

CHERNOBYL

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USSR - REFUGEES IN THE SOVIET UNION

WASHINGTON, JUNE 25 (SPECIAL) - THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY JERI LABER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION HELSINKI WATCH, APPEARED SUNDAY IN THE NEW YORK TIMES:

IT WAS NO ORDINARY INVITATION TO TEA. MRS. SAKHAROV APOLOGIZED IN ADVANCE WHEN SHE INVITED ME: "I'VE INVITED PEOPLE WHO REALLY KNOW OUR PROBLEMS. I WANT YOU TO SEE HOW VERY GREAT OUR CRISIS IS."

IT WAS WITH THIS PREPARATION THAT I ARRIVED AT THE SAKHAROV APARTMENT MY FIRST VISIT SINCE THE DEATH OF ANDREI DMITRIEVICH LAST DECEMBER 14. THE FAMILIAR LIVING ROOM FILLED WITH FLOWERS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE FAMOUS SCIENTIST-DISSIDENT-STATESMAN SEEMED LIKE A SHRINE. IT WAS SUFFUSED WITH A SENSE OF LOSS THAT BECAME ALMOST TANGIBLE AS OUR DISCUSSION GOT UNDER WAY.

MRS. SAKHAROV'S THREE GUESTS--A JOURNALIST A FREELANCE WRITER AND A RECENTLY ELECTED MEMBER OF THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES--DID NOT MAKE ANY PRETENSE AT SMALL TALK. THEY DESCRIBED THE COUNTRY'S INTERNAL REFUGEE PROBLEM A PROBLEM THE MAGNITUDE OF WHICH THE GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND THAT ACCORDINGLY HAS RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION AT HOME OR ABROAD.

ABOUT ONE MILLON PEOPLE IN THE SOVIET UNION THEY CONFIRMED ARE NOW LIVING AS DISPLACED PERSONS. SOME HAVE FLED FROM DISASTERS SUCH AS THE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT EXPLOSION IN CHERNOBYL IN APRIL 1986 AND THE DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE IN ARMENIA IN DECEMBER 1988.

BUT THE BULK OF THE REFUGEES ARE FLEEING THE VIOLENCE THAT HAS ERUPTED IN RECCNT YEARS AMONG VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE SOVIET UNION. SOME HAVE BEEN DRIVEN INTO EXILE BECAUSE THEIR HOMES WERE BURNED OR DESTROYED. OTHERS ARE LEAVING IN FEAR AFRAID THAT THEY MAY BE THE VICTIMS OF A POGROM.

THERE IS NO END IN SIGHT. SOME 60 MILLION SOVIET CITIZENS LIVE OUTSIDE THEIR OWN INDIGENOUS REPUBLICS THE RESULT OF STALIN'S ATTEMPTS TO RUSSIFY THE OUTLYING REPUBLICS OF OF HIS WAR-TIME POLICY OF FORCIBLY RELOCATING MINORITY GROUPS. MANY SUCH PEOPLE--INCLUDING SOME WHOSE FAMILIES HAVE LIVED FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS IN THEIR PRESENT HOMES--HAVE SUDDENLY BEEN FORCED TO SEE THEMSELVES AS PART OF AN UNWANTED MINORITY.

AND THEY HAVE REASON TO BE AFRAID. ETHNIC CLASHES IN MANY OF THE SOVIET REPUBLLCS HAVE PUT ARMENIANS AZERBAIJANIS MESKHETIANS AND OTHER PERSECUTED MINORITIES ON THE RUN.

ABOUT 40,000 REFUGEES ARE NOW CAMPED ON MOSCOW S DOORSTEP LIVING IN ABOMINABLE CONDITIONS THANKS TO ANOTHER LEGACY OF STALINISM. THE INSANE "PROPISKA" SYSTEM PREVENTS CITIZENS FROM TAKING UP A NEW RESIDENCE OR FINDING NEW EMPLOYMENT WITHOUT A SPECIAL PAPER THAT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO ACQUIRE.

ABOUT 300 ARMENIANS WERE ACCEPTED INTO THE ARMENIAN CONSULATE IN THE CENTER OF MOSCOW WHERE THEY REMAINED FOR FIVE MONTHS SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR AND SUFFERING FROM LICE AND DYSENTERY. MOSCOW REFUSES TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REFUGEES. SERGEI STANKEVICH THE NEW, REFORMIST DEPUTY MAYOR OF MOSCOW RECENTLY EXPLAINED WHY. IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO OPEN THE CITY TO THE REFUGEES HE SAID IT WOULD ALSO HAVE TO DEAL WITH MILLIONS OF IMPOVERISHED PEOPLE FROM THE PROVINCES WHO WOULD FLOCK TO MOSCOW WHERE GOODS ARE RELATIVELY MORE PLENTIFUL.

IN ADDITION TO THE REFUGEES, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE PATH OF THE CHERNOBYL FALLOUT MAINLY IN THE UKRAINE AND BYELORUSSIA MAY BE LIVING ON CONTAMINATED SOIL. THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT EVACUATED THOSE IN THE IMMEDIATE DISASTER ZONE. BUT AT LEAST FOUR MLLLION OTHERS SHOULD BE EVACUATED IN ORDER TO SAVE THEIR LIVES ACCORDING TO ALLA YAROSHINSKAYA ONE OF MRS. SAKHAROV'S GUESTS A DEPUTY FROM THE CHERNOBYL AREA. (PTO)



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USSR -(1) REFUGEES IN THE SOVIET UNION

MRS. YAROSHINSKAYA DESCRIBED A SITUATION "WORSE THAN HIROSHIMA," WITH DAMAGES THAT WILL COST 250 BILLION RUBLES BY THE YEAR 2000. "CHILDREN ARE SICK," SHE SAID. "THERE ARE MUTANTS AMONG THE FARM ANIMALS. THEY ARE NOT PERFORMING AUTOPSIES ON THOSE WHO DIE." SHE SPOKE OF RADIOACTIVE SILT IN THE DNIEPER RIVER WHICH FLOWS INTO THE BLACK SEA AND ULTIMATELY THE ATLANTIC OCEAN. SHE SAID THAT FOOD WAS STILL GROWN ON IRRADIATED SOIL THEN PROCESSED AND DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. SHE INDICATED THAT IF THE FULL TRUTH WERE REVEALED MANY MORE WOULD JOIN THE REFUGEE FLOW.

"ORDERS HAVE COME DOWN TO KEEP ALL HIS QUIET," HE JOURNALIST TOLD ME. "MY ARTICLES ON REFUGEES GO UNPRINTED. WE NEED GROUPS FROM OUTSIDE TO COME IN AND SHOW US WHAT TO DO. OUR GOVERNMENT ISN'T ABLE TO. MOREOVER IT HAS NO FUNDS. FOREIGN RELIEF AID SHOULD GO TO LOCAL BODIES NOT TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT."

WHY ARE SOVIET LEADERS SUPPRESSING THIS INFORMATION, "BECAUSE THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO," SOMEONE ANSWERED. ANOTHER ADDED BITTERLY: "BECAUSE NOBODY CARES."

I THOUGHT AGAIN OF ANDREI SAKHAROV OF HIS INSISTENCE THAT THE FULL TRUTH BE AIRED AND OF HIS LIFELONG STRUGGLE TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF VICTIMS. IT SEEMS IRONIC THAT OUR MEETING TOOK PLACE IN THE VERY ROOM WHERE HE PRESIDED IN THE PAST OVER MEETINGS CALLED TO PROTEST THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S REPRESSIVE CONTROL. MRS. SAKHAROV AND HER FRIENDS ARE CONTINUING DR. SAKHAROV'S STRUGGLE AT A TIME WHEN ALL SYSTEMS IN THE SOVIET UNION ARE BREAKING DOWN.

THERE ARE NO EASY ANSWERS TO THE PLETHORA OF PROBLEMS THAT THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT FACES TODAY. BUT IN HUMANITARIAN ISSUES -- INTERNAL REFUGEES AND VICTIMS IN NEED OF EVACUATION -- INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE.

BUT FIRST MR. GORBACHEV MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM. HE SHOULD OVERCOME PRIDE AND THE NATIONAL HABIT OF SECRECY. HE SHOULD INVITE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS INTO THE SOVIET UNION AND PROVIDE THEM WITH ALL THE INFORMATION THEY NEED TO HELP HIM HELP THE SOVIET PEOPLE. KR/