

CHERNOBYL

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USSR - SOVIETS LIVE, WORK, PLAY IN KIEV'S RADIOACTIVE AREAS

WASHINGTON, JULY 25 (SPECIAL) - THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY DAVID W. JONES APPEARS TODAY IN THE WASHINGTON TIMES:

KIEV, U.S.S.R. - CHILDREN STILL DIG IN THE SAND OF KIEV'S DNIEPER RIVER BEACHES WHILE THEIR PARENTS BASK IN THE SUNSHINE, APPARENTLY UNAWARE OF A NEWSPAPER REPORT THIS MONTH THAT 60 RADIOACTIVE "HOT SPOTS" HAVE BEEN FOUND ON THE SHORE.

IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THEY ARE IGNORANT OF THE DANGER OR MERELY FATALISTIC AFTER MORE THAN FOUR YEARS OF OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT INDIFFERENCE TO THE LINGERING HEALTH THREATS POSED BY THE APRIL 1986 CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR ACCIDENT 80 MILES AWAY.

PERHAPS THEY JUST CONSIDER THEMSELVES LUCKY COMPARED WITH THE MORE THAN 2 MILLION PEOPLE - INCLUDING MORE THAN HALF A MILLION CHILDREN - WHO STILL LIVE AND WORK IN SERIOUSLY CONTAMINATED AREAS WHILE THE AUTHORITIES DECIDE WHEN OR IF THEY WILL BE RELOCATED.

"WE HAVE A JOKE THAT IN MANY COUNTRIES, THERE ARE SOCIETIES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CATS AND DOGS AND OTHER ANIMALS," SAID GIORGI LEPIN, THE CHAIRMAN OF A NEW PRIVATE ORGANIZATION FORMED TO FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHERNOBYL'S VICTIMS. "IN THIS COUNTRY, THE MOST UNPROTECTED PART OF THE POPULATION IS ITS PEOPLE."

IN THE ABSENCE OF RELIABLE PUBLISHED FIGURES ON THE EXTENT OF THE DISASTER, IN WHICH A FIRE AT A NUCLEAR POWER STATION RELEASED A HUGE RADIOACTIVE CLOUD, MR. LEPIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE TRIED TO PUT TOGETHER A COUNT OF THEIR OWN.

"WE ESTIMATE THAT UP TO TODAY, 50,000 PEOPLE HAVE LOST THEIR ABILITY TO WORK" BECAUSE OF EXPOSURE TO RADIOACTIVITY, HE SAID. "ALSO BY OUR ESTIMATE, FROM 5,000 TO 7,000 CHERNOBYL PEOPLE HAVE DIED."

MR. LEPIN ADMITTED THAT THE ASSOCIATION'S DEATH COUNT INCLUDES ALL THOSE EXPOSED TO THE RADIATION WHO HAVE DIED OF ANY DISEASE, WORKING ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE EXPOSURE WEAKENED THEIR IMMUNE SYSTEMS AND MADE THEM MORE VULNERABLE.

ALEXANDER KOVALENKO, A RESPECTED FORMER SPOKESMAN FOR THE GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION CHARGED WITH CLEANING UP THE RESULTS OF THE DISASTER, SAID HE THOUGHT A MORE REALISTIC FIGURE WAS 500 DEAD, INCLUDING 300 WHO ACTIVELY WORKED IN THE CLEANUP.

BUT BY EITHER ESTIMATE, THE TOLL IS CLEARLY FAR HIGHER THAN THE OFFICIAL COUNT OF 31 DEAD, WHICH WAS PUBLISHED ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. MR. KOVALENKO SAID SOME EXPERTS BELIEVE THAT THE WORST PERIOD FOR DEATHS FROM CHERNOBYL WILL BE FROM 1991 TO 1993.

ONE OF THE FEW OFFICIAL FIGURES THAT DO EXIST, MR. LEPIN SAID, IS THAT 2.6 MILLION PEOPLE ARE STILL LIVING IN CONTAMINATED AREAS, GROWING TAINTED FARM PRODUCTS AND SPREADING RADIOACTIVE PARTICLES WHEN THEY TRAVEL. OF THOSE, ONLY 171,000 ARE SCHEDULED TO BE RESETTLED BY THE END OF NEXT YEAR.

"UP TO NOW THE AUTHORITIES SEEM TO HAVE CONSIDERED CHERNOBYL A TRAGEDY, BUT NOT THEIR OWN TRAGEDY," HE SAID. "ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE THEY CAN SAY, WELL, THERE IS TIME TO THINK: SHOULD THEY BE RESETTLED NOW OR IN SEVERAL YEARS? I THINK IF IT WERE THEMSELVES OR THEIR RELATIVES, THEY WOULD NOT THINK FOR LONG. THEY WOULD RESETTLE EVERYONE RIGHT AWAY."

AT ITS RECENT CONGRESS IN MOSCOW, THE COMMUNIST PARTY ADMITTED TO ERRORS IN THE PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION OF CHERNOBYL, IN FAILING TO RECOGNIZE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ACCIDENT, AND IN KEEPING VITAL INFORMATION SECRET FOR YEARS AFTERWARD.

THE CONGRESS PLEDGED TO DO ITS BEST TO HELP WITH THE CLEANUP AND EVACUATION OF THE CONTAMINATED AREAS AND TO SEEK \$800 MILLION IN THE PARTY BUDGET FOR MEDICAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN STILL LIVING IN THE AFFECTED AREAS. (PTO) FW/

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USSR - (1) SOVIETS LIVE, WORK, PLAY IN KIEV'S RADIOACTIVE AREAS

THOSE CHILDREN ARE NOW THE GREATEST CONCERN OF MR. LEPIN, A FORMER PROFESSOR OF METALLURGY WHO VOLUNTEERED HIS SERVICES IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT AND HAS BEEN WORKING THERE, USUALLY AS A LABORER, EVER SINCE.

HE PRAISED THE EFFORTS OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, THAT HAVE ACCEPTED MORE THAN 500 CHILDREN FOR TREATMENT, BUT HE SAID THE LONG JOURNEY AND CHANGE OF CLIMATE HAS IN MANY CASES DONE MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

IN A PASSIONATE APPEAL, HE URGED THOSE COUNTRIES TO PUT THE SAME MONEY INTO SENDING DOCTORS, MEDICINE, AND EQUIPMENT TO HELP ESTABLISH CLINICS IN THE AREAS WHERE THE CHERNOBYL VICTIMS LIVE.

"THAT HUMANITARIAN HELP WILL BE USED INCOMPARABLY MORE EFFECTIVELY" IN THIS WAY, HE SAID.

AS FOR HIS OWN THOUGHTS ABOUT GOING TO WORK EVERY DAY AT THE STILL HIGHLY CONTAMINATED CHERNOBYL COMPLEX, WHERE THREE OF THE FOUR POWER PLANTS ARE BACK IN OPERATION, HE RECALLED THE FEELING OF FEAR IN THE PIT OF HIS STOMACH DURING THE EARLY DAYS AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

"BUT I HAVE NOT FELT THE FEAR FOR A LONG TIME NOW," HE SAID.

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