

Photo exhibition
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Declaration on the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia

20

The sunniest day in the history of Latvia

Dainis Ivāns

It was a clear and warm day in Latvia on the 4th of May 1990. The fragrance of the bird-cherry tree blossom was in the air. By the Freedom Monument, some people were weaving a national flag out of red and white spring flowers. It was not yet an official holiday but these people felt it as a festive day.

Rebirth

At 10.00 a.m., the Supreme Council of the Latvian S.S.R. commenced its session on the question of the restoration of independence to the Republic of Latvia, founded in 1918 and occupied in 1940. There was a premonition in the air as if from behind these living people that the souls of all past and faithful generations of Latvians were forming ranks in a silent unity. All those who had perished in Siberia or who had been slain in wars in far-away lands had returned to their homeland like warm memories.

Vanished as from a non-existent past were the Soviet era myths and lies. The Communists were rapidly losing their influence. Latvian statehood was being reborn through the renewed self-awareness of its people.

Fears retreat

On the 3rd of May, the deputies of the Latvian Popular Front had gathered at the Brethren Cemetery in the full of the morning sunlight and, together, they swore an oath not to fall back from their highest ambition and to vote openly and without any doubt for the freedom of Latvia. The Kremlin had just launched an economic blockade against Lithuania. In Latvia, the Communists and members of the Interfront, encouraged by the occupation army and the KGB, worked to destroy any freedom aspirations.

It didn't take long for doubt and indecision to set in even among some supporters of the Popular Front.

However, the huge crowds of people in the streets of Rīga demanded but one thing from their deputies – Do not back down! And the fear retreated.



Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskās Republikas Augstākās Padomes
D E K L A R Ā C I J A
Par Latvijas Republikas neatkarības atjaunošanu

1918.gada 18.novembrī proklamētā neatkarīgā Latvijas valsts 1920.gadā tika starptautiski atzīta un 1921.gadā kļuva par līdztiesīgu Tautu Savienības locekli. Latviešu nācija savu pašnoteikšanos tiesiski īstenoja 1920.gada aprīlī, kad vispārējās, vienlīdzīgās, tiesās un proporcionālās vēlēšanās tautas uzticības mandāts tika dots Satversmes sapulcei. 1922.gada 15.februārī tā pieņēma valsts pamatlikumu - Latvijas republikas Satversmi, kas *de jure* ir spēkā līdz šim brīdim.

1940.gada 16.jūnijā Latvijas Republikas valdībai iesniegtā toreizējās staļinskās PSRS valdības ultimātīvā nota ar prasību mainīt valdību un 1940.gada 17.jūnijā PSRS militārā agresija kvalificējama kā starptautisks noziegums. Tā rezultāts bija Latvijas okupācija un Latvijas Republikas suverēnās valsts varas likvidēšana. Latvijas valdība tika izveidota pēc PSRS valdības pārstāvju diktāta. No starptautisko tiesību viedokļa šī valdība nebija Latvijas Republikas suverēnās valsts varas izpildorgāns, jo tā pārstāvēja nevis Latvijas Republikas, bet gan PSRS intereses.

1940.gada 14.un 15.jūlijā okupētajā Latvijā politiska terora apstākļos, pēc prettiesiski pieņemta antikonstitucionāla vēlēšanu likuma notika Saeimas vēlēšanas. No 17 iesniegtajiem kandidātu sarakstiem vēlēšanās tika atļauts tikai "Darba Tautas bloka" kandidātu saraksts. "Darba Tautas bloka" pirmsvēlēšanu platformā nebija izvirzīta prasība par padomju varas pasludināšanu Latvijā un Latvijas Republikas iestāšanos Padomju Savienībā, turklāt vēlēšanu rezultāti tika viltoti.

Tautas apmānīšanas rezultātā prettiesiski izveidotā Saeima nepauda Latvijas tautas suverēno gribu. Tai nebija konstitucionālu tiesību izņemt jautājumu par valsts iekārtas grozīšanu un Latvijas valsts suverenitātes likvidēšanu. Šos jautājumus bija tiesīga izņemt vienīgi tauta, taču brīva tautas nobalsošana nenotika.

Līdz ar to Latvijas Republikas iekļaušana Padomju Savienībā no starptautisko tiesību viedokļa nav spēkā, un Latvijas Republika joprojām *de jure* pastāv kā starptautisko tiesību subjekts, ko atzīst vairāk nekā 50 pasaules valstis.

Nemot vērā Latvijas PSR Augstākās Padomes 1989.gada 28.jūlija "Deklarāciju par Latvijas valsts suverenitāti", 1990.gada 15.februāra "Deklarāciju jautājumā par Latvijas valsts neatkarību" un 1990.gada 21.aprīļa Vislatvijas tautas deputātu sapulces Aicinājumu,

ievērojot Latvijas iedzīvotāju gribu, kas nepārprotami izpausta, ievēlot vairākumā tos deputātus, kuri savā priekšvēlēšanu programmā izteikuši apņēmību atjaunot Latvijas Republikas valsts neatkarību,

nostājoties uz brīvas, demokrātiskas un neatkarīgas Latvijas Republikas *de facto* atjaunošanas ceļu,

Latvijas PSR Augstākā Padome **n o l e m j :**

1. Atzīt starptautisko tiesību pamatprincipu prioritāti pār valsts tiesību normām. Uzskatīt par prettiesisku PSRS un Vācijas 1939.gada 23.augusta vienošanos un no tās izrietošo 1940.gada 17.jūnijā Latvijas Republikas suverēnās valsts varas likvidēšanu

PSRS militārās agresijas rezultātā.

2. Pasludināt par spēkā neesošu kopš pieņemšanas brīža Latvijas Saeimas 1940.gada 21.jūlija pieņemto deklarāciju "Par Latvijas iestāšanos Padomju Sociālistiskā Republikā Savienībā".

3. Atjaunot Satversmes sapulces 1922. gada 15.februārī pieņemtās Latvijas Republikas Satversmes darbību visā Latvijas teritorijā.

Latvijas valsts oficiālais nosaukums ir LATVIJAS REPUBLIKA, saīsināti - LATVIJA.

4. Līdz Satversmes jaunās redakcijas pieņemšanai apturēt Latvijas Republikas Satversmi, izņemot tos pantus, kuri nosaka Latvijas valsts konstitucionāli tiesisko pamatu un kuri saskaņā ar Satversmes 77. pantu ir grozāmi tikai ar tautas nobalsošanu, proti:

1. pants - Latvija ir neatkarīga, demokrātiska republika;
2. pants - Latvijas valsts suverēnā vara pieder Latvijas tautai;
3. pants - Latvijas valsts teritoriju starptautiskos līgumos noteiktās robežās sastāda Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme un Zemgale;
6. pants - Saeimu veidē vispārīgās, vienlīdzīgās, tiesās, aizklātās un proporcionālās vēlēšanās.

Satversmes 6.pants piemērojams, atjaunojoties tam neatkarīgas Latvijas Republikas valsts varas un pārvaldes struktūrām, kuras garantē brīvu vēlēšanu norisi.

5. Noteikt Latvijas Republikas valsts varas *de facto* atjaunošanai pārejas periodu, kurā beidzas ar Latvijas Republikas Saeimas sasaukšanu. Pārejas periodā augstāko valsts varu Latvijā realizē Latvijas Republikas Augstākā Padome.

6. Uzskatīt par iespējamu pārejas periodā piemērot Latvijas PSR Konstitūcijas normas un citus likumdošanas aktus, kas šīs Deklarācijas pieņemšanas brīdī darbojas Latvijas teritorijā, ciktāl tie nav pretrunā ar Latvijas Republikas Satversmes 1.,2.,3. un 6.pantu.

Strīdus gadījumos jautājumus par likumdošanas aktu piemērošanu izšķir Latvijas Republikas Konstitucionālā tiesa.

Pārejas periodā jaunus likumdošanas aktus pieņem vai esošos aktus groza tikai Latvijas Republikas Augstākā Padome.

7. Izveidot komisiju, lai izstrādātu Latvijas Republikas Satversmes jaunu redakciju, kas atbilstu Latvijas pašreizējam politiskajam, ekonomiskajam un sociālajam stāvoklim.

8. Garantēt Latvijas Republikas un citu valstu pilsoņiem, kas pastāvīgi dzīvo Latvijas teritorijā, sociālās, ekonomiskās un kultūras tiesības, kā arī politiskās brīvības, kuras atbilst vispārāztītam starptautiskām cilvēktiesību normām. Tas pilnā mērā attiecināms uz tiem PSRS pilsoņiem, kuri izteiks vēlēšanos dzīvot Latvijā, nepieņemot tās pilsonību.

9. Latvijas Republikas attiecības ar PSRS veidot saskaņā ar joprojām spēkā esošo 1920.gada 11.augusta miera līgumu starp Latviju un Krieviju, kurā uz mūžīgiem laikiem ir atzīta Latvijas valsts neatkarība. Sarunām ar PSRS izveidot Valdības komisiju.

Deklarācija stājas spēkā ar pieņemšanas brīdi.

Latvijas PSR Augstākās Padomes priekšsēdētājs
Latvijas PSR Augstākās Padomes sekretārs

A.Gorbunovs
I.Daudišs

Rīga 1990. gada 4. maija

Victory!

On the day, a people whose only weapons were flowers, stood guard at the Saeima building. They counted aloud as each of the deputies stood up in the parliamentary session room to confirm the signatures on their ballot papers. A roaring wave of joy, an overwhelming emotion of love for one's homeland shook through Old Rīga, when 138 out of the 195 deputies present (a majority of two thirds of votes was required to effect any amendments to the Constitution) confirmed their YES vote on the long-awaited break to freedom from the U.S.S.R.

The cheeks of eyewitnesses were wet with tears of joy. The great human choir of the *Singing Revolution* had commenced its song on the bank of the River Daugava.

Crumbled were the shackles that had been forged for the Baltic by Hitler and Stalin in the form of secret protocols to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact.

The people arose with their hands and two outstretched fingers forming the V-for-Victory sign – like branches on the Tree of Freedom on the sunrise of renewal. The people's representatives also came out waving that sign. "Victory!" – echoed their welcomers. A whole forest of human *Trees of Freedom* flourished throughout Old Riga.

Celebrating Freedom

On that day, Mother Latvia slowly rose to her feet, shaking off the burden of captive oppression from her shoulders, after having been downtrodden for so many long years. Joyful and victorious, thousands of hands hoisted upon her shoulders the heavy, sweet, and most precious ballast of freedom. Now she must bear this with patience. The wonder of freedom regained must never be rocked, nor the bearer ever allowed to collapse under the new-found burden.



Photo:
ILMĀRS ZNOTIŅŠ



By the 1980s, “developed socialism” in Latvia had noticeably worn itself out. The Soviet economic and political system had become increasingly miserable. The “Evil Empire”, which the oppressed nations and people had ceased to fear, could now be sustained only by new repressions, but these repressions would only serve to accelerate a collapse of the Communist regime.



Photo: ILMĀRS ZNOTIŅŠ



Although the spring of freedom has come to the towns and countryside of Latvia, the children of the oppressed people are rudely reminded by the USSR military commissariats – it is the army that holds the real power here. Thank the destiny, May 4th and independence for the withdrawal of Russian troops and Latvia's accession to NATO!



In 1985, the Communist Party Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev, realizing that developments in the U.S.S.R. were leading to a dead end, prescribed the new 'Perestroika'. He spoke about socialism as having a 'human face'. At the conscription centres of the occupation army, our Baltic boys awaited their grim fate – either to be sent somewhere farther away from home or to await their death in foreign wars initiated by the Communists. They knew that this state can not have a human face.

Photo: ILMĀRS ZNOTIŅŠ

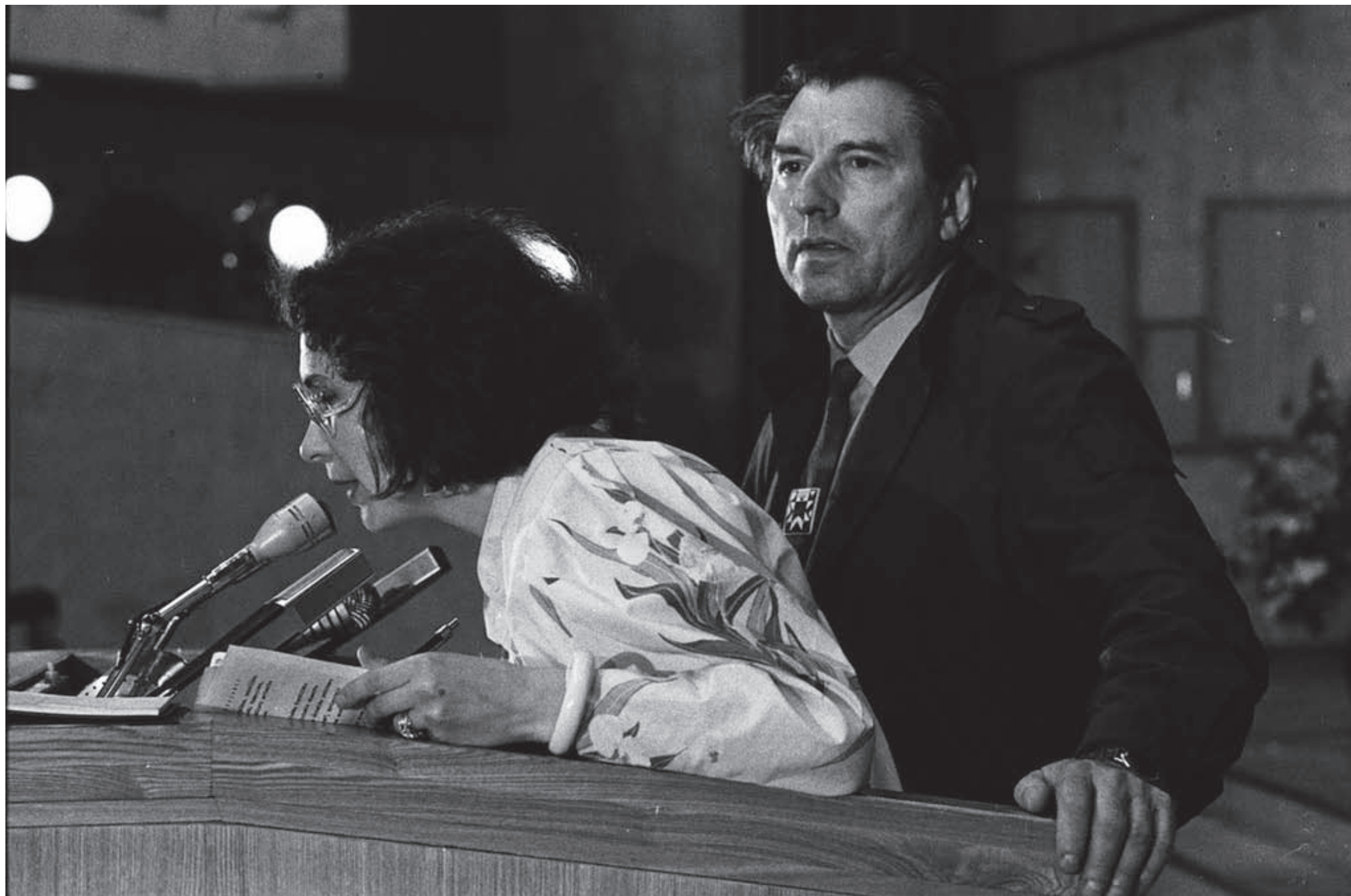


Photo:
GUNĀRS JANAITIS



The goal of the Latvian Women's League was to fight for the lives of Latvia's children. Standing in the streets of Riga, holding photographs of their boys who had been killed in the Soviet army, they maintained that only independence will save Latvia's youth from humiliation and death as soldiers conscripted in the brutal military service of a foreign state.

In the foreground – Anita Stankeviča, founder and leader of the Latvian Women's League.



June 2nd, 1988. The Popular Front has just been founded. The Soviet bureaucrats and secret services follow best practices of Bolshevism and form the Interfront. Meanwhile, writer Ēriks Hānbergs and Popular Front member Sandra Kalniete, at the People's Forum of Latvia, bring together different ethnic groups of Latvia for a march towards independence.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



The Soviet occupying powers blatantly ignored the Geneva Convention stipulating that the citizens of an occupied country may not be compelled to serve in the occupation army. The international community timidly kept silent. Until the Latvian citizens by themselves shook off the shackles of oppression, stood tall, and by themselves burnt the symbol of their oppression, the Soviet flag, by their Freedom Monument.

Photo:
BORISS
KOLESNIKOVS



Photo:
AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



‘Only Dainis could be a champion of the people,’ wrote Sandra Kalniete about this moment. ‘Nobody else could have found, again and again, those emotionally powerful new words with which to address, to protest, to unmask, to call out, and to encourage people to follow the People’s Front. Almost every day during the last pre-election week Dainis would make new announcements to the media. The last and the most powerful of these was made on ‘Panorāma’, a TV news programme, on the eve of the elections.”

Dainis Īvāns with his son Jurgis on March 17th, at the Popular Front’s (LTF) pre-election rally, several hours before his speech.

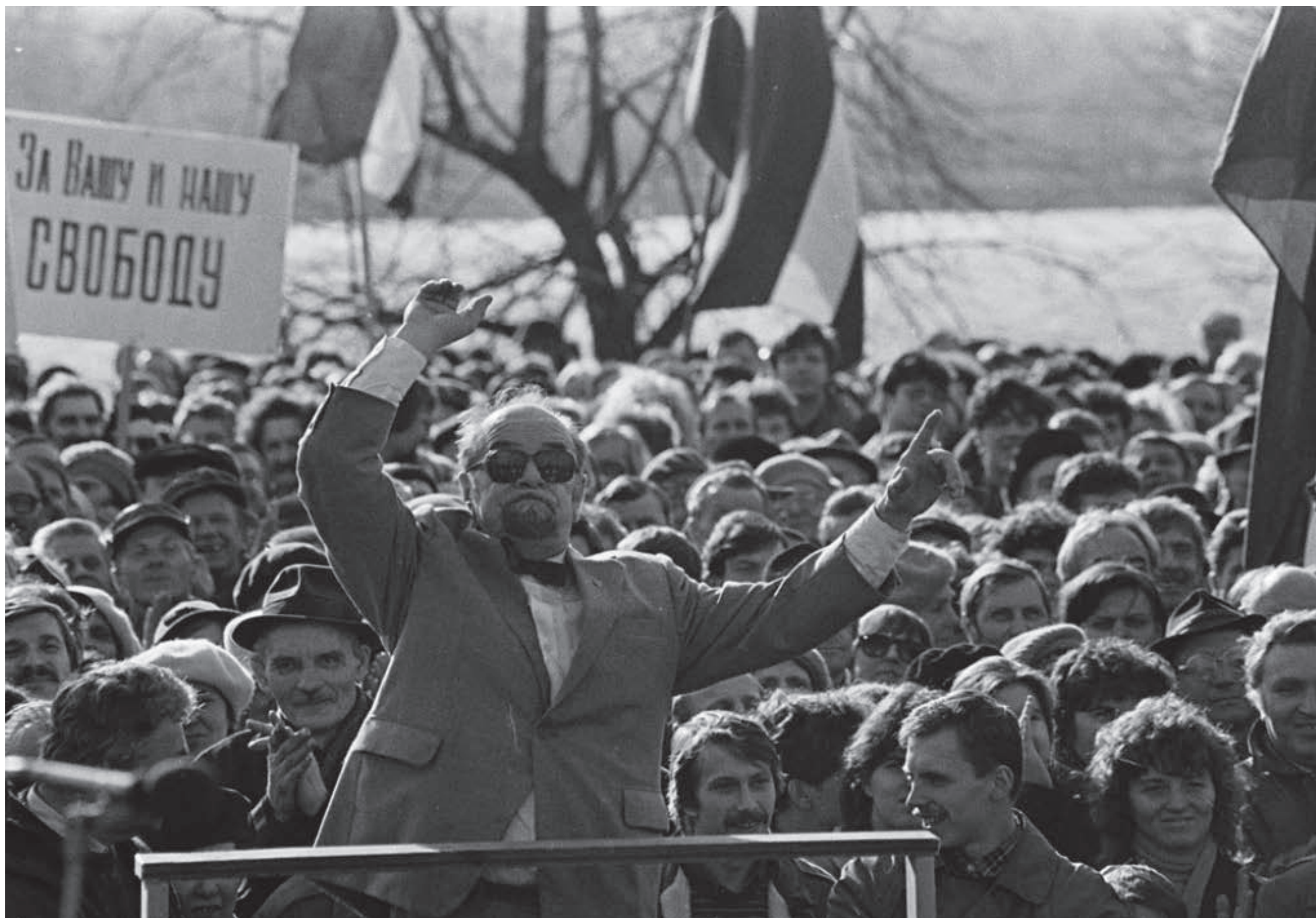


Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



Pre-election rally by the banks of the Daugava. The event was broadcast on radio and television. People on both banks of the Daugava held on to each and every breath-taking word. Actor Valdis Lūriņš directed the flow of proceedings, but the songs and music were selected by conductor Edgars Račevskis. On the stage – the LTF Board and parliamentary election candidates including well-known writers, actors, and artists. On both sides of the microphones – everybody who cherished the dream about the rebirth of the state.



“My dear, brave nation of ploughmen! The brave one, the tenacious one, the tough one!” Actor Ēvalds Valters need say no more than this at the opening of the Popular Front Congress. His wishes are coming true, his pride in Latvia is justified.

Photo:
IMANTS PRĒDELIS



On May 4th in the morning, the people awaited their deputies on Jēkaba iela, to encourage them. Even if it means poverty, there is nothing more precious than freedom. This was really only best understood by those who knew and had experienced what deportation, arrest, and a total control over their private lives meant. That had been experienced only by those who lived in the Soviet Union.

Photo:
GUNĀRS JANAITIS



Photo:
ULDIS BRIEDIS



A historical street as a hub for historic events. Which is better – a Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic or a Republic of Latvia?

Before the voting on May 4th, People's Deputy of the U.S.S.R. Jānis Vanags and Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Latvia Druvis Skulte are talking with Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Latvia and former KGB officer Juris Bojārs. At the March 18th elections, the latter ran successfully against LTF candidate Archbishop Kārlis Gailītis.



Photo:
VITĀLIJS STĪPNIEKS



“Without my support they could hardly get by and I do not think they will!”
On his way to the Supreme Council on May 4th – Andrejs Cīrulis, Editor-in-Chief of Latvijas Jaunatne, a paper loyal to the Popular Front. He was also an LTF deputy to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet and on his lapel he sported both the red flag badge of a Soviet deputy and the Morning Star (Auseklītis) symbol of national awakening.



Photo:
GUNĀRS JANAITIS



Peace to our common home, Latvia? Yet another threat? The Soviet troops have so far brought only disaster to Latvia; a totalitarian regime and mass repressions. "Our common home", has served for 50 years as a Russian Army barracks. Enough is enough!



Photo:
MĀRIS ZEMGALĪETIS



Nobody knew when or how the Soviet tanks would leave Latvia, but many openly and within themselves hoped to live to see that day. Also, it was clear for the new parliament, that this country would only be completely free when all foreign troops had left for good.



Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



The Popular Front was a notably decentralised organization, but it worked in a co-ordinated manner through concerted efforts. By 4 May, each LTF member was well aware that following the independence votes by the Estonian and Lithuanian parliaments, the Latvian deputies must follow their example. In those times voters not only voted but worked actively to influence decision-making.



Photo: IMANTS PRĒDELIS



Isolated and alone, Interfront followers and those out to save the U.S.S.R., having lost the security of army and KGB backup, to be on the safe side, stood clear of the crowds of people thrilled by freedom.



Photo: BORISS KOLESNIKOV



The LTF supporters did not lack a creative imagination or enthusiasm. Proudly with their posters – and proud of their posters.



One, two, three... To be or not to be? We'll count along and, even if the cowards shush us, we won't leave without our independence.

Photo: ANDRIS TENASS



“Now that you’ve donned a suit and changed your hairstyle, go and sit with the presidium!” Deputies Aleksandrs Kiršteins, Juris Karlsons, Eduards Berklavs, Einars Cilinskis, Andrejs Krastiņš, and Ivars Silārs urge Dainis Īvāns, having appointed him First Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, something akin to an LTF commissar to the parliament.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



While Imants Daudišs (centre) dozes off, and vote counter Indulis Ozols (front) is not doing any counting, Ivars Godmanis, the Chair-to-be of the Council of Ministers, and Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Chairman of the Supreme Council, distribute portfolios and fields of influence.

Photo: BORISS KOLESNIKOVS



All seats taken for the journey to Latvia's full independence!
In the foreground, on the left, Jānis Krūmiņš, Indulis Bērziņš, Pēteris Laķis are happy to accept the honour of ruling over the destiny of the nation. There will ever be only one day like that in their lives – a day so happy and so full of responsibility.

Photo: BORISS KOLESNIKOVS



On 3 May the fate of the post of Chairman of the Supreme Council was quickly decided by the LTF, once Dainis Īvāns had flatly declined to take up the position. Now the hottest debate was about the possible head of government. Ivars Godmanis, at the numerous LTF discussions before 4 May had counted up his shortcomings as a candidate to the post, but then turned to counting the advantages, sometimes even naming a recently noted shortcoming as an advantage. The responsibility he shouldered was heavy.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



Who laughs last? “The Black Colonel” Viktors Alksnis, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Latvia Alfreds Rubiks, or the European Parliament? Alksnis and Rubiks always sneered over the freedom aspirations sacred to the people. In January 1991, the All-Latvia Rescue Committee under Rubiks’ leadership provoked armed conflicts that could have served as a pretext for presidential administration. During the August Coup of 1991, he supported the conspiracy against Gorbachev. Rubiks is presently a Member of the European Parliament.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



The calm before the storm. In the hands of these deputies are the LTF prepared drafts of constitutional laws to determine the final hours of the changing political order in the Latvian S.S.R.

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVŠ



In the session room, the “greens” and their allies have already formed a sort of a faction: Skaidrīte Albertiņa, Imants Kalniņš, Ojārs Blumbergs, Ilma Briņķe, Dzintars Ābiķis, Indulis Emsis, Einars Cilinskis, Oļegs Batarevskis.

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVS



LTF deputy Rodrigo Rikards is trying to understand why Russian Orthodox priest, Father Aleksei Zotovs, will be the only one to abstain from the vote on the issue of Latvia's independence. It was hard to predict Zotovs' actions. He liked to present himself as an intermediary. In January 1991, Father Zotovs went as a parliamentarian to the U.S.S.R. Ministry of the Interior "black berets" base at Vecmīlgrāvis. This, however, did not influence the "black berets" criminal activity.

Photo: BORISS KOLESNIKOVS



Head of the Popular Front Information Centre and the Supreme Council's Press Centre, Sarmīte Ēlerte, wants to find out what Vytautas Landsbergis, Chairman of the Lithuanian Supreme Council, thinks about the Independence Declaration of Latvia. On this day, the world avidly awaits every piece of news on the events in Riga.

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVS



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



Deputies from the LTF and the Interfront vote for the leaders of the Supreme Council.

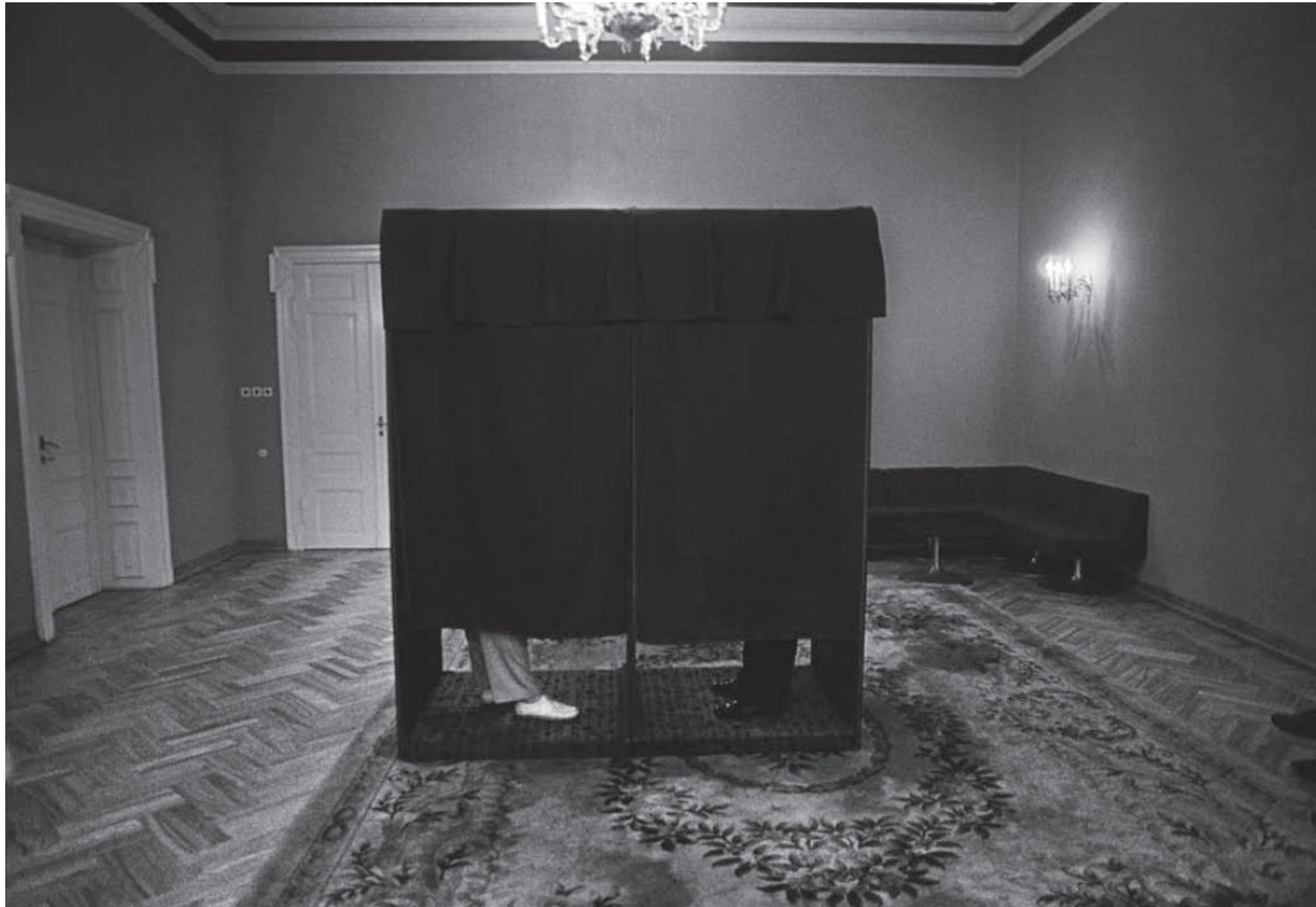


Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



Deputies from the LTF and the Interfront vote for the leaders of the Supreme Council.



The Government of the restored Republic of Latvia: Chairman of the Supreme Council Anatolijs Gorbunovs, First Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Council Dainis Īvāns, Secretary of the Supreme Council Imants Daudišs, Andrejs Krastiņš – Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council, and Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers Ivars Godmanis.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



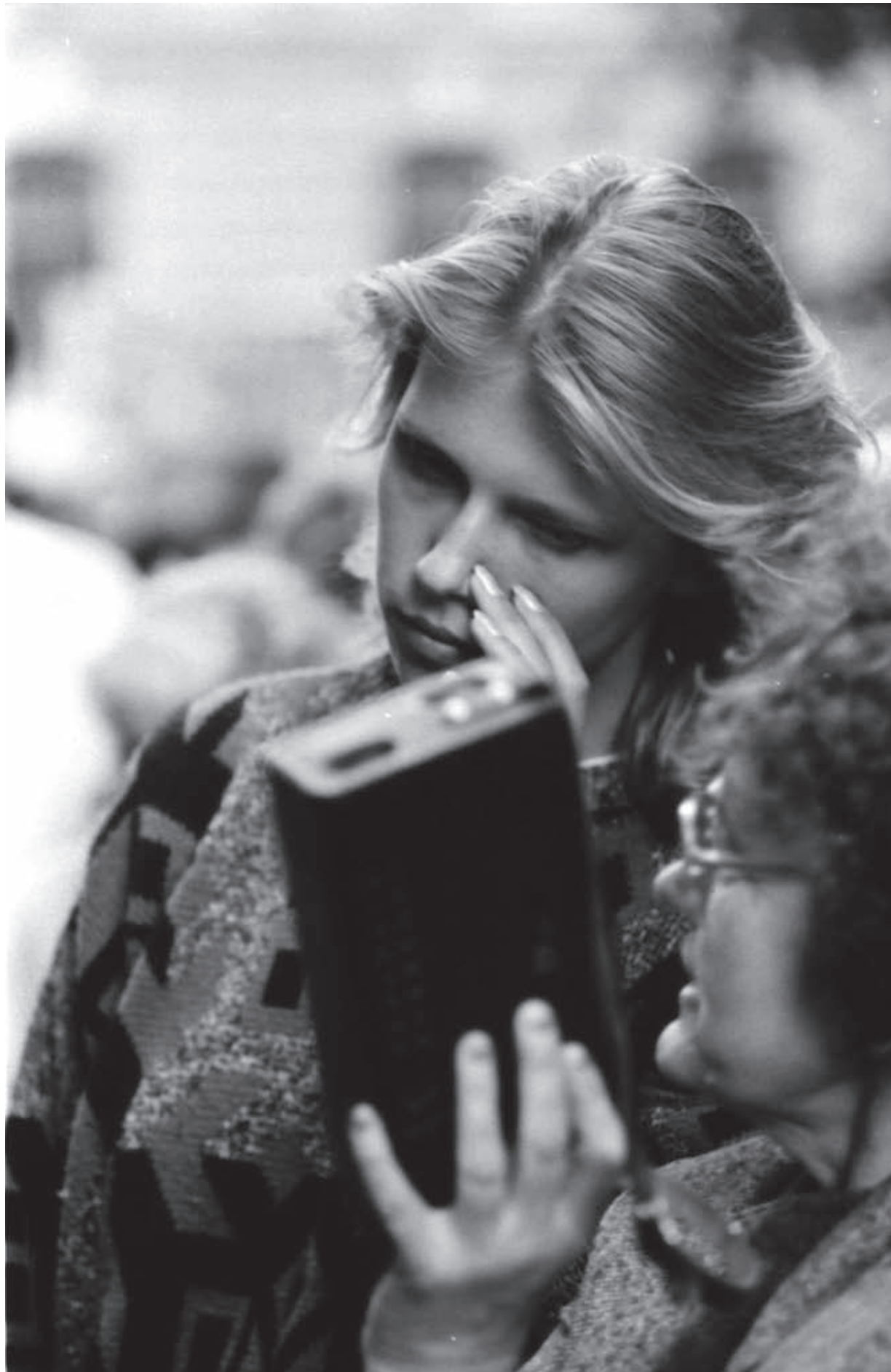
It is easier for two to throw off one burden, even if this burden is the U.S.S.R. Chairman of the Lithuanian Supreme Council, Vytautas Landsbergis can now also extend congratulations to Latvia. This time, the Latvian vote is also a support to him and to Lithuania.

Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



For whom are we applauding?
For Ourselves? No, for this – the
sunniest day in the life of Latvia!

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVŠ



Do you hear? Do you believe that we are really going to live in an independent Latvia?

Photo:
VITĀLIJS STĪPNIEKS



As if nothing has really happened.
The same sun is in the sky. These
same people. This same world is
about you. But something in me,
in me, Latvia, has blossomed!

Photo: VITĀLIJS STĪPNIEKS



Flags. The pattern of happy eyes.
From the heights of the cosmos
we are but a part of the pattern
of eternity. Our prayers have
been answered. Thy will be done,
Mother!

Photo:
ULDIS BRIEDIS



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



A lucky day for 'moment-photo' hunters. Open access to information was the power behind Latvia on May 4th.



Photo:
GUNĀRS JANAITIS



“The strains of the kokle, the song of the ancient one ...” It’s moments like these, when the great spirits of our nation are with us – ancient pagan priests, and the poets of the latter-day – the passionate Auseklis, the impetuous Kronvaldu Atis, the profound Rainis...



Photo:
VITĀLIJS STĪPNIEKS



“My dear ones, this is victory, and it is Now! – not one step backwards!” Here comes Professor Mavriks Vulfsons. Just two years ago, for having made public the facts on Latvia’s occupation, Communist Party First Secretary Boriss Pugo hissed into his face: “You have destroyed Soviet Latvia!” “It’s high time we did this!” On the stairs of the Parliament House, deputy and farmer Andris Felss explains it all to Lauku Avīze correspondent Egils Līcītis.



Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVS



May 4th – the only day in Latvia’s history when the people have raised their hands, waving the “V-for-Victory” sign in honour of an event.



Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



For the fact that today we no longer feel like “a Soviet people”, that Latvia’s self-confidence is reborn, we shall carry you, Mavrik, in our arms into the future, in eternal gratitude!



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



“It was late in the afternoon after the Independence Declaration had been voted on and adopted, and the Supreme Council’s session was closed for the day that the deputies went out to celebrate the event with the people standing outside. The Deputies were showered with handfuls of flowers, everybody sang folk songs; the people lifted up in their arms the most notable of the deputies. The procession moved towards the bank of the Daugava River where a mass rally took place.”

Lars Fredén, a Swedish diplomat

In the picture, behind deputy Ārijs Ūdris, there comes the Foreign Minister of the Latvian S.S.R., Nikolajs Neilands, followed by Lars Fredén.



Love for love. Best wishes and words of gratitude to the popular writer Marina Kosteņeckā, a champion for Latvia's freedom, at the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. in Moscow.

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVŠ



Chairman of the Supreme Council Anatolijs Gorbunovs, even from afar, could always be recognised in the crowd by his immaculate and expressive hairstyle. At this moment, the flow of people to the bank of the Daugava has been blocked by cameramen and television reporters.

Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



A Popular Front deputy and Chairwoman of the Polish Society of Latvia, the charming, truthful and, if need be, scathing Ita Kozakeviča left no one indifferent. Today in particular, when she, too, was just happy.

Photo: VITĀLIJS STĪPIEKŠ



Poet Imants Ziedonis with a bunch of flowers in Latvia's Orbit. He did not want to enter politics, but did. The Popular Front needed the bravest, wisest and those most unselfish, those who would command the right magic words for independence. Ziedonis was worth the whole of the Supreme Council, and those voting for freedom were worthy of him.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



Deputy from the Liepāja Section of the LTF, Vladimirs Eņiņš, signs a duplicate copy of the Declaration of Independence. Maybe today it is an heirloom for some Latvian family.

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVS



Photo:
VITĀLIJS STĪPIEKŠ



The Popular Front voluntary security guards – the only reliable power structure upon which the Supreme Council could rely for the time being.



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



Today, we can no longer tell you exactly what it was that these happy faces were chanting or singing at that very moment, but we can imagine. They sang about the courage of the people, the power of the people, about this great event from which, like from the sea, one can draw strength for the future, for whenever it is needed.



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



Why is everybody so elated?
What are they so happy about?
Does this not mean that human fulfilment requires something different other than that which we chase in the grey exhaustion of our everyday routine? What was our treasure then? What was our prosperity? Wasn't it our Spirituality?



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



To touch eternity. To enter eternity. At least for a while, for this moment to last a lifetime – for yours and for that of your grandchildren.



By the banks of the Daugava again. Earlier, on 17th March 1990, there was pre-electional uncertainty, doubt, concern. On 4th May 1991, they are standing proud, because they have not disgraced themselves before their ancestors, their contemporaries or their descendants, or before the whole world. Only when the voting is over can the people take a breath and start a song that will fly over the River of Destiny. Flowers, passed from hand to hand over to the deputies, are finally laid at the foot of the Freedom Monument.

Photo: IMANTS PRĒDELIS



Photo:
IMANTS PRĒDELIS



Downstage, Archbishop Kārlis Gailītis, Alfreds Čepānis, Ivars Godmanis. A couple of hours earlier, sneering at May 4th and rehearsing for the military parade for 9th May, proud as a peacock, there stood Fyodor Kuzmin, General of the Baltic Military Region. Enemy troops have come and they have gone, but the singing nation remains. That is what we sing about, generals!



Photo: ULDIS BRIEDIS



Hands enjoined so tightly can not be defeated. Hands enjoined so closely can not be split apart. Hands enjoined so intimately do not betray. He who has felt the power and the unity of the Baltic Way, will know how to stand up for himself.



Photo:
GUNĀRS JANAITIS



In 1959 the communist Eduards Berklavs was slandered by other communists, and he suffered repressions for his expressions of humanity.

On 4 May 1991, deputy Berklavs was able to demonstrate a humane stance, an integrity and a confidence in the ideals of freedom.



The principal player on May 4th was the 'people'. More exactly, on Independence Day, one could clearly understand what the 'people' really are. The 'people' are the individuals who can live in harmony, who can freely sing together, who can clasp themselves into a fist and who can stand up for themselves. The 'people' – it is a choir of free individuals with different voices, sounding in unison.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



Somebody's droning, somebody else is humming, and someone else is contemplating the blossoming of new values. Deputies: Godmanis, Karlsons, Plotnieks, Geidāns, Bojārs, Preinbergs. Still today, this male voice choir of the May 4th Club is happy to join together in song.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



How long have they been singing?
How long will they keep singing?
Until Latvia is free, and long after that! Our ancestors sang as they went off to war, and sang when they were coming home. On May 4th, there was also something of a military campaign, but without tanks, without firearms. With weapons much more powerful – the truth and self-worth.

Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



Now, one must keep quiet for a moment. One must feel, from which direction the wind is blowing. Are there any military helicopters scattering Interfront leaflets? Is a traitor creeping out from under the bridge? Are there any faint-hearted who will surrender to the enemy? The deputies must be able to embrace, in a glance, the whole life-space of Latvia. They must now be able to answer for it with their honour and with their conscience.



The breeze is in the flags and in the hair. The wind gradually dies down as dusk descends, but who will ever run short of song?

Photo: BORISS KOĻESŅIKOVŠ



As the sun is setting, more and more people are coming to the embankment. Some are just out from work, others, having just learned that the hour of freedom has been struck, come in groups or alone. Everybody understands: something like this can only be experienced once in a hundred years.

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



More happiness! More Sunshine!
More Voice!

Photo: GUNĀRS JANAITIS



Photo: IMANTS PRĒDELIS



The embankment is finally full of people. The singing grows more and more powerful. Choirs and their conductors have arrived without the asking. It is the same air, it is the same earth, it is the same city as it was in the morning – but somehow it is now a completely new world.



Photo: ANDRIS EGLĪTIS



People from all over Latvia are following the events of May 4th. Even up on the highest point in Latvia, atop the tower on Gaiziņš Hill where a flag was raised and a toast proposed to freedom.



On May 4th, the adversaries of freedom were still confused and unsure of what action to take. The Communist leader, Alfreds Rubiks, demanded that the Independence Declaration be withdrawn. When this did not happen, the state security committee (KGB) organised a storming of the building of the Supreme Council of Latvia on 15 May, in order to overthrow the 'anti-constitutional' parliament. Russian officers and cadets in civilian clothes broke through the cordon of Popular Front voluntary security guards. The attack ceased as abruptly as it started: the assailants disappeared as the lunch break commenced in the canteens of the U.S.S.R. military schools located in Riga.

Photo: ILMĀRS ZNOTIŅŠ



The Soviet Army in 1940 heroically overran the Republic of Latvia, bringing the red terror and slavery, but on May 4th 1990, in fear of final defeat had to keep watch night and day over the symbols of Bolshevism hated by the people. A waste of effort! The Lenin monument of Liepāja, like all the others, will soon end up on the rubbish dump of history.

Photo: ILMĀRS ZNOTIŅŠ



When the Independence Day festivities are over, you suddenly realise that the world outside has not changed and that greater efforts still have to be made. The Communists in their half-crumbled fortresses are still a threat to Latvia. The Interfront, half-forgotten in the festivities, are still trampling on the soul of the nation. The gates to the prison of nations are still to be forced open, to free not only the spirit but also the body.

Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



In restoring Latvia's independence, it was important to clear the country of the symbols of empire and of totalitarianism. The monument to Pēteris Stučka on the square at Pils laukums was the first to be removed after May 4th.



Photo: AIVARS LIEPIŅŠ



Here they are, those who voted for Latvia – all together! At that time, this day was only but a dream. Nobody could tell how it would all turn out. At that time, the people stood guard at their Parliament. It is hard to imagine this today. They should feel happy about having brought us this, the sunniest day in Latvia's history. But we are grateful to Time and to Destiny that May 4th will always be a mirror to the future – of what kind of a people we are capable of being.

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