

FF035

B-WIRE

15-JUN-86 05:50

EAST - CHERNOBYL STILL CASTS ITS SHADOW ON EASTERN EUROPE

BY ROBERT GILLETTE LOS ANGELES TIMES

WARSAW, JUNE 15 - "THE CLOUD," AS EAST EUROPEANS CALLED THE FALLOUT FROM CHERNOBYL, MAY HAVE DISPERSED ACROSS THE WORLD, BUT IT STILL CASTS A LONG SHADOW OVER EASTERN EUROPE, WHERE RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION WAS HEAVIEST OUTSIDE THE SOVIET UNION ITSELF.

THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF HISTORY'S WORST NUCLEAR ACCIDENT WILL REMAIN A TROUBLING INCONVENIENCE TO THE COMMUNIST AUTHORITIES IN EASTERN EUROPE FOR MONTHS TO COME, IF NOT YEARS.

CHERNOBYL HAS COST THE REGION TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN LOST INCOME FROM FOOD EXPORTS AND TOURISM. IT HAS HEIGHTENED POPULAR MISTRUST OF GOVERNMENTS THAT SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDED CRITICIZING THE SOVIET UNION'S SECRETIVE HANDLING OF THE ACCIDENT. AND IT HAS UNDERSCORED THEIR FUNDAMENTAL SUBSERVIENCE TO MOSCOW AS FEW THINGS HAVE SINCE THE SOVIET-LED INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN 1968.

BUT THE HIGHEST COST OF THE ACCIDENT, IF ONLY INDIRECTLY, MAY NOT BE ECONOMIC OR POLITICAL BUT HUMAN.

FROM POLAND TO YUGOSLAVIA, MANY WOMEN IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF PREGNANCY HAVE OBTAINED ABORTIONS IN RECENT WEEKS - AGAINST THE ADVICE OF CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS - RATHER THAN FACE THE UNCERTAIN RISK OF RADIATION-INDUCED BIRTH DEFECTS.

HEALTH AUTHORITIES THROUGHOUT EASTERN EUROPE HAVE GIVEN REPEATED ASSURANCES THAT CONTAMINATION NEVER APPROACHED LEVELS THAT WOULD JUSTIFY SUCH DRASTIC ACTION, BUT THIS HAS NOT DETERRED MANY WOMEN.

DOCTORS AND OTHER UNOFFICIAL SOURCES IN POLAND, THE EAST BLOC NATION CLOSEST TO CHERNOBYL, ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN SEEKING RADIATION-RELATED ABORTIONS SINCE EARLY MAY AT SEVERAL THOUSAND. NO OFFICIAL FIGURES ARE AVAILABLE, IN PART BECAUSE MEDICAL RECORDS DO NOT ALWAYS REFLECT THE REAL MOTIVATION FOR OBTAINING ABORTIONS, WHICH ARE AVAILABLE ON DEMAND IN MOST OF EASTERN EUROPE.

"THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT MANY WOMEN ARE HAVING ABORTIONS BECAUSE OF THIS," A WARSAW PEDIATRICIAN SAID OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT, WHICH OCCURRED ON APRIL 26. "IT IS VERY SAD, BUT THEY ARE AFRAID, AND WHAT CAN YOU TELL THEM?"

IN AN INDICATION THAT THE FEAR OF BIRTH DEFECTS WAS WIDESPREAD, THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN POLAND, WHICH STAUNCHLY OPPOSES ABORTION ON PRINCIPLE, AND THE POLISH GOVERNMENT, WHICH PERMITS THEM WITHOUT RESTRICTION, HAVE BOTH ISSUED STATEMENTS IN RECENT WEEKS ASSURING WOMEN THAT THE FALLOUT POSED NO HAZARD TO A DEVELOPING FETUS.

REPORTS IN THE OFFICIAL YUGOSLAV PRESS HAVE INDICATED A SIMILAR SURGE IN ABORTIONS. IN HUNGARY, DOCTORS HAVE APPEALED TO WOMEN NOT TO PANIC.

"WHAT FRIGHTENS ME IS THAT PREGNANT WOMEN RUSHING TO US IN DESPERATION WANT TO HAVE THEIR PREGNANCIES TERMINATED," GENETICIST IMRE FEIFFER SAID IN A PROGRAM ON HUNGARIAN RADIO. "I BEG, LET NO ONE EVEN THINK OF HAVING AN ABORTION BECAUSE OF THIS."

\* ALMOST CERTAINLY, WOMEN ELSEWHERE WOULD HAVE FELT SIMILAR ANXIETY IN THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES. BUT IN EASTERN EUROPE FEAR OF THE FALLOUT WAS INTENSIFIED BY AN UNDERLYING DISTRUST OF COMMUNIST REGIMES, MOST OF WHICH ARE WIDELY REGARDED AS LITTLE MORE THAN THE PROXY AGENTS OF SOVIET RULE. RESTRICTIVE NEWS POLICIES IN THE MIDST OF THE CRISIS AGGRAVATED THIS DISTRUST, ALONG WITH FEARS THAT INFORMATION ABOUT LIFE-THREATENING RADIATION WAS BEING SUPPRESSED.

THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION GOVERNMENTS ALLOWED IN THE PRESS AND ON RADIO AND TELEVISION VARIED GREATLY ACROSS EASTERN EUROPE, WITH POLAND AND HUNGARY PROVING THE MOST OPEN OF THE SEVEN WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES. BY CONTRAST, CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S RIGIDLY ORTHODOX REGIME MAINTAINED NEARLY TOTAL SILENCE, EXCEPT TO INSIST THAT THE FALLOUT WAS HARMLESS AND TO CRITICIZE WESTERN NEWS REPORTS FOR WHAT IT CALLED ANTI-SOVIET HYSTERIA. BULGARIA FOLLOWED A SIMILAR PATTERN. (PTO)

FF036

B-WIRE

15-JUN-86 05:52

EAST - (1) CHERNOBYL STILL CASTS ITS SHADOW ON EASTERN EUROPE

IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, BUT ONLY IN PRIVATE, HUNGARIAN AND POLISH JOURNALISTS AND SOME PARTY OFFICIALS VOICED DISSATISFACTION WITH MOSCOW'S FAILURE TO GIVE PROMPT PUBLIC NOTICE OF THE ACCIDENT, PARTICULARLY TO ITS NEIGHBORS, AND ITS GENERAL RETICENCE IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED. BUT IN DEFERENCE TO MOSCOW, THE CENSORS KEPT SUCH VIEWS OUT OF PRINT.

THIS SQUEAMISHNESS DID NOT ESCAPE NOTICE BY THE PUBLIC, WHICH RESPONDED WITH ANTI-SOVIET JOKES AND A FLOOD OF TERRIFYING, IF SCARCELY CREDIBLE, RUMORS ABOUT DEATHS AND INJURIES FROM THE FALLOUT. NOR DID THE ABSENCE OF ANY APOLOGIES FOR THE CONTAMINATION GO UNNOTICED, WHEN SOVIET LEADER MIKHAIL S. GORBACHEV DELIVERED HIS FIRST PUBLIC STATEMENT ON CHERNOBYL 18 DAYS AFTER THE ACCIDENT.

ALONE AMONG THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE, INDEPENDENT YUGOSLAVIA ALLOWED ITS PRESS TO CRITICIZE THE SOVIET UNION, THOUGH ONLY MILDLY, FOR ITS LACK OF CANDOR. FOR THE REST OF MOSCOW'S NEIGHBORS, THE IDEOLOGICAL TABOO ON CRITICISM OF THE "FIRST COUNTRY OF SOCIALISM," AS THE SOVIET UNION CALLS ITSELF, REMAINED IN FORCE.

ONE RESULT WAS THAT MILLIONS OF EAST EUROPEANS IMMEDIATELY TUNED IN TO SHORTWAVE NEWS BROADCASTS FROM AMERICAN-FUNDED RADIO FREE EUROPE AND OTHER WESTERN STATIONS, AS THEY ALWAYS DO IN A CRISIS.

OFFICIALS OF RADIO FREE EUROPE IN WASHINGTON SAID THAT DESPITE JAMMING, THEIR INTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE ACCIDENT BROUGHT THOUSANDS OF TRANSATLANTIC TELEPHONE CALLS FROM LISTENERS IN BULGARIA, HUNGARY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA, THE THREE EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WITH DIRECT-DIAL SYSTEMS.

"THE MEDIA HERE DO NOT TELL US ANYTHING SUBSTANTIAL ABOUT RADIATION," A CALLER FROM BULGARIA WAS QUOTED AS SAYING IN A MESSAGE RECORDED BY RADIO FREE EUROPE.

IN POLAND, WHERE THE DIVISIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND STATE ARE THE GREATEST, THE AUTHORITIES HOPED TO GAIN A MEASURE OF CREDIBILITY BY PROVIDING ABUNDANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE FALLOUT.

TO ALL APPEARANCES THEY FAILED, IN PART BECAUSE IT QUICKLY BECAME APPARENT THAT PUBLISHED FIGURES ON THE CONTAMINATION WERE LIMITED TO AVERAGE MEASUREMENTS, WHILE WARSAW TOLD ONLY THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY IN VIENNA ABOUT THE MAXIMUMS IT MEASURED.

ACCORDING TO AN OPINION SURVEY BY A GOVERNMENT POLLING ORGANIZATION, QUOTED IN THE JUNE 7 ISSUE OF THE POPULAR WEEKLY NEWSPAPER POLITYKA, RADIO FREE EUROPE'S DAILY AUDIENCE IN POLAND TRIPLED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ACCIDENT, FROM 10 PERCENT OF THE ADULT POPULATION TO 31 PERCENT.

HALF OF THOSE SURVEYED ADMITTED TO BEING "VERY FRIGHTENED." THE SAME PROPORTION SAID THAT THEY HAD NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY INFORMED ABOUT THE ACCIDENT, AND 37 PERCENT SAID THEY THOUGHT THE INFORMATION THEY DID RECEIVE WAS NOT TRUTHFUL. ANOTHER 41 PERCENT THOUGHT THAT IT WAS, AND 22 PERCENT HAD NO OPINION.

"THE DESIRE FOR THOROUGH AND TRUTHFUL INFORMATION RANKS FIRST ON THE LIST OF (PUBLIC) DESIRES," AHEAD EVEN OF MEASURES TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH AND STUDIES OF THE AFTER-EFFECTS, POLITYKA CONCLUDED.

ALONG WITH ITS HARVEST OF FEAR AND DISTRUST, CHERNOBYL ADDED TO THE WOES OF THE REGION'S AILING ECONOMIES.

THE FALLOUT DEALT YET ANOTHER BLOW TO FOREIGN TOURISM, JUST WHEN WHEN EASTERN EUROPE SEEMED TO OFFER THE CONTINENT'S SAFEST AND CHEAPEST TRAVEL. A COMMON MARKET BAN ON THE IMPORT OF FRESH FOODS FROM EASTERN EUROPE DURING MOST OF MAY COST HUNGARY AND YUGOSLAVIA \$25 MILLION EACH AND POLAND \$50 MILLION, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL ESTIMATES FROM THE THREE COUNTRIES. (MORE)

FFD37

B-WIRE

15-JUN-86 05:58

EAST - (2) CHERNOBYL STILL CASTS ITS SHADOW ON EASTERN EUROPE  
LOSSES OF FOOD EXPORTS ARE RELATIVELY SMALL, AND THERE ARE  
INDICATIONS THAT THE SOVIET UNION - WHICH HAS REFUSED EVEN TO  
CONSIDER COMPENSATING WESTERN COUNTRIES FOR FALLOUT-RELATED LOSSES -  
IS QUIETLY OFFSETTING ITS ALLIES' EXPORT LOSSES BY BUYING UP SOME OF  
THE SPURNED FOOD FOR HARD CURRENCY. MOSCOW HAS AGREED TO BUY AN  
ADDITIONAL 30,000 HEAD OF HUNGARIAN BEEF CATTLE FOR DOLLARS, FOR  
EXAMPLE, WHICH WILL LARGELY MAKE UP FOR HUNGARY'S DIRECT EXPORT  
LOSSES.

EAST EUROPEANS ARE NEVERTHELESS WORRIED THAT THE TEMPORARY BAN,  
WHICH THE COMMON MARKET LIFTED ON JUNE 1, WILL LEAVE ITS PRODUCTS,  
FROM POLISH HAM TO HUNGARIAN SALAMI, WITH AN UNWARRANTED STIGMA THAT  
WILL HINDER FUTURE SALES. MOREOVER, MILLIONS OF FARMERS, WHO MAKE A  
SIGNIFICANT PART OF THEIR ANNUAL INCOME FROM SELLING FRESH SPRING  
VEGETABLES, MILK AND MEAT IN DOMESTIC MARKETS, SUFFERED LOSSES THAT  
NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE ESTIMATED AND THAT HARDLY ANYONE IS PREPARED TO  
COMPENSATE.

ALTHOUGH DEMAND IS NOW RETURNING TO NORMAL, OFFICIAL FIGURES SHOW  
THAT 70 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION GAVE UP DRINKING MILK AND 60  
PERCENT ABSTAINED FROM VEGETABLES FOR THE BETTER PART OF A MONTH. IN  
PRIVATE MARKETS, LETTUCE FELL TO ONE-TWELFTH ITS NORMAL PRICE AND,  
STILL IT ROTTED ON THE SHELVES.

THERE ARE NO INSURANCE PROGRAMS TO COVER SUCH LOSSES. ONLY  
HUNGARY, ALONE AMONG EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, HAS SAID THAT IT WOULD  
COMPENSATE FARMERS EVEN PARTIALLY FOR CHERNOBYL.

IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, SENIOR HUNGARIAN OFFICIALS HAVE VOICED  
CONCERN THAT THE AGGREGATE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF CHERNOBYL WILL BE FELT  
THROUGH THE END OF THE YEAR, AND MAY MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO HOLD THE  
LINE ON INFLATION, A SENSITIVE SOCIAL ISSUE IN HUNGARY.

ONE AFTER-EFFECT THAT EAST EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO  
SHARE WITH THE WEST IS SERIOUS POPULAR RESISTANCE TO AMBITIOUS PLANS  
FOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT CONSTRUCTION.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE THREE COUNTRIES THAT HAD THE LEAST TO SAY  
ABOUT THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT - CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BULGARIA AND EAST  
GERMANY - HAVE THE LARGEST COMMITMENT TO NUCLEAR POWER, WITH 14  
OPERATING REACTORS OF SOVIET DESIGN AMONG THEM AND 19 OTHERS UNDER  
CONSTRUCTION. (ALL ARE CONVENTIONAL PRESSURIZED WATER REACTORS, NOT  
THE GRAPHITE MODEL THAT EXPLODED AND BURNED AT CHERNOBYL.)

HUNGARY HAS TWO OPERATING REACTORS AND IS BUILDING TWO MORE,  
YUGOSLAVIA HAS ONE IN OPERATION, POLAND IS BUILDING TWO, AND ROMANIA  
IS BUILDING THREE OF CANADIAN MANUFACTURE.

IN POLAND, THE SOVIET ACCIDENT HAS LED SO FAR TO ONE BRIEF  
ANTI-NUCLEAR DEMONSTRATION BY ABOUT 200 PEOPLE IN KRAKOW, WHILE 3,000  
PEOPLE IN THE FALLOUT-DUSTED CITY OF BIALYSTOK SIGNED A PETITION  
ASKING FOR A TEMPORARY HALT IN CONSTRUCTION OF THE COUNTRY'S FIRST  
PLANT AT ZARNOWIEC, NEAR GDANSK. ON THURSDAY, THE POLISH PARLIAMENT  
POLITELY REJECTED IT.

CHERNOBYL HAS PROBABLY GIVEN AN ADDED SPARK TO EMERGING  
ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN EASTERN EUROPE. BUT IN THE LONG RUN THEY  
HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF DERAILING NUCLEAR PLANS, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW  
OF MOSCOW'S UNWILLINGNESS TO SUPPLY CHEAP ENERGY AS IT DID ALL  
THROUGH THE 1960S AND 1970S.

AM/TA