

Ramiz' later efforts to assume a posture of orthodoxy did him little good. Although in 1929—the year after publication of his pamphlet—he was elevated to membership of the Buro of the Uzbek Central Committee, he was arrested, together with his fellow writer Batu, on allegations of involvement in the poisoning of the nationalist Abid Khoja Saidov, who had defected to the Soviets.¹¹ Ramiz was later released, then rearrested to perish finally in 1939. In 1935, his play of 1920, "The Khanate of Turkestan," was assailed as "pan-Turkic" and as having "idealized the feudal culture."¹² His name figured in the March, 1938, Moscow show trial at which the two Uzbek leaders Akmal Ikramov and Faizulla Khojaev were sentenced to death.

Ramiz was rehabilitated after the Twentieth Party Congress, but the status of his writings remains largely in

limbo. The pamphlet *Khayaldan haqiqatga*, which was published in an edition of only 3,000, was almost certainly withdrawn from circulation after his arrest. Even if copies were available today in special archives, its Arabic script would make it incomprehensible to most Uzbek readers.¹³ Despite the pamphlet's orthodox stance, its disclosures about Party life in the 1920s, especially the tolerant attitude of Muslim Communists of that era toward Islam, are food for thought for today's Central Asian intellectuals in search of new directions.¹⁴

¹³ For precisely this reason, Uzbeks are now trying to learn to read old literature in Arabic script. In 1989, the weekly *Ozbekistan adabiyati va san'ati* began a series of lessons designed to help readers master the script.

¹⁴ See, for example, *Ozbekistan adabiyati va san'ati*, May 26, 1989, p. 3.

RL 31/90, January 10, 1989

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

UKRAINE

Narodichi and "The Big Lie" about the Effects of Chernobyl'

David Marples

At the first session of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the attention of the Soviet public was turned once again to the situation in Narodichi Raion in Zhitomir Oblast of the Ukrainian SSR, where the effects of the Chernobyl' nuclear accident of April, 1986, continue to have a profound impact. Gradually, the story of Narodichi has been uncovered, first, by investigative journalists and in film reports, and, second, by scientists and government commissions sent to the area. Nevertheless, despite the high levels of radiation and a notable rise in cancers in the raion, the Soviet authorities have appeared reluctant so far to react with remedial action. The Ukrainian health authorities have continued to deny the very existence of the problem, and, according to one account, in October, 1989, children in the district were still attending school in at least two of the twelve villages slated for evacuation.¹

On October 19, at a meeting in the USSR Ministry of Health, the health of the population in zones affected by radiation from Chernobyl' was discussed by three committees of the Supreme Soviet—the Committee for Public Health Protection, the Committee for Ecology and the Rational Use of Natural Resources, and the Committee on Women's Affairs. The participants acknowledged that for a lengthy period medical experts had failed to provide an objective picture of the effects of the accident, but,

although "the shroud of secrecy" was not lifted completely, the discussion did at least convince some critics, including the chairman of the Subcommittee on Ecology and head of the Ukrainian ecology movement "Zelenyi svit," Yurii Shcherbak, that the statements of the health authorities showing signs of greater realism.²

In particular, Shcherbak noted that two of the key figures involved in analyzing the impact of Chernobyl' on health—Leonid Il'in, the vice president of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences, and Anatolii Romanenko, then Ukrainian minister of health and director of the Center for Radiation Medicine—"have begun to speak in the language of reality." Both of these men and their respective institutions have been accused of withholding information about the repercussions of the accident on public health. Indeed, it can be said that the Ukrainian public has completely lost faith in the credibility of information provided by its health ministry.

Shortly before the meeting at the USSR Ministry of Health, Shcherbak, Ales' Adamovich (a prominent Belorussian people's deputy), Valentin Bud'ko (first secretary of Narodichi Raion Party Committee), Vladimir Kolinko (of Novosti Press Agency), Alla Yaroshinskaya (a journalist and people's deputy), and others took part in a discussion at the editorial offices of the weekly newspaper

¹ *Molod' Ukrainy*, October 12, 1989.

² *Radio Moscow*, October 19, 1989.

Moskovskie novosti. This meeting led to the publication of a two-page article entitled "The Big Lie." Focusing on Belorussia and the Narodichi Raion, the authors assert that, from the very outset, the aftereffects of Chernobyl' have been covered up by officials, and that this constitutes a crime. For over three years, they contend, the population in areas affected by radiation has been kept in ignorance of the truth. They believe that Volodymyr Shcherbitsky, the former Ukrainian Party chief, and Nikolai Slyun'kov, the former Belorussian Party first secretary and now a member of the CPSU Politburo, are two of the chief culprits.³

In addition, the article alleges that knowledge about the victims of the disaster has been systematically concealed. Yaroshinskaya provides several examples of how data on the effects of radiation have been withheld and shows how the government commission headed by Boris Shcherbina that was set up in the aftermath of Chernobyl' has refused journalists access to information. Adamovich and Kolinko state that not only has contaminated food been grown in zones affected by radiation but it is still being distributed widely through the country. These critics hold to the premise that the bureaucratic system to which science and medicine are subordinate is flawed, and, as a consequence, once a lie has been uttered, it is perpetuated and compounded.

A series of reports have appeared concerning Narodichi, providing much detail about this unfortunate region. In Zhitomir Oblast as a whole, more than 455 settlements, covering an area in excess of 23,000 hectares with a total population of more than 93,000, including 18,000 children, have been affected by radiation. At least 18,000 people are living in areas where cesium contamination of the soil exceeds 15 curies per square kilometer. In some places, contamination is in excess of 200 curies.⁴ Narodichi is the worst affected raion. Twelve villages have been scheduled to be evacuated over the next four years, but at present there are insufficient funds to move the residents, among whom are 900 young families with children. According to one account, most of the funds available were spent on the construction of social and cultural amenities over the past three years.⁵

The efforts of such reporters as Kolinko—who took part in writing the script of the short film "Mi-kro-fon!"—have galvanized the residents of Narodichi, who have been criticized by V. Doguzhiev, chairman of the Commission for Emergencies, for their weak response to attempts by local collectives to alleviate conditions on farms in the area. At the same time, there has been no shortage of action in terms of publicizing their plight. The editorial board of the Kiev youth newspaper *Molod' Ukrainy* has been inundated with letters describing "a three-year

concealment" of the problems in the northern part of Zhitomir Oblast. Some of the letters demand that those responsible be punished, but there has also been an increasing number of offers of help from outside the oblast to those in need.⁶ Anger was voiced by the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Komsomol organization, which has demanded the immediate evacuation of residents from affected raions of Zhitomir, Kiev, and Chernigov Oblasts.⁷

Yurii Spizhenko, deputy minister of health of the Ukrainian SSR, has responded to questions prepared by one Ukrainian publication from a different perspective.⁸ The interview with Spizhenko provides a glimpse into the sort of thinking that has been so roundly condemned by the critics interviewed in *Moskovskie novosti*. He maintains that the Chernobyl' accident will not affect the Ukrainian population's life expectancy and that the maximum theoretical rise in oncological disease will be between 0.001 and 0.01 percent, which is infinitesimal. He also claims that in the period subsequent to the accident there has been no rise in overall morbidity in the republic. With regard to Narodichi, he argues that the undeniable rise in illness is a direct result of improved diagnosis and the high average age of the population there. He states, moreover, that, even in the case of exposure to radiation in doses of 100-200 rems, the human body develops its own means of self-protection without medical intervention.

Spizhenko's theory is that many of the medical problems in the Chernobyl' region have been caused by the statements of irresponsible and ignorant persons. While he agrees that there has been too much secrecy surrounding the effects of the accident on health, he believes that unconsidered and emotional speeches and writings have done far more damage and have led to increased stress, which itself has caused some of the illnesses. His comments illustrate precisely the attitudes among the Ukrainian health authorities that have allowed the present predicament to come to pass.

Even cursory examination of Spizhenko's responses reveals the flaws in his argument. He cites, for example, World Health Organization statistics that, out of every one million people, 1,600-4,000 are sick with cancer, and that Ukraine falls into the middle of this numerical range with 3,000 cases per million annually. According to a study of the medical effects of Chernobyl' in the three most heavily affected Ukrainian oblasts—Kiev, Zhitomir, and Chernigov—among the 187,000 registered residents, however, there were more than 2,000 cases of cancer in the year 1988.⁹ Therefore, if Spizhenko's figures are accurate, then

³ *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 42, 1989; see also the article by Ales' Adamovich in issue No. 41, 1989.

⁴ *Molod' Ukrainy*, August 23, 1989; *Radio Kiev*, August 24, 1989.

⁵ *Molod' Ukrainy*, June 24, 1989.

⁶ *Molod' Ukrainy*, October 10, 1989. On the same topic, see also *Molod' Ukrainy*, September 17, 1989; *Komsomol'skoe znamya*, September 17, 1989; and *Molod' Ukrainy*, September 23, 1989.

⁷ *Molod' Ukrainy*, October 10, 1989.

⁸ *Nauka i suspils'vo*, No. 9, 1989. Spizhenko became the Ukrainian minister of health after Anatolii Romanenko was relieved of his duties (see *Pravda Ukrainy*, November 11, 1989).

⁹ *Literaturna Ukraina*, August 10, 1989.

...ence of cancer in the worst fallout zone is three
... a half times the republican average.

Equally hard to accept is the thesis that the number of illnesses in Narodichi Raion is a result of the advanced age of the population—it does not fit with the demographic profile or the pattern of damage to health among children associated with radiation. First, the number of people of pensionable age in Narodichi has been recorded as 9,000 in a population of around 35,000,¹⁰ and the effects of radiation upon children are known to have been severe. The journalist Eduard Pershyn of the newspaper *Literaturna Ukraina* accompanied twenty leading Soviet experts to Narodichi in August, 1989, at the request of the well-known Ukrainian biologist Dmytro Hrodzyns'kyi. There, the children were placed into five different categories according to the amount of damage to their thyroid glands from radiation. More than 4,500 children have been affected by significant amounts of radiation, including over 1,000 cases where the dose exceeded 200 rems.¹¹

The Soviet health authorities, it must be acknowledged, could not have been expected to be able to deal adequately with a disaster of this magnitude, but, now that they have admitted that the picture provided hitherto was incomplete, the suspicion that they are withholding the truth will be hard to dispel in the future. As Spizhenko

demonstrates, the tendency has been to understate the effect on health in fallout areas by giving a mean for the whole republic. For far too long, the inquest into the disaster was left in the hands of a few scientists at the Center for Radiation Medicine in Kiev, with the result that even deaths clearly attributable to radiation sickness have been concealed, persons have been omitted from the all-Union register of the sick, and it has been almost impossible to gauge the real state of affairs in affected zones.¹² Even the official early death toll from Chernobyl—fixed at thirty-one—has now been decisively rejected by some Soviet officials.¹³

The current progress, however, has not yet alleviated the predicament of those waiting to be evacuated, without supplies of clean food, with sick families, and weary of government commission after government commission passing through their villages only to arrive at conclusions that appear self-evident. It is here rather than in the syndrome of "radiophobia" that the true psychological effects of Chernobyl are to be found.

¹² See the examples provided by the Kiev journalist Lyubov Kovalevs'ka in *Literaturna Ukraina*, August 10, 1989.

¹³ Steve Goldstein cites at least twenty-one more deaths, according to a report by V. D. Vokhmekov, head of the Chernobyl' public health section of the USSR Ministry of Health (see *Knight-Ridder Newspapers*, October 11, 1989).

(RL 32/90, December 19, 1989)

¹⁰ *Literaturna Ukraina*, June 22, 1989.

¹¹ *Nauka i suspils'tvo*, No. 9, 1989.

UKRAINE

The Ecological Situation in Ukraine

David Marples

Ecological problems are receiving particular attention in Ukraine both as a result of the forthcoming elections to local government bodies and as part of the discussion of the draft law on economic sovereignty.¹ A unique situation has arisen in which Party and government bodies and unofficial groups are cooperating at the oblast and raion levels to prevent the construction of potentially harmful industrial enterprises. This unusual coalition has threatened strike action if the demands of the public are not met. Its key concern is that many of the industries involved are administered from outside the republic. When Soviet scientific commissions have conducted analyses, they have either been ignored altogether or construction has continued

pending a visit by foreign experts. In the fall of 1989, these issues became even more critical.

M. P. Skrypnyk, the chairman of the Ukrainian Committee for Hydrometeorology, has published a concise survey of the current ecological situation in Ukraine.² From an analysis of forty-two cities, he has ascertained that, in 1988, some 11 million tons of poisonous substances, including sulfurous oxides and ammonia, were released into the atmosphere from "stationary" objects. The most serious offenders are located in the Donetsk, Zaporozhe, Dnepropetrovsk, Crimea, and Kiev Oblasts. Of the fifty most polluted cities in the USSR, eight are in Ukraine: Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhe, Kiev, Kerch, Makeevka, Debaltsevo, and Dneprodzerzhinsk. (The omission of Mariupol is astonishing.) In these cities, automobile fumes account for most of the pollution. In Kommunar'sk, however, concentrations of ammonia in the

¹ The guidelines for economic sovereignty in Ukraine were published in *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, September 6, 1989. As regards the continuing discussion on the topic, see, for example, *Molod' Ukrainy*, October 17, 1989.

² *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, August 22, 1989.

atmosphere are more than twice the permitted level, while in Kiev and Mariupol they are more than five times the permitted level.

Similarly, concentrations of oil, nitric acid, and phenols in rivers have reached a catastrophic level. The most seriously affected river is the Dnieper. In the Vinnitsa area, the Dniester and Southern Bug are in a lamentable condition, as is much of the Ukrainian section of the Danube. In addition, anxiety has long been expressed over the fate of the Azov and Black Seas.

Turning to agriculture, Skrypnyk noted that of fifty-five farms in twenty different oblasts that were the subject of observation in 1988, thirty-three were found to be contaminated with pesticides in the spring, and twenty-five in the fall. He cited various examples of measures to deal with the situation being hampered by the red tape of Moscow-based ministries such as the USSR Ministry of Nonferrous Metallurgy.

Sviatoslav Dudko, a secretary of the Green Council and a founding member of the ecological association "Zelenyi svit" (Green World), points out in another analysis that the number of rivers in the republic has declined from 40,000 to 25,000 in recent years. Moreover, 50 percent of the fertile chernozem region of Ukraine has been destroyed, largely by the flooding of land with salt water. The republic, which accounts for only about 3 percent of Soviet territory, has such a heavy concentration of chemical plants and has been so intensively industrialized that it now provides 25 percent of the Soviet gross national product.³

"Zelenyi svit" has focused its efforts on several specific ventures, with some success. It was planned to build a railroad station in South Kiev. The project would have entailed the destruction of 250 hectares of forest in the region of Bykovnya, where thousands of local residents were executed by Stalin's NKVD.⁴ Construction has now been canceled following protests by the environmentalists. A tobacco factory that posed a threat in terms of environmental contamination has been abandoned at Uman. Currently, there is controversy over the construction of a bridge to link the city of Zaporozhe and the island of Khortitsa; it is claimed that more than 1,000 species of rare wild life would be destroyed during the ten-year construction period.

Because of the heavy industrialization of the republic, it has also developed into a major center of power generation. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a massive increase in the number of hydroelectric stations, many of which harnessed small rivers. In the 1950s alone, the average capacity of these stations rose from 143 kilowatts to 290 kilowatts. In the 1960s, the smaller stations were amalgamated into stations with capacities of up to 6,000 kilowatts. This trend has continued, as is evidenced by the

mammoth project in Nikolaev Oblast. Increasingly, the smaller and ecologically less harmful hydroelectric stations have been phased out, so that today they make up less than 0.2 percent of the total hydroelectric capacity of the republic.⁵ As a result, the strain on small rivers from the larger stations has greatly intensified.

It is, however, nuclear power that has become the focus of discontent. Over the past four months, two major Ukrainian projects have been affected: the Chigirin station, which was in the early stages of construction, and the South Ukraine station in Nikolaev Oblast. The Chigirin station was abandoned early in 1989 after a lengthy protest campaign.⁶ The situation at the South Ukraine station is more complicated because two reactors are already in service, the project is a USSR-Comecon enterprise involving investment by Romania and Bulgaria, and Romania does not yet have a nuclear power station of its own in operation.

The campaign against the South Ukraine nuclear power plant has been led by the Nikolaev Oblast Party organization headed by L. G. Sharaev. In September, 1988, Sharaev was interviewed in *Radyans'ka Ukraina*. He noted that the campaign was also directed against the Dnieper-Bug hydroelectric power center, the Tashlitskoe hydroaccumulation station, and the Konstantinovka hydroelectric station and reservoir. Although a reservoir built at Tashlitskoe is currently being diverted to provide cooling water for the two operating reactors at the South Ukraine power plant, there is insufficient water for the third reactor. Nevertheless, despite the recommendation of a commission of the USSR State Nature Committee, the Ministry of Nuclear Power (as it then was) refused to drop plans for two additional phases of construction—the third and fourth reactors and the fifth and sixth.⁷

As a result, the Nikolaev Party Oblast Committee began a letter-writing campaign that was supported by the local branch of "Zelenyi svit." Letters were sent to the USSR Council of Ministers, the USSR Academy of Sciences, and the USSR State Committee for Science and Technology. The letters led to a visit to the oblast by L. D. Ryabev, a deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. As the *Radyans'ka Ukraina* interview with Sharaev went to press, the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution to discontinue construction both of the South Ukraine station and of the Konstantinovka reservoir and hydroelectric station. The fourth unit at the South Ukraine plant will not be completed, and preparatory work on the third phase of the plant has also been stopped. In short, after determined efforts supported by public and informal groups, the oblast Party committee has brought to a halt the most ambitious energy project in Ukraine.

While some success has been achieved, changes in other areas have been slow to come. The republic remains

³ As stated by Sviatoslav Dudko, secretary of "Zelenyi svit," in a speech in Washington, D.C., on October 8, 1989.

⁴ For details of the continuing investigation into the Bykovnya tragedy, see *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, October 14, 1989.

⁵ *Robotnycha hazeta*, August 25, 1989.

⁶ See David Marples, "Chigirin and the Soviet Nuclear Energy Program," *Report on the USSR*, No. 32, 1989, pp. 26-29.

⁷ *Radyans'ka Ukraina*, September 9, 1989.