

World and Nation

Striking Soviets question voting laws

From Associated Press reports

MOSCOW — Ethnic Russians stopped operations at 19 industrial plants in Estonia Wednesday and held protest meetings about legislation they say favors the republic's ethnic Estonian majority, strikers and news reports said.

The walkouts, which began at seven plants on Tuesday, escalated as Soviet officials ended a potentially disastrous strike by roughly half the nation's 1 million miners.

As many as 25,000 workers in Estonia stopped working, halting operations at enterprises from electronics plants to a defense industry factory, said Yevgeny Kolekhnik, chairman of the strike committee at the Baltic Shipyard in Tallinn, the Estonian capital.

Tens of thousands of workers attended protest meetings this morning, said Yaroslav Tolstikhov, head of the economics section at Sovetskaya Estoniya, Tallinn's Russian-language Communist Party daily.

"Thousands, tens of thousands of people took part. It's hard to say just how many," Tolstikhov said in a telephone interview. "The strike isn't having a great economic impact," he added. "It is mostly psychological." Many Tallinn industries are closed for routine summer vacations.

Strikers are complaining about a proposed law requiring that people live in the republic two years before they can vote, according to Rahve Haal and Sovetskaya Estoniya, two Communist Party dailies in Estonia.

They see the law as one more Es-

tonian assertion of power. In 1988, thousands of ethnic Russians migrated to Estonia because the republic enjoys a higher living standard than other parts of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the law making people wait before voting would primarily affect them.

The Estonian strike comes as more miners returned to work. They began striking July 11 and the unrest eventually closed mines from the Ukraine to the Arctic.

Miners began returning to work last week after officials agreed to most of their demands, including increases in deliveries of meat and soap and rights to share management of their industry.

Many miners who had refused to return went back Tuesday after President Mikhail S. Gorbachev and Premier Nikolai I. Ryzhkov signed a letter guaranteeing pay raises, longer vacations and other benefits, said Yuri

A. Bolderev, a strike leader from the Donetsk basin, the biggest Soviet coal field.

Coal Ministry officials said Tuesday that 79 mines remained idle, most in the Donetsk basin, 550 miles south of Moscow in the Ukraine, Tass reported.

The national parliament, the Supreme Soviet, appealed Tuesday to Soviet workers not to strike.

Lawmakers said they would adopt laws by autumn giving workers more control of management and profits and ensuring democratic elections of local government officials. Kremlin leaders and the miners have accused local authorities of insensitivity to workers' problems.

The coal strikes crippled coke and steel plants in much of the Soviet Union, and meeting the miners' demands will cost an estimated \$4.6

billion to \$8.6 billion, said Viktor G. Kurchenko, head of the parliamentary budget commission.

The Estonia strike appeared minor in comparison. But it signals a possible increase in ethnic tension in Estonia, which leads the drive in the 15 Soviet republics for greater economic and political autonomy from Moscow.

Estonians, who make up 65 percent of the republic's 1.6 million people, have pushed through their parliament a law making Estonian the official language, causing protests among Russians who comprise 28 percent of the population.

It was unclear whether the national parliament would allow the proposed election law to stand. The central newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda reported from Tallinn that just 58 of 244 deputies present in parliament

Monday opposed the law, virtually guaranteeing its passage.

But the parliament decided to withhold final passage for at least 10 days, said Tarmu Tammerk of Tallinn's weekly newspaper Kodumaa.

In October, the national parliament vetoed an Estonian law giving the republic wide autonomy, but on Monday Gorbachev said he would allow regional authorities greater latitude in carrying out local elections scheduled for spring.

The Estonian strike was organized by the Union of Soviet Working Collectives, according to Komsomolskaya Pravda and press reports read by Tammerk.

Sovetskaya Estoniya carried photographs showing signs plastered on the gates of the Dvigatil defense industry plant and one of the shipyards saying, in Russian, "We are on strike."

Death penalty in Hong Kong under fire

From Associated Press reports

HONG KONG — Human rights activists say their campaign to abolish the death penalty when this British territory is handed back to China has a new sense of urgency after Beijing's executions of pro-democracy protesters.

"We certainly are intensifying our efforts," said Andrew Stables, a former chairman of the local Amnesty International branch.

Amnesty today submitted a peti-

tion to local lawmakers urging the abolition of capital punishment, saying that events in China had heightened concern of local residents over the issue.

"It doesn't require too much imagination to think of possibilities" of abuse of the death penalty in Hong Kong after 1997, when the colony reverts to Chinese sovereignty, Stables said.

Murder and treason are capital crimes under Hong Kong law, but the colonial governor has commuted all of the more than 230 death sentences since 1966 — usually to life

imprisonment — because executions are not allowed in Britain.

When Hong Kong is returned to China, laws previously enforced in the territory will be kept on the books. While capital punishment may remain, there is no guarantee the automatic commutation of sentences will continue.

"After 1997, we are not sure whether this tradition (of commutation) can be respected," said Rev. Louis Ha, spokesman for the local Catholic Church.

What human rights campaigners find particularly worrisome is, in the

words of Stables, the "fairly liberal use" of the death penalty in China.

Several dozen executions are known to have occurred in China since the pro-democracy movement was crushed by troops June 3-4, but Beijing authorities have linked just 12 of those reported to the protests. Many Chinese believe the number is far higher.

Hong Kong government officials say they have not removed the death penalty statute because the public supports the law. They claim there is no evidence that recent executions in China have swayed local opinion.

Africa asks for debt relief

From Associated Press reports

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — Africa's leaders called Wednesday for Western nations to emulate the United States and France and write off the continent's official foreign debt.

The leaders, closing the annual summit of the 50-nation Organization of African Unity, also urged the international community to develop "a more comprehensive strategy to address all aspects of Africa's debt problems, both official and commercial loans, on an enduring basis."

Heads of state and ranking ministers of 42 member states had made Africa's foreign debt of \$230 billion the dominant theme of their meeting in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital. Africa's economy, never healthy, has been in decline for the past decade.

Leaders said the industrialized nations should follow the example of Washington and Paris, which have written off large sums of African debt.

While unanimous on the need for an urgent bail-out, some delegates, including Uganda's President Yow-

eri Museveni, noted a lot of past financial help has been squandered through corruption and waste.

The summit's resolution on debt also called for special relief from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. They called for the Western-funded institutions to create and direct an agency to purchase outstanding African debts at discount rates.

Also Wednesday, Tanzania's Deputy Prime Minister Salim A. Salim, was elected secretary-general of the organization.

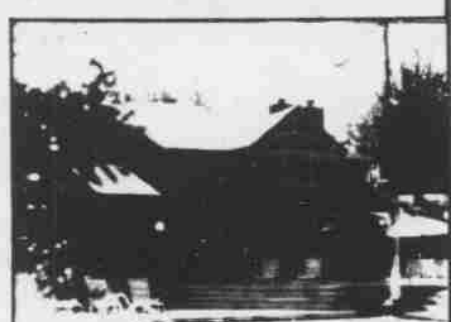
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