

repair plant or somewhere even further. Given the current circumstances, none of the leaders of the protest has been able to put forward other acceptable, well-founded alternatives for the fate of the temporary storage site. Even the chief, and most importantly, expert opponent V. Perovskii staged categorically after the analysis had been completed: "...to refuse today too build the storage site at the 'Atomflot' RTE would be suicide. The existing technology for charge replacement on nuclear powered ships of the Murmansk Maritime Steamship Line is sufficiently safe and is not having an environmental impact."

In reading the materials of the expert review and the minutes of the commission's working sessions, one thought stayed with me: "If the raion people's deputies were so worried, wouldn't it have been a good idea for them to have visited 'Atomflot' at least once and seen with their own eyes the subject of the dispute? Then they would have understood at the same time what the consequences of a hasty decision might be." After all, the ban will merely bring new worries and problems for both the city and the economy of the oblast, and of the country.

Here is the chain of events that would be unleashed. If the shore storage site is not approved by 1993, the storage capacity of service ships will have been exhausted. And this means that all of the navigational measures taken to enhance the safety of radioactive waste storage on the water, as prescribed by the Ministry of the Maritime Fleet, will cease to meet the actual degree of risk. Today the "Lepse", its radioactive waste storage capacity exhausted, has been secured beyond Cape Pinagorii to guard against an accidental collision with passing ships. Currently active storage ships, which by 1993 will be full, cannot be hidden away in the same way. What's more, all nuclear powered ships will have to be left at their moorings. It will be simply impossible to recharge their reactors since there will be no place to put the spent fuel. The nuclear fleet will come to a halt, and the icy Northern Sea Route will be virtually dead. How the residents of the country's Arctic fringe will survive without the cargo that travels this route, God only knows. And the risk of accidents among the ships laden with nuclear wastes and riding the unstable waves of the gulf will not be eliminated but will increase, and our northern economy will be fundamentally undermined.

If the deputies were to visit the base they would discover something else as well. The "Atomflot" RTE already has an onshore storage site for radioactive wastes: solid wastes, such as discarded equipment from reactors and nuclear installations, resin residues, ... But to call this a storage site is only half the story. It is a very complex and advanced facility at which the shield housing of a nuclear reactor can be replaced. Here, in a special furnace that is the workers' pride and the very latest word in advanced technology, the wastes that are the most difficult to recycle are converted to ash and sealed in containers.