeting was the Soviet action in his republic "then the decision would signify a clear and un-

mistakable position on the part of the United States."

He added, however, that "what matters more is the reason intended" which is hard to gauge immediately.

But "a summit which attached no particular importance to Lithuania would be a very bad event," Landsbergis said. He said he believes that "such a development seems virtually impossible."

The president said the confrontation between Vilnius and Moscow was beginning to look somewhat like the last time the Soviet Union trampled Lithuanian independence — following Josef Stalin's non-aggression pact with Hitler's Germany, which ceded the Baltic states to the Soviets.

"When we entered our own path to independence a few years ago, the whole world was moving in the same direction," Landsbergis said. "Now our circumstances are beginning to look more and more like those of 1940."

Although Lithuania has been under Soviet domination for a half-century, Lithuanians have been sustained by their culture and spirit, he said.

"Language, culture, literature, science, art, they all helped profoundly" in surviving the years of dominance by other states, he said.

He also said the people have developed a philosophy of "unspoken love" to carry them through trials.

"It's the love which every man has for the earth, his home, his garden, his children," Landsbergis said.

"In the long decades of persecution and exile, this love never died," he said. "Despite everything, our countrymen always knew that their home was here in Lithuania — that the birds sang finer songs here, that the grass was greener."

## Justice Department drops brutality charges

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Justice Department has informed the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights that it will not bring criminal charges against police officers accused of using excessive force during 1989 arrests at anti-abortion protests, the league announced Feb. 6.

Patrick Riley, director of governmental affairs for the league, said the decision was communicated to the league at a January meeting with Deputy Attorney General

William Barr.

Barr said an investigation into charges of police brutality during arrests in front of abortion clinics in Pittsburgh, San Diego, Los Angeles and West Hartford, Conn., failed to provide enough evidence to obtain convictions, according to the league.

Barr told Riley that federal civil-rights law requires proof of specific intent to use excessive force, a claim that the Justice Department decided could not be proven.



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