

FEBRUARY 16

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On FEBRUARY 16 of this year, Lithuanians throughout the world Commemorate the thirty-eighth anniversary of the declaration of that country's independence. As all national holidays have particular meanings to different nationals, so has February 16 a meaning of its own to the people of Lithuania. It is interesting to note how the meaning of this most important of all national holidays has varied with the moods of the country.

The restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1918 resulted in a great wave of enthusiasm. Progress marked the two interwar decades — new schools appeared; roads were built; cities were modernized; and the economy was rising. The future seemed to be bright for the newly reborn nation. The celebration of Independence Day reflected the enthusiasm and self-confidence of the people.

Toward the middle of the century, however, international horizons began to darken. At the very outset of the greatest international conflict known, Lithuania once again lost her independence. Firmly believing in the post-war initiative of the United States in establishing just order in Europe, it hoped and waited for the restoration of her lost independence. It waited in vain. In the celebration of Independence Day, one could notice the great disappointment of the displaced peoples.

As time went on and the future showed no signs of hope, the attitudes of people began to change. As before in the course of Lithuania's history, new, once again, the exile promised to be long. Inner strength and firm determination to survive through the storms of our day are needed. Consequently, February 16 exemplifies this new attitude. On this day Lithuanians proclaim to various peoples and governments their resolute will to retain the most sacred right of civilized peoples — the right to be free.

May we suggest that, in this age of greatest international conflict, justice not be ignored? Have we arrived at a stage in human development where might takes precedence over all the human values for which the members of our Western Civilization have fought for centuries? Are we to allow the existence of a wide contrast in theory and practice, ?s between the declarations of the United Nations, the articles of the Atlantic Charter, and the principle of national self-determination on the one hand and the action of the Soviet Union with its virtual enslavement of millions of people on the other? How lamentable it is that in this age of great technological advances the course of our Civilization seems to be on the verge of regression.

Looking today at the future development of the international community, one cannot help doubting the success of the final outcome. Similar doubts were raised by His Majesty Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, before the League of Nations some twenty years ago:

"There are different ways to maintain peace. There is the maintenance of peace through right and there is peace at any price... The League would be committing suicide if after having been created to maintain peace through right it were to abandon that principle and adopt instead the principle of peace at any price, even the price of immolation of a member state at the feet of its aggressor".

Recent statements, however, on the part of the President of United States and other responsible governmental officials, expressing hope of and directing the policy of United States toward the eventual liberation of the oppressed peoples behind the Iron Curtain, give hope as to the fulfillment of expectations of millions. For, in spite of the uncertainties and conflicts of our age, firmness on the part of the United States might yet lead the world to a better future.