

CHERNOBYL

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B-WIRE

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USSR - SOVIETS STILL DON'T KNOW JUST HOW BAD CHERNOBYL WAS

WASHINGTON, APRIL 26 (SPECIAL) - THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY T. ELAINE CAREY APPEARS TODAY IN THE COX NEWSPAPERS:

MOSCOW - THE ONE THING SOVIET NUCLEAR EXPERTS KNOW FOR SURE ABOUT THE CHERNOBYL DISASTER FOUR YEARS AGO THURSDAY IS THAT THEY STILL DON'T KNOW HOW BAD IT WAS.

MANY OF THE 3 MILLION SOVIET CITIZENS LIVING IN THREE REPUBLICS SURROUNDING CHERNOBYL KNOW ENOUGH NOT TO TRUST WHAT THE GOVERNMENT TELLS THEM ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE WORLD'S WORST NUCLEAR POWER DISASTER. THEY ALSO KNOW ENOUGH TO PROTEST, AND TO MAKE THEIR PROTESTS HEARD INSIDE THE KREMLIN.

FINALLY, THEY KNOW THAT THEY MUST SEEK MONEY OUTSIDE THE SOVIET UNION TO COPE WITH THE DISASTER.

IN JUST THE LAST YEAR, SOVIET GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE BEGUN TO ADMIT THAT FOR THREE YEARS AFTER THE DISASTER, THEY EITHER CONCEALED THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE AND DANGER OR DIDN'T KNOW IT THEMSELVES.

THE GOVERNMENT STILL MAINTAINS THAT ONLY 31 PEOPLE DIED IN THE EXPLOSION AND FIRE IN THE GRAPHITE CORE OF ONE OF THE FOUR REACTORS AT THE CHERNOBYL POWER PLANT. THE DISASTER, OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED APRIL 26, 1986, SENT RADIOACTIVITY ACROSS PARTS OF THE SOVIET UNION AND EUROPE. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS CLAIM THE NUMBER OF DIRECT DEATHS IS FAR HIGHER.

IN THE UKRAINIAN CAPITAL OF KIEV, JUST 80 MILES NORTH OF CHERNOBYL, AT LEAST 100,000 PEOPLE ARE EXPECTED TO MARCH THURSDAY TO PUBLICIZE THEIR FEARS AND ANGER REGARDING THE CHERNOBYL PLANT.

GROUPS SUCH AS THE CHERNOBYL ALLIANCE, WHICH CLAIMS ABOUT 600,000 SUPPORTERS AMONG CIVILIANS AND SOLDIERS AFFECTED BY THE ACCIDENT, HAVE A LONG LIST OF DEMANDS: HOSPITAL BEDS, NEW HOUSING OUTSIDE THE AFFECTED ZONE, HUGE CLEANUP SUMS AND EVEN THE PUNISHMENT OF UKRAINE OFFICIALS IN CHARGE AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT.

OVER TIME, THE GOVERNMENT POSITION ON THE ACCIDENT'S EFFECT HAS GRADUALLY GROWN BLOOMIER.

IN DECEMBER 1988, THE CHERNOBYL PLANT DIRECTOR SAID THE PLANT AND TOWN HAD BEEN DECONTAMINATED.

A FEW MONTHS LATER, VITALY STARODUMOV, DIRECTOR OF THE CHERNOBYL CLEANUP EFFORT, SAID THAT RADIOACTIVITY HAD BEEN LIMITED TO AN INITIAL AREA ESTABLISHED AT THE TIME OF THE DISASTER.

BUT LESS THAN TWO MONTHS AFTER THAT, THE GOVERNMENT SAID AN ADDITIONAL 100,000 PEOPLE, LIVING UP TO 325 MILES FROM CHERNOBYL, MIGHT HAVE TO BE EVACUATED. THIS WAS IN ADDITION TO MORE THAN 100,000 PEOPLE EVACUATED RIGHT AFTER THE CATASTROPHE.

AND ON WEDNESDAY, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER VITALY DOGUZHYIEV TOLD THE SOVIET PARLIAMENT THAT 180,000 TO 200,000 PEOPLE STILL MUST BE MOVED OUT OF CONTAMINATED AREAS OF THE UKRAINE, BYELORUSSIA AND RUSSIA UNTIL AT LEAST 1993.

THE LEADING CRITIC OF THE CHERNOBYL CLEANUP IS YURI SCHERBAK, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENT'S ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION. SCHERBAK MAINTAINS THAT 1.5 MILLION PEOPLE, INCLUDING 160,000 CHILDREN, SUFFER HIGH LEVELS OF RADIATION BECAUSE OF CHERNOBYL.

"WE THINK IT IS INADMISSIBLE THAT FOR THREE YEARS THE CONTAMINATION MAPS AND INFORMATION ON THE MEDICAL CONSEQUENCES WERE KEPT SECRET," SCHERBAK SAID. MAPS OF THE CONTAMINATED AREAS WERE PUBLISHED ONLY LAST YEAR. (PTO)

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B-WIRE

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USSR - (1) SOVIETS STILL DON'T KNOW JUST HOW BAD CHERNOBYL WAS

THE GOVERNMENT HAS SAID VERY LITTLE ABOUT THE HEALTH OF ITS IRRADIATED CITIZENS. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF DEFORMED ANIMALS BEING BORN AND RUMORS OF THYROID DISEASE, LEUKEMIA AND CANCER CASES CLIMBING. THIS YEAR, OFFICIALS ADMIT THE REPORTS ARE TRUE, BUT THEY HAVE YET TO GIVE ANY STATISTICS.

WHILE THE SOVIET PARLIAMENT DEBATES HOW MANY BILLIONS IT MUST EARMARK FOR THE CHERNOBYL CLEANUP, THE NUCLEAR INSTALLATION STILL OPERATES THREE OF ITS FOUR REACTORS. THE BURNED-OUT REACTOR LIES ENTOMBED IN CONCRETE, BUT SCIENTISTS RECENTLY HAVE RECOMMENDED THAT THE FAILED REACTOR BE FURTHER REINFORCED TO PREVENT RADIATION LEAKAGE.

DEMANDS TO SHUT DOWN THE WHOLE PLANT ARE GROWING. A MEETING OF ENVIRONMENTALISTS, SCIENTISTS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS LAST WINTER AGREED THE PLANT SHOULD BE CLOSED, BUT THE GROUP ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE COUNTRY COULD NOT DO SO BECAUSE IT COULD NOT AFFORD ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF POWER GENERATION. KR/SK