

CC CPSU

From May 4 to 9, I was in the area of the Chernobyl Power Station. I believe I have an obligation to share some of my observations.

1. Evacuation of Pripjat. The situation with radiation in the city was clear within an hour. No planned emergency evacuation measures existed: people did not know what to do.

According to all instructions and orders, which have been in existence for the last 25 years, the decision regarding evacuation of the population from the danger zone had to be taken by the local leadership. By the time the Government commission arrived, they could have evacuated everyone even on foot. But nobody was willing to take the responsibility (the Swedes first evacuated people from the zone of their station, and only later started to find out that the radiation release did not happen there).

2. Soldiers working in danger zones (including 800 meters from the reactor) did not have means for individual protection, including those men who were unloading lead. In conversations, it became clear that they did not have such [protective] clothing. Helicopter pilots were in the same situation.

It was a mistake for officers, including Marshals and Generals, to show off their bravery by appearing next to the reactor wearing regular uniforms. In this situation one must rely on reason and not on a false notion of courage.

3. Drivers who evacuated Pripjat and built levies along the river also worked without individual means of protection. One cannot rely on the excuse that the radiation dose was under the “yearly norm”—most of them were young people and consequently, it would affect their children.

The same applies to the adoption of “combat norms” for the army units. This was an extreme measure for combat action to be taken during passage through a zone where nuclear weapons were used. In my view, this order was precisely a result of the absence at that moment of means of individual protection, which were only available to special units.

4. The entire system of civil defense turned out to be completely paralyzed. There were not even any working dosimeters.

5. Fire-fighting units performed marvelously. They prevented the accident from spreading at an early stage. But even the units based in Pripjat did not have appropriate uniforms for working in a zone of elevated radiation.

6. The roof of the machine room was made of flammable materials, from the exact same materials that were used at the fabric factory in Bukhara, which burned to the ground in the early 70s. And even though several officials were tried after the accident in Bukhara, the same materials were used in building the nuclear power station.

7. Within the system of the Ministry of Energy, the requirements and attitude toward nuclear power stations are several times lower than within the system of the Ministry of Medium Machine Building. In particular:

- a) the number of service personnel has been cut
- b) they regularly undertake obligations to cut the time of scheduled repairs by 6 or 7 days, including during the repairs of the 4th block.
- c) according to experts, the quality of the equipment being supplied to the station has been reduced by half in the last ten years. The nuclear power station (NPS) receives a lot of defective equipment from supplier plants, and they do not have a sufficient quantity of control and measuring equipment.
- d) it takes three to four months to fill even urgent requests for repairs in the Ministry of Energy because they require long back-and-forth correspondence. In the Ministry of Medium Machine Building it takes a maximum of one week.
- e) protection of working blocs is clearly inadequate
- f) in recent years, the Ministry of Energy started treating nuclear power stations in the same way as it treats coal power stations or hydroelectric power stations; it does not draw a strict distinction between nuclear and regular power generators.

8. The inefficiency of local authorities is appalling. They did not have clothing, shoes or underwear to supply to the victims and were waiting for orders from Moscow.

9. Panicky moods emerged in Kiev for many reasons, but primarily because of the absence of information. [Information] not even about what happened but about the levels of radiation in the city. Foreign propaganda had a big influence, but not a single leader of the republic spoke on TV or radio, who could say very simple words to the effect that there were no grounds to worry and no danger to the health of children and residents. Comrade Lyashko appeared on the screen for the first time only after his meeting with foreign journalists.

Information about Comrades Ligachev and Ryzhkov's visit to the area of the NPS had a positive impact. However, the "silence" of the republican leadership in subsequent days, in my view, led to rising panic again, especially when people found out that the children and families of the leadership were leaving the city. The [ticket] line at the booking offices at the CC CPU was a thousand persons long. Naturally, this was very well known in the city.

On May 5, the Minister of Public Health of the Ukrainian SSR, in my view, performed poorly on TV, which, in turn, caused a new wave of panic. For the most part, on television they showed performances of dance groups and other shows, while some very simple information about radiation levels in the city and basic comments by scientists and experts, of whom we have many in Kiev, would have removed the stress, as happened

after their publication in the central newspapers. In general, CC CPU waited for instructions from Moscow, although the emergence of a panicky mood could have been prevented early on. Besides, we constantly heard the phrase: “We did not get any such instructions from the center ...”

There was an exception. Secretary of the Kiev regional party committee Cde. Revenko kept constantly informing the secretaries of regional committees and through them rank-and-file communists about the real state of affairs; it helped that he visited Chernobyl regularly. And it produced results: that region did not have the same level of panic that we witnessed in Kiev.

10. Now people’s moods have changed radically. But in essence, the elimination of the consequences of the accident is only beginning. A new explosion has been prevented, but a dangerous radiation situation remains. Elimination of consequences will take between several weeks and many months. People will not be able to return to their homes for a long time. And we have to explain this to them along with many basic rules for living in the conditions of an area that has been contaminated with radiation. Even down to such details as the fact that they must not pick mushrooms here this year ... and so on.

And the main thing: we must categorically ensure the safety of the people who work in the zone and do it right now. Whereas there could have been some exceptions during the first stage because of the very complex situation, there can be no excuse now for exposing people to the radiation.

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We have to make a thorough analysis of the lessons of this tragedy, in the name of those thousands of people who are so selflessly fighting this misfortune. People came together and took this burden on their shoulders without thinking about the consequences. There are numerous examples of heroism. For instance, several individuals (in particular, Major L. Telyatnikov, Lieutenants V. Pravik, V. Kibenkov and others) contained the accident and saved the station. They knew that they were getting a deadly dose of radiation, yet they did not abandon the block until the fire was extinguished. In my view, they deserve the rank of Hero of the Soviet Union. They don’t have long to live but why wait till all the necessary documents are processed—this will take months!

Of course, I do not have full information about the developments, but I feel an obligation to share what I have seen.

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[Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive]

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