

Conclusion

The popular fronts in Central Asia are not as integral a part of the political landscape as is the case in the western republics of the USSR; nor is the participation of the Central Asian population in political life in general as advanced or as widespread as is public involvement elsewhere in the country. Political decision-making is still firmly in the hands of the Party, although there are differences between republics in the leadership's commitment to *perestroika* and willingness to try to put the restructuring program into effect. Certain responses to the informal groups are common to all the Central Asian republics, however: while

groups that seek solutions to environmental problems seem to enjoy the greatest approval on the part of the authorities and the greatest acceptance as partners in working for change, groups such as the popular fronts that could be potential rivals of the establishment receive, at best, grudging acceptance. But all the unofficial groups, by introducing and developing the new concept of spontaneous public participation in political, social, and economic processes, are providing Central Asians with the same lessons in democracy as are being learned in other parts of the USSR.

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UKRAINE

Zhitomir Residents Express Concern over Radioactive Fallout

David Marples

Over the past two years, the Soviet authorities have revealed that the effects of radioactive fallout from the accident at Chernobyl¹ in 1986 were much more widespread than was initially acknowledged. The town of Narodichi and the raion of the same name have gained international attention because of the high background radiation and short supply of uncontaminated food.¹ More recently, there have come reports from other parts of Zhitomir Oblast indicating equally severe conditions. At the close of 1989, there were few signs that remedy of these effects of Chernobyl¹ was any nearer, instead, the local residents appeared to be at loggerheads with almost all the authorities officially responsible for dealing with the effects of radiation.

In late November, 1989, S. Vasilyuk, a radiological engineer from the Luginy Raion of Zhitomir Oblast, wrote an angry letter to *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, in which he complained that the situation in Luginy had been misrepresented

by V. K. Chumak, the director of the Center for Ecological Problems of Atomic Energy of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Chumak and a team of scientists had visited the raion and established that only nine of fifty villages were suffering from cesium contamination of the soil greater than 5 curies per square kilometer. Data from a research station in Zhitomir, Vasilyuk pointed out, revealed that more than 50 percent of the raion's arable land exceeded this figure, the area affected including twenty-seven population points.²

A similar discrepancy has emerged also with the radionuclide content of milk. According to the inquiry headed by Chumak, in only two villages did tests on milk indicate levels of contamination greater than 50 percent and the average for the remainder was said to be 36.8 percent. Yet, probes conducted by the raion's bacteriological laboratory indicate that 80 percent of milk samples from the private agricultural sector were found to be over the radionuclide limit, in some cases more than twenty-four-fold. The cesium content of vegetables and potatoes was said to be below normal, but, according to Vasilyuk, the procurement office had rejected the produce of local farms as unfit for consumption.

Most controversial is the individual internal and external irradiation of Luginy residents. Chumak provided an average figure of 0.28 rems per year, which is below the official limit of 35 rems per person over the course of an individual's seventy-year lifespan. In contrast, laboratories under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Ministry of Health Protection established that residents of

¹ Two of the most notable articles on Narodichi were in *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, June 22, 1989, and *Molod' Ukrainy*, August 23, 1989. On the decision to evacuate seventy-three population points in northern Zhitomir Oblast, see *Radio Kiev*, October 23, 1989. The position of the Popular Movement in Support of *Perestroika* in Ukraine ("Rukh") on Narodichi was outlined in *Literaturna Ukraina*, October 12, 1989. For an interesting Western survey, see David Remnick, "Fear and Illness Still Linger Over Chernobyl," *Guardian Weekly*, December 3, 1989, p. 19, but note, however, that Remnick's figure from *Moscow News* of radiation levels up to thirty times the natural background is an underestimate—the actual figure is closer to 450 times background at maximum.

² *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, November 24, 1989.

the raion were likely to receive an average of 2-3 rems per year—up to six times the maximum permissible. Vasilyuk maintained that the dosage in reality was considerably higher and noted that the local residents had begun to complain only because it had finally become evident that the measures taken had proved woefully inadequate.

Commenting on the letter, L. Brovchenko, a correspondent for the newspaper, observed that when he was present at a meeting in Luginy attended by both Chumak and local residents it seemed an invisible barrier stood between the two sides: "One attacked, the other defended." The correspondent "sympathized sincerely" with the population of Luginy Raion, especially while no solution of the problem was in sight. All views on the question of the Chernobyl' fallout, he concluded, must have as their common denominator the truth. The problem, however, has been that those investigating the radiation conditions in Zhitomir Oblast have rarely been willing to publicize the results.

In Korosten' Raion in the same oblast, the outlook, if anything, appears to be bleaker. Korosten' is one of the many "new villages" that have now appeared on the "map" showing radioactive-fallout distribution; it has a population of around 75,000.³ The problems were discussed during a visit there by K. I. Masyk, the chairman of the Permanent Extraordinary Commission established by the Ukrainian government to investigate the effects of Chernobyl'. As in Narodichi, the people were found to be short of uncontaminated food, particularly fruit and vegetables. It was also reported that local villagers wipe their hands with clay for lack of soap; there were no public baths either.⁴

V. M. Benya, the Party first secretary of Korosten' Raion, stated: "Our problems cannot be postponed until tomorrow." Children's health was the primary concern, but the raion did not even have a hospital. People who worked in Korosten', in his view, should be permitted to take sixty days of vacation, and villages where radiation levels posed a health hazard must be evacuated. I. M. Chyryk, the first secretary of the Korosten' City Committee, commented that everybody brought his problem to the authorities, "but we are not all-powerful." The Party itself was basically ignorant of the truth and dared not mislead citizens for fear of being unable "to look them in the eye" the next day.

The correspondent who reported this meeting, V. Skoropadska, observing in a personal footnote that the whole phenomenon had been dismissed as "radiophobia," recalled the haunting words of a woman at one of the many meetings in affected villages of Zhitomir Oblast:

I am still young, I want to live, and I want my children to live. But when I give my children a glass of milk, I feel treacherous, because I do not know how much cesium it contains. I have already been in hospital three times, and so have my children. Yet before the Chernobyl' tragedy, we were all healthy.

As the quotation indicates, the latest revelations have added to the psychological stress affecting these villages in northern Ukraine. Skoropadska maintained that simply to blame the local population for radiophobia was offensive; rather, the Ukrainian republic, and possibly the entire country, must be mobilized to resolve the crisis. Expense was immaterial, in her view, when speaking of the health of future generations.

One group that has taken an active unofficial role in investigating the extent of the radioactive fallout is the ecological association "Zelenyi svit" (Green World). In late summer, 1989, it commissioned some of its members from the Institute of Nuclear Research to visit the affected raions. According to E. Korbetsky, a member of the group, one of the leaders of the Center for Radiation Medicine in Kiev, on hearing of the impending visit, made a telephone call to the institute at once, demanding to know who had given permission for any of his employees "to interfere in places where they were not needed."⁵ No comment could more trenchantly indicate the paranoia of officials regarding information about the aftermath of Chernobyl'.

Korbetsky provided bitter criticism of what he called "the Il'in theory" about the effects of Chernobyl'. Leonid Il'in, the vice president of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences, has predicted that Chernobyl' will have very little impact upon the health of the people living in the path of the radioactive "cloud"; he has also supported the view that a total dosage of radiation of 35 rems over an individual's lifespan falls within the boundaries of safety. Korbetsky stated that this view had far too many gaps in its reasoning, not least because of ignorance of how much radiation the Zhitomir residents suffered in 1986, and thought unfounded Il'in's assumption that inhabitants had consumed only uncontaminated food products in the months since. "We consider," he ended, "that the residents of Narodichi Raion have already received 10 rems."

"Zelenyi svit" offered several proposals: first, that residents in contaminated areas who wished to leave should be permitted to do so where cesium contamination of the soil exceeded 5 curies per square kilometer; second, that families with children should be evacuated "in the current year"; third, that those remaining in the Narodichi Raion who worked in areas where contamination of the soil exceeded 2 curies per square kilometer should be placed on the same footing as professionals who work regularly with ionizing radiation. This provision was partly in response to the poverty of villagers who were unable to purchase uncontaminated food from, for example, cooperatives, which are more expensive than state outlets.

³ In 1972, the estimated population of this raion was 123,200. A rough estimate of the present population, by extrapolating from the average increase throughout the republic in 1973-89, would be around 164,000. See "Istoriya mist i sil: Zhytomyr'ska Oblast," Kiev, 1973, p. 307.

⁴ *Radians'ka Ukraina*, November 16, 1989.

⁵ *Robotnycha hazeta*, November 16, 1989.

In November, 1989, at a session of the Politburo devoted to the problems of Chernobyl', G. I. Revenko, the first secretary of Kiev Party Oblast Committee provided an example of the ambivalence of the Ukrainian authorities to new information about the effects of Chernobyl'. He acknowledged that the predicament in one third of Kiev Oblast was serious. This area has a population of about 300,000 people, 59,000 children among them, but he exhibited the same attitude towards unofficial observers as the Center for Radiation Medicine did. Members of "Zelenyi svit" and of the Ukrainian Popular Movement in Support of *Perestroika* ("Rukh"), he remarked, were actively causing instability by spreading rumors and raising anxiety in affected areas.⁶

Neither the Ukrainian Party leaders nor the USSR Council of Ministers Commission for Emergencies led by V. Doguzhiev has provided a solution to the mounting health problems in northern Ukraine. Moreover, as recent

⁶ *Pravda*, November 11, 1989.

evidence indicated, the number of affected raions has increased steadily, so that, logically, it must be asked whether such investigations have reached the heart of the problem. In Ukraine, the likelihood of similar conditions existing in northern Rovno Oblast have already begun to emerge. In addition to official reluctance to divulge information, the probability that most officials simply do not know how far radioactivity has spread must be considered.⁷ In the meantime, these long-hidden consequences of a nuclear catastrophe have created both a psychological crisis among a population numbering (at a conservative estimate) around 200,000 and an economic headache for the republic, which is being asked to find funds for a costly, large-scale evacuation in the immediate future.

⁷ The potential problems in Rovno Oblast were revealed in *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, March 1, 1989. Officially, this region falls into the category of "a zone of periodic control."

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KAZAKHSTAN

"Adilet"—The Kazakh Chapter of "Memorial"

Azade-Ayse Rorlich

On December 6, 1988, representatives of the Party and Soviet organs of Kazakhstan, as well as writers, historians, and film-makers gathered at the House of Cinematographers in Alma-Ata and decided unanimously to join the All-Union Society "Memorial," which is dedicated to the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism. Those present at the meeting elected a committee of seventeen members, who were charged with the organization of the Kazakh chapter of "Memorial." To this end, ten Kazakh delegates attended the All-Union Conference of "Memorial" held in Moscow on January 28 and 29, 1989. It was at the Moscow conference that the Kazakh delegates decided to name their society "Adilet"—which means "justice"—since its main goal was the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism.

"Adilet" was officially founded in April, 1989, and its governing board was elected on April 15. Subsequent meetings addressed specific organizational and administrative matters.¹ As a result, the tasks of the various sections of "Adilet" were identified as: administration, investigation, and research; charity; cultural enlightenment; protection of monuments; and legal defense. Sandzhar Urazo-

vich Dzhandosov, the president of "Adilet," Academician Ramazan Bimashuli Suleimenov, and all those who spoke at the founding meeting reiterated that the main goal of this Kazakh society for historical enlightenment was

to eliminate the blank pages in the history of the peoples of USSR, to restore their just name to those who were persecuted when Socialist ideas were distorted in [our] republic, and to mobilize the efforts of [our] society [towards] strengthening democracy and *glasnost'* in the future.²

Despite the fact that "Adilet" was born as the Kazakh chapter of "Memorial," it was not intended to focus exclusively on the plight of the Kazakhs, but rather as the voice of justice for all who lived on the territory of Kazakhstan. The founders of "Adilet" exhibited a remarkable sensitivity for deported peoples such as the Koreans, Germans, Meskhetians, Chechens, Karachais, and Crimean Tatars for whom Kazakhstan became a final destination.

¹ "Adilet Uni," *Qazaq Adebityeti*, April 28, 1989, p. 13.

² B. Qoyshibaev, "Adilet tu Koterdi," *Qazaq Adebityeti*, April 21, 1989, p. 14.

The literary sociopolitical weekly *Qazaq Adebiiyeti* was instrumental in the emergence of "Adilet." It opened its pages to very candid discussion of a broad range of issues regarding the history, culture, ecology, and economy of Kazakhstan. On April 28, 1989, *Qazaq Adebiiyeti* inaugurated a new column with the rubric "Adilet Uni" (The Banner of Justice) dedicated to "progress reports" and other news regarding the work of the various sections of "Adilet," as well as to letters from readers. The same issue launched a public appeal for contributions to lay the financial basis on which "Adilet" could carry out its tasks.

Hence, the main tasks of "Adilet" can be summarized thus:

- The restoration of truth and justice for all victims of Stalinism;
- Identification of all the victims of Stalin's purges by (a) compilation of comprehensive lists of victims with the assistance of the public at large, schools, and institutions of higher learning and (b) location of the places where the victims of Stalinism were buried;
- Reassessment of the impact of collectivization on the Kazakhs and recognition that the famine of the 1930s caused 2 million deaths in Kazakhstan;
- Rehabilitation of the victims of the repressions of the 1950s, the target of which was "those who, during the Second World War, found themselves in the occupied territories and had the misfortune not to die and returned home."

In its first six months, "Adilet" worked hard towards achieving these goals: it was responsible for bringing to the attention of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Office of the Prosecutor of the Kazakh Republic the existence at Boraldai ravine near Alma-Ata of what is believed to be the burial place of victims of the 1937-38

purges. The subsequent investigation led to a halt in construction work at Boraldai.³ "Adilet" also organized in Alma-Ata an exhibit entitled "Requiem," honoring the victims of Stalinism. Members of "Adilet" organized evenings in memory of rehabilitated victims of Stalinism while continuing their time-consuming research to reconstruct the careers of M. Dzhumabaev, A. Baitursun, and Zh. Aimantov in order to facilitate their rehabilitation.

One of the most moving contributions to the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism was the film "ALZHIR" produced by the members of "Adilet." The title of the film is an acronym of *Akmolinsky Lager' Zhen Izmennikov Rodiny*—the name of the camp at Akmolinsk where the wives of "the traitors to the fatherland" were detained.⁴ From January 12 to 14, 1990, at the initiative of "Adilet," a venerable Kazakh tradition, the *aytis*, a contest among *akymy*—master performers of folk epics and poetry—was put to the service of the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism: all proceeds from the contest were donated to "Adilet."⁵

In addition to the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism, "Adilet" has become involved in an intense effort aimed at filling in the blank spots of Kazakh history.⁶ In this regard, the "Adilet Uni" column has revived public discourse about Mustafa Chokaev and the "Alash Orda" party, not to vilify them as in the past, but to urge a thorough reevaluation of their place in Kazakh history.

³ O. Babiy, "Adilet'—znachit spravedlivost'," *Kazakhstanskaya pravda*, October 12, 1989, p. 2.

⁴ Sh. Quttayakov, "Alzhir—Ortaq qasiretimiz," *Qazaq adebiiyeti*, August 18, 1985, p. 15.

⁵ B. Qoyshibaev, "Aqindar aytisina dayindig qalay," *Qazaq adebiiyeti*, October 20, 1989, p. 13. The contest had originally been scheduled for November 24-26, 1989.

⁶ B. Qoyshibaev, "Adilet Uni," *Qazaq adebiiyeti*, October 6, 1989, p. 4; A. Ualikhanov, "T. Alqilaugha Adilet' qogami da qatissa," *Qazaq adebiiyeti*, May 12, 1989, p. 15.

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