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MN [Moscow News] Interview:
SEMIPALATINSK-NEVADA as Vewed by a People's
Deputy of the USSR

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Summary:

An interview between Moscow News journalist Yuri Dmitriyev and the founder of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement Olzhas Suleimenov. Suleimenov explains the origins and aims of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement. He also discusses how official authorities relate to the movement.

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MN [Moscow News] Interview

SEMIPALATINSK-NEVADA

as viewed by a people's deputy of the USSR

The new political thinking born of perestroika is reverberating in other countries. As it echoes back in the Soviet Union, this thinking results in marked changes in society's mentality. What are these changes! This question is answered by the following interview with people's deputy of the USSR and First Secretary of the board of the Writers Union of Kazakhstan, poet Olzhas SULEIMEHOV.

MN: What is the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement?

O.S.: The movement sprang up and was formalized early this year. It urges a stop to nuclear tests at Soviet sites, including the one near Semipalatinsk. For too long we have been fighting for peace in the world. It's time to fight for peace here at home. We should start with what is near to us. This is the motto we are trying to carry out. We are trying to awaken the public especially here in Kazakhstan, with the result that hundreds of thousands of people are now involved in our movement and actions.

One of our major actions came on August 6 outside the Semipalatinsk test site. It was a rally attended by more than 50,000. They paid homage to victims of the first atomic bombings and victims of nuclear tests everywhere around the globe in more than 40 years.

We are going to improve on the forms of our actions. We are now giving up passive forms of protest, sit-down strikes. At best, they are only educational. We propose more active forms of protest. In particular, we are calling an international voters' congress in Alma-Ata next spring. There we plan to call on the most active and powerful force - the voters, rather than governments and parliaments. This is a force that stands above states and classes, which takes in all sections of the population, people of all nationalities and all political creeds. This congress should be held on the eve of the Gorbachev-Bush summit. We would like the congress to come up with the initiative on a complete ban on nuclear weapons, so that this topic is discussed during the summit.

MN: As far as I understand, you are working for a full and immediate ban on all nuclear tests.

O.S.: Nuclear tests stand between production and the actual use of weapons. To withdraw the middle link of this chain would mean a sharp cut in production and research in this field.

MN: In what way does the movement relate to the official authorities?

O.S.: We are the first really **popular** antinuclear movement in the Soviet Union. And we want to keep this status. To date our funds are made up of donations. We don't have a rouble of government funds. This is natural because we oppose government agencies. For this reason we don't deal directly with the government. But as a matter of future relations, our government, if it really wants peace on earth, should support such movements.

MN: Is it right that the authorities don't interfere but don't cooperate either?

O.S.: Our state is increasingly very dependent on public opinion. For this reason officials somehow feel shy and don't pressure us much, although we aren't getting broad access to the press. On the other hand, pressured by us, the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan has passed a decision on closing the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. This decision has been sent to the centre. So the ball is in its court.

The country's leaders announced several years ago a unilateral moratorium on tests, but this was a government action. Today the government, pressured by the public, stopped tests for five months this year. Tests were resumed, but now they are again stopped. As a result of our rallies, it has been decided not to carry out any blasts between October 19 and January 1, 1990 near Semipalatinsk. This is because our working people protest. They say: "Each new blast will be responded to by a long strike."

I think our country is strong enough both morally and physically to say: "I've stopped

explosions, so you stop too." I see as criminal the nuclear parity theory. It was necessary before: now it is criminal. This is my strong belief. On this issue we should take the stand of a strong person, a strong side. And we should perhaps yield to the side which is morally weaker.

Interviewer: Yuri DMITRIYEV