

The Atomic Spectre of Novaya Zemlya. In October 1989 Dudinka and Norilsk were suddenly swamped with rumours that radioactive potatoes were being unloaded from the motor vessel "Yurii Arshenevskii", which was currently docked in Dudinka. The reason for this was said to be that the ship has passed close to Novaya Zemlya while nuclear tests were being conducted there and had received a heavy dose of radiation. Local newspaper people and personnel from the okrug sanitation and epidemiological station conducted a joint check: dosimeters showed a normal radioactive level.

But as it turned out, the rumours were not unfounded. The "Yurii Arshenevskii" had indeed encountered radioactive fallout following a nuclear blast on the Novaya Zemlya nuclear testing range, but this had happened a year earlier. Still, these explosions are continuing and it cannot be excluded that radioactive contamination could be "delivered" by ships, planes or helicopters to Dudinka, Norilsk, Dikson and to towns of the Taimyr.

Novaya Zemlya was converted into a nuclear test range in 1954. The archipelago's aboriginal inhabitants - the Nentsy - were not consulted. It is true, of course, that the famous Nenets Tyko Vylka, "President of Novaya Zemlya", signed a paper giving approval in the name of the town soviet, but everyone understands how these things were done in those days. The nuclear testing range occupies 90,200 square kilometres, of which 55,000 are on land (the entire archipelago occupies an area of 83,000 square kilometres). More than a hundred tests have been conducted there.

Now, as a result of sharp public protests it is being proposed that some of the nuclear explosions be transferred from the Semipalatinsk test site to Novaya Zemlya. The Ministry of Defence is seeking to calm the protesting inhabitants of the Nentsy Autonomous Okrug and adjoining arctic regions with assurances about the safety of the Novaya Zemlya range and with promises about additional measures to protect the public. In response there has sprung up the broad-based popular movement "For a Nuclear Free North", and in Archangel the committee "Novaya Zemlya - Nevada" has been created. Protest meetings have been held in Archangel, Salekhard, Naryan-Mar, Dudinka, Norilsk and other populated centres.