

First of all I had to find out what had actually happened. No matter how hard I tried I wasn't able to get a straight answer to this question. The first secretary of the regional Party committee, P. Kovalev, said one thing, the chairman of the regional executive committee said another. The chairman of the settlement council I. Struchkov (who, incidentally, was the most active person in the hours immediately following the accident and who took it upon himself to lead the work) told me something else again. No one even knew exactly what the force of the wind or the air temperature had been on that awful day. For some reason or other this information turned out to have been classified as a secret. After many tribulations I succeeded in getting the information from the local weather station. However, I got no further in my investigations.

The chairman of the regional executive committee himself remained ensconced in the cold building of his department, stubbornly refusing to move to the warm building of the regional Party committee. Evidently the enmity between Popov and Kovalev, which was openly talked about in the settlement, had something to do with this stubbornness. The main burden for coordinating the operations of the repair brigades had been taken on by the general director of the "Yakutzhilkomkhoz" Association, A. Popov, who had flown in from Yakutsk. But he too was often bound by the "collective" method of management, which the local authorities used to avoid any personal responsibility for the decisions which had to be made.

The staff met every day, but between meetings not even the most insignificant decision was taken. Materials and equipment which had been delivered to the airport sat there for three full