

CHERNOBYL

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B-WIRE

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USSR - WASTE, COVERUP, HEALTH PROBLEMS FOUR YEARS AFTER ACCIDENT
BY ANDREW KATELL

VETKA, U.S.S.R. (AP) - CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ERECT NEW BUILDINGS IN THIS BYELORUSSIAN VILLAGE EVEN AS RESIDENTS PREPARE TO FLEE BECAUSE RADIATION FROM THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT ENDANGERS THEIR LIVES. POOR ORGANIZATION IS WASTING MILLIONS OF RUBLES. ONE AGENCY CONTINUES WORKING ON CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS PLANNED BEFORE THE REACTOR EXPLOSION AND FIRE APRIL 26, 1986, WHILE OTHERS EVACUATE RESIDENTS OF THE SAME VILLAGE.

CRITICISM OF HOW THE DISASTER WAS HANDLED BEGAN EARLY. THE GOVERNMENT CAME UNDER ATTACK AT HOME AND ABROAD BECAUSE THE ACCIDENT WAS NOT REPORTED FOR TWO DAYS, AFTER THE REACTOR HAD SENT UP A SENT UP A HUGE CLOUD OF RADIATION THAT EVENTUALLY BLEW AROUND THE WORLD.

POLITICIANS ELECTED UNDER MORE LIBERAL POLICIES INTRODUCED SINCE 1986 SAY FULL INFORMATION ABOUT RADIATION LEVELS AND HEALTH PROBLEMS WAS KEPT SECRET.

THE GOVERNMENT LIFTED SECRECY RESTRICTIONS ON SUCH INFORMATION LAST YEAR. AS POLITICIANS LEARNED MORE, THEY PRESSED FOR, AND WON, EVACUATION OF SOME OF THE ESTIMATED 4 MILLION PEOPLE STILL LIVING ON IRRADIATED LAND.

BYELORUSSIAN WRITER ALES ADAMOVICH SAID THE ALLEGED COVERUP, AND OFFICIAL CLAIMS THAT NO RADIATION SICKNESS WAS DIAGNOSED IN CONTAMINATED AREAS, AMOUNTED TO A CONSPIRACY.

"THE EXPLOSION IMMEDIATELY MADE VERY MANY PEOPLE AT MANY LEVELS GUILTY, SAID ADAMOVICH, A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT. "THE REFLEX OF UNDERESTIMATING THE SCOPE OF THE DISASTER WORKED IN ALL OF THEM BECAUSE, IF THE SCOPE IS GREATER, THEIR GUILT IS GREATER."

A UKRAINIAN LAWMAKER SAID DOCTORS JOINED THE COVERUP, REFUSING TO REGISTER ILLNESSES AND DEATHS AS CHERNOBYL-RELATED AND BLAMING "RADIOPHOBIA" INSTEAD.

"THEY LIED," SAID YURI N. SCHERBAK, CHAIRMAN OF A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON CHERNOBYL. "THEY SAID THERE WOULD BE NO EFFECTS. THEY SAID ALL IS GOOD, ALL IS PERFECT; AND NOW WE ARE BEGINNING GRADUALLY, AND PROBABLY NOT FULLY YET, TO LEARN THE TRUTH, THAT NOT EVERYTHING IS SO GOOD."

MEDICAL REPORTS SHOW LEUKEMIA, THYROID GLAND MALFUNCTIONS, CANCER AND ANEMIA ARE SPREADING, ESPECIALLY AMONG CHILDREN.

NO NATIONWIDE FIGURES WERE AVAILABLE, BUT AN UNRELEASED REPORT OBTAINED BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS SHOWS WORSENING HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG CHILDREN IN THE VETKA REGION.

IN 1986, THERE WERE FIVE CASES OF APLASTIC ANEMIA, MARKED BY LOW COUNTS OF PLATELETS NEEDED FOR CLOTTING AND OF WHITE BLOOD CELLS TO FIGHT INFECTION. BY LAST YEAR, THE NUMBER WAS 114.

CASES OF IRON-DEFICIENCY ANEMIA ROSE IN THE SAME PERIOD FROM 134 TO 341 AND CASES OF SWOLLEN THYROID GLANDS DOUBLED, FROM 763 IN 1986 TO 1,508 IN 1989.

DEBATE HAS BEGUN OVER WHAT RADIATION LEVEL IS SAFE. THE GOVERNMENT CONTENDS A PERSON CAN BE EXPOSED SAFELY TO 35 REMS OVER HIS LIFE, BUT SPECIALISTS TESTIFIED BEFORE SCHERBAK'S COMMITTEE THAT THE STANDARD DOES NOT ACCOUNT FOR LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SMALL RADIATION DOSES.

VIRTUALLY ALL U.S. NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS LIMIT EXPOSURE TO 5 REMS A YEAR, ACCORDING TO THE U.S. COUNCIL FOR ENERGY AWARENESS, AN INDUSTRY GROUP.

ASIDE FROM HUMAN COSTS, CHERNOBYL IS TAKING A HUGE TOLL ON THE SOVIET BUDGET. (PTO)

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USSR - (1) - WASTE, COVERUP, HEALTH PROBLEMS...

NEW CHERNOBYL CLEANUP ESTIMATES ARE 30 TIMES THE ORIGINAL FIGURE OF 8 BILLION RUBLES (13 BILLION DOLLARS AT THE OFFICIAL RATE OF EXCHANGE). SCHERBAK SAID SURVEYS BY THE THREE REPUBLICS AFFECTED INDICATE THE COST COULD REACH 250 BILLION RUBLES (405 BILLION DOLLARS) IN THE NEXT DECADE.

IN VETKA, A NEW COMMUNICATIONS CENTER AND THREE APARTMENT HOUSES ARE BEING BUILT. FOR WHOM?

"I ASKED A PARTY SECRETARY ONCE, AND HE SAID WE MUST THINK ABOUT FUTURE GENERATIONS. BUT BASICALLY, IT'S MISMANAGEMENT, AN INABILITY TO PLAN," SAID VETKA COUNCILMAN OLEG S. GROMYKO.

CORRUPTION ALSO TAKES A TOLL. THE SOVIET PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE HAS REPORTED "CRIMINAL DISREGARD FOR THE RULES OF RADIATION SAFETY, DISTORTIONS IN REPORTED DATA ON MEDICAL AID, EMBEZZLEMENTS, AS WELL AS VIOLATIONS OF THE RULES OF PAYING COMPENSATION."

PRESS REPORTS SAID SOME OFFICIALS USED CHERNOBYL CLEANUP MONEY FOR A SEA CRUISE.

IZVESTIA, THE GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER, REPORTED IN OCTOBER THAT CONTAMINATED MEAT WAS MIXED WITH "CLEAN" MEAT AT A PACKING PLANT AND MADE INTO SAUSAGE. EC/