

1990-04

# People's Deputy: Mecys M. Laurinkus

---

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/22601>

*Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository*

PUBLICATION SERIES

Number 3 (April 1990)

## People's Deputy

By Mecys M. Laurinkus

## **Mecys M. Laurinkus**

Secretary, Sajudis Executive Council  
People's Deputy from Lithuania to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies

Interview with Gordon M. Hahn  
Research Fellow, Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology & Policy  
Boston University

Boston, Massachusetts  
December 8, 1989

**Q.** Was there in Lithuania, as there was in East European countries, a kind of "countersystem," a system outside the established system, an underground movement or organization prior to the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to power that once given the opportunity to come out of the underground immediately went into action, or was the emergence of "Sajudis" something spontaneous?

**Laurinkus:** It was absolutely spontaneous. However, pre-Gorbachev there was an underground movement, but it was not at all a mass movement. I mean there was an underground—the Helsinki Watch—but just as in other countries it was basically just a dissident group.

**Q.** Concerning the Congress of People's Deputies and the USSR Supreme Soviet, what are your impressions of the Inter-Regional Group?

**Laurinkus:** They are progressive deputies who meet regularly in Moscow. I am not a member. There are Lithuanians who participate, but not as members. They express their opinion when there is a discussion on nationality issues. So they are more of an advisory voice in the Inter-Regional Group than real members. Although they support its program, they have not officially joined it. They are not interested in improving the Soviet Union, their goal is independence for Lithuania.

**Q.** What about the Estonian deputies and the Latvian deputies—are they official members of the Inter-Regional Group?

**Laurinkus:** They also are not members. However, there is just one Estonian who is an official member.

**Q.** So the official members are almost exclusively Russian and Moscow delegates?

**Laurinkus:** Yes, almost all of them are Russians from Moscow.

**Q.** Regarding the situation in Lithuania, what do you know about the Russians' attempts to foment Polish national feeling among the Polish minority and induce them to demand the creation of a Polish autonomous region?

**Laurinkus:** This is an attempt by Moscow to instigate conflict between Lithuanians and Poles. The Polish people in Lithuania did not support it. They are more interested in economic benefits. The Polish people do not really understand the question of autonomy. There were a number of instigators.

**Q.** Who were they?

**Laurinkus:** Ten or fifteen people and we know who they were. Two of them are even deputies to the Congress. The editor of a Polish paper in Lithuania was also a member of the group.

**Q.** Are there any military people involved in this?

**Laurinkus:** No.

**Q.** Members of the party apparatus?

**Laurinkus:** They are members of the party, but not officials.

**Q.** Are you a member of the CPSU?

**Laurinkus:** No.

**Q.** They have set up six new commissions within the CC CPSU apparatus, and very few members of the CC departments are members of the CC commissions. Is this an attempt by

Gorbachev to circumvent the party apparatus and set up his own personal apparatus so that he can reform the party?

**Laurinkus:** I think that perhaps you are on the right track, with the reservation that I am not well-placed to comment. Gorbachev likes to surround himself with people from different backgrounds, especially in selecting cadres.

**Q.** Has there been any violence between Lithuanians and members of the Red Army?

**Laurinkus:** Between soldiers?

**Q.** Since you brought it up, either between soldiers or between civilians and servicemen?

**Laurinkus:** There has been no violence between civilians and the army, but of course there is some negative feeling about individual actions that the army takes, which is natural. There is also opposition to conscription in the army, so there is some tension there. There are young men who are refusing to report for the draft. Although there is tension, the army itself is not the object of antagonism. Some very interesting things are happening in the Defense Ministry itself, however. Reforms are being carried out in the ministry. The younger officers are reformist, while the older ones are conservative.

**Q.** What about Generals Makhmut Gareyev and Mikhail Moiseyev?

**Laurinkus:** They are not very pro-reform. However, it is not a question of personalities or individuals. There is a general tendency, and an understanding that the army would be more effective if there were reforms.

**Q.** Are the younger officers more opposed to interference by the Main Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy (MPA) than the older officers?

**Laurinkus:** I would say yes--that is a problem.

**Q.** Have there been suggestions to abolish the MPA or to change its role by either reducing the amount of political indoctrination in the services, or the emphasis on Marxism-Leninism?

**Laurinkus:** The discussion is about technology, not ideology.

**Q.** Does the Supreme Soviet Committee that oversees defense and security matters<sup>3</sup> have the power to countermand orders for a military intervention or reject a proposal by the Politburo directing the military to crack down on the Baltic republics?

**Laurinkus:** No.

**Q.** What kind of power does the committee have? Regarding what issues?

**Laurinkus:** For the first time the defense budget is being openly discussed, and that has never occurred before. That's about it.

**Q.** Would you like to see Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution abolished?

**Laurinkus:** All the republics hope that it will be. I have an advisory role in the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet.

**Q.** How many were elected delegates both to the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet and to the USSR Supreme Soviet?

**Laurinkus:** After the new elections there will be many.

**Q.** Does this cause a problem for delegates in that they are forced to take different positions in the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet and in the USSR Supreme Soviet?

**Laurinkus:** No.

**Q.** How about the situation in the other Baltic republics?

**Laurinkus:** The Russian delegates from Estonia act differently in Moscow than in Estonia.

---

<sup>3</sup>The Committee on Defense and State Security, of which Laurinkus was appointed a member.

**Q.** Do you have the impression that the delegates to the USSR Supreme Soviet from the Central Asian republics and from Azerbaidzhan are more "conservative" than delegates from the Baltic republics or even from the Ukraine or Moldavia?

**Laurinkus:** It is not so much conservatism as a lack of experience. Unlike the Lithuanians, they simply lack an understanding of the democratic process. Sometimes they just do not understand the issues or the process itself. When they do see the advantages, then they copy the Baltics.

**Q.** Has Sajudis had much contact with Birlik or other popular fronts in Central Asia?

**Laurinkus:** Yes, with organizations in Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, and Georgia. But we feel that we should not interfere in the complex question of Armenian-Azerbaidzhani relations. But we do have contacts.

**Q.** What about Central Asia? For example, Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kirghizistan?

**Laurinkus:** We have contacts with Birlik in Uzbekistan. I do not believe there are any other fronts.

**Q.** What about the so-called "Islam and Democracy" movements?

**Laurinkus:** There are quite a few of them, but we do not have relations with them. But they do visit Lithuania.