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Introduction: Soviet People's Deputies speak

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By Keith Armes
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As part of its ongoing series of publications on Soviet affairs, the Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology & Policy is making available to the Soviet studies community a presentation on political developments in the Soviet Union by the prominent public figure and member of the executive of the Inter-Regional Group of People's Deputies, Yuri Dmitriyevich Chernichenko. The present publication also includes an interview with the secretary of the executive council of Sajudis in Lithuania, Mecys Mecio Laurinkus. The texts are translations from the original Russian and Lithuanian.

Before he achieved distinction as a particularly active People's Deputy, in recent years Yuri Chernichenko, while on the staff of USSR Central Television, had acquired a considerable reputation in the Soviet Union as an outspoken television commentator on agriculture. Earlier he had published extensively on agricultural affairs in the Soviet press. Since winning election to the Congress of People's Deputies from a Moscow district in April 1989 Chernichenko has become one of the best-known members of the (liberal) Inter-Regional Group. He has continued to write trenchantly in the central press, advocating radical reforms in Soviet agriculture, and exposing the inadequacy of the legislative measures adopted so far.¹ In his opinion, the Russian peasantry is still the victim of a system of serfdom. No major improvement in the catastrophic agricultural situation will be possible until the collective and state farm structure of Soviet agriculture is abolished. Chernichenko's prominence as a Moscow deputy, member of the Congress's Commission on Agricultural Affairs, and television personality ensures that his views receive wide attention. He has been active in the recently constituted Association of Peasant Farms and

Agricultural Cooperatives of Russia (AKKOR), and at the Association's first Congress in January 1990 was chosen as one of the delegates from the Congress to meet with the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai I. Ryzhkov, to present AKKOR's platform on agricultural reform. Chernichenko also serves on the editorial board of Ogonyok and has played a major role in ensuring that the periodical provides extensive coverage of agricultural problems and abuses.

In this paper, based on his address at Boston University in October 1989, Chernichenko discussed the March election campaign for the Congress of People's Deputies and the methods employed by the apparatus to prevent his being elected. "The elections," Chernichenko says, "were designed to ensure that ultimate power remained in the hands of people who had not been elected." Chernichenko gives his view of the results of the first Congress and the power relationship between the Congress and the Soviet government. Discussing the membership of the Supreme Soviet, he finds that it "was formed by the Party authorities and was obedient to them," but was now becoming less subservient under the pressure of public opinion. Chernichenko also discusses the measures taken by the government to limit the influence of the Inter-Regional Group. His presentation constitutes a valuable eye-witness account of the election process and the work of the first Congress of People's Deputies by one of most distinguished members of the democratic movement in the Soviet Union at the present time.

At the same time, the Institute is publishing an interview with Mecys Laurinkus by a research fellow of the Institute, Gordon M. Hahn. Laurinkus is a research associate in philosophy with the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology, and Law of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius. His special field has been the history of Lithuanian philosophy and literary criticism. After having been an active member of Sajudis since its creation, in October 1988 Laurinkus was elected to the executive council of Sajudis and subsequently appointed secretary of the council. He also serves as one of the three Sajudis delegates on the Baltic Council constituted by the Baltic.

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2 In the first round of the election in the Gagarin (7th) Moscow district, Chernichenko led among a total of 12 candidates with 38.75 percent of the vote. In the runoff election on April 9 Chernichenko won with 67.7 percent of the vote. Voter participation in the runoff was 70 percent.
republics. In March 1989 Laurinkus was elected to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies from the Taurage territorial district in Western Lithuania. He has been a member of the Lithuanian Supreme Council (Soviet) since February 1990, and was elected the following month a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Council. In the latter capacity he has taken part during recent weeks in the negotiations between the Lithuanian government and the Soviet government in Moscow.

In this publication, based on his interview at Boston in December 1989, Laurinkus discusses the attitude of the Polish minority in Lithuania to the Lithuanians and the artificial fomenting of anti-Lithuanian Polish national feeling among the Polish population. Laurinkus throws light on the view taken by Lithuanians of the Soviet army, as well as the opinions of army officers on the role of the Main Political Administration (MPA). As a member of the Committee on Defense and State Security of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Laurinkus makes clear the very limited powers of the committee. Thanks to this interview with a key elected official of Sajudis, we are able to gain an important non-Russian perspective on the workings of the new legislative institutions in the Soviet Union.

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