

Ukrainian support for Vilnius struggle^(U)

From Susan Viets
in Kiev U.S.S.R.:

LEADERS of the Ukrainian pro-independence movement, Rukh, denounced the communist crackdown in Vilnius for the first time, at a 10,000-strong Ukrainian Independence Day rally yesterday.

Rukh's political leader, Mykhailo Horyn, supported the activists protesting at the parliament building in Vilnius and said: "The fight is for your freedom and ours." He reported that the Praesidium of the Ukrainian Parliament had sent a letter to President Mikhail Gorbachev, protesting against intervention in Vilnius. Rukh is collecting money for Lithuania.

The Rukh MP Vladimir Yavorivsky recalled Ukraine's brief two-year period of independence, which started on 22 January 1918, and said: "With our ally [Boris] Yeltsin in power, this may prove to be a unique test for Ukrainian independence."

The crowd, hemmed in the centre of Boghdan Khmelnitsky Square by free-flowing traffic, enthusiastically shouted, "Yeltsin!" and held up placards saying, "Gorbachev, hands off Lithuania."

The second Rukh MP, Dmytro Pavlythko, told the crowd: "We hate the imperialist centre, because it oppresses the little nations."

Yesterday's lightly-policed rally was the first sign of opposition activity since the communist clampdown in the Baltic states and its offensive in Ukraine, which led to the arrest of an opposition MP and the detention of Oles Doniy, a student leader. Another rally is planned for tomorrow evening.

■ MOSCOW — The people of Crimea voted on autonomy yesterday in a referendum that pitted ethnic groups with competing claims to the Black Sea peninsula against each other, AP reports.

The official news agency, Tass, reported that leaders of a Crimean Tatar nationalist movement said only their ethnic group, which was deported *en masse* from its homeland by Josef Stalin in 1945, had the right to decide the issue.

But Rukh was urging ethnic Ukrainians to boycott the balloting, Tass said. It said Rukh representatives saw the referendum as "encroachment on the territorial integrity of a future Ukrainian power".

Crimea had a degree of legal autonomy that was revoked when many of its residents were deported in 1945. The Crimean Tatars were accused of collaborating with the Nazi invaders. Many were sent to Soviet Central Asia, and thousands died along the way. Nine years later Crimea was brought under direct authority of the Ukraine.

The Moscow magazine *Stolitsa* said the population of 2.4 million people was now predominantly Russian, and they were likely to vote for the re-establishment of the autonomous republic that existed before 1945.

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