

FF024

B-WIRE

09-JUN-86 05:13

USSR - KIEV, ITS PLAYGROUNDS VACANT, SCRUBS ON  
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WASHINGTON POST

KIEV, SOVIET UNION, JUNE 9 - THERE ARE PRACTICALLY NO CHILDREN LEFT IN THIS CITY, WHOSE NORMAL POPULATION IS 2.3 MILLION. MOST WERE SENT AWAY IN THE FIRST WEEKS AFTER THE ACCIDENT AT THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR REACTOR, 80 MILES AWAY.

WITHOUT CHILDREN, THE CITY SEEMS STRANGELY CALM. PLAYGROUNDS ARE EMPTY AND PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC UNDER KIEV'S FAMOUS CHESTNUT TREES IS CURIOUSLY OF ONE SIZE.

VIKTOR IVANOVICH SENT HIS SMALL SON OFF IN THAT FIRST WAVE IN EARLY MAY, TO RELATIVES IN THE FAR WEST OF THE UKRAINE. LAST WEEK, THE LITTLE BOY GOT THE FLU AND RETURNED. BUT HIS FATHER, A YOUNG PROFESSIONAL, IS GETTING READY TO SEND THE BOY OFF AGAIN. "THE DOCTORS RECOMMEND IT," HE SAID. "THE CONSEQUENCES FROM CHERNOBYL ARE JUST NOT KNOWN."

THE ABSENCE OF CHILDREN IS ONE OF THE ABNORMALITIES OF LIFE IN THE UKRAINIAN CAPITAL, WHERE SINCE APRIL 26 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO LIVE UP TO THE IMAGE OF NORMALITY PORTRAYED BY THE OFFICIAL SOVIET MEDIA.

A ONE-DAY VISIT SHOWS THE AMBIGUITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS AS PEOPLE SLOWLY COME TO TERMS WITH THE REAL AND POTENTIAL HEALTH RISKS OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT.

"WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT US IN MOSCOW?" ONE MAN ASKED. "THAT EVERYTHING IS NORMAL, THAT EVERYTHING IS FINE?" HE PAUSED, AND ADDED. "THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER. BUT THE LESS YOU ARE HERE THE BETTER. BEST TO BE IN MOSCOW."

SIX WEEKS AFTER THE ACCIDENT, MUCH IS STILL UNKNOWN ABOUT THE HAZARDS FOR THE POPULATION IN KIEV. THERE IS OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL INFORMATION, A LOT OF RUMORS AND FEW FACTS. ONE MAN SAID MANY STILL BELIEVE THAT VODKA PREVENTS RADIATION, DESPITE INCREASINGLY SHARP REJECTIONS OF THIS IN THE MEDIA.

UPON OFFICIAL ADVICE, WASHING HAS BECOME A CITYWIDE OBSESSION. CARS, VEGETABLES, CLOTHES, STREETS, BUILDINGS ARE CONSTANTLY DOUSED WITH WATER, GIVING RISE TO A GENTLE STEAM THAT HOVERS IN THE WARM SUMMER AIR.

THE BATTLE IS AGAINST WHAT THE NEWSPAPERS HAVE CALLED "OUR ENEMY, THE DUST" - THE RADIOACTIVE PARTICLES THAT HAVE DRIFTED SOUTH FROM CHERNOBYL. PEOPLE HERE SAY THAT WHEN THE WIND BLOWS "FROM THERE," THE RADIATION LEVELS GO UP AGAIN.

THREE TIMES A DAY, WATER TRUCKS WET THE PAVEMENTS AND WORKMEN PICK UP HOSES COILED ON THE SIDEWALKS TO DOUSE THE WALLS. ACCORDING TO ONE FOREIGN STUDENT DOCTOR, MEASUREMENTS HAVE SHOWN THAT THE DUST SHOWS HIGHEST RADIATION CLOSE TO THE GROUND, SO MOST OF THE SPRAYING IS DONE ONLY TO THE SECOND-STORY LEVEL.

WET RAGS ARE POISED BEFORE DOORSTEPS ALL OVER TOWN, SO PEOPLE CAN WIPE THE DIRT OFF THEIR FEET BEFORE THEY GO INTO FOOD STORES, POLICE STATIONS, HOTELS. SOMETIMES THE RAGS ARE DRAPED OVER FOAM RUBBER AND RAISED ON WOODEN PLATFORMS.

IN THE BESSARABSKI MARKET, LOCATED AT THE END OF KIEV'S MAIN KRESHCHATIK STREET, SHOPPERS SCRUB THEIR VEGETABLES UNDER A HOSE THAT EMPTIES INTO A TUB BY THE MAIN DOOR.

KIEV'S MARKETS OPERATE UNDER POST-CHERNOBYL RULES: PEASANTS CANNOT SELL MILK OR LEAFY VEGETABLES FROM THEIR PRIVATE PLOTS DIRECTLY TO THE PUBLIC. EVERYTHING THEY DO SELL TO MIDDLEMEN IS CHECKED BY A DOSIMETER. IF RADIATION LEVELS GO ABOVE NORMAL, THE ITEMS ARE REJECTED. (PTO)

FF025

B-WIRE

09-JUN-86 05:14

USSR - (1) KIEV, ITS PLAYGROUNDS VACANT, SCRUBS ON THAT STILL LEAVES A TANTALIZING ARRAY OF GOODS, SUSTAINING THE UKRAINE'S REPUTATION AS BOTH THE GARDEN AND BREADBASKET OF THE SOVIET UNION. CHERRIES, STRAWBERRIES, RADISHES, FRESH GARLIC, GREENS OF ALL VARIETY ARE PILED HIGH. IN THE FLOWER SECTION, SWEET WILLIAM, ROSES AND PEONIES SPILL OUT OF THEIR ROUGH VASES.

WOMEN WITH WEATHERBEATEN FACES UNDER FLOWERED KERCHIEFS STAND OVER THEIR GOODS, LIKE BROODING MOTHER HENS. THEY HAVE ADDED A NEW PHRASE TO THEIR BECKONING CALLS: "FRESH STRAWBERRIES," THEY SAY, AND ADD, "ALL CHECKED." THEN THEY PAT THE POCKET IN THEIR WHITE COATS WHERE THEY KEEP THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED TO SELL.

BUT THE SYSTEM IS NOT FOOLPROOF. SOME OF THE VENDORS THEMSELVES SAY HAPPILY THAT THEY DRINK UNCHECKED MILK, AND GIVE IT TO THEIR FAMILIES. "IF WE DON'T EAT, WE DIE," SAID ONE WOMAN WITH GUSTO.

SOME SHOPPERS SAID PRODUCE COULD BE CHECKED AGAIN AFTER PURCHASE AT A SPECIAL "LABORATORY" OUTSIDE THE MARKET. BUT WHEN ASKED TO CHECK A CUP OF WILD STRAWBERRIES, A DOUR TECHNICIAN SAID IT WAS NOT PERMITTED.

INGRAINED SUSPICION COMBINED WITH POST-CHERNOBYL SENSITIVITY KEPT TWO WESTERN REPORTERS FROM GETTING PERMISSION TO WATCH THE GEIGER COUNTERS AT WORK. "EVERYTHING HERE IS COMPLETELY CHECKED," SAID A CITY TRADE OFFICIAL, WHO WAS SUMMONED BY THE MARKET DIRECTOR. "WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?" HE DECLINED TO GIVE HIS NAME.

SINCE MAY 5, WHEN THE UKRAINIAN HEALTH MINISTER FIRST APPEARED ON TELEVISION, PRECAUTIONARY INFORMATION HAS BEEN RELEASED SLOWLY. ABOUT 250,000 CHILDREN IN THE FIRST SEVEN GRADES OF SCHOOL WERE ADVISED TO LEAVE. PEOPLE HERE REFER TO THAT PROCESS AS AN EVACUATION. MOTHERS WITH INFANTS AND MANY PREGANT WOMEN JOINED THE EXODUS.

ACCORDING TO SEVERAL PEOPLE, SOME DOCTORS ADVISED WOMEN TO HAVE ABORTIONS, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NEVER A BLANKET RECOMMENDATION.

PEOPLE IN KIEV SHOW CONCERN ABOUT THE LONG-TERM HEALTH EFFECTS AND TALK VAGUELY ABOUT RADIATION IN THE EARTH, ON THE GRASS. BUT THERE IS LITTLE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE LONG-TERM IMPACT ON THE FOOD CHAIN, AND OTHER UNSEEN AND UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES.

IN THAT SENSE, LIFE HERE DOES SEEM TO GO ON AS NORMAL, IF WITH A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF CONCERN. ANXIETY EXISTS, BUT IT IS NOT ACUTE. PRECAUTIONS, EVEN THE FEW ADVISED OFFICIALLY, FREQUENTLY ARE IGNORED.

A YOUNG TEACHER, NATASHA, BEMOANED THE OFFICIAL WARNING AGAINST EATING RASPBERRIES WHEN A BUMPER CROP WAS EXPECTED THIS YEAR AT HER FATHER'S DACHA OUTSIDE KIEV. THE BERRIES, LIKE MUSHROOMS, ACCUMULATE RADIATION. SHE SAID HER FATHER WOULD DO HIS USUAL CANNING THIS YEAR, AND SHE NO DOUBT WOULD FALL TO THE TEMPTATION AND EAT THE PRESERVES.

SOME GROUND RULES HAVE BEEN REVISED IN THE LAST WEEK OR SO. OUTDOOR STANDS SELLING ICE CREAM, VEGETABLES AND MEAT PIES, WHICH WERE BARRED FROM THE STREETS IN MID-MAY, ARE BACK IN BUSINESS. LOCAL FISH IS BEING SOLD AGAIN, AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY NEWSPAPER PRAVDA TOLD ITS READERS THAT CHECKUPS HAVE SHOWN "NO TRACES OF HIGHER RADIATION IN GILLS, INTERIOR ORGANS, FINS OR TAILS," OF FISH FROM THE DNIEPER RIVER.

SWIMMING IN THE DNIEPER IS ALSO ALLOWED NOW, KIEV RESIDENTS SAID. THE GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER IZVESTIA SPELLED OUT MORE PRECISE RULES FOR KIEV BEACH LIFE: PEOPLE ARE ADVISED NOT TO PLAY SOCCER OR VOLLEYBALL ON THE SAND TO AVOID KICKING UP RADIOACTIVE DUST. SUNBATHERS SHOULD NOT STAY LONG IN THE SUN AND SHOULD LIE ON DECK CHAIRS AND BLANKETS, NOT ON THE SAND.

(MORE)

FF026

B-WIRE

09-JUN-86 05:17

USSR - (2) KIEV, ITS PLAYGROUNDS VACANT, SCRUBS ON  
ON THE SANDY BEACHES, WOODEN BENCHES ARE FILLED WITH SUNBATHERS,  
BUT FEW ARE VENTURING INTO THE WATER. HERE, THE CHILDREN ARE MOST  
MISSED: NO SHRIEKS OR SPLASHES.  
BUT ACCORDING TO SOME, WHEN THE TEMPERATURE RISES INTO THE 90S,  
AS IT DID LAST WEEKEND, PEOPLE FIND THE WATER HARD TO RESIST.  
STILL, DISTRUST OF THE WATER LINGERS, MIRRORING A VAGUE DISTRUST  
OF OFFICIAL INFORMATION AND ITS SOURCES. "THEY TELL US WE CAN SWIM  
NOW, BUT THEN THEY GO TO THE CRIMEA AND SWIM IN THE BLACK SEA," SAID  
ONE MIDDLE-AGED MAN, WHOSE 13-YEAR-OLD SON IS SPENDING THE SUMMER AT  
A HOLIDAY CAMP IN THE EASTERN UKRAINE.

KR/TA