

CH 537C

RADIOACTIVE GRAIN USED IN ALCOHOL DISTILLATION

Our distillery produced alcohol, vodka, and a small amount of wine. The alcohol was distilled from grain that had started to rot. There is always plenty of this, since wheat and barley are left lying in mounds in the fields on top of woven mats after the harvest, due to shortage of transportation. At best these mounds are covered with tarpaulins. Nevertheless, the grain gets wet and is then brought to us since it cannot be milled into flour. Normally, the grain we used came from Tambov oblast. But, in 1987, we started receiving grain from the Ukraine. It goes without saying that everyone who works at an alcohol distillery steals alcohol, and I was no exception. Some of it I sold, since our wages were miserly, and some of it we drank. Once I took a bottle of the alcohol made from Ukrainian grain to Moscow as a gift for relatives. The recipient was a physicist, who had a home-made Geiger counter that he used to check food products. (They often turned out to be radioactive -- particularly those bought in the market.) He checked the alcohol and found that it showed a high level of radioactivity. When he asked where the alcohol came from, and I remembered that the grain came from the Ukraine, everything fell into place. They sent us radioactive grain, we distilled it, and the people drank it. (Vintner from Michurinsk, Tambov oblast)

THE NON-ALCOHOLIC WEDDING: A SHOWCASE EVENT

The district cultural section offered a brand new washing machine to one of my co-workers, who was planning to get married, on condition that he agreed to hold a non-alcoholic wedding reception. Only mineral water and lemonade were available at the reception: the representative of the cultural section gave a speech on the benefits of non-alcoholic weddings, and a piece appeared in the local paper announcing that a new start was being made and urging other young couples to follow suit. The following day a "real" reception, with alcohol and the leftover food, was held for the guests -- with the blessing of the cultural section. (Technician from Kaluga)

DRUG ABUSE ALLEGED TO SPREAD

Drug addiction is taking on frightening dimensions in the Soviet Union, and accepted methods of dealing with it are inadequate. The numerous Afghan veterans in Leningrad have brought back the secrets of "Eastern cooking." Some addicts sniff a great variety of substances, ranging from crow's blood and cockroach poison to shoe cream. After using these lethal concoctions for six months, they become half-witted, if they haven't already killed themselves outright. In 1987, the sale of medical syringes was severely curtailed. As a result, a syringe is no longer used by just two or three addicts, but by upwards of five or six. The number of drug addicts has not been reduced, while the chances of catching AIDS have been increased. The traditional way of dealing with drug offenders is to catch them, put them under

observation, limit their civil rights, put them in prison. Another method is to treat them by force. This involves electric shocks, insulin, and sulfazine injections. These render the patient totally helpless and one single injection may cause temperatures of over 40 degrees Celsius, pain, hallucinations, fainting, depression, and fear. (Physician from Leningrad)

BUS DRIVERS STRIKE IN KLAIPEDA

As a result of perestroika, the bus depot in Klaipeda changed to a new system of labor compensation. When we received our time sheets, we discovered that everyone had lost between 10 and 50 rubles. Monthly salaries had gone down by an average of 20 rubles. The drivers felt that they should have been compensated for the shortfall from the economized residual pay funds. These amounted to 35,000 rubles, and the pay-off would have been 10,000 rubles. Management refused, so the bus drivers refused to accept their schedules and to drive their routes. A one-day strike caused a loss of almost 33,000 rubles to the depot. At this point, the director agreed to the compensation claim so that the drivers would return to work. (Bus driver from Klaipeda)

EXPERIENCES WITH PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

I worked in a sewing factory. When the law on private enterprise went into effect, my brother and I organized ourselves into a team for contract work. We started to sew lightweight women's dresses, some good quality and some cheaper. In our first year, the profit we gave the factory was fifteen times greater than the factory average, and we were earning over 1,000 rubles per month each. But then our team was liquidated, on the pretext of a struggle against "mad salaries." (Tailor from Batumi)

I was a member of a six-man cooperative which repaired television and radio equipment. We guaranteed to repair equipment within 24 hours, and in cases where quick repair was impossible, we installed a replacement set of an equivalent type. We guaranteed not only the part which had been repaired, but the entire set for one year. This required checking the entire system. In two years, we did not receive one complaint about the quality of the repairs or service. Our prices were higher than those of the State workshops, but the client benefited from the fact that no subsequent repairs were needed. We had so many clients that sometimes we had to turn down orders and put the client on a waiting list. High taxes prevented us from expanding the production base. We paid 45% from turnover, compared to only 20% for State workshops. For the same reason, I formally received only 300 rubles pay, with another 200 being paid under the table. (Technician from Kaunas)

Everyone understands that only the private sector is capable of feeding and clothing Soviet people, and overcoming the perennial "temporary difficulties" that beset the supply situation. In Minsk, private plots are supplying high quality products to the