

Chernobyl Sufferers in Ukraine and Their Social Problems: Short Outline

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. Change of nationhood and political system in Ukraine after the accident.

At the moment of the Chernobyl NPP catastrophe Ukraine was one of 15 republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, or Soviet Union). Ukraine was the second biggest republic (population 51 million) after Russia (population 144 million in 1986). Soviet Union was a strongly centralised state with one and very powerful ruling Communist Party (CPSU), which dominated in all structures - governments, local authorities, army, businesses, culture, society as a whole.

Formally republics were self-governed, but in reality all important decisions were taken in Moscow by the Central Committee of CPSU and the so called Union Government. All management system was known as "command and control". The backbone of vertical authority was the Communist Party committees of all levels - Central, Republic, Oblast, district. There were also party committees at enterprises, organisations, villages and city quarters, which controlled implementation of decisions of higher levels. All resources, including financial - for industries, housing, food etc. - were distributed by central government in Moscow. Local governments and industries were lobbying interests of their regions and enterprises in Moscow.

Actually the only one way of influencing the state (and at that time everything was state!) policy was raising an issue at the meeting of a low-level party committee. Of course, only ideas supported by high level party authorities had some chances to be implemented.

In 1985 a new and dynamic leader of CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev launched "perestroika" - reconstruction of the whole system. This had led to a substantial weakening of the authority of Communist Party. One important feature of perestroika was "glasnost" - opportunity to publicly express one's opinion, reveal information etc. This opportunity was used to disclose facts and consequences of Chernobyl disaster, and eventually to make this problem an issue of a public policy. Glasnost was used by active political forces in republics, first of all Baltic republics, to begin a struggle for independence. Similar movements began also in Ukraine, Belarus and other republics. Very often "green" slogans (protests against nuclear power plants, polluting industries) were first in programs of these movements.

Such slogans were patriotic, but politically neutral and thus safer than direct appeals to independence. Major political forces were using issues like consequences of Chernobyl disaster, secrecy around this problem, absence of real consultations with sufferers to prove the necessity of real changes of the state system.

Soviet Union was facing extremely severe economic problems in 80-s, caused by the lasting Afghanistan war, huge expenses for armament race and dramatic 1985 drop in world crude oil prices - one of the main export commodities and the source of hard currency income.

Chernobyl disaster, mitigation of impacts of which required huge material and labour investments played an important role in developing economic crisis. Victims of radiation increased the number of suffering people which needed urgent help - like invalids of Afghanistan war, like victims of military conflicts in Azerbaijan, refugees from Georgia, sufferers of Spitak earthquake in Armenia, population in the area of Aral sea.

In August 1991, after the unsuccessful attempt of a coup-d'etat in Moscow, Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) proclaimed the Act of Sovereignty of Ukraine. The communist party lost its role and in less than a year the USSR has disintegrated. Ukraine had become an independent state with full responsibility for all positive and negative issues, including the legacy of Chernobyl catastrophe.

First and subsequent governments of independent Ukraine faced enormous problems with liquidation of Chernobyl consequences. These problems were exacerbated by enormous inflation during 1992-1995 and general breakdown of national economy due to various reasons. Rapidly decreasing quality of life of all population did not allow for proper measures to protect those who suffered from Chernobyl. It is hard to judge whether there existed adequate political will and capacities to sort out the problems and properly solve them.

1.2. Sufferers from Chernobyl catastrophe

a) liquidation of the consequences of disaster: "liquidators"

The first statement about Chernobyl catastrophe from the USSR Council of Ministers said "An accident has taken place at the Chernobyl power station, and one of the reactors was damaged. Measures are being taken to eliminate the consequences of the accident".

Those who “were taking measures” are the first big category of sufferers - “liquidators”.

The first who immediately was affected by reactor # 4 explosion was personnel of Chernobyl NPP and fire brigades - many of these people died, and hundreds lost their health. Urgent measures to prevent further aggravation of disaster involved thousands of other specialists and workers. For example, to cool and strengthen the basement of reactor building a tunnel under the damaged reactor was dug by miners from Donetsk oblast - hundreds of them are suffering now from different diseases. To dampen the fire and contain the radioactivity, 5 thousand tons of lead, boron and sand had been dropped from helicopters in the heart of the burning reactor this meant irradiation among pilots and others who participated in this operation.

During May-November 1986 a giant construction of sarcophagus was erected. To build it out of more than 400,000 cubic meters of concrete, 7,000 tons of steel tens of thousands of construction workers, engineers, drivers were drafted to work just near the debris of unit 4, where radiation levels were very high.

The deadly decision to start again reactor # 3, situated on the same basement with # 4 and sharing a lot of vital communications, had led to over-irradiation of thousands of workers who constructed necessary walls and rearranged thousands of pipelines and electric circuits.

Of course, all these men working at the reactor 4 and around needed food, housing, transportation etc. Army and militia (police) regiments were guarding the fenced out 30-km exclusion zone. Most of them had only basic understanding of what's happening and often their doses were very high.

During the years after the accident buildings, roads, machines and equipment needed permanent desactivation - and again this involved hundreds of drivers, dosimetrists, washers. In the course of desactivation houses in tens of villages were demolished and buried, and all the so called “red forest” (hundreds of hectares) adjacent to the power plant, was cut and buried in specially dug huge ditches.

People needed food and basic services, so logistical problems were solved on the highest level - in Moscow, with involved tens of thousands people lived at a time in the city of Chernobyl 30 km from nuclear power plant. The biggest canteen in Chernobyl, organised in a huge ward constructed for cars technical service could house more than 1000 men at a time.

First years after the accident “command and control system” was still strong, and the country (USSR) worked more or less as an army. Workers for the giant construction were recruited in all 15 republics, many of them were volunteers (levels of financial compensation for possible health problems were quite high). Those who did not want to come on their own were recruited to the Soviet Army and in the 30-km

zone they were doing what was needed - but being dressed in military uniform.

As it is clear from above mentioned, people were draft from all parts of Soviet empire - and eventually dispersed on its wide spreads. No one knows exact figures - how many “liquidators” worked in Chernobyl. Some estimates give numbers around 600,000. According to the recent data, in Ukraine live about 180,000 liquidators. And, of course, much less is known about liquidators' radiation doses.

b) population

The second huge category of the sufferers is population - we will speak of Ukraine. First of all, these were people of nearby cities and villages. Immediate victims became those who had rest or work out of houses. Some of them contracted even acute radiation diseases, radiation burns - and all received enormous doses of iodine on thyroid glands. But this was only the beginning - they lost their houses, property, jobs, their native land, after all.

The 50,000 population of the city of Pripjat was evacuated two days after the accident, and in later months and years still more people were forced to leave their homes. People were resettled to newly constructed villages, many found shelter with their relatives and friend all over Ukraine. They lived as refugees, very often in unfriendly surrounding - some illiterate men looked at evacuated as lepers.

Evacuation from contaminated areas continued for many years. Plan of Ukrainian Council of Ministers for 1990-1991 previewed evacuation of 45,000 people from contaminated zones. On contaminated territories of Ukraine in 1990 lived about 1,5 million people. All of them were suffering from Chernobyl.

People in contaminated areas were not allowed to eat wild berries and mushrooms (and this is the territory where traditionally “gifts of woods” are very important part of diet), they were not allowed to use milk of their cows and goats, and the traditional economy of collective-farms producing milk, meat, potato, linen collapsed.

It is hard to say whether evacuated people were in a better situation than those living in contaminated areas (except some limited number of NPP personnel and other privileged categories, who received comfortable apartments in Kyiv and other big cities). The quality of new settlements, built for the evacuated under a big time pressure was often very low, and many people were moving back to their houses in evacuation zone, including the 30-km zone around Chernobyl NPP.

There were direct and obvious sufferings like loss of houses, forced abortions or diseases caused by thyroid irradiation. But there were also hidden losses, like stress, change of life style, uncertainty etc. And, of course, families of Chernobyl “liquidators” suffered a lot.

1.3. Role of media and public politics in disclosing the real situation of people living in contaminated areas and liquidators

The information approach of the Soviet Government towards Chernobyl accident was formulated in a simple order of 27 June 1986: "To consider as secrets: data about the accident; data about results of treatment of sufferers; data on irradiation of personnel involved in liquidation of the consequences of disaster". Numerous cases of diseases among liquidators and population of contaminated areas were called "radiophobia".

It was perestroika and glasnost which eventually led to the disclosure of the truth about the accident. As was already mentioned, democratic movements emerged in many republics of the USSR, and many of them were coloured in green. In Ukraine, the first unofficially (not by the order from the party committee) big rally in Kyiv was organised by Ukrainian Environmental Association "Green world" in November, 1988. At this gathering participants accused official medicine in hiding up the number of Chernobyl victims, the dangers of living in contaminated areas, in lack of care for liquidators and evacuated people.

One of the biggest information successes was documentary filmed by Georgi Shklyarevsky ("Mi-cro-phone!"), which revealed the truth about radiation levels in Narodichi district of Zhytomyr oblast. This documentary was followed by films and articles of other journalists. Some films had been shelved by authorities, like "Threshold".

Very important role in disclosing the truth about liquidators' sufferings played documentaries by Rollan Sergiyenko ("Threshold", "Bells of Chernobyl" and others). In the West, several documentaries about Chernobyl disaster in general, about ill children, abandoned villages and people living in "forbidden 30-km zone" had been shot by different companies and TV programs. They had raise awareness of Western people and initiated the movement to help Chernobyl victims.

In fall 1988 - winter 1989 an election campaign of the first almost free elections of people deputies of the USSR began (role of People Deputies was to some extent similar to the role of Members of Parliament in Western democracies). Many candidates included requests connected with Chernobyl disaster in their programs. For example, Alla Yaroshynska from Zhytomyr oblast wrote in her program: "It is necessary to publish data on the consequences of radioactive contamination in Narodichi district, which are thoroughly hidden from the people. There are many villages with extremely high levels of radiation. On radioactively contaminated areas new construction has been organised, and more than 50 million roubles had been already invested. It is necessary to investigate the usefulness of this construction".

Real fight against secrecy and for the benefit of sufferers of Chernobyl disaster was launched at the first Congress of People Deputies of the USSR, which took place from 25 May till 10 June in Moscow. People deputies from Ukraine - Volodymyr Yavorivsky, Yuri Shcherbak, Borys Oliynyk, Alla Yaroshynska - raised their voice to help victims of Chernobyl. Right before the Congress, on 24 May 1989, the USSR Government took decision to unclassify information about Chernobyl disaster. Unfortunately, it was easier to reveal the truth than to really help victims.

Another information blockade fell in 1989, when the documentary "Mi-cro-phone!" had been shown in the West. Later that year Volodymyr Yavorivsky openly spoke about the consequences of Chernobyl in the USA, Yuri Shcherbak was invited to the hearing in the Swiss Parliament (Switzerland was preparing vote on the future of Swiss nuclear industry), Alla Yaroshynska participated in a big antinuclear conference in France.

It was now clear that a lot should be done to solve the problems of Chernobyl. But it was also 100 % clear that the public purse of the Soviet Union Central Government is empty, and Ukraine was to elaborate its own Chernobyl policy. This was the task for the new Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine, which was elected in 1990.

Hundreds of candidates to Ukrainian Parliament included Chernobyl problems in their programs. The issue of Chernobyl sufferers became the question of a real politics. Basic laws on Chernobyl were adopted and money were needed to implement them.

Scarce budget resources were needed here and there, economic crisis in Ukraine became graver, but the decision was taken to impose a sort of a special Chernobyl tax and to spend it on the needs of liquidation of the consequences and mitigation negative impacts. Here we set aside the question of how effectively were this money spent.

2. STATE ACTIVITIES TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF SUFFERERS OF CHERNOBYL CATASTROPHE

As it was described in part 1.1, by the "State" we mean the Soviet Union and its part Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1986 -1991, and an independent state Ukraine after December 1991. We will discuss efforts and successes of both legislative and executive branches of power, often calling both "Government", although interrelations among them were not clear and obvious.

Of course the state (government) - taxpayers, as we would say now - carried the main burden of helping sufferers from Chernobyl. Public activity was essential to disclose the consequences and to attract attention of the state to this or that important issues. Public also played the main role in "independent",

non-governmental assistance, and this is the topic of chapter 3 of this report.

2.1. Soviet “command and control” period. Immediate measures and attempts to formulate a balanced policy

The state was badly prepared to a disaster of such scale as Chernobyl and most of necessary decisions were drafted and taken immediately when they were needed. Fortunately in the initial period there were material and financial resources available and a mechanism of direction was in place - an “undivided union” of the party, the state, the army. This mechanism was not perfect, and its quality was quickly deteriorating, undermined as well by Chernobyl itself.

Obviously Chernobyl disaster was not a case for a public policy, and it would not be such case in any other political system, at least during the initial period. The Soviet people were silent, they did not have vote. They received such vote only at the First Congress of the People Deputies of the USSR in 1989.

Executive power of the USSR - Council of Ministers and numerous ministries - behaved practically independently from the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) until 1989. First period was marked by attempts to hide and to diminish the consequences, and many efforts were needed to alter this approach (see pp.1.3 and 3.1 of this paper).

First decisions on compensations for those working at Chernobyl NPP and around, as well as for those evacuated, had been taken by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the USSR 7 May 1986. Workers received higher rates, those relocated from the zone of disaster - insurance compensations for their houses and one-time gratuities up to 4,000 rubbles per person. It should be noted that insurance premiums were several times lower than the real cost of abandoned households.

Of course, no compensation was received by women who underwent abortions during evacuation and first weeks after the accident. We could not find the number of such women or reliable information on whether and according to which criteria abortions were recommended (or not recommended) to pregnant women. This information is missing, although in the first period after the accident 2,000 medical teams examined 135,000 evacuated from the 30-km zone, “paying special attention to children and pregnant women” /1, p.540/. Could they turn the time back and annihilate huge doses accumulated by future mothers and foetus? Could they eliminate, reduce or compensate future impacts of these doses?

The question of desirability or necessity of abortions was also widely discussed in all area around Chernobyl, including Kyiv.

By mid-August 1986 some 90,784 persons were evacuated from Ukrainian area around Chernobyl. According to the ordinances of the Council of Ministers of Ukraine more than 11,000 one-family

houses had been built for people evacuated from rural areas. People from cities Pripjat (50,000) and Chernobyl (12,000) received apartments in Kyiv, Chernigiv and other cities of Ukraine and other Soviet republics. Many of them moved in October 1988 to the city of Slavutich, built for the personnel of re-started Chernobyl NPP.

As always, a lot of abuses were happening with distribution of apartments, benefits, compensations. To solve their problems, people wrote letters to prosecutors offices, local and central party committees, Councils of Ministers. Pushing these letters through “corridors of power” were people deputies of all levels, journalists, some public organisations.

Evacuated people faced many problems. Often the quality of new-built houses was bad, they were cold and wet. Nature conditions in areas of resettlement were different from those of Chernobyl area - steppes instead of woods. People were complaining, some had moved back to their abandoned villages. In autumn 1988 more than 1000 people lived in the 30-km zone - as a rule, older people, pensioners. Some assistance for them was provided by the administration of the 30-km zone and, from time to time, they received shipments of humanitarian aid.

Even in the privileged city Slavutich, built by joint efforts of 8 Soviet republics, people were suffering from lack of medical care, poor food supply, uncertainty. The council of Slavutich public organisation “Pripjat society” which consolidated more than 2,000 former inhabitants of the city of Pripjat, had written numerous appeals, asking vital questions: “Who will calculate our real doses? Who will organise medical treatment and rest for our children - many of them are ill? When will we receive compensations for the damage to our health? The city of Slavutich is located in radioactively contaminated area, will we have respective privileges?” /2, p.105/

Similar issues were raised by the people in many other areas, like Narodichi, Ovruch, Polisske and others. They pointed out that levels of contamination were too high for safe living - why then to invest? “In our district - 25,000 people. In the district 67 million rubbles has been spent for new construction. 37 millions planned for this year. Easy calculations show that these sums would allow construction of 90 five-storey apartment houses, and all rayon would have homes. Where then this money is invested, when the decision is to be made on evacuating people from this land? Who benefits from this wasted millions?.. Why should someone supply us “clean” food when we could harvest them ourselves on “clean” lands?” /2, p.147/

Still there are no answers to these questions. Polisske, many villages in Narodichi and other districts are abandoned now, in 1997 - after all desactivations and construction...

Many people in contaminated areas (especially those with children) requested evacuation. Many others preferred to live where they lived but insisted on improving infrastructure (gas and water pipelines, paved roads, medical services) and financial compensations. Government was manoeuvring between these two options - both needed huge money, and after 2 years of central (USSR) funding the burden was shifting to Ukrainian budget.

The choice between evacuation and compensations was extremely controversial. Moreover, scientific and legal backgrounds for decisions were missing. As it was put in March, 1989 by TASS news agency: "The Ukraine Health Ministry has recommended the evacuation of five villages in the affected area, even though the ministry insisted that there hasn't been an increase in radiation-related "congenital anomalies" or tumour or blood diseases"/3/.

By the end of 1989 a low effectiveness of desactivation efforts became obvious and the Council of Ministers of Ukraine issued an ordinance allowing people with children under 14 to leave contaminated villages. Actually this decision was providing for some compensation for households which was left by people in contaminated areas. Calculations performed in the end of 80-th had proven that per capita costs of compensations and rehabilitation measures for people who live in contaminated areas are more than 2 times higher than the costs for evacuation.

In 1990 - 1992 several ordinances were endorsed by the Council of Ministers of Ukraine regarding obligatory evacuation, voluntary evacuation and compensations for those who live on contaminated areas. In 1990-1991 there were 13 658 obligatory evacuated persons and 58,700 "voluntary" resettles /1, p.88/.

By 1995 in 57 Ukrainian villages and settlements around Chernobyl lived less than one half of pre-disaster population (we do not mean those settlements which were evacuated).

Liquidators were also badly suffering from poor medical treatment, low pensions and low compensations for their lost health. Many of them were invalids but could not receive official proof that their diseases had been caused by irradiation during their work in the 30-km zone. In specialised wards and clinics for liquidators hunger strikes took place.

In March 1990, the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the All Union Central Council of Trade Unions adopted a special provision which defined the status of "liquidator", demanded regular medical examination of such people and determined some privileges to liquidators. This provision had been put into effect from 1 June, 1990 when the first certificates to liquidators had been issued.

Nevertheless, it was obvious that "soviet justice" did not work any more and real laws and mechanisms for their implementation are needed.

During September-October 1989 Councils of Ministers of Ukrainian SSR, Bielorrussian SSR and Russian Federation developed the complex perspective plans of liquidation of consequences of Chernobyl disaster, and the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) of the USSR approved respective State Union-Republican Program. In line with this work, on the 28 of February 1991 Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine passed a law "On the status and social protection of citizens who had suffered due to Chernobyl catastrophe". The Parliament also approved the "Concept of safe living on the territories of Ukrainian SSR with high levels of radioactive contamination due to Chernobyl catastrophe".

In the same time the Parliament adopted decision on the source of funding for implementation of these laws. Enterprises were obliged to pay to a special Fund of Liquidation of the consequences of catastrophe 19 % (later 12 %) of sums of their wages-funds.

2.2. The Law of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (the law of Ukraine) of 28.02.91 and its implementation

The Law had been passed by the Parliament of Ukrainian SSR 28 February 1991. It was drafted under a serious pressure from "Chernobyl" lobby - people deputies and organisations who represented liquidators and those living in contaminated areas. Later the Law underwent some serious amendments in 1992, 1993 and 1996, mainly because an application of the law revealed some economic miscounts.

"The Law is directed at protection of citizens who have suffered in consequence of Chernobyl catastrophe, and at solving connected with it problems of medical and social character which have appeared because of radioactive contamination of the territory.

The state policy in the area of social protection of sufferers from Chernobyl catastrophe... is based on the principles:

- priority of life and health of people, who have suffered from Chernobyl catastrophe, full responsibility of the state for creating safe and non-harmful conditions of work;

...

- social protection of people, full compensation of detriment to people who have suffered in the consequence of Chernobyl catastrophe;

- use of economic methods of improving quality of life by employing policy of preferential taxation of citizens who have suffered from Chernobyl catastrophe and their unions..." (Article 1. *Here and onwards the law is quoted in unofficial translation of the author of this paper*).

According to the Article 70, added in 1996, citizens received the right to protect in the court their interests and rights guaranteed by this Law.

a) The Law explicitly distinguishes two groups - those who worked on liquidation (liquidators), and

citizens (including children) who lived or lives in affected areas (suffers). Children also constitute a separate group with a separate system of privileges and compensations (Chapter V of the Law).

There are four categories of persons who have suffered from Chernobyl. These categories are defined according to the level of damage for their health (manifested and potential) during their work or because they have lived in contaminated areas. Liquidators have categories from 1 to 3, sufferers have categories from 1 to 4. Depending on their category people receive “general compensations and privileges” (Chapter IV. Social protection of the citizens... General compensations and privileges).

Disabled (both liquidators and sufferers) who had lost their health as a result of Chernobyl catastrophe constitute the category # 1. To receive this category a person must have a decision (based on medical examinations, records etc.) of a special certified medical commission which “ascertains a causal nexus of disease or disability and Chernobyl catastrophe”. These commissions work in oblast centres.

Whether liquidator (not disabled) receives a category # 2 or # 3 depends on the period and duration of his/her work on liquidation. The fact of his work has to be proven by respective records at the enterprise which issued his/her assignment. For example, to receive category # 2 one should have worked “any number of days in a period from 26 April until 1 July 1996, or more than 5 days in a period from 1 July until 31 December 1996, or more than 14 days in 1997” (Article 14). Another time scale is used for category #3.

Of course, not all records at the enterprises were kept in proper order, and this had led to a numerous cases when people could not receive respective category. Even more frequent were abuses and false documents. Lyubov Kovalevskaya reported /4, p.307/ that of 14 scrutinised 2-nd category “liquidators” from high-level trade-union office only one half proof their category. In 1996 the state launched campaign of verification of liquidators’ and sufferers’ documents.

b) Definition of categories of “sufferers” is based on the level of radioactive contamination of soil in accordance with the Article 2 of the Law: “Categories of zones of radioactively contaminated territories”. There are four zones.

The worst zone # 1 is an “alienation zone” - territory from which people were evacuated in 1986. “Zone of unconditional (obligatory) resettlement” (#2), “zone of guaranteed voluntary resettlement” (# 3), “zone of intensified radiological control” (# 4) are defined according to the levels of contamination. For example, territory is defined as a zone # 4 if it is contaminated by caesium isotopes with density 1.0 to 5.0 Ci/sq.km, or strontium 0.02 to 0.15 Ci/sq.km or plutonium 0.005 to 0.01 Ci/sq.km. There are some

additional criteria stipulated by the National commission of radiation protection.

Actual category assigned to each sufferer depends on the zone where he/she lived, and the period and duration of living in this zone. e.g., if “a person permanently lived at the territory of unconditional (obligatory) resettlement on the date of disaster, or by the 1 January 1993 lived not less than two years in the zone of unconditional (obligatory) resettlement...” this person belongs to category # 3.

Actually for categories # 2 , # 3 and # 4 the Law does not distinguish the harm which has been already manifested (in the form of some diseases, or more frequent illnesses, or psychic misfunctions) and potential harm which has not yet developed in some visible form.

Dynamic of numbers of sufferers is impressing, partly because of changes in legislation directed at better social protection of sufferers and partly because of natality. During 1986-1995 the number of people which have the status of sufferer according to Ukrainian laws increased from 540,000 to 940,000 in 1990 and 3,200,000 in 1995 (of them 997,000 children) /1, p.129/.

There are seven grounds why a child can be the sufferer from Chernobyl catastrophe: evacuated from alienation zone, those who lived certain number of years in other contaminated zones, were born from parents who were sufferers of 1st, 2nd or 3rd category, those who have thyroid cancer or radiation sickness, those with thyroid doses higher than the level established by the Ministry of Health (Article 27). Medical treatment of children sufferer is defined as priority for all medical programs and is performed by the best medical and recreational facilities.

Children sufferers from Chernobyl catastrophe have privileges and compensations similar to those of adult sufferers. It is hard to say how efficient are all these measures, and how effective is government in providing equal access of all sufferers to the existing opportunities.

c) There are three other special chapters in the Law. Chapter VI defines mainly compensations and assistance for evacuated people for lost of their property. It also prescribes regulations on providing them with new housing.

Chapter VII regulates the work rules and remuneration for those working in contaminated areas.

Chapter VIII is specifically devoted to pensions, pensions due to disability caused by Chernobyl, and compensations to families that had lost providers.

According to the system of social protection, “general compensations and privileges” higher categories of sufferers have more privileges. The main components of this system are: health (medical care); recreation (vacations, sanatorium); material aids like apartments, houses, reduced rates for water and heat and electricity; social benefits - schools, universities;

economic - taxes and custom privileges; lower pension ages and higher pensions; transportation privileges and others.

These are long and complicated lists: 32 points for category #1, and somewhat shorter lists for other categories.

Never the system was accomplishing in full all that has been prescribed by the law. Always there were people waiting apartments or houses, or waiting free bed in a hospital, or disabled people waiting promised cars. According to the published data (we do not speak of real situation) allocated state funds allowed for covering recreation expenses for each second sufferer in 1991, each third in 1992, each eighth in 1995 /1, p.128/.

For example, all categories can get medicines free of charge, but this good provision very often does not work because pharmacies do not have needed medicines in stock.

Some privileges were directly leading to abuses, like tax exempt status for liquidators or permission to import everything free of charge. There were many articles in newspapers telling of liquidators or sufferers who managed to import new cars every second week. There were also enterprises importing lot of goods duty free and then selling them. Of course these enterprises claimed that this money is being used for the "protection of the sufferers of Chernobyl disaster", but it was hard to control their compliance. As a result, taxation and import privileges were soon revoked.

Some privileges were substantial at the time of endorsement of the law, like compensation for recreation or additional annual payments or special payments for "clean" food. Now many of them are negligible and result mainly in extra paper work for accountants, like 2.10 hryvna (\$1.1) monthly extra payment for "clean" food in zone # 3.

The Law bears all signs of the so called "socialist distribution system". At that time (and sometimes now too) the state was the biggest owner and investor in housing, communication systems (telephones), educational and transportation system etc. Easier (in the first place or jumping the queue) access to these services and facilities was a benefit in itself, and this is often mentioned in the law. Indeed this system worked (and was also a huge temptation for abuses). Liquidators could even buy motor boats and vacuum cleaners "out of queue".

Almost at the same time when the Law had been passed the State Committee on Chernobyl was created to manage all related problems (later - the Ministry of Chernobyl). Local authorities with all their infrastructure (social care, medical care etc.) were also extremely tightly involved in these activities. Special "Chernobyl" departments were organised in rayon state administrations and now they carry main responsibility for accounting of sufferers, their needs etc.

d) There are two sorts of compensations: for the damage to health and for lost property. Calculations of compensations for health are based on the minimal monthly salary, which is specified by the Parliament (17 hryvna, or \$9.20 in 1997).

For example, one-time compensation for people who were commissioned as disabled of the 1st group (as a rule, these people cannot work and need assistance in everyday life) is 60 minimal salaries (1,020 hryvna, or \$550). There are also compensations for families, children of disabled parents etc.

Sufferers of all categories have some extra payments to their pensions and lower pension age. The pension age for category # 2 is lowered by 8 years, so men can become pensioners in 52 instead of 60. Pensioners of this category receive monthly an extra payment 30 % of minimal pension.

Compensations for lost property are defined in a special chapter of the law. This was one of the most controversial issue during all period after the catastrophe, because of extremely diverse conditions of living before and after the resettlement, and because of quickly changing and aggravating economic situation in Ukraine.

Another serious issue was construction of housing and respective infrastructure for evacuated people and resettles. With the so high state expenses on this construction (up to 15 % of all state capital investments) abuses with construction materials and funds were very frequent. And, of course, programs of construction were not achieved: in 1992 the program of resettlement was fulfilled on 19 %, and the program of housing construction on 28 % /5, p.668/.

Compensations, privileges and direct expenses on liquidation of the consequences of the catastrophe (e.g. maintenance of the infrastructure of the 30-km zone) have been an incredible burden on Ukrainian economy. The share of these expenses in the budget of Ukraine was 15.7 % in 1992, 10.9 % in 1993, 5.4 % in 1994 and 3.4 % in 1995 /1, p.79/. The biggest part of this money has been spent on compensation. The structure of Chernobyl budget (estimate) looks like the following: compensations 50 %, resettlement 20 %, health care 9 %, "Shelter (Sarcophagus)" and 30-km zone 5 %, Agriculture/Forestry 6 %, other 10 %. As it was mentioned before, these money are collected as obligatory payments to the special "Chernobyl" fund: enterprises pay 12 % of their wage-fund.

Ukrainian Parliament and Cabinet of Ministers have been facing intense pressure from all sectors of society which badly needed financial and other resources: social protection, medical care, education, local authorities of non-Chernobyl areas and so on. Of course the relatively high privileges to Chernobyl sufferers look unfair. Why only those who had suffered from Chernobyl and radiation are receiving so much? Why not the other areas of environmental crisis, like heavily polluted cities of Dniprodzerzhynsk

or Mariupol? Why only Chernobyl children and not those children who are from time to time losing hair to full baldness in many areas of Ukraine, probably because of high non-specific chemical contamination of air, water and food? This acute problem is still far from solution.

As it was already mentioned, some controversial provisions of the law, like tax exempt status of organisations working in contaminated areas, or import laws for “Chernobyl” organisations have been already revoked.

3. PUBLIC MOVEMENT IN UKRAINE AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO HELP PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT

3.1. *International medical and humanitarian aid*

In this chapter we will pay special attention to “informal”, non-governmental help from international community to sufferers of Chernobyl. Few projects of international organisations (IAEA, WHO), very often quite negatively perceived by Ukrainian people, require separate analysis. As a rule the goal of these projects was to offer research assistance to respective Ukrainian institutions and thus these projects were to some extent not directly aimed at sufferers, but at some medical problems.

When Chernobyl nuclear reactor exploded, the Soviet rulers did not yet comprehend the poverty of the state. Ukrainian government, headed at that time by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukrainian Republic Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, refused to accept assistance from foreign countries.

Nonetheless, the policy of openness initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev was gradually dismantling the “iron curtain”. Soviet-American Peace Marches, ecological conferences touched the problems of Chernobyl victims.

Assistance came first from non-governmental organisations and charitable foundations. First it was dosimetric and medical equipment, then medicines, vitamins, food. Concentrated efforts were made to protect children.

The process of development of foreign assistance to Chernobyl victims went hand in hand with the process of democratisation in the USSR. Of course, foreign donors needed domestic Ukrainian organisations to advise what is the best way of assistance and to practically deliver this assistance. From the very beginning the leading role in these contacts belonged to newly emerged NGOs - like “Zeleny svit (Green world)”, “Chernobyl Union”, “Children of Chernobyl”, “Rukh (Movement)”. Founded in 1989, later Rukh had become a political party. Very often the role of mediators was played by well established Soviet “quasi-NGOs” like trade-unions, young communist and pioneer

organisations, Ukrainian Peace Committee and some others.

At the same time, specialised “Chernobyl” funds had been set up in foreign countries. During his visit in the US in October 1989 Volodymyr Yavorivsky implored America’s help in forestalling the tragedy of Chernobyl victims. And Americans shipped humanitarian load of medicines, vitamins, powdered milk to Ukraine. All organisation was done by Chernobyl Fund organised by the family of Ukrainian Americans Matkivsky and their colleagues. This shipment was distributed among the people in contaminated areas by Ukrainian movement for independence and perestrojka - Rukh.

In spring of 1989 liquidators and former workers of Chernobyl NPP founded their own NGO - “Soyuz Chernobyl” (Chernobyl Union). Later this union became an international organisation.

Many other international activities were taking place during 1989-1990. We will briefly describe some as examples - not because they are better or different from others, but because an author was somehow involved in them.

a) A very attractive program of support had been suggested by Prof. Edmund Lengfelder from Munich University. Numerous German organisations and authorities (including universities, cities, lands) supplied dosimetric and diagnostic equipment, medical instruments etc. to Ukrainian and Bielorussian hospitals. This action was planned as trilateral co-operation (Germany, Ukraine, Bielorussia), but later Germans concentrated their efforts on Bielorussia. Results of the action were somewhat disappointing for Germans, as during follow-up visits they often found expensive diagnostic equipment to be not in use.

b) French organisation “Medicins du monde” set up a diagnostic laboratory in Kyiv to investigate Chernobyl children. Organisation worked in close relations with local medical authorities. Unfortunately, organisation provided only limited treatment for ill children who were investigated, this was considered unfair (“you use us as guinea pigs”), and after a year the mission was wrapped up.

c) One of the first international organisations which came to Ukraine was Greenpeace. In 1989 Greenpeace set up Ukrainian office with a clear name - “Greenpeace Children of Chernobyl”. The aim of this office was to set up a hospital for Chernobyl children, equipped by the most sophisticated equipment. Negotiations with Ukrainian medical and Government authorities were very hard, but eventually all necessary approvals were obtained. Unfortunately, when the design of reconstruction of one of children hospitals was ready, agreement was cancelled by Ukrainian side. Greenpeace was forced to end up with equipping of biochemical laboratory in one of Kyiv children hospitals. Canadian technicians and doctors

worked more than one year in the lab performing analyses needed by Ukrainian doctors. Finally the lab was donated to the city of Kyiv. The University of Alberta continued the program of training for Ukrainian doctors using grants from Canadian Government.

Later on Greenpeace had set up (jointly with International Renaissance (Soros) Foundation and Ukrainian Environmental Association "Zeleny Svit (Green World)" an independent environmental laboratory which investigated radioactive contamination of soil, food, water in the area around Chernobyl.

d) Very attractive was the project developed by Dr Martin Walter from the Swiss branch of IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War) and later implemented by SKH (Swiss Commission for Help in Catastrophes). Swiss organisations equipped rayon hospital in Polisske, Kyiv oblast, with modern diagnostic equipment and several years Swiss doctors lived and worked in Polisske side by side with their Ukrainian colleagues. It is hard to believe that Polisske was evacuated in mid 90th (after construction of natural gas supply network, building new apartment houses, reconstruction of roads and millions of roubles invested in desactivation...)

Generally speaking, Ukrainian medical authorities were friendly, but not very constructive. It looked as if they suspected foreign organisations in attempts of learning something secret and extremely valuable about radiation diseases and suffering children. It was also very hard to get letters of acknowledgement from Ukrainian medical organisations and doctors.

Many foreign organisations got involved in assistance to children, including complicated and expensive medical treatment. "Help Chernobyl children" projects were taking all possible forms: organised groups of children, stay in families, organised vacations in Ukraine etc. Tens of countries in Western and Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union, Americas and on other continents - hosted Chernobyl children from Ukraine (and continue to do this now, in 1997!) All sorts of organisations were counterparts of foreign donors in Ukraine. Some figures related to Chernobyl Union activities you can find below, but that is only a small example.

First groups of children often were undergoing careful and specialised medical examinations, but later it appeared not necessary. Some projects were quite controversial, like an annual treatment of Chernobyl children in Cuba hospitals - many experts said that the climate was too hot and transportation costs were too high, but the project goes on.

A lot of humanitarian aid shipments were received in Ukraine. This was medicines, syringes, vitamins, powdered milk etc - tens of 20-ton trucks and airshipments a year. As a rule, such goods were

distributed to hospitals and clinics, but also directly to big families, disabled.

The fact of supplying food needs some explanation. The region of Ukrainian-Bielorussian Polissie is a rural, quite poor area with forests, small villages and very bad road system. Traditionally people depended mainly on home supply of food - milk and milk products, potatoes. Wild berries and mushrooms was substantial part of a diet. After the accident, when milk was very radioactive and definitely not recommended for children and babies, this problem became extremely acute: supply of safe fresh milk from elsewhere was practically impossible, and Soviet industry producing children and baby food was agonising (as many other industries at that time). Purchases of imported baby food were limited because of lack of hard currency resources. Thus, any shipment of baby and children food was indeed vital.

Disappointments also happened during this humanitarian aid activities - both from foreign and Ukrainian sides. Foreigners complained for unfair distribution of donations, Ukrainians accused foreigners of supply of outdated medicines or broken equipment. Officials dreamed of co-ordination. An attempt to set up a Co-ordination Committee was made at a Congress of World Federation of Ukrainian Medical Societies in 1991. Fortunately or not, both co-chairmen of Committee did not start a real work, and the idea died without consequences. It seems, however, that the need in co-ordination was quite real - in 1992 the same appeal was expressed by Volodymyr Yavorivsky.

Eventually Committee on Humanitarian Aid had been created at the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. It was headed by Vice Prime-Minister and was solving all questions related to receiving and distribution of humanitarian help. By 28 December 1992 11,439 tons of humanitarian shipments were received in Ukraine /1 p.176/. Of course it is impossible to believe that all loads had been registered at this Committee, so actual number is higher. The biggest donor was Germany (about 50 % of all aid), then Italy, France, USA and other countries. Of received humanitarian aid 67 % was food, 18 % medicines and medical equipment, and 15 % of clothing's and other goods.

Some less successful fund-raising activities were organised by Chernobyl NGOs in the end of 80th - beginning of 90th. These were bus tours to European countries, tele-maraphones, exhibitions. Expenses for such events were sometimes comparable to the sums collected. Some Western Europeans had already sad experience with individual "Chernobyl fund raisers", which collected money or medicines and later were reported to sell these medicines to clinics.

Gradually children summer recreation has become the main "Chernobyl aid" activity, while medical problems are being solved mainly under bilateral or multilateral intergovernmental projects. As an

example, the Sasakava Fund helped in equipping and financing examinations of children in several clinics, including one in Ovruch (Zhytomyr oblast).

Intergovernmental assistance to sufferers was quite limited. For example, in September 1991 the special Conference was held in New York to create a special Chernobyl Fund for three regions of the former USSR. Total collected sum amounted to \$1,500,000 /1, p.161/. This poor result was partly a consequence of the report prepared and published by the IAEA. This report was prepared during an international investigation headed by Itsuzo Shigematsu (by the way, investigation did not include liquidators). At the very first stages of the investigation “green movement” strongly protested against biased approach of IAEA. When the report has been published the Government of Ukraine also objected against its conclusions.

3.2. Non-governmental “Chernobyl” organisations

Ukrainian writers were the first who began campaign to disclose the truth of Chernobyl in Ukraine. In 1988 the first “green” NGO in Ukraine was created - “Zeleny Svit (Green World)”. It was an association with numerous member organisations in many oblasts and districts of Ukraine. Of course, Chernobyl problems were of the highest priority for the “Green world”. In 1989 another network of small NGOs appeared as part of “Green world” - Union “Salvation from Chernobyls”. Organisations of this Union were founded mainly in contaminated areas.

These NGOs played an important role of pressure groups. This was “vox populi”, and it was used by people deputies and local authorities of contaminated regions to redistribute resources in favour of contaminated areas. Often local politicians were using support from these groups in their election campaigns and legislative work.

An important example of such activity was the first public meeting of the State Commission for Liquidation of the Consequences of Chernobyl Accident in Narodichi, Zhytomyr oblast in August, 1989.

Later that year an antinuclear, anti-Chernobyl march had been jointly organised by “Green world” and Ukrainian movement for perestrojka “Rukh”. March started at Khmelnytska NPP in Western Ukraine and was to finish in Kyiv. On the route rallies were taking place in numerous villages and towns: people protested against the secrecy in Chernobyl affairs, demanded fair compensation for the victims, demanded clean food, medicines for sufferers, evacuation of children. More than 300,000 people from 5 oblasts signed an appeal to the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) of the USSR. This appeal with signatures had been taken to Moscow and handed over to Ukrainian members of the Parliament (Shcherbak, Yavorivsky and others). They use this appeal to push

the badly needed Chernobyl legislation through the Parliament.

Another important project of “Green world” was an Independent Chernobyl Investigation (1990-1992), with participation of lawyers, witnesses etc. This was an attempt to give a legal appraisal of actions of government officers and all others responsible for Chernobyl disaster and clean up (liquidation of consequences). Ideally that would have allowed the victims of Chernobyl disaster to sue the state, officers or managers and to receive through court procedure a just compensation for loss of health or property. Unfortunately, very few lawyers agreed to participate in this project (organisers were thinking of a trial similar to Nuremberg Tribunal). As a result, collected evidences and their legal appraisal did not have convincing value. What is even more important, government officers who were responsible for Chernobyl decisions are still active politicians and they would never allow such process to go too far.

While “Green world” worked primarily with the population of contaminated areas, similar role for liquidators and evacuated people played another NGO “Chernobyl Union International” (CUI), founded in Ukraine in 1989 and registered as an international organisation in 1991. The primary aim of CUI was “to address and mitigate the consequences of the accident... by assisting the 1.5 million direct victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe including children and those disabled due to the effect of the explosion, to deal with the extraordinary social, economic and medical needs they are facing” (Statute of International Organization “Chernobyl Union”, registered in the Ukraine Ministry of Justice 24th February, 1992).

Funds for its activity CUI received from other charitable organisations abroad - Bavarian Red Cross, German land and city governments, clinics etc. CUI has not been the recipient of aid, but has served as the facilitator and co-ordinator of relief to institutions, hospitals, clinics etc. The cost of goods and medicines distributed by CUI in Ukraine amounted to tens of millions dollars (compare \$1,500,000 collected at the UN Conference in 1991, p.3.1 above).

CUI played an important role in initiating and drafting laws concerning the status and social needs of Chernobyl victims. At that time the CUI President Volodymyr Shovkoshytny was a People Deputy of Ukraine.

Important and still going on program of CUI was organisation of children rest abroad: 231 children in 1990, 1520 in 1991, 1800 in 1992 and so on.

There are also several NGOs named “Children of Chernobyl” in Ukraine and other countries. They organise treatment of children and their rest abroad and in Ukraine.

Separate investigation is needed to assess the role and results of activities of different charitable

foundations and enterprises, which were organised by people who had status of sufferers from Chernobyl disaster. Such organisations enjoyed substantial tax privileges and other benefits according to Chernobyl legislation. It is essential that these privileges were stipulated not by the law itself, but by decrees and ordinances of the Cabinet of Ministers, which were often applied selectively, according to the statutes of organisations and some other features.

CONCLUSION

This report is based both on materials published in the Soviet Union and Ukraine and on author's personal experience. Report does not pretend to be a complete investigation of social activities in Ukraine related to Chernobyl disaster.

In 1987-1989 the author worked as physicist in the 30-km zone and in other contaminated areas. This enabled him to meet many people of different levels (administrators, collective-farmers, "self-settlers" etc.). In 1988-1991 author was an active Board member and researcher of Ukrainian Environmental Association "Zeleny Svit (Green World)" - the biggest and most influential Ukrainian NGO at that time, headed by People Deputy of the Soviet Union Yuri Shcherbak.

In 1991-1993 the author worked as a Project Manager and Director of Greenpeace Ukraine office. That was the time when Greenpeace ran a medical assistance project and independent investigation of radioactive contamination in Zhytomyr oblast. These activities required frequent contacts with the Ministry of Health Protection and members of Ukrainian Parliament, with people in contaminated areas.

The author also participated in some humanitarian projects, mainly with Swiss and German partners.

Being a "participant of the liquidation of the consequences of Chernobyl catastrophe, category 2A"

author has also personal experience with the system of social assistance.

The author is well aware that this short report is only one drop in the process of disclosing of the role which public and different social forces played during after-Chernobyl period. While - at last! - many documents have been published and analysed /1,5/, a really deep and unbiased analysis of the roles of many important players like IAEA, UN and its organisations, international "green" and anti-nuclear organisations, internal Soviet nuclear lobby, Soviet "green" and public movements is needed. Maybe it is still too early and in-depth analyses is not possible simply because the drama is not finished yet and many players are still on the stage.

Of course it is necessary - as gratuity and acknowledgement - to collect and publish information about all people of good will from all over the world, who have helped the sufferers of Chernobyl catastrophe. This should include both official structures and purely unofficial and private actions.

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