

USSR legislation. At the same time, it passed a resolution giving Estonian status as a state language. This was passed into law on 18 January 1989.

The next important event occurred with the March 1989 elections to the newly formed Congress of People's Deputies. Rahvarinne openly fielded or supported candidates (as did the popular fronts in Latvia and Lithuania). These candidates, including the First Secretary of the ECP (who was also the president of Estonia) and the premier of Estonia, were elected. Significantly, four candidates backed by the opposing International Movement were also elected. The success of the two movements indicated the change in the political climate of Estonia.

In the weeks prior to the elections, President Gorbachev made further compromise initiatives. On 15 March he proposed that powers over distribution of industrial materials be devolved to the republics and that they be able to raise their own funds through stock and bond issues. On 24 March, *Pravda* published a draft Communist Party document proposing the transfer of power to the republics in the following areas: agriculture, consumer industries, environmental protection, housing, and social services.

These proposals were behind the pace of Baltic demands. All three popular fronts met in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, for a "Baltic Assembly" in May 1989. It called for Moscow not to obstruct the restoration of state sovereignty, for the freedom of the Baltic States to choose their own socio-economic systems, for total control of the economy by 1990, and for the trial of those responsible for the deportations and killings that had followed their 1940 incorporation into the Soviet Union. A few days later, Estonia rejected the Gorbachev and CPSU proposals, passing a resolution for full control of its economy. Further radicalization of the political scene was evident in a proliferation of popular movements with independence programmes.

In August 1989, Estonia overhauled its electoral law, essentially curtailing the right of non-Estonians to stand for, or vote in, local elections. This measure, discussed since June, was aimed at upcoming elections on 10 December 1989. Soviet reaction was swift, with the Presidium of the USSR declaring the law illegal and stating that it contravened basic human rights embodied in the Soviet constitution. But in a compromise action, instead of declaring the law null and void, it recommended that it be modified to meet these objections by October. Estonia complied with these demands on 5 October, noting that the law would be redesigned once legislation defining Estonian citizenship had been adopted.

Meanwhile, Soviet state and party authorities continued to work on the nationalities problem. In late July 1989, the Supreme Soviet endorsed the Baltic republics' transition to economic autonomy, conceding forms of independence in budgeting, taxation and economic planning one year ahead of similar reforms proposed for the entire Union. Furthermore, first reading was given to an economic independence bill. The vote to enact this bill as law was postponed, however.

September 1989 saw the long-awaited Central Committee of the CPSU plenary session on nationalities policy. At this session, President Gorbachev decried Stalin's "deviations" on nationalities policies and other errors of the past. He called for self-determination not through