

SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES

Softening The Blows Of The Elements

At the beginning of January the settlement of Chokurdakh on the Indigirka river was faced with a misfortune. Gusts of wind knocked out the electric power transmission lines, the diesel electric power station stopped functioning, the pumps died and homes and other buildings stopped receiving heat. By evening about half the buildings in the settlement were frozen out, including the school, the kindergartens and shops. About fifteen hundred people were billeted in the remaining buildings. The pupils from the boarding school were billeted with families.

I happened to have taken part in the team which dealt with the accident at the Chernobyl' nuclear power plant and, evidently for this reason, it was suggested that I fly to Chokurdakh to deal with the situation which had developed there and to find out what could be done to help. I have to say that the whole of the Autonomous Republic was responding to the plight of the people of Chokurdakh. At Yakutsk they organized a central office to help the victims and airplanes began to fly in everything that was necessary for coping with the consequences of the accident. Brigades of volunteers - sanitary engineers and electricians - began arriving from the neighbouring regions.

What did I find when I flew into Chokurdah? Muddling around and confused local leaders who, in the face of danger, showed clearly that they were not competent to lead people.