**The Singing Revolution, Estonia**

Estonians have a long tradition of singing. Beginning in 1869 they have held a song festival every five years called the Laulupidu during which thousands of Estonians gather to sing together.

During the 1940s, the Soviet Union invaded and occupied the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Forced to live under Soviet Communism, Estonians were subject to KGB surveillance, deported to work in Siberia, and prohibited from singing Estonian nationalist songs or waving the Estonian flag.

At the 1947 song festival, after singing songs about Communism, the Estonian choir began to sing a nationalist song that had been inspired by an old Estonian poem “Land of My Fathers, Land that I Love”. Although the Soviets responded by forbidding the singing of the song, the song became the unofficial Estonian national anthem.

In 1969, on the 100th anniversary of the song festival, Estonian singers again used the festival as an opportunity for them to express their desire for national independence. After finishing their official Soviet-approved programme, the Estonian choir sang additional traditional Estonian songs and refused to leave the stage. Soviet officials ordered the brass bands to drown out the singing but this didn’t work. Eventually, as thousands of Estonians continued to sing, the Soviets were forced to let the conductor come back onto the stage to conduct the song.

In 1987 after the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) the Estonians decided to try again to resist the occupation. They organised protest against the Soviet plan to carry out open cast mining in Estonia. Their non-violent protests successfully stopped the mining.

At a demonstration in Hirve Park where there were several thousand Estonians, the police shut off the public address system. Demonstrators responded by using rolled up paper megaphones to be heard over the crowd. They spoke against the Soviet occupation, but were not arrested.

In the summer of 1988, during song concerts that attracted thousands, creative Estonian protesters brought separate blue, black, and white banners to fly side by side, creating the visual effect of flying the Estonian flag – an act that had been forbidden for years. In June, a summer celebration festival in the capital city of Tullinn erupted into a spontaneous singing jamboree. Close to 100,000 people participated. Increasing numbers of Estonian flags started to blossom at the demonstrations, people waving them brazenly.

In September 1988 a rally was staged at the song festival grounds that brought together more than 300,000 Estonians, nearly a third of the entire population.

In August 1989, because the USSR continued to deny that the occupation of the Baltic nations was illegal, more than a million Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians organized and formed a 600km human chain from Estonia in the north to Lithuania in the south. Activists held signs that declared “Freedom for the Baltics.”

Eventually after much further non-violent resistance across the Soviet occupied countries; Lithuania attained its independence in 1991.