

CHERNOBYL

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USSR --- MASS RESETTLEMENT OF CHERNOBYL VICTIMS PLANNED
London, April 26 (Special) -- this report appeared in THE
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DEPUTIES representing the Ukraine and Byelorussia argued in parliament yesterday for a substantial improvement on Soviet government plans for recovery from the Chernobyl nuclear accident, the gravity of which is only now becoming clear, four years after the disaster.

One MP said 300 people, mostly power station workers, had died of nuclear-related causes since the explosion, which cost 31 lives at the time.

Angry at Moscow's failure to grasp the extent of the catastrophe, the republics sought a minimum of 20bn roubles (£20bn) each over the next five years to help clean up radioactive contamination, blown by the wind over a far wider area than was first realised after a reactor at the station, near Kiev, blew up on 26 April 1986.

Yuri Shcherbak, a deputy from the Ukraine, told a news conference he had seen official documents suggesting that 180-200bn roubles would be needed over the next 10 years for a full Chernobyl clean-up, which could be raised only if the world community came to the aid of the Soviet Union.

Yuri Voronezhtsev, the member for Gomel, one of the worst affected regions of Byelorussia, said his republic was demanding that 115,000 of its people be evacuated from irradiated towns and villages in the next two to three years. "I believe that if the necessary measures are carried out to improve conditions in Byelorussia, a mass evacuation will not be necessary. But 115,000 should leave as a matter of urgency."

From Helen Womack in Moscow

Parliament finally passed a revised plan under which 180 to 200,000 people will be evacuated from the Ukraine, Russia and Byelorussia over the next two years, at a cost of 16bn roubles.

Many speakers in the debate criticised the "norms" of exposure to radiation which have been officially accepted until now. People have been told that it is safe to live in areas contaminated by up to five curies per square kilometre, but Byelorussia believes one curie per square km should be the limit.

Radiation in the city of Gomel, which I visited last week, ranges up to eight curies per square km in the most dangerous suburbs. But towns nearby register much higher levels.

These are the so-called "dirty spots" outside the 30-km exclusion zone drawn around Chernobyl. In fact the dirty spots, where farm life goes on, are often as contaminated as settlements inside the zone, long since abandoned as unfit for human habitation.

Altogether, Byelorussian land absorbed 70 per cent of the radiation from Chernobyl and the damage from this is estimated at 82bn roubles, eight times the republic's annual budget.

Photographs have already been published, showing the leaves of trees in the zone growing to monstrous sizes as a result of radioactive stimulation. But now it seems we are seeing the first long-term human casualties of Chernobyl, as instances of thyroid abnormalities,

anaemia and even leukaemia are increasing.

In Gomel, I was told, six children now have thyroid cancer. Mr Shcherbak said yesterday five children from his republic had the same disease. It is, of course, impossible to prove that Chernobyl is to blame. But thyroid cancer is an extremely rare condition among children and radiation is the most likely cause.

It was Mr Shcherbak who confirmed the 300 post-Chernobyl deaths, a figure quoted by the Soviet media some months ago but denied officially. The Ukrainian environmentalist was scathing in his assessment of the Ministry of Health, which he said had conducted a propaganda campaign to soothe people worried about Chernobyl.

Mr Shcherbak called for a system of regular medical checks for the "army" of 600,000 soldiers and civilians who helped to decontaminate Chernobyl and subsequently dispersed to their homes around the country. He also appealed to foreign specialists to advise on what to do with the concrete sarcophagus surrounding the damaged reactor, which was "reliable but not a permanent solution". One possibility might be to build a super-sarcophagus over the existing cover, he said.

Mr Voronezhtsev demanded the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate the disaster all over again. Many people responsible for the Chernobyl accident, including senior politicians, had still not been exposed, he said, but he declined to name names.

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USSR -- 300 DEATH TOLL ADMITTED ON GRIM CHERNOBYL DAY (1) F520
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From Mary Dejevsky, Moscow

ON THE fourth anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in the Ukraine, the Soviet public is finally learning something of the ignorance, delay and negligence that hampered their country's response.

Yesterday the Supreme Soviet met in full session in Moscow to hear details of an emergency programme, costing 16 billion roubles (£16 billion), to counteract the effects. A parliamentary deputy told journalists that at least 300 people — 10 times the official figure — had died.

The emergency programme, compiled by a parliamentary commission, recommends that another 200,000 people be evacuated as a matter of urgency. It also urges additional measures to ensure the safety of foodstuffs, better medical treatment and invalid benefits, and an end to the continuing secrecy that surrounds the disaster.

The commission found that the disaster had so far cost the Soviet Union nine billion roubles and would cost more than 30 billion roubles by 1995; by the turn of the century, the cost could run into 100 or 200 billion roubles. The number and extent of the affected areas outside the immediate disaster zone is only now being recognized, as are the debilitating physical and psychological effects. The situation is particularly serious in Belorussia, which was

initially said to have been only slightly affected, where more than 20 per cent of agricultural land and 15 per cent of forest has been lost. The damage is officially estimated at 82 billion roubles, more than eight times the republic's annual budget. Areas where radioactive fall-out was concentrated include the Gomel region of Belorussia, Bryansk in the Russian Federation, as well as the whole of the Ukrainian capital, Kiev.

A report by the chairman of the parliamentary commission, Mr Vitaly Doguzhiev, the Deputy Prime Minister, expressed dissatisfaction with the haphazard way in which data on the accident had been collected. Particular concern was voiced about arrangements for monitoring and treating children. Economic planners and industrial enterprises were criticized for their slowness in providing urgently needed equipment.

Public anger with the way victims of Chernobyl have been treated has increased markedly in the past year as information has become available about the incidence of sickness among residents of the affected areas and relief workers.

In January, several official newspapers campaigned on behalf of relief workers whose symptoms were not recognized by the authorities as resulting from their exposure to radiation at Chernobyl. A

group of former relief workers went on hunger strike in February. The plight of the relief workers was eventually recognized in a special government statement on April 7, which promised free medicine and privileges in treatment and convalescence.

Today has been designated "Chernobyl Day" and Soviet television is running a 24-hour telethon in aid of the Chernobyl victims which will provide a reconstruction of the accident.

At a press conference to introduce the emergency programme, it was stated that the long-term medical effects had been grossly underestimated and some necessary measures had been rejected on cost grounds. Mr Yuri Shcherbak, a parliamentary deputy and author of a book on Chernobyl, said that the main cause of the disaster had been inadequacies in the design and technical specification of the Chernobyl-type reactors.

Mr Shcherbak said yesterday that more than 300 had died as a direct result of the accident, and more than 200 were seriously ill.

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