

Security and the Environment: The Fallout From Chernobyl.

To use the words of Olzhas Suleimenov, the founder of the anti-nuclear group "Nevada" and a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the meltdown of the reactor at Chernobyl was "the greatest nuclear disaster of the twentieth century." It affected 17 percent of the land area of the large Soviet Republic of Byelorussia, where it is estimated that 2 million people should still be evacuated. We were told that to date some 650,000 people, including 250,000 children, have suffered health effects; many have died, often of apparently normal illnesses like pneumonia; 20,000 children have been sent to health centers outside the region. An area stretching out 30 kilometres from the reactor has been fenced off, but the authorities continue to find new zones of Strontium 90 contamination much further out than that. When they do, they are obliged to evacuate people living in those areas.

As a result of the disaster, Moscow has been persuaded to postpone or delay plans for some new nuclear plants and to decommission several existing plants, although we were told that the number of nuclear plants in the Soviet Union continues to grow. According to Vitold Fokin, Chairman of the Ukraine State Planning Commission, the reduced growth rate for nuclear power has had the effect of eliminating energy reserves in the Ukraine. But the fallout from Chernobyl has also been psychological and political. According to Mr. Suleimenov, many people in the Soviet Union have developed nuclear phobia. "The nuclear option is still alive but Chernobyl shows that one accident can overwhelm all the advantages of nuclear".

The disaster has also had the effect of deepening and intensifying public alienation and suspicion of the communist authorities who withheld vital information from the people. We were told that to this day, there has not been a full disclosure of the health effects of Chernobyl, a situation that had prompted the scheduling of a special session of the Supreme Soviet to investigate and debate the issues. It has powerfully fuelled demands for the transfer of governmental powers to local authorities, who are thought to be more accountable and sensitive to the needs of the people, or can be made so in a decentralized and democratic Soviet Union.

Canada-USSR Cooperation. The Soviet Union and several of its republics, including Byelorussia and the Ukraine, continue to grapple with the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, including the massive health effects and economic and social dislocation. At the same time, we found that Soviet authorities are far more prepared than they once were to openly acknowledge the problems. In these circumstances, **the Committee recommends that the Government inquire of Soviet authorities whether they would welcome Canadian cooperation in dealing with any of the remaining problems associated with**