

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Distant Chukotka Experiences Problems Of Soviet Reforms

Several years ago, I came across a curious article in the magazine called Morskoi Flot, which gave a break-down by nationality of the Soviet merchant navy. At the bottom of the list came the Chukchi, of which only one had decided to become a sailor.

Unfortunately, I did not come across him during my trip to Chukotka. If I had, I would have liked to ask him why it is that the Chukchi, Eskimos and other peoples of the Soviet North, with their excellent knowledge of the polar sea, long renewed as courageous hunters of walrus, whales and seals, have not chosen to enter this service. Surely their skills and their knowledge would have been just the thing for negotiating convoys of vessels through the Arctic routes.

I did manage to find a partial answer to this question by seeing life in modern Chukotka at close quarters. I was able to talk with the first secretary of the Chukotka district Party, Nikolai I. Kashtykin, about the problems of this autonomous district. They are many. However, almost all of them arise from economic problems. Let's take, said Mr. Kashtykin, a problem like the fall in the number of reindeer. One of the reasons is that there are no youngsters taking over from the old reindeer herdsman. Family links have been more or less severed. The family contract is not being introduced because there are no families left which preserve this centuries-old way of life.