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RUSSIFICATION

The New York Times, Thursday, July 6, 1972, (Editorial)

Another Lithuanian has burned himself to death to protest Soviet occupation of his country, it is reported from Moscow. This is the latest sobering reminder of the wave of discontent that has broken out this year in tiny Baltic country whose independence, along with that of her two neighbors, was extinguished by Stalin more than three decades ago as one of the side dividends of the Soviet-Nazi pact. It is a measure of the desperation many Lithuanians feel that three in the last several weeks have chosen self-immolation as a means of calling world attention to their plight.

The Catholic religion and Lithuanian nationalism are * so intertwined that there is no point in debating whether it is religious or national oppression that is at the root of the current discontent. Rather, the protest petitions and other appeals for help that have been smuggled out of Lithuania suggest that Lithuanians believe that Moscow wishes to extirpate both the Catholic religion and Lithuanian language and culture. The purpose would of course be forcibly to assimilate the tiny Lithuanian nation into the vast sea of Russians — a practice known in czarist days simply as "russification."

What is most remarkable about the recent outburst of overt Lithuanian resistance is the role of the young, of those who were born and grew up under Soviet rule and have no memories of an independent Lithuanian state. The first Lithuanian to burn himself alive was a young worker, Romas Kalanta. His personal sacrifice in May ignited several days of massive riots during which thousands of young Lithuanians fought the police and troops in the streets of Kaunas.

So long as the Lithuanians protest alone, of course, Moscow has more than enough force to repress their discontent. But there is every reason to suppose that there is similar nationalist passion in the Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other non-Russian republics, not to mention the other two Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia. If the non-Russian minorities were ever able to integrate their activities and present a united front against russification, Moscow would have a major challenge on its hands.

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