обрывистыми берегами

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ANXIOUS NORTH

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ANXIOUS NORTH

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN SOVIET AND POST SOVIET RUSSIA

ANXIOUS NORTH

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA.
SELECTED DOCUMENTS, LETTERS, AND ARTICLES.

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
ALEXANDER PIKA, JENS DAHL
AND INGE LARSEN

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INTRODUCTION

BY OLGA MURASHKO

Before you is a volume of texts about the Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North and Far East. It was compiled by Alexander Pika, scientist and prominent participant in the movement for the rights of the indigenous peoples that started in the late 1980s. He was supposed to have written this introduction but died in a boating accident in September 1995 while doing research on Chukotka.

Alexander Pika personally knew most of the leaders and activists of the indigenous movement in Russia. He collected publications, manuscripts, and tape recordings of their public speeches for the present volume. In so doing, he wanted to give the reader of this IWGIA document an inside view – the view of the indigenous leaders – of the situation among the Small Peoples of the North, of their needs, demands, plans and hopes for the future. He also included other kinds of material that will give the reader of this document an idea of both the modern life and the old traditions of the indigenous peoples and of the unique landscape and nature, in which they live: A novel by a Nenets writer from Yamal, field work accounts by a Russian zoologist, working among reindeer breeders in Artic Siberia during the Second World War, a traveller's account, and a number of articles introducing the reader to the history of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North and to economic, social and political problems of crucial importance.

The participation of Russian scholars has for a long time been an inseparable part of the indigenous rights' movement. The Russian intelligentsia has always taken interest in the life and fate of the indigenous peoples and an active part in defining and defending their rights. This tradition emerged early in the 19th century with the Decembrist exiles in Siberia and manifested itself most clearly in the works of G.N. Potanin and N.M. Yandrintsev. In this volume you will find works by Russian scholars who, in our time, have taken an interest in the life of the indigenous peoples. They have studied their situation and problems and tried to contribute to the efforts made to secure them a better future.

By way of this introduction I shall present a summary of my frequent conversations with Alexander Pika and some of my own reflections on the development among the Small Peoples of the North from the period when these texts were collected, namely from 1988 to 1992, and from the most recent years, not included in this volume.

In the very beginning of the democratization process that started in the Soviet Union in 1988, articles by indigenous intellectuals and scholars, concerned with the North, began to appear in magazines and newspapers. These articles told the readers about the existence of serious social,

economic, cultural, and demographic problems among the Small Peoples of the North, problems resulting from the totalitarian policies pursued by the Soviet regime. For the first time in many years the situation of the Small Peoples, their problems and the question of their specific rights, became a legitimate subject for public discussion.

In 1990 and 1991 several indigenous organizations were established almost simultaneously: The Association of the Small Peoples of the North (1990), which organized the First Congress of the Small Peoples of the North in Moscow, March 1990; the Deputy Assembly of the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East (1991); and The International League of Small Peoples and Ethnic Groups, founded at the initiative of Yevdokia Gayer (1991). Mrs. Gayer – a Nanai by birth, and ethnographer by profession and, in the years until the break-down of the Soviet Union, a people's deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR – for some years, deputy head of the State Committee of the North (*Goskomsever*). All these organizations saw their early light in Moscow, enjoyed the support of the highest state bodies, and held their founding congresses in governmental buildings put at their disposal.

The leaders of the Small Peoples were thus given the opportunity to meet, to discuss their problems and present their claims to the state representatives. This was a period of hope and expectations, a period of vivid legislative activity. It seemed as if it was sufficient to enumerate all the deficiences of the government policies of the past and then a new and better life for all the peoples of Russia would follow automatically.

In 1990-92 state bodies issued a number of documents of a declaratory nature (resolutions, decrees), all in the spirit of the ILO Convention No. 169 "On Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries", which the Soviet Union had not signed. The new Constitution contained an article No. 69, guaranteeing the observance of international principles and norms in the relation between the state and the Small Peoples of Russia. In 1992 decrees were issued by the Supreme Soviet, the Government and the President (from April 22, 1992), which laid out the basic principles of the state policies toward the Small Indigenous Peoples. The decrees suggested the introduction of official bodies of self-government (national districts, village soviets, clan-based communes) in areas traditionally inhabited by the Small Peoples of the North. Furthermore they suggested that lands traditionally used by the Small Peoples should be handed over to the official indigenous bodies as their property, and that the priority right of the indigenous peoples to the traditional use of the land should be quaranteed.

All of these rights were supposed to be secured in the special laws "On the Legal Status of the Indigenous Peoples of the North", "On the Legal Status of National Districts, Village and Settlement Soviets, Clan and Communal Soviets", and "On the Territories Designated for Traditional Land Use by the Small Indigenous Peoples". The deadline for passing the laws was initially supposed to be "before the end of 1992". The laws were worked out and the first of them passed by the Supreme Soviet of Russia

in the summer of 1993, but rejected by the president. After that the law "The Foundations of the Legal Status of the Small Indigenous Peoples of Russia" was passed twice by the State Duma, but rejected by the president. The other laws on the rights of the indigenous peoples have been worked out but never even considered by the legislative bodies.

A number of federal laws, worked out by the central bodies and coming into effect in 1991-1994 ("The Land Law of the RSFSR"; "On the Payment for Land"; "On the Protection of the Environment", "On the Subsurface Resources"; "On Wildlife"; "On Education", and others) did point at the special rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the North to the natural resources and at their specific cultures. But practice has shown, however, that these laws are not effective because of the lack of mechanisms allowing for their implementation.

By the time of the Second Congress of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North in November 1993, the authorities no longer put at its disposal the Kremlin Congress Palace as had been the case in 1990, but a hotel on the outskirts of Moscow. While President M. S. Gorbachev personally was present at the first congress, at the second congress only the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, looked in for about 20 minutes. But these were only the symptoms of a major shift in the attitude of the state towards the question of granting the Small Indigenous Peoples special rights.

Furthermore, the indigenous peoples' own public organizations became afflicted with internal problems. This manifested itself at the Second Congress of the Association, in November 1993. The congress could not agree on any constructive plans for action, being dominated by the fight between two competing Moscow-based groups of prominent persons for the executive posts of the secretariat of the Association. Regional delegates tried in vain to raise a debate about the economic and legal difficulties that the indigenous population of the North are facing. The outcome of the congress was disappointing for many participants, particularly for the representatives from the regional associations.

The government passed a special federal programme to support the economic and cultural development of the Small Peoples of the North for the period of 1991 to 1995, but due to budget shortages the programme was never fully implemented.

After 1991, several legal documents were passed in a number of republics (Buryatia, Yakutia, Karelia) and autonomous areas (the Koryak, the Chanty-Mansi) that defined the rights of the indigenous peoples with regard to natural resources. In other autonomus areas similar documents are being drafted. Experience shows, however, that these measures are not sufficient to protect the lands of the indigenous peoples in the Khanty-Mansi Area against an ever expanding oil industry or the lands of the Koryaks, Itelmens, and Evens against the development of mining and the privatization of fishing and hunting grounds by joint- stock companies.

The consequences of a decree issued by the President in December 1993 "On the State Programme for Privatizing State and Municipal Enter-

prises in the Russian Federation" were dramatic to the North. Literally in one year all the former state and collective farms, with all their livestock and lands, were turned into joint-stock companies. The same thing occured with former state enterprises, extracting or processing this or that natural resource, a.o. minerals. Big forestry enterprises split up their possessions into small parcels and leased them together with licences to enterprises that wanted to develop hunting and fishing tourism. The *de facto* owners of all this came to be people from the outside, often not even residing in the North. This privatizing practice has gone far beyond the frames of the presidential decree and has, together with a rapid and barbaric plundering of resources, become a new threat to the preservation of the habitat of the Small Peoples of the North and to their cultural survival.

A presidential decree of April 22, 1992, aroused great hope among the Indigenous Peoples of the North. It instructed "the administrative authorities to hand over, free of charge, pastures and other lands of economic importance such as hunting and fishing grounds to clan-based communes and families belonging to the Small Peoples of the North as their life-long heritable property..." and to "provide clan-based communes, families and individual representatives of the Small Peoples of the North with preferential rights to conlude contracts and acquire licences for the exploitation of renewable natural resources." Communes were founded together with ethnic enterprises and clan-based "farms". Their leaders went to the local administrative authorities in order to obtain the right to the use of the land and the renewable natural resources and carried with them the presidential decree as a confirmation of their right to the traditional use of the land of their ancestors. But very often they were told that a decree is not yet a law; that no instructions had yet been given about how to hand over the land to the indigenous peoples; and that one should await the passing of the Federal laws on the rights of the indigenous peoples. The administration of the northern region was obviously in no hurry to implement the decree. In contrast, the presidential decree on privatizaton has been implemented with unprecedented zeal.

The working out and passing of a whole complex of laws on the rights of the indigenous peoples is still being delayed. On December 20th, 1995, the President again rejected and returned for further elaboration the federal law "The Fundaments of the Legal Status of the Small Indigenous Peoples of the North of Russia". Meanwhile the methods by which the indigenous peoples are being deprived of their traditional land and resources are getting more and more sophisticated. In some areas private companies rent, at a small expense and for a period of 90 years, oil-bearing clan pastures where clans graze their reindeer; in other areas the local administration issues "resolutions" withdrawing "commune land that has not yet been legally consolidated", when for example healing springs have been discovered on a certain territory. Nature preserves are then established along with health resorts (that the indigenous inhabitants in

the neighbouring village were planning to establish themselves). In March 1996, the President signed a decree on the selling and buying of private land. This decree may come to serve as yet another means of depriving the indigenous peoples of land that should belong to them.

At the same time, in a situation of ever growing impoverishment and neglect, elements of traditional subsistance are spontaneously being revived. Ethnic, clan or neighbourhood based units are set up, providing, for example, food and processing products. Old forms of common activities are being reestablished, like old ways of distributing food and forms of mutual aid. Traditional means of transportation are reintroduced, together with the use of traditional medicine and environmental knowledge. The use of native languages is getting more common. Children are taught traditional trade, and traditional culture is thus being handed down from one generation to another. All this gives grounds for hope.

The past experience of forcible integration of the indigenous peoples into industrial society, both in our country and all over the world, has not led to positive results. The losses were too great.

The authors of this anthology believe that new strategies have to be found. Only self-government, respect for international law, and economic support of the indigenous communities can contribute to the survival of the indigenous peoples and the preservation of their unique cultures. This is essential, not only for the Indigenous Peoples of the North, but for all of us. Different peoples' right to ethnic and cultural diversity, the right to preserve cultures, and to develop freely, are preconditions for the survival of all humankind.

This is why we find it important to publish a document that tells of how the Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet and post-Soviet North started organizing their movement for survival in the years from 1988 to 1992.

(Olga A. Murashko is an anthropologist at the Institute of Anthropology, Moscow University, and a member of the IWGIA group in Moscow)

THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH: FROM PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM TO "REAL SOCIALISM"

BY ALEXANDER PIKA

The Peoples of the North have created their civilizations of roaming reindeer herders, sea and land hunters, and coastal fishermen under conditions verging on the impossible. In the most extreme natural surroundings where human beings exist as a biological species, they have throughout thousands of years preserved their languages and cultures. During the last two or three decades they have, however, been subject to the most serious trials ever in their history. In exactly the same period, they have received more attention than ever in our press, in fiction and, most regrettably, in scholarly accounts of the "unprecedented blossoming of the Small Peoples of the North." This representation of their modern history and recent conditions was, however, highly schematic, distorted, and embellished.

Only recently, worrying local accounts and honest and engaged scientific reports that previously suffered the fate of disappearing into the drawers of bureaucrats' writing desks or the archives of various institutions, have found their way into newspapers and journals, and are being discussed full blast at conferences and on television.

So what have we got to know during recent years? The 1979 census showed that among the 26 Small Peoples of the North, now numbering approximately 170,000 persons, there had been almost no population growth for a decade, and seven of these peoples had even declined in number. Is this a sign of their dying out? Possibly, for it turns out that the average life expectancy among the Small Peoples of the North is unprecedented in its shortness, not only compared with other parts of the Soviet Union, but also compared with many countries in the Third World: 45 years for men and 55 years for women. This is 18 years lower that the average for the Soviet Union!

The reason is plain poverty, sometimes verging on misery. In national villages, there is an acute housing shortage, the average number of square metres per person being three to four. More than fifteen thousand people are leading the life of nomads in forests and tundras with traditional birch-bark *chums* and old *yarangs* (tents), and canvas tents as the only form of housing. Nomadic life has for decades been claimed a "culturally imperfect" and temporary phenomenon that has to be abolished. But it seems difficult to abolish because someone must, evidently, take care of the reindeer. For the state and the authorities – to whom the reindeer, strictly speaking, belong and for whom they are herded -this is very convenient, because they, the owners, do not have to concern themselves with the herders.

Traditional economies – reindeer breeding, hunting, and fishing – have been in a state of crisis for a long time. The crisis is caused by an unbalanced economy, irrational management, and the deterioration of pastures and hunting and fishing areas due to industrial exploitation. Until recently, indigenous northerners looked at this with the eyes of indifferent outsiders. Why should they care? All the wealth of the rivers, forests and tundras – even the domestic reindeer – and almost all the means of production had long ago ceased to be their collective (or family) property. Everything had been handed over to the state or, to be more exact, to monopolist authorities – not unlike the scandalous United Fruit Company – i.e., the State Department for Agricultural Industry (*Gosagroprom*), the Ministry of Fisheries, the Consumers' Union and the Main Hunting Company, etc. The activities of these authorities are determined solely by their own narrow institutional interests, which hardly take into account the needs of the Northern Peoples, their urgent problems, and uncertain prospects.

Unemployment has become a stable social phenomenon in the national villages. The absence of civil rights among the Northern Peoples and the impossibility of influencing and changing their conditions has engendered among them a psychology of diffidence, pessimism and despair. This is the reason for an increase in drinking and aggressiveness, as well as for an increase in the suicide rate, which according to sociologists is now three or four times higher among indigenous northerners than the Soviet average. Furthermore, thousands of people suffer from tuberculosis and many die from it.

The stereotyped and undifferentiated educational programmes in schools, and the boarding school system that separates children from parents and families for many months every year, have made northern youth indifferent toward their national culture, mother tongue, folklore, and art. It is evident that the Small Peoples' loss of their native language is leading to the collapse of their spiritual culture and ethnic self-comprehension. For them, this is the road to non-existence.

Why is it so; when did it start; and how? It is not easy to find answers to these questions in the history that we have been correcting, adjusting, and distorting for so long. But no other way of understanding our social history has yet been invented.

Previously, we looked back to our past as if at someone's command, as if to assure ourselves one more time of the "correctness" of our accomplished historical path, of the inevitability of our "glorious victories and achievements." Now the time has come to look attentively into our past, to turn to it, again and again, in search of the origins of the present problems, anxieties and disappointments, common to the whole country. The attention of more and more scientists, publicists and writers is now being concentrated on a very short period of our history: the years from 1929 to 39.

This decade contains, in a compressed form, a whole historical era. The official name of the beginning of the period, "the Great Turn", is in our

time uttered with a feeling of bewilderment, bitterness, and tragedy that has not been overcome. New names have appeared, such as "the Stalinist counter-revolution" and "the Thermidor" of October. What do these words mean? They mean a rupture with the structures, established in the 1920s, of socialist self-government and free economic, national, and cultural display. These structures were replaced by a repressive and bureaucratic power apparatus. They mean the dispossession of prosperous peasants, mass-nationalization of rural property, deportation of thousands of peasant families, hunger, and repression.

Now we are learning more and more about the tragic fate of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian peasantry at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. And we are beginning to realize more clearly to what extent these events have left and continue to leave their imprint on the present economic and cultural situation in our country in all spheres of public and economic life. But what happened in the areas with no peasant population; for example, in the Far North, where Small Peoples and tribes of reindeer-herding nomads, semi-settled hunters, and fishermen were supposed to undergo three stages of social and economic formation (slavery, feudalism, and capitalism) in two or three years, from a patriarchal and communal structure and directly to socialism? The Northern Peoples did leap into socialism, but the results of the last 60 years of development are not very comforting: from highly skilled reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen, indigenous northerners have turned into unskilled occasional workers, drivers, watchmen, and cleaners. In the 1970s, northern indigenous inhabitants who had been "transferred to settlements" became "lumpen proletarians" troubled by alcoholism, crime, and suicide to an extent that affected their demographic situation. Depopulation and even extinction constitute a real threat to the Northern Peoples in the future (*Kommunist*, 1988, No. 16).

The majority of the existing scientific and popular literature and fiction dealing with these themes presents a cheerful and optimistic picture to the readers. The applied historical and social concepts and models are all in strict accordance with the good old "recipes" of the official historical sciences of the Soviet period, whose foundation was the ideas and directives of the well-known "Short History of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the Soviet Union." The forced collectivization, both in the North as well as everywhere else, is considered historically inevitable and proclaimed a further development of Lenin's cooperative plan. The removal of the Northern Peoples from political life, the dismissal of self-government, and the creation instead of a bureaucratic pseudo-autonomy in the form of national areas (*okrugs*) is proclaimed a further development of "the Leninist national policy". The building of socialism in the Far North is presented as predetermined by objective laws and as being realized beyond reproach. The legitimacy of this presentation is being disputed now, and there is a strong need for revision, for other kinds of historical concepts and views. But when will this happen? How much time will be

needed to re-read historical sources, re-evaluate facts, and clear history of rough generalizations, dogma, omissions, and even falsifications? In any event, it is important to start at once. This article is far from claiming to be a "perfect" product of a "new" history of the Northern Peoples in the 1920s and 1930s. It is simply an attempt to look at history and social and historical processes, events, and facts in a different way, and perhaps to evoke critical reaction and discussion.

The Civil War was over. "War Communism" yielded to the New Economic Policy. The 1920s may be called the most constructive period in the relationship between the Soviet State and the population of the outlying national districts. The concept of a "non-capitalist road of development", which was to become predominant in the 1930s, had not yet got the upper hand. But there was already a prevailing political concept that "historically backward peoples" might "fuse" with socialism. In accordance with this concept, outlines of the necessary prerequisites took shape: the equality of all nations and peoples; governmental aid to less developed areas; the awakening of the political consciousness and activity of the population in the outlying national districts; general and mutual respect for other peoples' national feelings, culture, and interests; and territorial autonomy.

These ideas were put forth and their realization attempted in the work of the Department for National Minorities of the People's Commissariat of Nationalities, established in 1918. In charge of the indigenous inhabitants of the Far North was the so-called Polar Department. When the Commissariat was abolished in 1923, the Polar Department was preserved and even extended and transformed into a special Committee for the Assistance of the Peoples of the North under the Russian Central Executive Committee. Members and collaborators of the Committee were well-known government and party members, old Bolsheviks such as A. V. Lunacharsky, N. A. Semashko, F. Ya. Kon, S. I. Mitzkevich, P. A. Krasikov, E. K. Malinovskaya, and others. The head of the Committee was Petr Germogenovich Smidovich, member of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. Significant influence on the formation of the theoretical concepts, political guidelines, and practical strategy was exercised by Anatoly Evgenyevich Skachko, the deputy of P.G. Smidovich.

In June 1923, at a meeting of the Commissariat of Nationalities, A. E. Skachko, who was then a deputy of the Department for National Minorities, proposed the establishment of a Committee of the North. His arguments were as follows:

1. "The native inhabitants are the main wealth of the North."
2. "The native tribes live exclusively by exploiting the riches of nature, whereas the Russians live from exploiting the natives."

3. "To entrust the Siberian authorities with the task of saving the Siberian natives is like entrusting a wolf with the task of herding a flock of sheep."

It was furthermore proposed that the Committee should consist of representatives from all the existing People's Commissariats and from different subordinate bodies, so that all the Committee members would be members of the Communist Party; and that the local inspectors of the Committee of the North should be provided with immunity from the local organs of the GPU (Department for Political Administration, i.e., the political police). "This immunity is a condition *sine qua non,*" Skachko insisted. "Without it, the inspectors will be able to do nothing." The question of establishing reservations for the Small Peoples of the North, similar to those of American Indians, was also discussed, as well as the possibility of establishing special territories where plenipotentiary emissaries of the Commissariat of National Minorities would be in charge (these and the following quotations are from The Central State Archive of the October Revolution (TsGAOR). F. 3977, Committee of the North).

According to the plans of the staff of the Commissariat and some of the scientists, the Committee of the North would act as a "counterbalance", alleviating the pressure exercised by the local authorities on the small Northern Peoples. The Committee would coordinate local interests and state interests in cases where indigenous peoples were involved, defending their interests. But how could this idea be put into practice? The ethnographer V. G. Tan-Bogoraz and A. E. Skachko proposed the combining of "a special governmental body, intended to serve the natives" with these peoples' own bodies of self-government. Thus a "special governmental body" was formed in the guise of the Committee of the North in October 1924. Two years later, special self-government bodies for the Northern Peoples were set up according to a decree called "On the Temporary Provisions for the Self-government of the Native Peoples and Tribes in the Northern Borderlands of the RSFSR". The decree obliged the local soviet and party organs to initiate a system of self-government among the Northern Peoples through national (native – *tuzemnye*) congresses, district, tribal and other kinds of soviets. The new decree was designed to encourage public initiative and activity among the indigenous northerners. This actually happened. The number of native district soviets, *TuzRik*, rose quickly. From 1926 to 1930, the number of native district soviets rose from 16 to 64 and other kinds of national rural soviets from 201 to 455.

The course was thus set for the self-government and the extension of the rights of the indigenous peoples of the North. It was an attempt to realize one of the most important ideas in the Leninist theory of non-capitalist development – the idea of awakening in the masses a striving towards "independent political thinking and political activity, even in places with almost no proletariat" (Lenin, V. I.: Poln. sobr. soch., Vol. 41, p. 244.3).

Furthermore, a decree "On the Judicial Functions of the Bodies of the Native Administration of the Peoples and Tribes of the Northern Borderlands of the RSFSR" was issued as a supplement to the "Temporary

Provisions" of October 1927. The decree extended the rights of the native soviets, providing them with judicial functions.

It would be wrong, of course, to overestimate the authority and influence, exercised by the native soviets. Most of them were not organized by the indigenous peoples themselves, but by employees of the district executive committees, by representatives of the local branches of the Committee of the North. As a rule, the key-position of secretary was held by non-local workers familiar with office work. But it is beyond doubt that the indigenous peoples also actively participated in the work of the "native soviets". Besides, as a part of the general national politics of the period, the Committee of the North aimed for the "indigenization" of all local administrative and economic bodies in order to ensure the Northern Peoples of the right to solve matters by themselves.

As to the economic development among the Northern Peoples, the course that was chosen in the 1920s was that of cooperation. By a special decree of 1927, it was decided to organize cooperation in the northern territories according to the principles of so-called "integral" or mixed cooperation, whereby Soviet trading cooperatives were closely connected with local cooperative production. In 1932, at the 9th Plenum of the Committee of the North, it was reported that almost 90% of the indigenous population of the North was involved in some kind of cooperative activity. Apart from trading stations organized according to the integral principle, which were importing goods to the remote northern areas and buying local northern products, simple cooperative production units were organized by the people themselves. Very often, people worked together in traditional *artels* (before 1917 it was a voluntary association of people working together for some common purpose), common among the Northern Peoples, as for example *baidar*(whaling boat)-*artels* among sea hunters, or groups of reindeer herders herding their reindeer together, or fishermen's *artels* or associations. It was not all plain sailing, and there were reports of abuses in the factory stations of the State Trading Company and in the cooperatives. But there was no use of non-economic methods of compulsion in relation to the indigenous population.

The most important improvements of the 1920s took place in the sphere of culture, education, and health. On the initiative of the Committee of the North, various ministries and local authorities, dozens of scientific expeditions were working constantly in the tundra and the taiga. The Committee started to build up cultural centres, the so-called *kultbazy*, for culture and enlightenment. At the University of Leningrad, a Workers' Faculty for Northern Peoples was opened; and subsequently, the Institute for the Peoples of the North was established, also in Leningrad, under the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. Detachments of the Russian Red Cross were taking an active part in doing preventive work and giving medical care in the Far North.

The leaders of the Committee described the aims, and to a certain extent, the results of the work among the Northern Peoples in the 1920s as

follows: "The three ploughshares of Soviet power have been put into action: self-government, cooperation, and enlightenment have already ploughed the virgin soil of the taiga and tundra, and have called forth from social and national non-existence a whole number of peoples hitherto almost unknown to the world, who have already started to join the ranks of the fighters for socialism." With the exception of the phrase about "the fighters for socialism", this was indeed a true statement.

One of the most important tasks of the Committee was to form cautious attitudes among workers in the local soviet, party and economic bodies towards the culture of the Small Peoples of the North and its foundations. At one of the meetings of the Committee A. F. Skachko expressed it as follows: "Very cautious approaches are needed for our attempt to alter their culture. Under no circumstances should we handle the matter in a way that will damage and destroy it. If we do so, we will run the risk of also destroying the very ability of the Small Peoples to adapt themselves to the extreme natural surroundings in which they live... We must handle the matter in a way that makes it possible, gradually and without destroying the existing culture of the Small Peoples, to draw it closer to and in the end make it merge with the universal socialist culture developing in our country. Of course you cannot perform such a difficult and delicate operation without the direct participation of the natives themselves, without having first formed a complement of persons from their own ranks who are mastering a Sovietized European culture."

Realizing the difficulties connected with creating a political avant-guarde among the Peoples of the North, and understanding that an alert and sound national self-consciousness is always more constructive and easier to control than an oppressed, dormant or sickly one, Skachko said: "There is no reason to fear native nationalism. To secure the possibilities of national development, national self-consciousness and initiative must be awakened."

We are not yet able to make a thorough evaluation of how profoundly the changes stimulated by the work of the Committee, by the first Soviet decrees, and by local practical work actually affected the life of the Northern Peoples. But the political strategy for a national policy in the 1920s was evidently not wrong. If aspects of it had had the opportunity to develop for a long and undisturbed period, and if the people from the Committee had been able to work seriously and enthusiastically, the ideas of the Committee, progressive for their time, might have been carried out in practice. But this did not happen. There were forces opposed to democratic changes in national and cultural life. These forces were rooted in the very same political structures that were supposed to carry out the national politics in the North. In the party and in the Soviet economic bodies, there were many adherents of administrative command methods who opposed the idea of increasing the activity and initiative of the masses. Here are some examples of how the two different approaches clashed.

In 1922, the Polar Department of the Commissariat for National Affairs sent the experienced party official P. I. Sosunov to the village of Samarovo (in what is today the Khanty-Mansiisk Autonomous Area) to hold a non-party conference for the national minorities of the northern parts of the Tobolsk Region. At the conference, a resolution was passed that recommended the northern part of the Tobolsk Region be turned into a separate administrative unit with local self-government. This was the wish of the herders, hunters, and fishermen who had come together from remote taiga villages and distant tundras. The resolution, which did not oblige anyone to anything, was perceived as a "scandalous sedition", as political sabotage. The regional authorities in Tyumen had P. I. Sosunov arrested (this is precisely why Skachko had demanded immunity from the GPU) and taken to Beryozovo, where he spent more than seven months in prison. After prolonged investigations and persistent inquiries into the matter by the Commissariat of Nationalities, which wanted to know what had happened to its employee, Sosunov was finally released. Thus initiatives from below (from elected deputies) collided with the bureaucratic administrative apparatus. The Tyumen newspapers wrote about "the maturity of the party organizations... thus having repulsed leftist deviationists." And they went on: "The party organizations turned down the request of the executive committee of Samarovo to establish an independent national unit in the lower Ob area with its centre at Samarovo, considering it unsuitable for the backward Peoples of the Far North."

A year later the Tyumem newspaper, "Worker's Alarm" published an article with a new "seditionist proposition" to establish a "Polar Republic" for the Khanty, Mansi, and Nenets. This article also caused panic in the Regional Executive Committee and was called "adventurous" and "politically detrimental." The Tyumen Regional Committee "categorically rejected the idea of turning the northern Ob area into a separate autonomous national unit" because "without continuous help from the great Russian people, the backward Northern Peoples cannot yet survive and it is still too early for them to base their life on autonomy." Some years later, exactly this kind of national administrative area was established with its centre at Samarovo, but no longer on the initiative of the indigenous peoples but by a decree from above, from the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. In this way, regional bureaucracy was able to postpone the establishment of an autonomous area for the Khanty and Mansi for almost 10 years.

Neither did the Saami of the Kola Peninsula succeed in establishing their own national districts, although attempts were made. In December 1929 at a joint session of the Murmansk Area and Town Soviets, the local Committee of the North presented a proposal to establish two Saami national districts: an East-Lappish one and a West-Lappish one. The proposal was endorsed and put before the Administrative Commission of the Executive Committee of Leningrad for a final decision. The commission, however, agreed to recognize only four rural soviets as national

ones. Instead of founding the proposed East-Lappish district, the committee proclaimed the already-existing Lovozero District "national Saami", although the majority of the population was not Saami but recent Komi settlers. The proposal to establish a West-Lappish district was not touched upon at all. The Saami community tried once more in 1931 to have national districts established, but in vain. In 1939, the above-mentioned four national rural soviets were declared "artificial" and transformed into ordinary rural soviets by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Today, almost all Saami from the entire Kola Peninsula have been settled collectively in one and the same town, Lovozero.

In the early 1930s, when new national and administrative units were established in the North, one could observe conflicts between the momentum of the forces awakened by the activities of the Committee of the North in the 1920s and the new realities of the 1930s. National areas and districts emerged, merely to be liquidated shortly after; decrees were passed and then suspended; and political, economic, cultural and other public organizations were closed down, one after another.

In 1929, within the borders of the so-called Northern Territory (*Severny krai*), the first national area (*okrug*) for Northern Peoples was established – that belonging to the Nenets. After one year of "positive experience", another eight national areas were created: the Yamal (Nenets) and the Ostyak-Vogul Area in the Ural Region; the Taimyr (Dolgan-Nenets), the Evenk, and the Vitim-Olekminsk in the East Siberian Territory (Vostsibkrai); and the Chukot, Koryak, and Okhot (Even) in the Far East.

Various Evenk national districts were established, one in the East Siberian Territory, two in the Far East, and five in the Yakut Autonomous Republic. Other national districts were established in Yakutia (a total of 10 in 1931). Seven were established in the Far Eastern Territory (DVK) in 1931 and two more in 1932, and in the West Siberian Territory the Tymsk National District was formed in 1932. By an All-Union Executive Committee decision of the 20th of February, 1933, the Lower Amur Area was counted among the national areas of the northern borderlines. This was, however, the end. From then on, things began to reverse. Soon after, the Okhot (Even) Area succumbed to the heavy yoke of *Dalstroi* (The Far Eastern Construction Trust that administered the industrialization of the Far East, building factories, mines, construction sites, etc., and achieving the quick industrialization of Siberia at the cost of the lives of millions of political and criminal exiles and prisoners from the Siberian labour camps). Three of the Okhot's districts were made part of the *Dalstroi* (today the Kolyma Districts of the Magadan Region), whereas the three southern districts were handed over to the Far Eastern Territory (DVK). A decision to liquidate the Okhot, and together with it the Lower Amur National Areas, was made by the All-Union Executive Committee in 1934, and the Vitim-Olekminsk (Evenk) National Area was liquidated in 1937. With the new Constitution of 1936, the national districts disappeared, too, as their very concept was absent from the constitution. Thus, the barely initiated

process of establishing national territorial units in the North was interrupted in the 1930s and part of the already-existing autonomous formations abolished.

And what about the Committee of the North itself? Under conditions of mass-collectivization and "intensified class-struggle", the humanistic activities of the Committee could not but cause dissatisfaction in the party apparatus of the northern territories (*krai*) and regions (*oblasti*). The party apparatus considered it no better than a joke that it had to recognize the authority of a half-public organization with no more than 15 to 20 employees, who tried to dictate to the local leaders of almost half the country how to conduct politics! Furthermore, times were bad for all kinds of public organizations. Gradually all independent social and political activity of the masses was curtailed, and political and public organizations that did not suit the political leaders were successively closed down: the Political Red Cross in 1930, the Society of Marxist Historians of the Communist Academy in 1934, the Society of Old Bolsheviks and the Society of Political Prisoners and Convict Settlers in 1935, and many others. There were purges occurring in the party under the direction of Shkryatov and Yezhov, and political trials were underway. Under these circumstances, the fate of the Committee of the North was sealed. In 1930, all of its local departments were closed down, as they were considered superfluous to the formation of the autonomous areas. Now the Committee had no "hands", only a "head". We know very little about how exactly the Committee was finally abolished. We know only that in 1934 the head of the department of the leading administrative organs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, D. A. Bulatov, on the initiative of the director from the department of the Central Committee, D. F. Medvedev, sent a memorandum to the Central Committee concerning the "inadvisability" of the continued existence of the Committee of the North. In August 1935, the Committee was abolished, and all matters concerning the Peoples of the North were handed over to the Central Directorate of the Northern Sea Route (the state company, founded in 1932, in charge of securing the sea route through the Arctic Ocean, providing ice-breakers, aeroplanes, helicopters, meteorological stations, arranging geological and other expeditions, etc.). After only three years, the Central Directorate of the Northern Sea Route asked to be relieved of this task. From the end of the 1930s to the end of the 1950s, there was no special central body responsible for the conditions of the Peoples of the North and for their support.

Shortly after the abolition of the Committee of the North, P. G. Smidovich, N. A. Krasikov, V. G. Tan-Bogoraz and S. A. Buturlin died. Almost nothing is known about the fate of A.E. Skachko. The year of his death is 1942. D. A. Bulatov himself became the victim of reprisals, and his name is to be found on the well-known list of persons shot in October 1941 in the prison of Saratov (*Literaturnaya gazeta*, 20th of April, 1988).

How did the leaders of the Committee evaluate their activity and the

local situation? The 10th Plenum of the Committee of the North was held in Moscow in April 1934. Judging from the stenographic report of the speeches of the delegates, the atmosphere of the session was depressed. Everyone knew about the imminent abolition of the Committee. P. G. Smidovich ended his speech by asking the following question: "Had the outlying areas gained from the last 10 years' development, or had they become still more backward?" His own answer was: "There is no clear picture yet." Then telegrams from the staff of the local committees were read aloud, together with greetings from students at the Institute of the Peoples of the North in Leningrad, praising comrade Smidovich for his method of realizing the "Leninist national policy". A representative from the Vitim-Olekminsk National Area put it this way: "Although comrade Smidovich never visited our area, the natives know his merits very well, and in almost every *yurta* (tent) you can find his picture." A flattery too coarse to please Petr Smidovich! A delegate from Taimyr expressed himself in the same spirit: "The natives ask: where is this Committee of the North, where is this comrade Smidovich, our very considerate comrade? If he cannot come to visit us, then please send us at least his picture!" This was the new servile style of the time of the cult of Stalin. It was not in the power of P. G. Smidovich to change the state of affairs.

At the evening session, A. E. Skachko made a speech. He emphasized that this was the last plenum, and he reminded the delegates how and why the Committee of the North was founded. Then he passed on to the main question: how the directives of the 9th Plenum had been carried out and to what extent things had changed during the last 10 years.

We will present some quotations from Skachko's speech that show him touching upon problems that remain unsolved even to this day.

On the role of the soviets:

> *"After the establishment of national territories, the catchword became all power to the soviets. This meant that the soviets should be freed from the power of authorities such as the State Fur Company and the Integral Cooperation Company. This task has not been completed."*

The catchword is well-known today, and so is the problem, which has not yet been solved 50 years later.

On national self-government:

> *"The area executive committees are directing the district executive committees through the secretaries, bypassing the chairmen (the secretaries are Russians, bureaucrats, while the chairmen are elected natives). This means that the bureaucrat wins over soviet power. This is why the soviets (i.e., the native soviets) are captives of the still-larger bureaucrats (the economic organizations) and are not defending the interests of the native population, although it is the natives who are feeding and keeping the judge, the prosecutor, and the soviet."*

This picture is typical of the present time as well.

On the appropriation of the riches of fur in the North:

"There is nothing socialist about the Hunting Stations of the State Fur Company (POSy). They appropriate the hunting-grounds of the indigenous peoples and exploit them by means of brigades consisting of persons who have lost their right to vote and by political convicts. In this way, the POSy are ousting the cooperatives, exterminating the animals, and amassing fur. 'After me – the deluge' is the ruling principle of the officials of the State Fur Company."

Today, there are no special political convicts, but the antediluvian principle is still intact.

On the economic policy in the North:

"The politics of state procurement in the North obstruct all other tasks. The efforts to improve the indigenous economy are being deformed by pumping out of it its entire production and demanding from it the impossible."

This policy is also being continued today.

On unequal exchange:

"We are treating the Peoples of the North as they treat the northern reindeer. As you know, they do not give it anything; it maintains itself, but they in turn get all they need for their life from it. In the same way, we are trying to get everything necessary for our life from them, both fur and fish and reindeer skin, and in return we make every effort to give them nothing."

This was his evaluation, without embellishment, of the prevailing conditions and of the results of his and the Committee's work. But maybe one should not believe Skachko, maybe he distorted the state of affairs? No. All the problems to which he called attention remain unsolved today. At present, there is much talk about how to strengthen the power of the soviets, about the remoteness of the indigenous peoples from the administration of "their" autonomous areas, and about the enormous and bureaucratic administrative apparatus that the reindeer herders, the fishermen, and the hunters are feeding. There is also much talk about the injurious way in which government departments exploit the North, and about the continuous concerns of the State Department for Agricultural Industry (*Gosagroprom*) to "raise the productivity of the traditional northern branches of production," which actually means how to continue pumping out of the indigenous population everything of vital importance to it – reindeer meat, fish and fur – while importing into the northern areas industrial goods and products of low quality and little use, such as canned fish and (why hide it), first and foremost, until 1985, vodka.

Thus the policy of extensive territorial autonomy for the Northern Peoples was curtailed in the mid-30s, the institutions for national self-government abolished (the native soviets), and the Committee of the

North – the main governmental body for working out of a national and economic policy among the Small Peoples – done away with. In this way, what was in the beginning one of the basic principles of the Soviet system, one of the "ploughshares" of Soviet power, was abrogated – the principle of self-government, together with another basic principle: that of cooperation. Formerly, it was widely held that cooperation in the 1920s was the first stage of collectivization, that "cooperation paved the road for collectivization," etc. Now it has become evident that there was an essential difference between the Leninist cooperative plan and Stalin's collectivization.

In the North, collectivization in the form of a "socialist offensive on the whole front" began later than in the southern parts of Russia. In March 1929, the 6th extended Plenary Session of the Committee of the North passed a resolution "On the Practical Measures to be Taken in Connection with the Reconstruction of the Economy and Life of the Small Peoples of the North at the Beginning of Collectivization". At this point, only 39 collective farms had been registered in the Far North. Then it became a matter of multiplying this number by hundreds in two or three years. A mad race started in order to catch up with the so-called control figures, the targets set by the plan, and to surpass them. Farms were established where reindeer and hunting and trapping outfits were collective property. Such forms of collectivisation appeared particularly strange to the native peoples. To go hunting for squirrel, sable, and polar fox is practically always, and by nature, an individual process. So why collectivization, when with every new season people scatter to the four winds with their families into the forests and the tundras? The collectivization of the reindeer overthrew the foundation of the nomads' traditional world-view. Ethnographers have found out that all cattle-herding nomads have deep-founded cultural and psychological conceptions about man's individual spiritual connection with his domesticated animals. The family, the household, and the animals make up a coherent system, a microcosm, and if this system is broken, people are left with nothing but primitive physical work, meaningless and hard – the life of nomad-proletarians. In contrast to hunting, reindeer breeding offered something to expropriate. As for fishing, the collectivization of the means of production seemed rather logical, as fishing on big rivers demands collective work. But among Northern Peoples, systems of cooperation had existed since time immemorial, and people had been fishing communally or in *artels*, and putting up gratings, traps, and nets collectively without collective farms. What could collectivization add to this, other than taking away miserable fishing nets from those who had them, and passing them on to people who had none? Was it really worth turning life inside out just for this?

Here is the story about how an *artel* (in fact, a collective farm), "Red Enge", was organized in one of the districts of Yakutia. The story is told by the *artel's* first Evenk chairman: "Some kind of authorized person arrived and began to organize total collectivization. He assembled everybody and

said: "All Tungus (Evenks) must register as members of a collective farm. Those who don't will be fined – men 80 roubles, women 20. So everybody registered." (Tarasov, I.A.: KPSS – organizator sotsialisticheskogo preobrazovania khozyaistva malykh narodnostei Severa. Yakutsk, 1967, p. 84.). Techniques of social pressure, threats, promises, and slander were effective everywhere. Of course most of these "collective farms" turned out to be untenable, and a number of them ceased to exist during the years from 1930 to 32. Mass exit from them started after the well-known decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the 22nd of June, 1932, "On the Inadmissibility of Carrying Through Total Collectivization of the Households of the Backward Peoples of the North".

The central political issue of the collectivization campaign was that of the *kulak* (pejorative term for a better off peasant). Under the guidance of the theory of "intensified class struggle under socialism", it was easy to find "class enemies" even in a classless, patriarchal, clan-based society. The "class enemy" was he who at the given moment was better off than others. "The *kulak* is a person characteristic of capitalist society. Can there be such a person in a primitive communal society?" asked people who tried to show how meaningless and unjust it was to apply a label invented by the Kremlin leaders with a view to Russian "class-divided" villages to nomad reindeer herders and forest hunters. But their protests were in vain. The "liberals" from the Committee of the North were now accused of "not fully supporting the large-scale Soviet measures against the *kulak* and of submitting to the false fetish of national uniqueness, not realizing that this was just a cover for the most repulsive forms of *kulak* activity." At that time such an accusation was no joke, and it was necessary to defend and justify oneself. A. E. Skachko tried to strike the right note: "We do not love the *kulak* so much as to protect him from offences, not even unjust ones!" But still he kept insisting on the correctness of his viewpoints, defended them, and explained that "fixed targets" are not measures that will exempt the poor and affect only the rich; but are requisitions that also fall on the shoulders of the poor part of the population and are collected from the entire people. He said also that "confiscated property is not passed on to the native poor, but to the economic and industrial organizations and enterprises, to the Russians, or is just being destroyed or passed on at random."

The central economic issue of the collectivization in the North was that of the reindeer. The reindeer nomads of Chukotka and Kamchatka had since time immemorial considered it a "sin" to sell live reindeer for money. Underlying this were old conceptions about the mutual bonds between the souls of the animals and their masters. Reindeer were never common property. Every reindeer in a household, in a herd, belonged to one special person and member of the family. Every person wore in his belt or kept at the bottom of his baggage a small stick called *gychgyr-gyrgyr* – the soul of the reindeer. To sell a reindeer live was a sure way to lose one's "reindeer fortune" and perish. Reindeer were used as presents, as sacrifices, or sold as meat. American Protestant missionaries who had wanted to buy reindeer from the Chukchi at the beginning of the 20th century in order to start reindeer breeding in Alaska had had great difficulty for exactly these reasons. Now it was demanded that well-to-do reindeer nomads should sell their reindeer. But they did not want to sell their "reindeer fortune". So confiscation became the alternative. Under pressure from the collectivization officials, even coastal communities of seafishermen and hunters, who had never had any reindeer or any idea of how to breed them, passed resolutions such as "...rich reindeer breeders' reindeer must be handed over to us, the poor." Whoever among reindeer nomads had the opportunity migrated as far away as possible from the officials in their leather coats. Those who could not ended up in a hopeless position. Many of them would have been happy to pass on their reindeer freely to anyone, who had none, but this was not allowed and was looked upon as a counter-revolutionary activity and deception, "a way of luring the poor onto their side." Then people started killing their reindeer. Thus in the end, the same events took place in the North as over all of Russia. Comrade Mer from the Commissariat of Agriculture presented the following figures on losses of reindeer in the Far North during collectivization: in 1926, there were 2.99 million reindeer; in 1931, 2.52; in 1932, 2.33; and in 1934, 1.83 million. "And the real figures are lower still", he added. So in the years of collectivization (1932-34), the number of domestic reindeer in the Soviet Union was reduced by almost one third. This evil turned out to be a bigger disaster than the epizootics of malignant anthrax (Siberian reindeer plague) and foot and mouth disease. The disturbance of the ecological balance in the extreme natural conditions of the North meant hunger, cold, and death for many people.

This was the economic strategy. But what about the tactics? What about "how to isolate the *kulak*?" Agitation had no effect. During a journey in the Taimyr tundra, the Nganasan Bettu Parfen told Comrade Usoltsev, a district executive committee representative: "We, the natives, do not mind whether a person is good or bad, but we help each other. Therefore we do not agree with the plan of banishing the *kulaks* to the poorest lands, because the *kulak* is one of us." Then it was decided to put people beyond the law. In the Chukotka National Area, the *kulaks* were isolated in the following way: 37% of the indigenous population was deprived of the right to vote, being "relatives of *kulaks*". This represented half of all the reindeer herders of Chukotka! And, indeed, the Chukchi kinship system has so many terms, indicating relationship by blood, marriage, friendship (brotherhood), and by "wife" that it would even allow for proclaiming 100% of the population "relatives of *kulaks*". The percentage of people deprived of their vote was as high or even higher among other Northern Peoples.

But who carried out collectivization? In the Allaikhov District in Yakutia, the organizing of collective farms took place, as learned books tell us, "in an atmosphere of embittered class struggle." And the books

state that despite the complicated situation, the local party organizations "on the whole correctly directed the efforts of the communists towards the organization and mobilization of the working masses for the fight against the class enemy, the *kulaks* and their henchmen." (Tarasov, I. A.: ibid., p. 85.). How this was done was related at the 10th Plenum of the Committee of the North: "Comrade Modin, the secretary of the Allaikhov District Executive Committee, was excluded from the Communist Party for having shot at a portrait of Lenin and for having circulated a directive to the party cells with sexual organs drawn on it." There were quite a few "Modins" during the collectivization campaign. In archival documents, a certain official from the OGPU (Unified State Political Administration, i.e., the political police), a certain comrade Sergeyev, is mentioned, who was punished for having stolen fur from a wintering ship near Nizhnekolymsk. In Kolyma, he was remembered for "having driven to death dozens of reindeer and having beaten Chukchi on their faces." During an inspection trip to the Tigil District of Kamchatka, A. E. Skachko found out that the "District Executive Committee had organized a concentration camp where everyone who dared to criticize its activities was interned."

Under these conditions it was difficult to avoid armed clashes, especially in the North, where all of the hunting sector of the population is armed. Both on Chukotka and in Yakutia, there was armed resistance to collectivization. In 1943, the reindeer herders of Yamal were preparing for an uprising. Very few details are known yet; only short references exist in books on the history of the North.

But one such case is actually known to us in some detail. During one of my official trips, I came across a document – the indictment in case 2/49 on the 10th of June, 1934, of the OGPU in the Ob-Irtysh Region, named "On the Counterrevolutionary Actions against the Soviet State by the Natives of the Kazym Tundra". So what happened in the Kazym tundra?

The river Kazym flows into the river Ob not far from the town of Beryozovo, which is famous in Russian history because of Prince Menshikov and later Prince Osterman and others, who were exiled to Beryozovo. The population of Kazym is no more than one thousand five hundred hunters, fishermen, and reindeer herders, all of them Khanty. The chief instigator of the uprising was the former chairman of the native village soviet, Ivan Andreyevich Yernikhov. In 1931, Ivan Andreyevich decided to summon a meeting according to old Khant traditions. He made a *shum-ty-yuch,* an arrow stick with his *tamga* or personal sign engraved on it and sent it off to the pastures. The rebellious Khant "princess" Anna had done the same thing while preparing for an uprising against the Russians in 1609. Twenty-nine people met in the taiga. They were all sorts of people: "*kulaks*, shamans, poor people, average people." They decided to "gather all of the people of Kazym and put forward their requests." The requests were as follows: the abolition of the special *kulak*-taxation and the return of the vote to those who had been deprived of it, the removal of the cultural centre (*kultbaza*) and the fur station of the Ural State Fur

Company, re-election to the native soviets, restoration of the free trade with fish and fur, and no more state procurements. Furthermore, it was decided to remove all children from school and to demand its closing down. After the meeting, a magic hunting ritual, a *pory*, was arranged, and 15 reindeer were slaughtered and sacrificed.

At the next meeting in December 1931, more than 150 people gathered. Armed men decided to move towards Berezovo and put forward their requests. The women went to the school in Kazym for their children. But the men did not reach Berezovo. People from the District Executive Committee came to meet them on their way to town. They calmed down the Kazym people and promised to go to Kazym soon for a big meeting where all problems were to be discussed. So people went home to their *chums*.

A month later, the promised meeting was held in Kazym. The representatives from the District Committee instantly demanded that Yernikhov be deprived of his vote and that all *kulaks* leave the meeting. The assembly's answer to this was the following: "There are no *kulaks* among us. We are all equal, and everyone of us must take part in the meeting, in the solving of the problems." The visitors did not succeed in convincing the natives. A new native soviet was elected that began to carry out the decisions taken at the autumn *pory* of 1931. After this, the Kazym people met a couple of times more, thinking about what to do next, praying, shamanizing and sacrificing reindeer.

In this disturbed period, the local authorities in Berezovo decided to teach the Kazym people a lesson, to show them who was in power – or perhaps people in Berezovo simply did not imagine what the situation was like in the Kazym tundra? Anyhow, a group of seven armed people, among them Astrakhantsev from the District Executive Committee and P. P. Shneider, representative of the Ural Committee of the North, were sent to the upper reaches of the Kazym River, to the sacred lake of the Khanty, Num-to (the Divine Lake). The seven people were to organize a fishery in Num-to. The fishing trip was not undertaken for any urgent economic reasons. The remote Num-to is much poorer of fish than the big rivers Ob and Sosva close to Berezovo. This was a sheer demonstration of power and its outcome was sad. The Khanty seized the intruders and held them as hostages. They wanted to exchange them for those kinsmen who, during the previous years, had been carried away to Berezovo never to return.

But the contending parties did not succeed in exchanging prisoners. One of the plotters started arguing: "Wherever we take the small fox cubs we have caught and no matter for how long we keep them, we shall never be able to bring them up!" After that all of the captives, including the only woman, P. P. Shneider, were strangled with ropes. At that moment, the representatives from Berezovo arrived in order to negotiate and protest against the capture of the "brigade of fishermen". But the captives had already been punished. For the rebels, there was nothing left but to disappear into the most desolate taiga areas of the rivers Pur and Nadym.

The operative groups of the OGPU took action, and 88 persons were arrested. Later on, 34 of them were released and three died during the investigation. Yernikhov himself died of "lobar pneumonia" during interrogation. Fifty-one persons were accused of counter-revolutionary terrorist activities according to article No. 58 of the Penal Code of the RSFSR: a very dismal end. Why all this? Why all of these pointless deaths? A handful of forest people had engaged in an unequal fight against a mad government machine. Involuntarily, they had been drawn into a terrible fight and paid tenfold with their lives for the lives of the captives who had been killed. Both the Russian communists who were killed in the taiga, and the non-party Khanty who died in prisons and camps, were the victims of other people, namely of those who drove them to undertake senseless expropriations, commit offences and violations, and stir up conflicts and mutual hatred. For many years, we have been looking at the lot of the Northern Peoples as an "outstanding illustration of the successes of the Leninist national policy... the first example in the history of mankind that shows that it is possible to pass directly from primitive to socialist forms of economy, from primordial communalism to socialism, bypassing the intervening stages." Thus, it seems that there is nothing left for the small Northern Peoples but to be happy and proud that they will vanish under socialism and not during some kind of "transitional stage" (when people, by the way, do not vanish but grow in number and become stronger economically, such as the Inuit of Greenland, the American Indians, or the Australian Aboriginals). Or maybe one should look at things from a different angle? "The non-capitalist style of development among the Small Peoples" underwent an abrupt change in the 1930s, when it substituted Stalinism for Leninism. And since then we have not changed direction! Is this not the reason why we have so many problems in the northern regions (and not only there) of a national, cultural, social, and ecological nature, which so stubbornly remain unsolved? Doesn't this road lead us a in dance back to primordial communal society, "bypassing all of the intervening stages"? It is worthwhile to consider this carefully.

The Peoples of the North must finally be given the opportunity to develop nationally and socially in the modern sense of the word, and in accordance with the provisions of the Soviet Constitution. No doubt special governmental aid will be necessary if the Northern Peoples are to be rescued from the state of "total crisis" that has left its mark on all aspects of indigenous peoples' lives: household, economy, national language and self-consciousness, popular culture, everyday life, ecology, and health services. Cosmetic means and "further perfection" are not needed any longer; but rather the active involvement of the indigenous peoples in an effective reconstruction of the inflexible territorial and administrative structures of the 1930s, in the bureaucratic command methods of management, and in the introduction of genuine democracy, social activity, constructive methods of economic management, and the free display of national culture.

For what do the fundamental principles of the Soviet state, the so-called "ploughshares of Soviet power" – self-government, cooperation, enlightenment" – actually mean? They mean the right of the Small Peoples to independent development in the spheres of politics, economy, and culture. This was the "rational core" of the national policy in the North in the 1920s. Our own experience and that of foreign countries have shown that independent development, the direct involvement of the peoples concerned in the solution to their national problems, is not a superfluous luxury but a necessary condition. Without this, there can scarcely be any positive results. Development on their own terms is the only viable way for the Small Peoples to survive in the modern world. If social passivity is not overcome by the indigenous northerners themselves, no help from the outside will be of any use. It must again become an obligatory political principle of primary importance that the Small Peoples are to take part in all plans and programmes for local development at every stage, from the outset through the debate to the implementation.

The political intentions of the leadership of our country to establish a system of "direct democracy" – of direct participation by the people in the elaboration, passing, and realization of government decisions – make it possible to look at the future with optimism. Now the most important thing is to ensure that there will be a correspondence between words and deeds.

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PEOPLES OF RUSSIA'S NORTH: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

BY D. D. BOGOYAVLINSKY

Introduction

Since ancient times, a number of small nationalities, grouped together in official and scientific terminology as "Peoples of the North", have been living scattered across the wide expanses of the North and Far East of Russia. Despite their small numbers, they have populated these enormous territories – half of today's Russia – and made them their home.

Traditionally, they have lived from reindeer herding, hunting and fishing and their livelihood and lifestyle were closely linked with the surrounding environment. Many of them were nomads. As a consequence of their "attachment" to specific landscapes, their forms of livelihood and cultural characteristics were extremely varied. The Peoples of the North were made up of a multitude of separate tribes and groups living relatively independently, although maintaining links with their neighbours. Their connection with "the world of the white man" was limited to the payment of tax in kind (*yasak*) and some trading of goods.

However, the northern regions of today have seen some striking changes take place. Along with the indigenous inhabitants (in 1989: in all 184,000), there are now more than nine million people of non-indigenous origin living here, all of them either newcomers or the children and grandchildren of migrants. The majority of the aboriginal peoples now live in settlements where newcomers predominate. In many ways, the lifestyle of the indigenous population has also changed. Fewer than half of them are now working in traditional branches of the economy.

There are 26 nations belonging to Small Peoples of the North (SPN): the Saami (on the Kola Peninsula), the Nenets (in the tundra areas from the Barents Sea to the Yenisei River), the Enets (around the lower reaches of the Yenisei River), the Dolgan and the Nganasan (in the tundra of Taimyr), the Chukchi, the Chuvan and the Eskimo (on Chukotka), the Koryak and the Itelmen (on Kamchatka), the Aleut (on the Commander Islands), the Khanty, Mansi, and Selkup (in the taiga of Western Siberia), the Ket (around the midstream area of the Yenisei River), the Tofalar (in the Eastern Sayan Mountains), the Evenk and the Even (throughout Siberia from the Yenisei River to the Sea of Okhotsk), the Yukagir (on the Kolyma River), the Nanai, Negidal, Ulch, Oroch and Udege (in the basin of the Amur River), the Nivkh and the Orok (on the island of Sakhalin).

The indigenous peoples of Northern Russia are in a critical state. The crisis has affected many different aspects of their life, including their demographic development.

Demographic transition[1]

At present, the Small Peoples of the North are in a state of "demographic transition". This commonly used term signifies a reduction of mortality and birth rates in populations. Among the population groups of the North, we can see examples of both very rapid transition – such as that among the Eskimos of Greenland – and of a slower shift such as that taking place among the Saami of Scandinavia; for them, the process of transition is near completion.

The demographic transition among the Small Peoples of the North of Russia began with the reduction of the mortality rate – according to my calculations in the 1950s. Initially, the reduction was very noticeable in as much as in the 1940s the mortality rate had been catastrophically high. However, already in the 1960s the reduction in the mortality rate had begun to slow down. State statistics on the Small Peoples of the North, that were gathered from late 1950s, indicate that the coefficient of mortality even grew in the late 1960s (see tables). In fact, this was obviously a result of better counting of the deaths among the Small Peoples of the North.

Mortality

In the 1970s, the mortality coefficient was almost stable. By the end of the 1970s, the average life expectancy for the Small Peoples of the North was 49 years, which was almost 19 years fewer than for the country as a whole. It is impossible to say that the decrease in the mortality rate came to a halt – infant and child mortality rates continued to fall (see table), but the mortality rate among middle-aged people was on the increase. The causes of death also changed significantly. Whereas in the 1950s the main cause of death was infectious diseases (among these tuberculosis), by the 1970s the main causes of fatality among the indigenous people of the North had become injury, suicide, murder, and other forms of violent death (see table).

The incidence of violent death, and its increase among the middle-aged population, gives in my opinion an indication of the social conditionality of this phenomenon. The destruction of the traditional way of life, the resettling of indigenous peoples from small settlements to big ones, the appearance of unemployment, and the increase in alcoholism all had an influence on changes in the mortality rate.

In the mid-1980s, after draconian measures were introduced in the campaign to reduce alcoholism, the number of violent deaths fell sharply

[1] All figures and calculations are based on data from state statistical records. They were obtained by processing documents recording births and deaths, marriages and divorces (registered at the ZAGS, the registry office) and also data from the censuses. The shortcoming of the ZAGS data is insufficient or incomplete calculations - especially what concerns the early periods, nomads etc,. In the same way, but to a lesser degree, over- or underestimates are possible in the censuses. In addition to this, the method of fixating ethnic origin in the censuses (self-definition) is different from that of the registry offices (according to documents).

and the coefficient of mortality also fell. The average life expectancy for the Small Peoples of the North increased. From 1988 to 89, it was up to almost 60 years and the gap between this rate and indicators for the country as a whole was reduced to 10 years. However, in recent years the mortality coefficient has risen again. To make prognoses for the future is difficult because of the critical situation all over the country.

For the Small Peoples of the North, the highest mortality rates are to be found among the Chukchi, Koryak and Even of Chukotka and Kamchatka, the Dolgan, Nenets and Nganasan of Taimyr. The lowest rates are among the Peoples of the North in the Yakut-Sakha Republic.

Birth Rate

A reduction in the birth rate coefficient among the Small Peoples of the North began, it seems, at the end of the 1960s. This was to a great extent due to a "wave effect" (a small generation of mothers at the end of the 1940s), but another factor that played a role here was the beginning of a trend towards intended restriction of births in families (family planning). The appearance of the phenomenon of birth control is confirmed by sociological research. This process, however, was conditioned by external influence and not by internal developments in the Northern Peoples' traditional way of life. Therefore, the decrease in the birth rate was comparatively slow (when compared with, for example, the figures for Greenland) and fluctuating; and, in fact, in the 1980s the birth rate among the Northern Peoples even increased slightly. However, in recent years the birth rate coefficient is again declining. Such fluctuations in the form of both increases and decreases can largely be explained by structural influences (the wave effect), but nevertheless a decreasing birth rate seems to be a long-term and relatively stable tendency.

The level of the birth rate is not uniform among all the Small Peoples of the North (see table). The highest birth rate is among the Nenets and the Chukchi, the lowest among the Saami, the Aleut, the Negidal, and the Nanai.

Marriage

For the Small Peoples of the North, a rather low incidence of marriage is currently characteristic. On the one hand, this is due to a tendency to get married late and, on the other hand, it is due to a high mortality rate among married couples; the proportion of widows and widowers among the Small Peoples of the North is the highest of all the various nationalities in Russia. However the low incidence of marriage is not having such a negative effect on the birth rate as might be expected in that a very large proportion of children born to women among the Small Peoples of the North (especially younger women) are born outside marriage (in some regions up to 50%), and this proportion is increasing. Another noticeable characteristic is that significantly fewer men from among the Small Peoples of the North get married than women. This can be explained by the fact



Western Siberia 1978. Children spend the Summer in the tundra with their parents (Photo: Alexander Pica).

that nowadays women often prefer to get married to non-indigenous men. The low incidence of marriage among men from the Small Peoples of the North – the high number of widowers and men who are divorced or who have never been married – constitutes one of the factors contributing to the high mortality rate.

Ethnic Processes

The Peoples of the North are experiencing a loss of culture and are being exposed to processes of assimilation.

Under circumstances whereby the non-indigenous population constitutes a majority, the Russian language is used as the everyday language, and in all of the institutions the indigenous languages are being replaced by Russian. This tendency is reinforced by the fact that teaching in schools is conducted in Russian (indigenous languages are generally studied only in the infant classes, and sometimes they are not taught at all). Only 52% of all the Small Peoples of the North consider the native language of their people to be their mother tongue, the rest specify Russian as their mother tongue (the Evenk, Even and Yukagir of Yakutia often also specify Yakut as their mother tongue, and likewise the Nenets of the European North specify the Komi language). Among the younger generation of the Northern Peoples, knowledge of the native language is even scarcer.

Along with the Russian language, the behaviour and lifestyles of the newcomers are also taking hold among the Small Peoples.

In addition to this, a physical process of mestization of the indigenous inhabitants is going on. Almost half of the children born to women from among the Northern Peoples at the end of the 1980s had non-indigenous fathers. Upon reaching adulthood, many of these mestizo children identify themselves as being of a non-indigenous nationality. In Russia the nationality (ethnic origin) of every citizen is recorded in the passport. Nationality is inherited – in other words, it can only be that of one of the parents. Total losses due to assimilation have been large, constituting more than 5% of the overall population of the Small Peoples of the North during the last decade.

The worst losses due to assimilation have been suffered by the Mansi, Selkup, Saami and Ket, whereas the Chuckchee and the Dolgan, for example, have hardly suffered any losses due to ethnic processes.

Table 1. Command of indigenous mother tongue among the Small Peoples of the North, in percentages. *Source*: All-Union Censuses.

	1959	1970	1979	1989
Total	75.7	67.2	61.7	52.3
Nenets	84.7	83.4	80.4	77.1
Evenk	54.9	51.3	42.8	30.4
Khant	77.0	68.9	67.8	60.5
Even	81.4	56.0	56.9	43.9
Chukchi	93.9	82.6	78.2	70.3
Nanai	86.3	69.1	55.8	44.1
Koryak	90.5	81.1	69.0	52.4
Mansi	59.2	52.4	49.5	37.1
Dolgan	93.9	89.8	90.0	81.7
Nivkh	76.3	49.5	30.6	23.3
Selkup	50.6	51.1	56.6	47.6
Ulchi	84.9	60.8	38.8	30.8
Itelmen	36.0	35.7	24.4	19.6
Udege	73.7	55.1	31.0	26.3
Saami	69.9	56.2	53.0	42.2
Eskimo	84.0	60.0	60.7	51.6
Chuvan	–	–	–	21.4
Nganasan	93.4	75.4	90.2	83.2
Yukagir	52.5	46.8	37.5	32.8
Ket	77.1	74.9	61.0	48.3
Oroch	68.4	48.6	40.7	18.8
Tofalar	89.1	56.3	62.1	43.0
Aleut	22.3	21.8	17.8	26.6
Negidal	–	53.3	44.4	28.3
Enets	–	–	–	45.5
Orok	–	–	–	44.7

Table 2. Population of the Small Peoples of the North in the USSR and their growth in percentages over selected periods. *Source*: All-Union Population Censuses.

	1959	1970	1979	1989	1959-69	1970-78	1979-88
Total	131111	153578	158324	184448	17.1	3.1	16.5
Nenets	23007	28705	29894	34665	24.8	4.1	16.0
Evenk	24151	25471	27294	30163	5.5	7.2	10.5
Khant	19410	21138	20934	22521	8.9	-1.0	7.6
Even	9121	12029	12523	17199	31.9	4.1	37.3
Chukchi	11727	13597	14000	15184	15.9	3.0	8.5
Nanai	8026	10005	10516	12023	24.7	5.1	14.3
Koryak	6287	7487	7879	9242	19.1	5.2	17.3
Mansi	6449	7710	7563	8474	19.6	-1.9	12.0
Dolgan	3932	4877	5053	6945	24.0	3.6	37.4
Nivkh	3717	4420	4397	4673	18.9	-0.5	6.3
Selkup	3768	4282	3565	3612	13.6	-16.7	1.3
Ulchi	2055	2448	2552	3233	19.1	4.2	26.7
Itelmen	1109	1301	1370	2481	17.3	5.3	81.1
Udege	1444	1469	1551	2011	1.7	5.6	29.7
Saami	1792	1884	1888	1890	5.1	0.2	0.1
Eskimo	1118	1308	1510	1719	17.0	15.4	13.8
Chuvan	–1)	–1)	–1)	1511	–	–	–
Nganasan	748	953	867	1278	27.4	-9.0	47.4
Yukagir	442	615	835	1142	39.1	35.8	36.8
Ket	1019	1182	1122	1113	16.0	-5.1	-0.8
Oroch	782	1089	1198	915	39.3	10.0	-23.6
Tofalar	586	620	763	731	5.8	23.1	-4.2
Aleut	421	451	546	702	7.1	21.1	28.6
Negidal	2)	537	504	622	–	-6.1	23.4
Enets	3)	3)	3)	209	–	–	–
Oroki	4)	4)	4)	190	–	–	–

1) Included in the figures for Chukchi
2) Included in the figures for Evenks
3) Included in the figures for Evenks
4) Included in the figures for Oroch

Table 3. The population of the Providenia District of the Chukot Autonomous Republic. In numbers and percentages. *Source*: All-Union Population Censuses.

	Total population	Chukchi	Eskimos	Indigenous population in %	Chukchi in %	Eskimos in %	Russians in %
1989	9,981	1,467	808	22.8	14.7	8.1	61.0
1979	8,736	1,331	718	23.4	15.2	8.2	61.8
1970	8.728	1,310	629	22.2	15.0	7.2	63.7
1959	6,267	1,028	562	25.4	16.4	9.0	59.8

Table 4. The Providenia District of the Chukot Autonomous Republic. Urban and rural population. In numbers of thousands and in percentages. *Source*: All-Union Population Censuses.

	Total	Urban	Rural	Urban in %	Rural in %
1989	9.9	5.5	4.4	55.4	44.6
1979	8.7	4.7	4.0	53.5	46.5
1970	8.8	4.4	4.4	50.0	50.0
1959	6.3	3.3	3.0	52.4	47.6

Table 5. The Providenia District of the Chukot Autonomous Republic. Persons with an Education per one thousand employed persons. Both sexes: urban and rural population. *Source*: All-Union Population Censuses.

	1989	1979
Total	1,000	1,000
Persons with an education	995	980
Higher and secondary education (app.)	956	870
Higher Education	180	128
Secondary specialized	373	262
Incomplete secondary	111	233
Primary education	38	110

Table 6. Towns and villages in the Providenia District of the Chukot Autonomous Republic. Population, in numbers. *Source*: All-Union Censuses.

	1989	1979
Total	9,782	8,415
Urban	5,434	4,643
Rural	4,348	3,772
Providenia (town)	5,434	4,643
Urelki (village)	1,753	1,504
Nunligran (village)	539	373
Sireniki (village)	724	661
Novoye Chaplino (village)	515	420
Enmelen (village)	392	464
Yanrakynnot (village)	425	317

Table 7. Providenia District of the Chukot Autonous Republic. Population according to sex and age, in numbers. Total population.
Source: All-Union Censuses.

	Both sexes 1979	Both sexes 1989	Men 1979	Men 1989	Women 1979	Women 1989
Total	8,736	9,778	4,445	4,969	4,291	4,809
Age 0-2	462	633	243	321	219	312
Age 3-6	718	768	381	388	337	380
Age 7-15	1,686	1,838	891	908	795	832
Age 20-29	1,620	1,715	844	912	776	803
Age 30-39	1,677	2,020	808	995	869	1,025
Age 40-49	1,293	1,354	623	629	670	725
Age 50-59	489	684	206	311	283	373
Age 60 -	170	224	49	60	121	164

Table 8. Providenia District of the Chukot Autonomous Republic. Population according to nationality, in numbers. *Source*: All-Union Censuses.

	1989	1979
Total	9,981	8,736
Russians	6,087	5,394
Ukrainians	1,022	804
Belorussians	121	103
Ossetians	20	16
Tatars	105	63
Chukchi	1,467	1,331
Eskimos	808	718
Evens	16	25

Table 9. Providenia District of the Chukot Autonomous Republic. Rural population belonging to the Peoples of the North, 1 January 1990.

Total	Chukchi	Eskimos	Evenks	Evens	Dolgans	Orochs	Chuvans	Yukagirs
2,057	1,329	711	6	4	3	1	2	1

(D. D. Bogoyavlinsky is a demographer and researcher at the Centre for Human Ecology of the Institute for Economic Forecasting, the Russian Academy of Sciences)

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS: THE ASSOCIATION OF THE 26 SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH AND FAR EAST

In March 1990, less than two years after the first articles describing the difficult situation of the Northern Peoples had appeared in the Soviet press, the First Congress of Indigenous Peoples in the Soviet Union was convened in Moscow. The delegates from all these "26 Small Indigenous Peoples of the North and Far East" decided to establish an "Association of Small Peoples of the North". The Nivkh writer, Vladimir Sangi, was elected its first chairman.

In the following we present documents that relate to the founding of the Association, its intentions and plans for future actions. Also included in this section is an interview with its first chairman.

LETTER OF APRIL 20, 1988 TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION COMRADE M. S. GORBACHEV

Honourable Mikhail Sergeyevich,
We are appealing to you as a group of writers belonging to the Peoples of the North.

During the years of Soviet rule, a great deal was done to develop the economy and culture of our peoples. Over the past 15 to 20 years, discoveries of huge reserves of hydrocarbon material and other minerals have led to the rapid industrial development of the regions that are home to the Peoples of the Far North and East. In the taiga and the tundra, modern towns and villages have grown up and new types of industry have appeared. Television and radio have also come to our regions. A literate culture has been created and national literatures emerged and developed. There have been certain movements within the spheres of culture, health care, and education for the indigenous peoples.

In attempting to evaluate these achievements we would, however, like to point out that as far as social development in the northern regions is concerned, many serious errors have been permitted.

Recent years have seen constant encroachment upon the environment of the northern regions. Reindeer pastures, forests, and fishing grounds are being destroyed. Meanwhile, the local authorities do not attempt to oppose the all-powerful departments and ministries who are subjugating the northern territories. All over, one can observe the totally unjustified and arbitrary destruction of centuries-old indigenous villages and settlements in favour of big settlements and towns (among the Eskimo, Nivkh, Mansi, Khanty, and others). The huge influx of migrants has made the life of the indigenous population very difficult in its ancestral homelands. The irreplaceable national characteristics, the traditionally strong moral values, ethnic appearance, indigenous language, and distinct way of life are disappearing from the peoples' culture and gene pool.

The destruction of a way of life that has been formed and shaped over many hundreds of years and the abandonment of a genetically determined diet (fresh meat and fish) have brought the Peoples of the North to the edge of inevitable extinction.

The demographic situation gives cause for alarm. Life expectancy in the autonomous areas (*okrug*) of the Tyumen region (*oblast*) has fallen by 10 years, and the number of Nivkh, Orok, and Even inhabitants on Sakhalin has dropped by between 3 and 12%. There is still a high incidence of tuberculosis, and infant mortality remains two or three times higher than the average for RSFSR as a whole. Yet no one takes responsibility for this situation.

For the indigenous population of the North, it has become a problem to find work. In a number of areas (*okrug*) and districts (*raion*), one in ten is out of work; in some areas even one in five. And add to this that more than half of the peoples concerned are under 30 years of age. The reasons are always the same – destruction of the living conditions of the Peoples of the North, and the constantly increasing and unchecked influx of newcomers to the area, with the result that the indigenous peoples are ousted from their traditional occupations (fishing, hunting, deer herding, sea hunting, and fishing). A significant number of indigenous people are employed only on a seasonal basis. However, the directors of the enterprises continue to recruit workers from other regions of the country.

Hasty measures that were introduced to concentrate the indigenous population in central farms have destroyed the working traditions that had developed through history. In the environment of the Far North and East, the type of economic activities pursued (e.g., trapping, fishing, and deer herding) presupposes wide expanses of territory and a small and very scattered population. The setting up of large central farms has proved inexpedient and has had harmful ecological consequences.

Another unsolved problem is the question of the erection of houses and buildings for social and cultural purposes on the land used by the reindeer breeders and hunters. Let us take the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area by way of example. In this area, every third inhabitant leads a nomadic lifestyle. The construction of houses – mostly done by the *Gosagroprom* – is progressing slowly and new houses are being distributed unevenly. In the regions inhabited by the Peoples of the North, each member of the indigenous population has received on average a quarter of the amount of living space allotted to those of other nationalities, and a closer examination of housing quality shows the contrast to be even more striking. According to estimate, if we are to rely solely on the allocation of materials and financial resources from the above-indicated state enterprise, then the housing problem cannot possibly be solved by the year 2,000.

There are very few representatives of the Peoples of the North to be found in the party, in soviets, trade unions, the *komsomol* (Communist Youth Movement), and other public or governmental organs and organizations. To give an example, the local party apparatus of the Khanty-Mansi Area does not have a single representative of indigenous origin who speaks his mother tongue. The situation is no better in the Nenets, Taimyr, Yamal-Nenets, and Koryak Autonomous Areas. And within the party apparatus of Sakhalin, Primoriye, and the Murmansk Region (*oblast*), there are no representatives of the indigenous population whatsoever. There are few party members among the Peoples of the North, and overall membership is half of that among representatives of other nationalities.

Good and regular resolutions passed by the party and government concerning the social development in the districts inhabited by the Peoples of the North are simply not carried out. The departments for the nationalities of the North in the regional executive committees and the

territory (*krai*) executive committees have failed to tackle a whole number of questions that they were supposed to. These bodies are affected by a formal, bureaucratic style of work and an attitude of indifference toward the Small Peoples' problems. The corresponding subdivisions of the Administrative Department of the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR are not carrying out their obligation to ensure that decisions taken by the government are actually being implemented. They cover up the passivity of the regional district administrations, they put up with anything, and they accept and forward the executive committees' fraudulent reports to other authorities. Therefore, due to the absence of any control of the implementation of the Provision No. 115 of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR (dated 7th of February, 1980) and of the Provision No. 260 of the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR (dated 20th of May, 1993), "On Measures for the Future Economic and Social Development of the Districts Inhabited by the Peoples of the North", essential measures stipulated in these resolutions, such as intensified building activities in national villages, have not been implemented in any of the 15 northern territories. It is already obvious that these resolutions have turned out to be a monstrous deception of the Peoples of the North. The Sakhalin Regional Executive Committee, to name but one example, informed the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR as long ago as 1981 that the tasks set out in the provision for 1980 to 1990, regarding housing, had been implemented in excess of all targets. In reality, not one square metre had been built for the Nivkh people. The situation is the same in the districts inhabited by the Khant, Mansi, Nenets, Selkup, Udege, Koryak, Evenk and other peoples.

To swiftly remove the shortcomings, to implement effective measures for the rebirth of the Peoples of the North, and to find solutions to the social problems you are kindly requested to examine the following proposals:

1. In order to improve and increase the efficiency of local governments in the regions inhabited by the Peoples of the North, we propose a Committee of the North to be established under the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (similar to the Committee of the North that existed under the All-Union Central Executive Committee in the first years of Soviet rule).
2. Extensive protected reserves should be established where the Peoples of the North can live and pursue their work. The peoples should be permitted to fish and to hunt mammals and wild ungulates for their own personal needs without a licence.
3. Autonomous formations should be established for the Nanai, Saami, Nivkh, Selkup, Even, Udege, the Far Eastern Evenk and other peoples, and they should be represented in the Supreme Soviets of USSR and the RSFSR.

4. As the many omissions and failures in the attempts to establish socially just policies in the North seem due to the insufficient representation of the indigenous peoples in the local party and soviet apparatus, and in local economic enterprises, we consider it important to intensify the efforts to have representatives of the indigenous peoples nominated to senior positions within the mentioned bodies.

5. It would be expedient to elect people as deputies of the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and RSFSR who are both educated and politically well-versed, who know how to think in terms of government, who have a knowledge of the indigenous languages, and who are capable of resolving the essential problems of the development of the economy and culture of the northern regions at the appropriate level.

6. An effective long-term compensation policy should be devised through legislation to cover the losses suffered by the peoples and by nature in the North in the process of industrial development. The compensation should be used at the discretion of the indigenous peoples, above all to construct national villages, social and cultural facilities, and a proper production potential, well-suited to the economic activities and the culture and lifestyle of the Peoples of the North. Environmental measures should also be implemented with the help of the compensation.

7. When decisions are being taken on large-scale and local construction work, and on exploitation of the subsurface and other natural resources, the final say regarding the protection of the environment should lie with the indigenous peoples, as guaranteed by appropriate legislature.

8. In all regions inhabited by the Peoples of the North, family enterprises and small producers' cooperatives should be developed and encouraged within reindeer farming, hunting, fishing, and maritime hunting and fishing. Work on construction of buildings suitable for this type of economic activity – small, well-appointed hunters and fishermens' enterprises (including manufacturing) – should be carried out during the period from 1988 to 1995. The recultivation of deer pastures, hunting and fishing grounds should also be initiated.

9. In order to protect and develop the indigenous peoples' material and spiritual culture, a cultural centre should be set up for the Peoples of the North, bringing together specialists with a knowledge of the native languages, cultures, traditions, and history of the indigenous inhabitants.

10. A university or institute should be established for the Peoples of the North.

11. A state publishing house should be set up for the publishing of literature in the languages of the Peoples of the North.

12. The following article should be introduced into the Constitutions of the USSR and RSFSR: "In the USSR, the languages of all nations and peoples have equal standing and shall be protected by the state and the law. Governmental, public, and other organizations and individual citizens should take the necessary measures in order to promote the languages of the Soviet nations and peoples."

13. Local writers' organizations for the Peoples of the North should be set up and, the publication *The Polar Star* should be transformed into a monthly journal produced under the jurisdiction of the Writers' Union Board of the RSFSR and the Writers' Union of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

(Signed)

V. Sangi – Secretary of the Board of the Writers Union of the RSFSR, Nivkh, Moscow

Yu. Shestalov – Winner of the Gorky State Prize for Literature, Mansi, Khanty-Mansiisk

V. Ledkov – Member of the Writers' Union of the USSR, Nenets, Arkhangelsk

R. Rugin – Member of the Writers' Union og the USSR, Khant, Salekhard

Ye. Aipin – Member of the Writers' Union of the USSR, Khant, Khanty-Mansiisk

V. Koyanto – Member of the Writers' Union of the USSR, Koryak, Palana, Kamchatka

G. Varlamova – Evenk writer, Candidate of Philological Science, Yakutsk

20th of April, 1988

DECLARATION OF THE CONGRESS OF THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

We, the representatives of the indigenous population of the North, Siberia, and the Far East announce the creation of an Association of the Small Peoples of the North. The purpose of the Association is to unite our efforts in order to survive. The time of illusions has passed and what is needed now is serious reflection and concrete action.

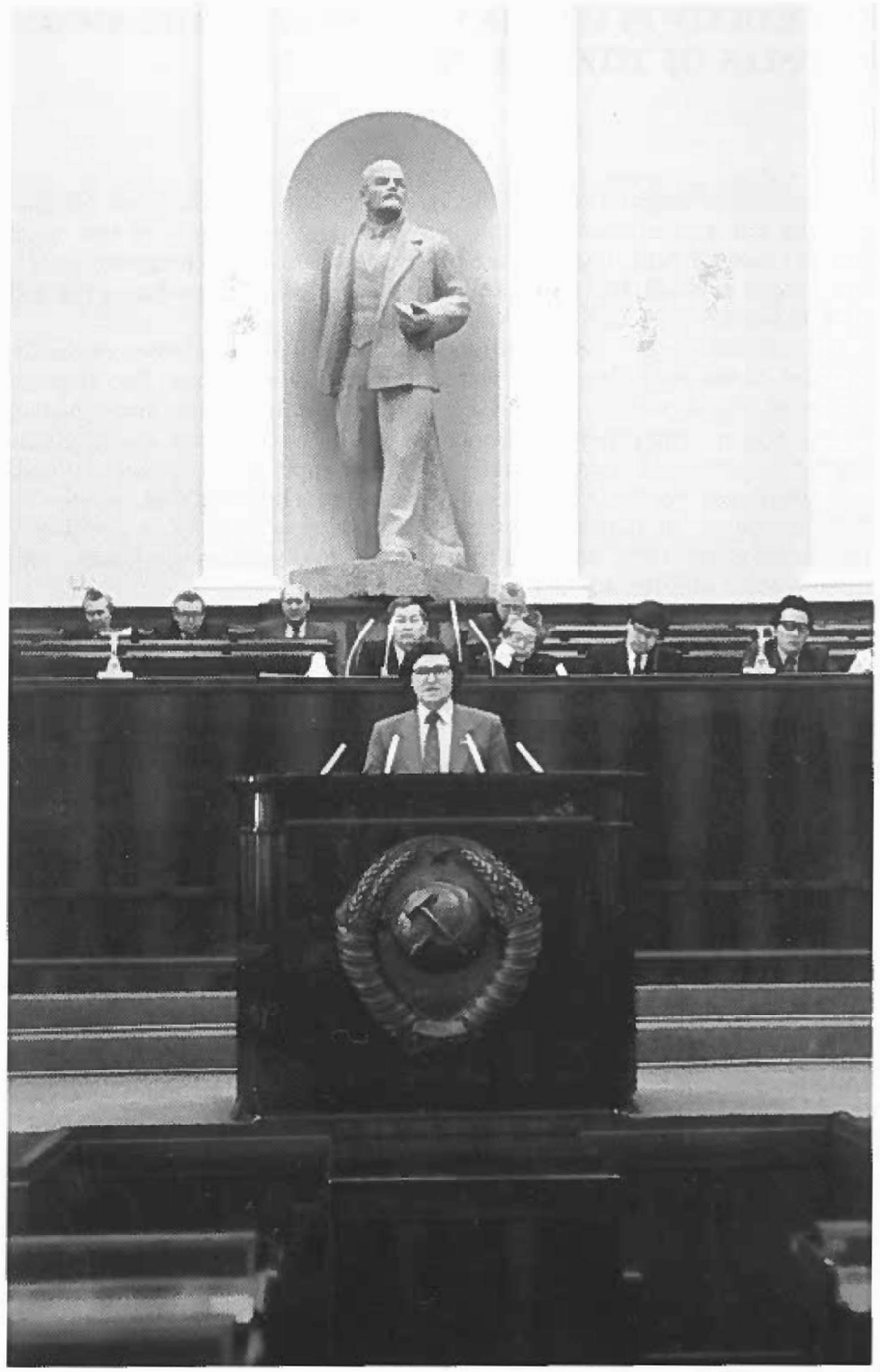
We cannot but be concerned about the fact that only seven of the 26 Peoples of the North have national autonomous formations. The absence of administrative, economic, and legal structures amongst the Even, Nanai, Saami, Selkup, and other representatives of the Soviet North is complicating the processes of consolidation and the attempts at a revival of national self-awareness. For this very reason, the Congress believes that, along with the re-creation of national districts and village soviets, it is absolutely necessary to return to previous forms of self-rule such as the lineage and tribal soviets and the soviets of elders.

A fatal wound has been inflicted on the environment of the northern regions of which we are an inherent part. Therefore we advocate a thorough re-examination of the principles of industrial development in the North, with our participation, and we demand that legal priority be given to traditional forms of land use. Any large-scale project involving the use of natural resources should be subject to obligatory examination by the local branches of the Association of the Small Peoples, among whose members will be the rightful masters of the land. The exclusive right to dispose of the tundra, taiga, rivers and lakes, to the extent of creating special areas for the development of traditional types of land use, should be transferred to the soviets of people's deputies. This would be the first real step towards saving nature and thereby also the peoples.

We are deeply concerned about the fact that our children and grandchildren, the ambassadors of our unique civilization for the millennium to come, are growing up unprepared for this mission. The amalgamation of schools and the consolidation in all regions of the boarding school system has dried up the spring of the uniqueness of the peoples, and has destroyed the continuity between the generations.

The education and training of economic specialists from among the indigenous peoples is extremely inadequate. The Congress considers it necessary to reconstitute the University (Academy) of Peoples of the North in Leningrad.

We note with alarm that despite years of warnings and calls for action, the state of health of the indigenous peoples of the North remains critical. Tuberculosis and infant mortality rates in the region are almost double those in the republic as a whole. Without radical improvements in the



Aipin at the first Congress of the Small Indigenous Peoples of the North and Far East, Moscow, March 1990 (Photo: J. Dahl).



Saami delegates to the first Congress of the Small Indigenous Peoples of the North and Far East, Moscow, March 1990 (Photo: J. Dahl).

work of the health-care services, responsibility for which lies with the government, the physical dying-out of the Peoples of the North will continue.

The Congress recognizes the right of all human beings to be different from one another and it expects that the government will guarantee spiritual revival. Special attention should be paid to the development, not in words but in deeds, of national cultures, literatures, languages, customs, traditions, and festivals.

As an acknowledgement of the enormous help and assistance provided to us by our Russian, Ukrainian, and other neighbours in our common home, we believe that we should open a section within our Association for patriots and old-settlers of the North who have a genuine wish to support our cause.

However, the struggle for our rights is unimaginable if it does not involve a general consolidation of indigenous peoples from all of the Arctic countries of the world. We offer them our friendship, hoping for mutual understanding and assistance.

The Congress advocates an immediate ratification by the USSR Supreme Soviet of the "Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries" adopted by the International Labour Organization in June 1989, and the observation of its principles in relation to the indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North.

We call upon all of our contemporaries to wake from their lethargic sleep, take heart, and become actively involved in the reconstruction and revival of their existence. Only through our own efforts and intellect, reinforced by our loyalty to national traditions and socialist ideals, will it be possible to save our future.

CONVENTION OF THE 26

On November 27th, 1990, the President of the Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North, V. M. Sangi, sent a letter containing the Convention of the 26 and other relevant documents to the President of the USSR, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, M. S. Gorbachev, bringing the documents in as bills. Below we shall bring Mr. Sangi's letter and the Convention.

Honourable Michail Sergeyevich,
In Yakutsk, 16th to 17th of October this year, a meeting took place in the Council of the Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North. At the meeting, the Convention of the 26 was passed. On the 18th to 19th of October, a scientific conference "Employment problems in public production among the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East" was held. The conference was arranged by the Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North, the Association of the Small Peoples of the North of Yakutia, associations of Small Peoples from other regions, the Institute for the Exploitation of the Natural Resources of the North of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and the Soviet of Ministers of the Yakut Autonomous Republic.

On behalf of the Council of the Association and the Conference I shall by this bring in the Convention of the 26 and the recommendations as bills.

Yours sincerely

V. M. Sangi
President of the Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North, author, laureate of the State Prize of the Russian Federation.

The Convention of the 26.
We, the representatives of 26 Peoples of the North of the Soviet Union, meeting in Council on October 16th, 1990, in the city of Yakutsk, state that at the moment our peoples are on the verge of extinction.

The Peoples of the North lived through the hardships of colonial policy and emerged with optimism on the shores of resurgence. But their expectations were cruelly deceived. They clashed with the unwillingness and inability of the state to deal with their problems. Today they are suffering from the tragic consequences of the thoughtless industrial conquest of the areas where they live. Vast territories of the historical

habitat of the Peoples of the North, from the Kola Peninsula to Chukotka, Kamchatka, Sakhalin, and the Amur, have become the major suppliers of raw material for the whole country. Enourmous amounts of oil, gas, timber, gold, fur, diamonds, and other precious stones have been extorted from the ancestral lands of the Peoples of the North, bringing them no prosperity, but only misfortune and disaster. Moreover, these peoples are being mercilessly driven away from their national livelihoods by pushful immigrants. By decision of local party and soviet organs they have been moved to industrial towns, sea-ports, district centres, and large settlements where social and cultural assimilation was forced upon them. Their cultures, traditional ways of life, and languages have been left in ruins. In this way the Peoples of the North have become outcasts in their own land.

Unless the processes now in motion are not reversed, the Peoples of the North are threatened with extinction in the near future. Urgent steps are needed to ensure their survival, their preservation in modern society, and future development in a rapidly changing world.

The Council of the Association of the 26 Small Peoples of the Soviet North hereby adopts this Convention and invites the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR to:

1. Ratify the "Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries" (Geneva, 1989), adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization which calls for the preservation of the distinctivness, culture, customs, and traditions of indigenous peoples; acknowledgement of their ownership of their land; and of a special status of the indigenous population while maintaining equal rigths with other population groups.
2. Accord the legal status of states to the Associations of the Peoples of the North and regional organizations of peoples not yet having national state entities.
3. Pass the act "On the Small Peoples of the Soviet North" in accordance with the act of the USSR "On the Free National Development of the Citizens of the USSR Living Outside Their National State Entities or Having No Such Entities Within the USSR".
4. Incorporate into the new constitution of the RSFSR special articles reflecting the rights and interests of the Peoples of the North as follows:

   - state parks and reservations where traditional uses of nature will enjoy priority shall be established in the areas where the People of the North have lived throughout history;

   - the Peoples of the North shall be granted exclusive rights of ownership over their ancestral lands and the continental shelf off their shores, including all biological and other resources and minerals; the land shall be handed over for clan-based and private use by the Peoples of the North; clan-based soviets should be reestablished;

   - in order to ensure the representation of all the Small Peoples of the North in soviets at all levels, there shall be introduced a category of special national electoral constituencies along ethnic lines;

   - in order to protect the interests of the 26 Small peoples of the North at the state level, the districts where these peoples live shall have parliamentary self-government with republican status;

5. To build up a fund for the social development of the Peoples of the North within the framework of the Association of the Small peoples of the Soviet North and similar regional associations, setting aside for this fund not less than 12 % of the annual revenues of the enterprises owned and operated by ministries, government departments and other organizations functioning in the Far North and areas equated with them, and areas where the People of the North have lived throughout history and carried on their traditional trades.
6. The Government of the USSR and the government of the RSFSR, the Soviets of people's deputies, ministries, and government departments of the USSR and the RSFSR shall establish, within the framework of the Association of the Peoples of the Soviet North, an All-Russian fund for the survival of the Peoples of the North.
7. To exempt the Association of the Small peoples of the Soviet North and regional associations of these peoples, and any organizations or enterprises they may may establish, from all forms of taxation.

The President of the Association The Council of the of the Small Peoples of the Soviet Association of the North Small Peoples of the Soviet North
V. M. Sangi

October 16th, 1990

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CPSU ON THE LETTER FROM V. M. SANGI

In his letter, the President of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North expresses alarm at the ongoing processes that are destroying the foundations of the traditional economy and the original way of life of the northern natives, and undermining the sources of their culture and language. Attention is drawn to the passivity of the state organs concerning the defense and support of the national rights of these peoples, and to the absence of definite measures aimed at resolving the growing problems of their existence.

Attention is furthermore drawn to the evaluation of the situation in the Convention of the 26 (enclosed) and its suggestions for the first measures to be taken to overcome the present critical situation.

The analysis of the problems laid out in the letter shows that the indigenous Peoples of the North continue to be in danger of disappearing and are in need of urgent help to preserve themselves. Among the most acute problems facing the Peoples of the North are the absence of the following: national local soviets and other organs of self-government in areas with compact indigenous populations, structures for ethnic consolidation, educational and cultural centres, and priorities for traditional forms of land use. The destruction of the ecological balance in the North is turning into a great disaster. The assimilation processes are on the increase, as is the destruction of the traditional way of life and economy. The life expectancy of the indigenous Peoples in the North has decreased by 15 to 18 years, sickness rates have increased to three to five times those of the RSFSR average. They have the lowest income level (30-40% of the average income of new arrivals in the North). In the majority of the settlements, there are no means for improving the state of affairs and no funds for public use. The unchecked activities of the so-called "joint ventures" represent a serious danger to the traditional economic activities of the Peoples of the North, as does the creation of "zones of free enterprise" in the regions where they live.

These issues have been raised repeatedly by the CPSU since the 19th Party Conference. In particular, it was noted in the resolution adopted at the December (1990) Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the CPSU that the draft of the Union Treaty would need to express guarantees for the protection of the Small Peoples' rights.

Is it possible to support Mr. V. M. Sangi's request and to propose that a group of communist people's deputies, in accordance with the Constitution, approach the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on behalf of the CPSU and suggest a bill to be passed, making possible the ratification of the 1989 ILO Convention "Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent

Countries"? Would it be possible, also, to recommend that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the RSFSR assist, together with a group of communist people's deputies, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in working out and passing the following draft legislation:

- on the legal status of the indigenous (native) Peoples of the North,
- on the status of national soviets and organs of self-government for the indigenous Peoples of the North,
- on the status of communal territories (lands) and national parks (nature reserves) for traditional land use by the indigenous Peoples of the North,
- on the legal status of the Association of Small Peoples of the North?

Would it be possible to support the idea of setting up a League to assist the development of the communities of the indigenous Peoples of the North as a union-based public organization; and setting up a Development Fund for these peoples under the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, made up of state subsidies, deductions from the exploitation of natural resources, charitable payments from enterprises and organizations, private donations; and of forming a deputies' club, "Natives of the North", under the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and RSFSR, in order to consolidate the intellectual and political potential of the representatives of the indigenous Peoples of the North in the organs?

Is it considered expedient to address the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR and the RSFSR with a number of proposals:

- to work out within two months a state programme for the further development of the economy and culture of the indigenous Peoples of the North, and to invite the Association of Small Peoples of the North to take part in this work,
- to examine, in the near future, issues raised in the Convention of the 26 of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North, especially those concerning the establishment of non-taxable status for organizations and enterprises within the Association, ethnic land-tenure rights, and the creation of regional revival and other types of funds,
- to assist in providing adequate working conditions for the Association of the Small Peoples of the North in Moscow, to assist in finding office space for its staff and apartments for specialists invited to Moscow, and to examine the question of a permanent work schedule and its financing?

The CPSU Central Committee draft resolution is enclosed.

Signed: 28th of December, 1990
by the Head of the Department for National Politics of the Central Committe of the CPSU

V. Mikhailov

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE USSR ON THE RATIFICATION OF ILO CONVENTION 169, MAY 1991

Letter from N. N. Bessmertnykh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, to G. S. Tarazevich, Chairman of the Committee on National Policy and Inter-ethnic Relations under the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Ref No. 8897/OS-ns.
Moscow, 28th of May, 1991

Honourable Mr. Tarazevich,
The question of the Soviet Union's ratification of the ILO "Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries" has been examined by the Foreign Ministry. The proposal, in my opinion, merits support. Hereby it must be taken into consideration that a ratification of the Convention would require specific corrections or addenda being made to existing Soviet legislation to make it conform with the accepted obligations.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR comments on this question are enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

N. N. Bessmertnykh

Enclosure

On the Soviet Union's Possible Ratification of the ILO Con-vention No. 169
The USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports the proposal for a ratification by the Soviet Union of the ILO Convention No. 169 "Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries". The Convention represents a significant step towards the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and the preservation of their way of life, culture, and traditions. Practical implementation of the conditions set out in the Convention must be furthered by completing the Soviet legislation and by implementing programmes for the social and economic development of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North. Ratification by the Soviet Union of the Convention would be met with sympathy on an international level,

especially in light of the fact that 1993 is the International Year of Indigenous Peoples.

It should be noted that a ratification of the Convention implies the necessity of introducing Soviet legislation and practices that conform with the conditions stipulated in the document.

The Convention specifies, in particular, the recognition of indigenous peoples' "rights to property and ownership over land" in their traditional homelands (art. 14), and "the rights of these peoples to the natural resources of their lands" (art. 15). The Convention also establishes special rules for the economic exploitation of the territories concerned and for the payment of compensation on losses caused (arts. 15,17,18). This will require specific alterations being made to the Soviet legislation on land.

According to the Convention, special governmental programmes are to be carried out that ensure the full implementation of the rights of the indigenous peoples and the preservation of their national, cultural, linguistic, and religious way of life. Special procedures must be introduced in order to allow the peoples to participate in decision-making at all levels within elected organs and administrative bodies, whenever their interests are affected. In particular the Convention demands the establishment of mechanisms allowing for the consultation of indigenous peoples' representatives. This means that it will be necessary to form independent representative structures for indigenous peoples - with corresponding authorities - in addition to the existing governmental administrative structures. Therefore, a ratification of the Convention requires the adoption of additional legislative acts in order to resolve the indicated issues.

It should also be taken into consideration that the ILO has a strict system for verifying fulfilment by governments of the terms of the conventions ratified, which includes the presentation of annual written reports and an analysis of these by a group of experts whose conclusions and recommendations are examined at the ILO General Conference. There is also a procedure for lodging complaints in the event of non-observance by any government with the conditions set out in the Convention.

Consequently, it would probably be a good idea to discuss the measures it would be necessary for the Soviet Union to take if it were to ratify the Convention with all interested soviet bodies, ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of the Small Peoples of the USSR.

INTERVIEW (APRIL 1991) WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE SOVIET NORTH, THE WRITER VLADIMIR MICHAILOVICH SANGI.

BY ALEXANDER PIKA

Question: Vladimir Michailovich, please tell us how the idea of the Convention of the 26 was born. Who started all this?

V. Sangi: It started a long time ago. Maybe you remember the letter from a group of northern writers to Gorbachev in April 1988, and maybe you know that even before that, in January 1988, as far as I remember, the journal "Knizhnoe obozrenie" (The Book Review) published an article of mine – this was actually the first time that the Soviet press gave a truthful account of the hard conditions of the Peoples of the North. This is how it all started. By the way, I sent this article to Gorbachev, together with a letter explaining everything in a mild and gentle way (at that time it was already evident that Gorbachev's future was to be a bright one), because I did not expect Gorbachev to be prepared for too harsh an account of the realities, the harsh truth of the conditions of the Peoples of the Soviet North. But Gorbachev actually took an interest in my letter, and later on, when I was sure that he was sufficiently prepared to take a serious interest in the problems of the Northern Peoples, a group of northern writers gathered at a seminar in Pitsund (Georgia) and sent Gorbachev a collective letter. Along with me, the Yamal writer Roman Rugin took an active part in this. Six people signed the letter, which contained, in our opinion, all the basic elements of the Convention of the 26.

Question: But nobody yet called it "The Convention of the 26"?

V. Sangi: No, not yet. But, when we established the Association of the Peoples of the North and began to think of how to move on, we realized that just to think out a "concept of survival" was not enough. We had to make a political document out of the concept. And the Association has the proper organization to do this and also to initiate bills and laws, and we have to define our goals and tasks rather precisely.

Question: Is there a decree about the Association of the Peoples of the North that has been confirmed on a governmental level?

V. Sangi: There is no such decree, but we are working on it. For the time being, we have the decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where it is

stated very precisely that the interests of peoples with no state-formations are to be represented by their public organizations at all governmental levels. In this way, the Association, in our opinion, has got such a status.

Question: Where and when was the Convention of the 26 adopted?

V. Sangi: On the 18th to the 19th of October, 1990, a scientific conference was held in Yakutsk on the employment problems among the Peoples of the North. Three days before the conference began, the Soviet of the Association met in Yakutsk in order to discuss the draft for the Convention. Actually we intended to carry on this discussion earlier, in August 1990, and not in Yakutsk but in Moscow. But we did not succeed in so doing. Certain people working in the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR prevented us from doing it. Therefore, we had to meet in Yakutsk.

Question: Who took part in the discussion of the Convention of the 26?

V. Sangi: A group of people from the Khabarovsk region under the leadership of Yury Samar. He is our vice-president, and it was his job to coordinate the work. Among the group from Yakutsk, Nikolai Kalitin took an active role – he is the vice-president of the Association of the Peoples of the Yakut North – and also Khristofor Grigoryev. There were other delegations too. The preamble of the Convention of the 26 was taken from my application to Boris Yeltsin at the First Congress of Peoples' Deputies of the RSFSR. Andrei Krivoshapkin did a lot of useful work. In November, the text of the Convention was send to Ryzhkov, and also to Gorbachev, to Lukyanov, to Yeltsin, and to Silayev. At the Ryzhkov-level, things did not move at first but, as it turned out later, he was finally acquainted with our writing and via his deputy he gave instructions to the State Planning Organization of the USSR, to the Ministry of Finance of the USSR and to the Ministry of Employment of the USSR to examine all of the problems mentioned in the Convention and to contact me.

In the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR, there were officials who tried to delay the passing of the Convention of the 26 and prevent it from being put before Silayev. Gorbachev, on the other hand, reacted quickly and enjoined the appropriate organs of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the apparatus of the presidency to look into the matter. And only when a joint decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the USSR and the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR on the extraordinary measures to improve the social and economic living-conditions of the Small Peoples of the North for the period from 1991 to 1995 (No. 84 of the 11th of March, 1991) was being passed, did the new prime minister Pavlov, to whom Gorbachev had entrusted the matter, obviously realize, that the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR had not taken our Convention into account. Pavlov sent the draft of the joint decree to Silayev for addititonal preparation, so that it could be worked out in cooperation with the Association of the



Vladimir Sangi, the first President of the Association of the First Congress of the Small Indigenous Peoples of the North and Far East, Moscow, March 1990 (Photo: J. Dahl).

Peoples of the North. It was I who personally commented on it, and also involved in the work were the Nanai Samar, the Aleut Dobrynin, and the Evenk from Buryatia, Stepanov.

Question: Vladimir Michailovich, how was the Convention of the 26 adopted?

V. Sangi: When the project was written down, corrected and manifolded, it was distributed among the members of the Association for judgement. This happened, as I have already said, in Yakutsk. The text was discussed section by section. There were disputes.

Question: Did anyone vote against the Convention?

V. Sangi: No, everybody voted unanimously for it.

Question: As far as I know, the Convention has not yet been published anywhere. Is it an "internal", secret document?

V. Sangi: Of course not. But some time ago, I came to the conclusion that it is better not to make a show of your undertakings. Somehow it is unethical, immodest.

Question: But ought not the people living in the settlements and in the tundra, on Yamal and Chukotka, know? How can they get to know about it?

V. Sangi: I have sent it to all the regional associations.

Question: But oughtn't people in the remote settlements know about it?

V. Sangi: You see, the fact that people know a lot doesn't necessarily imply that there will be any results. You have to take effective measures. And therefore I turned to Gorbachev, because I know that without his support we will not succeed. Recently the vice-president of the USSR, Yanayev, received a Canadian delegation. There we met and he said to me: "Vladimir Michailovich, I must pay you a compliment. You have prepared and passed a serious document." Therefore, I believe that they will support us. By the way, in the new decree, the economic theses of the Convention are confirmed by almost 70%. Only the political questions remain unsolved, that is, the establishment of a parliament for the Peoples of the North and other questions.

Question: From which part do you expect the biggest support? Doesn't it seem to you as if the union-parliament and Gorbachev are politically more active towards the Small Peoples than the Supreme Soviet of Russia and Yeltsin?

V. Sangi: For the time being, yes. In the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR the apparatus, the commissions, consist of people who do not understand our condition very well, and in this sense Russia is at present losing ground, although Yeltsin may not actually want it to be like this.

Question: So what you are saying is that in what concerns the Small Peoples, Gorbachev is an asset for the time being?

V. Sangi: He surely is, yes.

Question: Vladimir Michailovich, the first article of the Convention of the 26 is the request that the USSR or RSFSR ratify Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989). Why is this the very first article? Is it because you consider it the most important one?

V. Sangi: I think that the ILO Convention is of utmost importance to us. It points plainly at the foundations of freedom and independence for the Northern Peoples: the right to land and the land itself! To be master of your own land, to be master of your own yields, to have the right to speak in your own language, to follow your own cultural traditions, to have your own valid and independent international relations – on the level of the UN as well – this is what we need. But in our country, the Convention could not be ratified.

Question: Do you think it will be?

V. Sangi: Yes, since the changes in the legislation of the USSR and Russia – since the laws on land, property, and other issues, and with the coming of special laws on Small Peoples – I believe that the Soviet Union is "ripe" or "almost ripe" for the adoption and ratification of the ILO Convention of 1989. And meanwhile, we will try to have our Convention of the 26 confirmed, and this will be an important step towards the ratification of the ILO Convention in the USSR.

Question: The Convention of the 26 claims the recognition of "a special status for the indigenous peoples, while maintaining full equality of rights with other population groups." What does "a special status" mean?

V. Sangi: A special status means, first of all, the existence of a mechanism that does not permit the ignoring of the political and social demands of the Small Peoples. In America, the state system ignores the recognized rights of the indigenous population, and the agreements between the government and the Indian tribes are not based on equality. Everywhere you find the priority of the rights of the "white man." Many Indians believe that "the white man's" presence in America is illegitimate. From this point of view,

the presence of the Russians east of the Ural mountains is illegitimate. There is no legal foundation for their presence in Siberia or the Far East. They made their way into these areas by means of weapons and by eradicating the local population, the small ethnic groups. But nevertheless, the Small Peoples of the North will some day wonder, and are already wondering, why the settlers living on their lands behave like masters towards them? A special status would endow this situation with a legal foundation. We would like to avoid confrontation. The claims of the Peoples of the North are just: we are being exploited, our lands are being destroyed, we are lawless, we are being assimilated and even wiped out. A special status for the indigenous peoples will define what the right to their own land consists in, and on what part of the land they will be their own absolute masters. And further, our legislation assures the right of any people to make its own agreements with the Russian government, and such agreements will have to be confirmed by Russia's highest legislative bodies. I believe that the Peoples of the North, together or separately, should participate in the signing of the Federative Treaty.

Question: In the Convention, it is said that the indigenous peoples must have their land turned into "their own property." How do you imagine the process whereby their land will be obtained by them or returned to them?

V. Sangi: I look at it in the following way: each people is an historical category, each people has in fact "shaped" its land, looked after it, taken care of it, lived together with it as with a living being. You see, in Nivkh folklore, and in many other Northern Peoples' ancient legends, land is a living being, and both man and land know about each other's existence. To these peoples land is also a moral category, but to the state it is only some kind of fortune or possession. The state realizes the moral essence of the peoples' right to land, but does not recognize it, and tries to be cunning. In all of the legislative acts, it therefore proclaims that the land is the property of the people, but it does not specify which land exactly and therefore it turns out to be nobody's, which means that it actually belongs to the state. Not to give the people land, and especially not the Small Peoples, is the intention behind the formula "the land belongs to the people." Every people that has taken shape through time on a definite territory must have special rights and claims to this territory: Russians to Russian territory, at least in the European part, Kalmyki to the lands of Kalmykia, the Nivkh people to their land, and so on.

Question: And this is why people often call you a nationalist?

V. Sangi: I am called a nationalist by persons who want people to be the masters of their land only in words and not in practice. Once all peoples had their own land and were later deprived of it. Now they must regain it. I am a Nivkh; I must have my own land, and I must respect the Nanais and

their land, as well as the Russians on their's, the Georgians, and the Ukrainians. And they in return must respect my rights. If it is not like that, we will always have ethnic conflicts. But unfortunately, there are many people to whom land is but a kind of possession, and they deny the right to land to those people for whom it is needed as a moral category. These people will be against the Small Peoples' having their own land. They will not allow this to happen. They are quite satisfied with the land belonging to nobody; it suits them. People who no longer have any roots do not need land, but a people whose roots are not yet totally dead and dried up needs land.

Question: But how will it be possible for the Small Peoples of the North to have land?

V. Sangi: First of all, it is necessary to pass the law about the land of the Small Peoples and ethnic groups, about their special status, about the special conditions for the utilization of this land. The foundations for this have already been laid in the union and republic legislation.

Question: Must all of Sakhalin belong to the Nivkh or only part of it?

V. Sangi: Why only Sakhalin? The lower parts of Amur must also belong to the Nivkh. And all of Sakhalin must belong to the Nivkh and the Ainu. Historically, it is their native country.

Question: And all of Evenkia must belong to the Evenki?

V. Sangi: Yes, all of Evenkia. But this does not imply that other peoples cannot live there. The knowledge that this land belongs to them will discipline the indigenous peoples. We know very well that it is not the Evenki who are in charge of Evenkia and its lands, and that those who are in charge deal with it badly. The primordial lands of the Northern Peoples must be divided into several categories. There are lands used exclusively by the Northern Peoples, i.e., almost 50% of all northern administrative units, the territories (*krai*), and the regions (*oblasti*). Part of the land must be made into sanctuaries controlled by governmental bodies for the preservation of nature, and controlled too by the indigenous peoples. And then there must be governmental lands for common utilization, where the exploitation of natural resources must take place without causing damage to the Peoples of the North. It is up to the Small Peoples and ethnic groups to decide, whether parts of their preferential territories can also be used for industrial exploitation, but in such a case, then only temporarily and on the condition that this land would be returned in a fully recultivated state. And lease, compensation, and other kinds of dues would have to be paid.

Question: And the resources of the underground, must they, too, be the property of the Peoples of the North?

V. Sangi: Unconditionally yes, and the water too.

Question: Do you believe that the problems will be solved in the way you have just explained?

V. Sangi: Hardly, but this is what we are aiming for. There will be compromises.

Question: In the Convention of the 26, it is said that the land must be handed over for "clan-based and private utilization." Do you consider it possible to re-establish the old clan structure, even though some of the Northern Peoples, as ethnographers believe, never had any clan structure?

V. Sangi: All peoples had clan structures, even the Chukchi and the Eskimos, although they were "blurred", but in principle all communities were based on lineage – the lineage of Tevlyanto, of Koravye, and of others.

Question: When the Americans started the reforms in Alaska in the the early 1970s, they told the indigenous peoples that land was to be handed over not according to traditional lineages, clans and tribes but to new structures under establishment – to regional and local corporations designed to participate in questions of self-government and business. To what extent are lineage and tribal structures in our country capable, at the moment, of taking part in modern life?

V. Sangi: The Americans made a fatal mistake. They gave the land to collectives like the collective farms in our country. And what happened? People began to fight over land. But historically they, too, had lineage structures, and lineage-lands that had evolved over a thousand years. And the system was so harmoniously devised! For Europeans, this is simply unattainable. They were something beyond justice – interlineage relations. Each lineage had a spawning ground, and seasonal lands for fishing and for hunting fox and bear, reindeer and sea animals. It was a whole system founded on a profound humanistic philosophy. The Americans ought to do the same, so that the land there can be handed over to the traditional structures, too. These are our roots. We cannot follow the cooperative way; we must call to mind our lineage origins and return to our lineage-lands. We have to follow our own path, not the American one.

Question: The Convention says that "the Peoples of the North shall be granted exclusive rights of ownership over their ancestral lands and the continental shelf off their shores." How will the Peoples of the North exploit the shelf?

V. Sangi: We will not exploit it. We will simply not allow the extraction of oil there without consideration of our interests and without our permission.

Question: Does this also apply to other underground resources?

V. Sangi: They are ours, and we must take part in solving the problems – when, how, and what is to be extracted from the areas where the Peoples of the North live, from our primeval lands.

Question: Would you please explain what "parliamentary self-government in the areas where the Peoples of the North live" means?

V. Sangi: It ought to be that the only power exercised by the state on our territories is that of defending our interests, not forgetting about its own, either. If we, in future, will be subject to the ordinary territorial power structures, we shall have above us the district executive committee (*rayispolkom*), the regional executive committee (*oblispolkom*), and so forth. This administrative structure will not come to an understanding with the Small Peoples and will not even try. Either we shall continue to be under its yoke, or we shall at last win the chance to realize the Soviet slogan "the right of the nations to self-determination."

Question: Does this mean that you believe that the Small Peoples of the North must have their own structures of self-government, different from the structures prevailing in the Soviet North: the territories, the regions, and the autonomous areas (*okrugi*)?

V. Sangi: Yes, all over the world it has been like this for a very long time.

Question: And now the last question concerning the Convention of the 26. Why do you believe that 12% of the profit of the industrial enterprises must be reserved and given to you? Why this percentage?

V. Sangi: The money will be needed to create a foundation for the survival and economic development of the Peoples of the North. Why exactly 12% ? First of all, for hundreds of years, from the time our land became Russia, everything possible was taken away from us, without any percentages being counted. I have done some calculations and found out that even 0.5% would be fine for us, but when I started thinking of the past, of the ruined environment that we must restore or adapt to, I realized that much more is needed. Therefore 12%. But it's open for discussion, for arrangements.

Question: And now the very last question. Soon Russia will have a president. Who do you think? What kind of expectations can the Peoples of the North have of Russia's president with regard to their problems?

V. Sangi: A very interesting question! To be frank: I am convinced that Yeltsin will win, and I will be very happy about it. Yeltsin is quickly becoming a great politician, and has distinguished himself too in what concerns the nationality problems. Remember his position in the Baltic countries. He was not overwhelmed by simplistic, ordinary sentiments; he supported the indigenous peoples of the Baltic countries, behaving like a true politician and not like an average, ordinary person who distinguishes between "his kind of people" and "other kinds". We hope that Yeltsin will act just as wisely and with the same responsibility when confronted with the claims of the Peoples of the North. Yeltsin's authority is, by the way, growing fast in the North. He went to Sakhalin – can you imagine the first leader of the republic rushing away to remote and desolate settlements, to pastures, where the most oppressed and socially unfortunate people live? And he visited the Nivkh who live at Rybnovskoye Poberezhye. He made his way to the Evens and Yukagirs in Northern Yakutia, looked at their life and gave them a sum he had received in dollars: 20,000 dollars he gave them to help the reindeer nomads. And his action was not calculated – it was spontaneous.

A. Pika: We will not forget that Yeltsin sent a telegram to the newly held Congress of People's Deputies of all levels from the North, in which it was written literally:.... in this noble cause you can always count on the help and the support of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR and my own.

V. Sangi: Exactly, we will not forget it. We shall soon remind the President of Russia of it.

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS: THE ASSEMBLY OF THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

The founding of the association was followed by other initiatives. Among them was an attempt to strengthen the cause of the indigenous peoples throughout the political system of the Soviet Union, i.e. the system of soviets. Peoples' deputies elected to soviets at various local and central levels in the areas inhabited by the Peoples of the North, met in Moscow in May 1991 to establish an "Assembly of Peoples' Deputies Representing the Small Peoples of the North" and hold its first congress.

The existence of the congress was, however, short-lived. Being part of the all-Union electoral system, it dissolved with the break-down of the Soviet Union in August-September 1991. The following documents testify to the founding of the Assembly. Included is a speech from the congress by the leading economist and politician, V. M. Yetylen, Chukotka.

PROPOSAL FOR AN ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLES' DEPUTIES REPRESENTING THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

The letter of Ye. Aipin, Chairman of the Sub-committee on the Problems of the Peoples of the North of the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 26th of March, 1991.

To the President of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR,
Mr. A. I. Lukyanov

Honourable Anatoly Ivanovich,
The Sub-committee on the Problems of the Small Peoples of the North proposes to arrange a founding conference (Congress) in May 1991 for peoples' deputies of the USSR and the RSFR, who are the representatives of the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East in the district, area, region, and territory soviets of people's deputies, with the purpose of creating an Assembly of the Small Peoples of the North.

The task of the Assembly would be to consolidate and coordinate the political and intellectual potential of the corps of peoples' deputies at all levels; to carry out the control of the implementation of laws, decrees, and acts passed by the state in the areas where the Peoples of the North live; to provide expertise on legislative bills and acts passed by the local organs of power that affect the interests of the Small Peoples; to train the deputies; and to further other kinds of work.

The Sub-committee also proposes to set up an All-Union Survival Fund for the Small Peoples of the North and to publish a weekly newspaper, *Journal of the Peoples of the North*, through the central press organs, along with a monthly journal about social, political, cultural and literary questions, *The Almanac of the Peoples of the North*.

The Assembly would consist of 100 to 120 peoples' deputies. The conference (Congress) would meet at least once a year.

It is proposed that the working organ of the Assembly would be a Secretariat consisting of no more than three people.

By agreement with the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and the Commission on National Issues and Inter-ethnic Relations of the Central Committee of the CPSU and its Departments for National Politics, a list of delegates to participate in the founding conference (Congress) of the Peoples of the North will be formed.

We kindly request your cooperation in the setting up of an Assembly of the Small Peoples of the North.

Ye. Aipin
Chairman of the Sub-committee
(Yeremy Aipin is a well-known Khant writer. In 1993 he was elected President of the Association of the Peoples of the North, at the Second Congress of the Small Peoples of the North)

DECLARATION ON THE FORMATION OF AN ASSEMBLY OF DEPUTIES REPRESENTING THE PEOPLES OF THE NORTH, SIBERIA AND THE FAR EAST

We, people's deputies, representing the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East – the Aleut, Veps, Dolgan, Izhor, Itelmen, Kamchadal, Koryak, Ket, Mansi, Nenets, Nanai, Nivkh, Negidal, Nganasan, Orok, Oroch, Saami, Selkup, Tofalar, Ulchi, Udege, Khanty, Chukchi, Chuvan, Even, Evenk, Enets, Eskimo, and Yukagir,
recognize the common historical and personal responsibility of all citizens for the fate of the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East,

express our alarm and concern over the deterioration of the economic situation of the Small Peoples of the North during the country's transition to a market economy,

wish to support the efforts of the Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North to improve the situation of the small peoples, ethnic groups, communities, and individual citizens, in agreement with government policies and by way of using our parliamentary authorities,

and therefore **declare** that we are forming an Assembly of People's Deputies representing the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East by bringing together people's deputies of the USSR and the RSFSR, of the Supreme Soviets of the republics, and of regional (*oblast*), territory (*krai*), and area (*okrug*) soviets who represent these peoples.

1. Main Aims and Objectives of the Assembly:
   a. To coordinate the efforts of the deputies representing the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East at all levels in order to improve the protection of their interests and rights and the efficiency of legislative work, and to find practical solutions to the current problems concerning their survival and national revival.

   b. To participate in the working out of bills of the USSR and the RSFSR, of USSR presidential decrees and orders, of decisions of the Federative Soviet and other appropriate legislative acts aimed at securing the national development of the Small Peoples and the creation of the necessary social and economic conditions for their survival and revival.

   c. To carry out systematic deputy control to ensure that laws, decrees, and other legislative acts concerning the Small Peoples of the North are implemented, including the arranging of deputies' hearings of the

executive and administrative bodies of the RSFSR and the USSR and of local executive bodies.

d. To carry out examinations of bills of the USSR and the RSFSR in order to take into account the rights and interests of the Small Peoples of the North by consulting scientific and practical experts.

e. To examine, together with experts and specialists, the decisions and resolutions passed by the local authorities to make sure that the rights and interests of the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East are being considered.

2. The Assembly of Deputies shall conduct its sessions in accordance with a detailed plan and programme of action, as a rule in the appropriate Northern regions with the participation of deputies from local soviets, members of the Association of Small Peoples of the Soviet Union, the soviets of elders, and other community representatives.

3. The Assembly of Deputies shall be governed in its work by the Charter and Programme of the Assembly as approved by the Congress of Deputies representing the Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.

   The Assembly of Deputies' work shall be coordinated by a Presidium made up of 3 co-chairpersons and 25 members who are all deputies.

   In order to ensure efficient cooperation with the executive and administrative bodies of the RSFSR, the Assembly (parliament) shall propose the creation of permanent representation (executive committee) under the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR.

4. The Assembly of Deputies intends to create a Fund for the Survival of the Peoples of the North, to publish its own newspaper, *The Northern Peoples' Gazette*, and a monthly socio-political and literary journal entitled *The Almanac of the Peoples of the North*, and to have a working group in the form of a secretariat.

5. The Assembly of Deputies intends to establish contacts and to cooperate with governmental bodies and public organizations in other countries with Polar areas, as well as with international and local movements that act as spokespersons for the interests of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic region.

Draft composed by V. Yetylen

PROGRAMME OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

Article 1
The Assembly of the Indigenous Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East (hereafter "the North") is a supervising and coordinating body composed of the people's deputies representing the indigenous peoples of the North, i.e., deputies of the USSR, the RSFSR, and the territory (*krai*), region (*oblast*), area (*okrug*), town (*gorod*), district (*raion*), settlement (*posyolok*), and village (*selo*) soviets. The Assembly has been set up in accordance with the USSR law "On the Status of the People's Deputy in the USSR". The Assembly advocates the consolidation of the political and intellectual efforts in our society supporting a national revival of the Small Peoples of the North. It carries out its activities within the framework of the constitutions of the USSR, the RSFSR, and the sovereign republics.

Article 2
The main aims and tasks of the Assembly are:

- to coordinate the activities of the deputies representing the Small Peoples of the North in order to protect the rights and interests of individuals and of the peoples,
- to participate in the compiling of bills for the USSR and the RSFSR, and decrees, orders and other standard legislative acts aimed at supporting the survival and development of the Small Peoples of the North, and to forward them to the appropriate bodies according to the procedure established by the law,
- to examine the legal, economic, and ecological implications of bills and standard legislative acts, both at the request of the bodies which adopt these acts and on the Assembly's own intiative,
- to supervise the implementation of laws and other standard legislative acts relating to the Small Peoples of the North,
- to approve projects involving industrial exploitation of the regions inhabited by the Small Peoples of the North and accomplish their examination by experts,
- to adopt the necessary measures to prevent any action that may constitute a threat to the life, environment, and economic activities of the Small Peoples,
- to inform the people's deputies about the development of indigenous peoples of the North, to assist them in executing their deputies' powers, to conduct seminars and hold consultations on the most urgent problems of national policy, legislation, and inter-ethnic relations,

- to coordinate the Assembly's activities with the committees and deputy groupings within the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and the RSFSR and also with local soviets in the areas inhabited by the Small Peoples of the North.

Article 3
The Assembly shall set up its own press and a Fund for the Survival and Development of the Small Peoples of the North.

Article 4
Through the Constitutional Commission, the Assembly shall present the following legislative proposal for entry into the Constitutions of the USSR and the RSFSR:
- to define a quota of 30 deputies' mandates in the Soviets of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and the RSFSR – with one deputy from each of the peoples. The people's deputies to the Soviets of Nationalities are to be elected by secret ballot at the Congress of Deputies of the Small Peoples of the North, and in some cases according to special electoral lists in the areas inhabited by the Small Peoples.

Article 5
The Assembly proposes to designate from among its numbers one permanent representative for each of the following: the Federative Soviet of the USSR, the Federative Soviet of the RSFSR, the Security Soviet of the USSR, the Committee for the Supervision of the Constitution of the USSR, and the Monitoring Chamber of the USSR.

This programme was adopted on the 7th of May, 1991, in Moscow.

SELF-GOVERNMENT AMONG THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

BY V. M. YETYLEN

A speech read at the founding Congress of People's Deputies representing the Small Peoples of the North, May 1991. Due to the break-down of the Soviet Union the Congress (Parliament) of the Small Peoples of the North was never established.

Honourable deputies and guests!
The main purpose of the radical political reforms going on in the USSR is to bring about the transition from an over-centralized bureaucratic system of government to a new form of democratic system, which will make it possible for the population to become active political agents.

Among the many national communities of the USSR, the 26 Small Peoples of the North, numbering more than 180,000, make up, in their way of life and living conditions, a particular group whose urgent needs for social, economic, and cultural development have their own distinctive importance.

So what are the prospects for developing the processes of democratization and self-government, common to all the country, among the indigenous Peoples of the North? What mechanisms are there for doing this and which are the most expedient and effective under the present circumstances? These issues are relevant to practical state policy and to you and me; for we run into them every day, try to analyze the current situation and think intensely about the future of our peoples and kinsmen, about their survival and national revival.

A retrospective analysis of the issue shows that in the history of the Soviet state, the efficiency with which the development of the Peoples of the North has been managed has varied considerably in different historical periods. State policy with regard to these peoples was most efficient and goal-oriented in the period that came to an end in the mid- 1930s. As early as the 1920s, a government provision singled out the Peoples of the North as a distinct social and cultural group and a whole range of state and other administrative institutions were set up. In 1924, a "Committee to Provide Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands of the RSFSR" (The Committee of the North) was established under the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee.

The task of the Committee was "to assist the Small Peoples of the North in planning and organizing their economic, administrative, judicial, cultural, and social affairs." Three basic tasks were designated by the members of the Committee of the North: the promotion of 1) self-government 2) cooperation and 3) education by means of which the peoples would be able to join the Soviet system.

Please note, comrade deputies, that the first two of these tasks were not carried out. This is the reason why today, having almost reached the end of the century, we have to discuss them again in order to save our peoples. The aim set out in the programme of the Committee of the North – to help each of the Small Peoples of the North to achieve "an independent existence as a self-governing economic and political unit" – was never met.

And we, deputies of our peoples from all levels, have now got one more, and perhaps the last, chance to save their culture, languages and way of life.

In the 1920s, local administrative bodies were introduced: clan gatherings, clan soviets, and indigenous district congresses were set up, along with regional executive committees elected by them. An important phase in the development of a state system was the creation, in the early 1930s, of national state formations in the form of national (now autonomous) areas.

Important administrative measures were devised and implemented, beginning with emergency measures to eliminate the threat of physical extinction, and right up to the passing of numerous acts and statutes concerning the legal protection of the Peoples of the North.

All of these measures were, however, carried out within the framework of state rule over the peoples and not through self-government by the peoples. This type of rule, which was characteristic of the period in question, implied not only the possibility of wrong voluntaristic decisions, but also of a decrease in the attention paid by the state to the Small Peoples of the North, phenomena that have since manifested themselves strongly over the past 30 years and have led to a sharp intensification of the problems affecting the Small Peoples' existence and development.

This happened as a result of the introduction, both in the USSR as a whole and in the RSFSR, of a national policy based on the so-called "voluntary" limitation of the sovereign rights of the national formations. They were now placed under the administration of institutions and authorities at the union or republic level, all in the name of the overall greater good of the Soviet Union. Thus the nations' or peoples' sovereign rights were gradually whittled away and the national autonomies destroyed or abolished.

It was this practice that was the initial cause of the outbreak of national sentiment, of an increase in national self-awareness and efforts to create national formations in order to affirm sovereignty and limit the powers of the central bodies, whether at the union, republic, regional, or territory level.

This was what manifested itself when the Chukot, Koryak, Yamal-Nenets, and Nenets Autonomous Areas decided to change the status of the areas to that of autonomous Soviet republics within the RSFSR. The reason for this is not to be found in anyone's personal ambitions but in the preceding state policy.

Perestroika is highlighting the negative tendencies inherent in almost all aspects of the Northern Peoples' lives and the crisis in their communi-

ties caused by previous methods of state rule. At the same time, it orients politicians and scientists towards working out and implementing a fundamentally new political strategy – the strategy of self-government.

Previous methods of government were based on a paternalistic policy within the framework of which the Peoples of the North were simple objects of state rule, being at best able only to hope for an "understanding" of their needs and for the "benevolence" of the state system.

At the root of this type of paternalistic policy lies state charity, which has appeared at various times in various ideological and organizational guises and has been implemented more or less effectively. However, this policy was always that of the state and party apparatus and it was something extrinsic to the Peoples of the North, who themselves remained the objects of this external rule, and played and continue to play a passive role.

Yet for the sake of objectivity, it is necessary to bear in mind that the paternalistic policy of charitable assistance with all its costs, especially during the last three decades, cannot simply be considered a subjective strategic error. After all, this model was also conditioned by the level of readiness of the Northern Peoples to acquire self-government and by the nature of the social processes in the USSR.

Just before the sovietization process began, the Small Peoples of the North were in a critical condition. Illiteracy was widespread; there were no written languages and no national intellectual élites. The Northern Peoples were scattered over enormous expanses; they had a weak awareness of themselves as ethnic groups, and regular political structures were absent. These are the main reasons why "charity" was adopted as the determinant element in the political strategy of the state.

The current national policy of the state towards the Northern Peoples, together with the existing objective conditions, does provide the necessary prerequisites for a transition from paternalism and charitable state rule to actual self-government for the Peoples of the North, so that they will become active agents of their own economic and social development.

The genuine possibility of such a transformation is conditioned by a number of new factors, four of which are crucial.

The first of these is the social and cultural potential among the peoples, created during the years of Soviet rule. Nowadays, the majority of them have written languages and the level of education among them is not lower than that of the rest of the country, with the exception of the older age group. However, the most significant factor is that a national intelligentsia has been formed, the ratio of which is higher than for the population of the country as a whole. Social and cultural potentials have been developed to the extent that they can ensure effective self-government among the Small Peoples of the North on a local scale, as well as on a much larger one, implying active interaction with other peoples at inter-republic and union levels.

The second factor that makes the transition from a policy of "charity" to a policy of self-government possible is the change in the public awareness

of the peoples. The indigenous Peoples of the North have made their way from local ethnic consolidation to an awareness of themselves as a wider ethnic entity, and are prepared to work out common aims and undertake common actions to obtain them. In other words, people have started to become aware of themselves as agents of self-government, and of the possibility and necessity to becoming true masters of their own lives. An awareness of the rights of ethnic groups and of human rights is one of the most important factors creating genuine possibilities for a new kind of political rule for the Small Peoples of the North.

An additional two factors that fill in the prerequisites for a transition to a new type of policy are connected with the general political developments towards democratization in the country and with the fact that in recent years the USSR and RSFSR Supreme Soviets, the governments and leaders of various ranks, and the public have realized that there are major difficulties connected with the development in the North. It is now generally acknowledged that it is extremely important actively to involve the Northern Peoples themselves in the search for solutions. This is the third factor.

Finally, the fourth important factor is connected with the actual changes in the structures and mechanisms of political and economic rule, with the development of new approaches and of new legislative acts on, for example, land use, property rights, market relations, agricultural affairs, and national relations.

As a result, possibilities are opening up for administrative territories, autonomous formations, nations and peoples to act independently, to take their own initiatives. These new political and economic mechanisms in the country will facilitate the task of introducing self-government for the Peoples of the North.

All of these factors bear witness that both internal and external conditions have been created for a new stage of political action for the Peoples of the North, a new national policy directed towards self-government, towards the mobilization of the peoples' inner potentials. This makes it possible not only to consolidate and activate the self-development of the peoples but also to overcome some of the negative phenomena associated with the "charitable" policy of the past, in particular, a certain national passivity and parasitic attitudes.

It should be stressed that these factors are only preconditions for the transition of the Northern Peoples to self-government. They require appropriate administrative mechanisms aimed at establishing a complete system of self-government for the Peoples of the North.

An important step in this direction was taken when the Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North was founded in March 1990 as a public organization established on a countrywide scale with the aim of uniting the Northern Peoples, expressing and protecting their interests and rights, and promoting their active participation in the search for solutions to common problems in economic and cultural development. The Association is supposed to support a growth in the consolidation, self-awareness and political activity among the Peoples of the North and to increase their influence on government legislation that affects their existence and development. In this sense, the Association is one of the institutions of self-government, one element in the system.

However, as a public organization it does not possess any legislative or administrative power, and it has to turn to the organs of state power at the centre and in the local areas with its proposals and initiatives. Therefore, a consistent and thorough system of self-government for the Peoples of the North cannot be formed through the structures of the Association alone. For such a system to be formed, there has to exist, together with the public organizations, effective state-structures of self-government for the Northern Peoples, state-structures that carry out legislative and administrative functions.

Today, the basic form of a national state system within the framework of which self-government and legal protection of the Northern Peoples should be realized is the autonomous area (*okrug*). Fifty per cent of the overall population of the northern indigenous peoples of the USSR are spread throughout seven autonomous areas.

Recently some measures have been taken to increase the independence of the autonomous areas in relation to the administrative bodies at various levels. However at present the autonomous areas, as a way of organizing power and administration, express the interests of the whole population of the territories and do not, in a legal sense, guarantee and give priority to the protection of the specific interests of the indigenous population.

Why?

The Peoples of the North form a conspicuous minority in their autonomous formations – from 3% in the Khanty Mansiisk Area to 18% in the Evenk District (averaging 8% of the population in all of the autonomous formations taken together), and under a democratic electoral system they will not be able to hope for a majority in their own national soviet. Consequently, they will not be able to count on a decisive block of votes. As a result, once again they will have to fall back upon the kindness, humanism, and mercy of the administrators, i.e, they will ultimately still be relying on charity.

In other words, even in the national soviets there will be virtually no deputies actively representing the interests of the indigenous peoples, and most importantly, no deputies provided with mandates sufficient for the realization of the Small Peoples' interests. In fact, being elected as a people's deputy is becoming more and more difficult for representatives of the indigenous peoples. Their absolute and relative numbers in soviets at all levels are decreasing, as was shown at the elections in 1989 and 1990. If such an electoral system continues to operate in the future, it could mean that even in the soviets in their own autonomous areas there will not be one single deputy who is a representative of the Peoples of the North.

Therefore, the creation of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North, and the strengthening of the role played by the autonomous area in

the administration of a given territory, will still not bring about self-government for the Peoples of the North to any sufficient extent.

Neither will the recent re-introduction of the national district and the national village soviet solve the problems of the Small Peoples living more or less scattered throughout the territories.

Nevertheless, it is necessary for us to speed up the drafting and adoption of an RSFSR law on the status of the national district and national village soviets (the drafts of this, you have), in order to offer protection to the Small Peoples within a legal framework.

The question of re-establishing the liquidated autonomous formations (the Okhot-Even, the Vitim-Olekmin, and Nizhne-Amur) has not been clarified, nor has the question of whether to organize new autonomous areas and regions where conditions permit.

All of this forces us to look for specific ways and means of solving difficulties and removing obstacles while taking into account the current general political situation and realizing that the discussion about what direction to take, which has already been going on for a long time, will continue to go on for a long time to come.

Scientists, soviet workers, and deputies are proposing at least four different alternatives for the solution to the problems, although in practice it is rather more likely to be a combination of all of these:

1) The establishing of special quotas of deputies' mandates from the Small Peoples of the USSR North at all levels of the system of soviets.

   The special quotas and procedures for elections of people's deputies should be determined by the USSR legislation on elections and the legislation of the republics and autonomous areas.

2) The organization at village (settlement), district, area, regional, and territorial levels of a two-chamber system of soviets, where one chamber will be composed of deputies from the Small Peoples of the North or by deputies representing them in the soviet.

3) The creation at the local soviet level of deputy commissions – made up of the deputies representing the Small Peoples of the North – provided with a right of veto in the soviet on decisions affecting the interests of their peoples.

4) The election of deputies by direct secret ballot, according to special electoral lists representing the group of the ethnic communities of "The Small Peoples of the North".

Let us look in more detail at the last of these alternatives as the most radical option.

It is necessary to look at the group of ethnic communities known as the Peoples of the North as a stable social and cultural group with a specific history and a specific social organization and leadership. This group should be seen as a joint political system, which covers all the 26 nationalities.

A fixed quota of deputies' seats for the group of ethnic communities of the Peoples of the North in the soviets of people's deputies at all levels will guarantee the election of the peoples' "own" deputies, representing their interests and being accountable only to them. At the present time, even in the national autonomies the elected national deputies cannot represent their peoples, as they are elected to territorial (or national territorial) bodies and are accountable to the whole population of any given area in which the Peoples of the North form a conspicuous minority.

In case of a deputy's protecting only the interests of his "own" people, in particular when these interests go against those of the majority of voters, there is a genuine risk of his being recalled. It should be remembered that the inclusion on the electoral list of the Peoples of the North is voluntary and that deputies expressing the interests of the Northern Peoples can be of any nationality.

The very act of direct election of deputies from electoral lists made up of the Peoples of the North implies a considerable element of self-government. The voters choose their deputy in the hope that he will solve their specific problems. So not only does a voter feel himself to have become involved, but also that he has been given a genuine possibility to elect the person who he feels can solve *his* problems. The deputy, in turn, can devote himself completely to the service of *his* people, accountable to them and only them.

It would be expedient to introduce such a system into the territories where the Peoples of the North live. There are about 450 to 500 settlements involved here that should be recognized by law as national villages, along with 110 to 120 administrative districts in 16 regions, territories, and autonomous republics of the RSFSR.

Deputies elected from the ethnic communities that make up the Peoples of the North will form deputy commissions in the soviets at any given level, disposing of the necessary rights to represent the interests of the Peoples of the North and to take decisions relating to issues that fall within their exclusive competence.

The legislation addressing this exclusive competence and its limitations will be a most important component of the system at all levels. At stake here are such issues as the ownership of land and right to natural resources; the access to areas for hunting, fishing, and trapping at the village soviet level or the creation of special zones giving the Peoples of the North the exclusive right to exploitation of natural resources within the borders of their administrative districts, regions, and territories; and the passing of legislative acts at Republic and USSR levels.

The decisions of a deputy commission, within the confines of its exclusive competence, must be irrevocable and must be carried out. They cannot be repealed by a simple majority of votes within the soviet at the given level. Such important legal guarantees will allow for taking the interests of the Peoples of the North into consideration in the regions where they live. In case of a disagreement arising in any given soviet, the

settling of the conflict must be transferred to soviets at higher levels and to their deputy commissions in charge of the affairs of the Peoples of the North. This procedure of referral can, if necessary, be carried through right up to the Supreme Soviets of the RSFSR and USSR, to the Assembly (Parliament) of the Small Peoples of the North that is being set up today.

The choice of the deputy commission as the fundamental link and central cell of the whole system of self-government is conditioned by the particular way in which the Peoples of the North are living scattered throughout the territories. Another possibility would be to achieve self-government only on the community level in the shape of independent national soviets and other kinds of formations. But the Peoples of the North do not live in compact ethnic groups where they form a majority in the national settlements. On the contrary, they form minorities in the areas where they live.

Only a small percentage of the indigenous peoples of the North – not more than 15% – live in settlements where they form a majority (more than 50%) of the population. These are small villages, considered unpromising in terms of future prospects for development, and as a rule they have very low economic potential and an undeveloped infrastructure. They are branches of bigger farms, and sometimes they do not even have their own political administration – soviets. In this case, two solutions are possible. The first is the comprehensive development of such villages, from the building up of the production potential to the construction of schools, hospitals, and other kinds of infrastructure. Alternatively, such villages, provided with national or village soviets, could become the centres of special zones where traditional land use has priority.

The comprehensive development of such villages will inevitably be followed by an influx of other nationalities (i.e., non-indigenous peoples), and the indigenous population will then come to form a minority. In the second case though, it is possible to envisage independent community self-government. However if we take into consideration that the absolute majority of the Peoples of the North currently form a minority in their villages and settlements, it is evidently necessary to find a way to combine the administration of their local affairs with specific elements of actual self-government, as on the level of all the Peoples of the North.

The formation here of a separate parallel system of self-government will only complement the existing system because of the existence of a production potential, an infrastructure etc., that are common to all of the population. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the interests of the whole population and those of the Peoples of the North in any given territory. This is possible through a common system of government, in this case through the Soviets of People's Deputies. The deputy commissions (groups), elected by the Peoples of the North in a given territory, will participate in the administration of all affairs of the territory and, at the same time, of the affairs of the Peoples of the North legally recognized as being under their exclusive competence.

In this way, there would not be two parallel systems of government on a territory, but instead the interests of the whole population and the Peoples of the North would be combined in one and the same system. This would reduce the possibility of inter-ethnic conflicts, include a system of self-government for the Peoples of the North within the overall state system, and thus overcome any possible isolation.

In order to coordinate the work of the deputy commissions at all levels, it would be expedient for us to organize a Deputy Assembly (parliament, congress, association, union) that automatically includes all deputies elected from electoral lists of Peoples of the North. This type of organization would ensure the coordination of the work of the deputy commissions and of all deputies, and could give expert advice at meetings of territorial authorities, deputy congresses, and at meetings of the various bodies set up by them. The main areas in which advice could be given would be on the drafting of legislative initiatives, important state acts and the decisions of local soviets. The assembly could also gather proposals put forward by lower cells and by individual representatives of the Peoples of the North and work towards their realization. It could study public opinion on current issues concerning the life of the Peoples of the North and organize expert examinations of large-scale projects that affect the interests of the indigenous peoples, etc., etc.

It is clear from these proposals that our constitutive congress of deputies representing the Small Peoples of the North will only be the beginning of the construction of a new model of self-government; but, after all, someone has to take the first step on the road towards real self-government for our peoples.

Therefore, the organizational committee is presenting to the congress a whole package of draft documents for discussion, and among these documents are the Programme and the Charter. The Declaration and also the election of a Presidium will require that we take decisions now, whereas the other drafts can be studied, re-worked and then passed as they are ready.

As you can see from the material, the structure of the Assembly (parliament) of the Small Peoples of the North pre-supposes the forming of a Presidium made up of 25 to 30 people with obligatory representation of one deputy from each of the 26 individual peoples.

The Presidium will have an office made up of two to three co-chairmen and five to six chairmen of the permanent commissions.

The following directions are proposed for the work of the committees: 1) legislation at USSR and Republic level, 2)lines of direction for the local soviets, 3) mechanisms to control that provisions passed at USSR and Republic levels are implemented, 4) coordination of the activities of the self-government institutions and organizations with other public political institutions and organizations in the country, 5) definition of the rights of the Small Peoples of the North and, 6) international contacts.

The setting up of the second committee on the "lines of direction for the local soviets" is necessary, as is not surprising, to protect the interests

and rights of the peoples from arbitrary rule on the part of the local organs of power i.e. the territorial, regional, area, district, and village soviets.

Arbitrary rule is found under the guise of various specious aims and plausible pretexts and always without due regard for the specific interests of the Small Peoples. There are numerous examples of this sort of thing and you will probably also be mentioning some of them in your speeches.

It is proposed to set up a paid secretariat (five to six people) to ensure that work will be carried out in a qualified and professional way in the Presidium and its bureau. Payment should be provided by the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and RSFSR. We will request that this issue be decided by the leadership of the Supreme Soviets.

With regard to the procedure for election of leaders and coordinators, it is proposed to hold a secret ballot only for the election of the co-chairmen, and to elect all the rest of the members of the Presidium, including the chairmen of the committees, by open voting.

In order to get our ideas and aims across to the population at large, it has been proposed that we publish newspapers and a literary journal. The problems of money and paper will of course make this task rather difficult, but we need to discuss the idea and think about how quickly from an organizational point of view we will be able to start the publishing activities. One idea that has been put forward is that the Assembly (parliament) and other organizations – for example the Association of the Small Peoples of the North, the association "Agrosever", the RSFSR Union of Writers, the State Committee for Northern Affairs, and the State Committee for the Nationalities of the RSFSR and other republics – could become co-founders of a newspaper and a journal. There are also other ideas about how to solve these problems.

Another important question is the setting up of a "Fund for the Survival of the Peoples of the North".

The organizational committee believes that the creation of numerous different funds to assist the development of the Small Peoples of the North would be a good rather than a bad idea, and in fact this is normal practice elsewhere in the world. Therefore, the "Fund for the Survival of the Peoples of the North", established under the aegis of the Deputy Assembly, will, we believe, help to finance *some* of the Assembly's activities; and will help to raise funds for specific purposes and complex programmes with specific aims, for which other forms of financial support from either public or charity funds have not been found.

In order to link the system of self-government to the executive structure of state government (ministries, authorities, etc.), it would be advisable to form an executive committee of Peoples of the North or a type of permanent representation under the RSFSR Soviet of Ministers – i.e., a managing organ of the group of ethnic communities the Peoples of the North under the RSFSR Soviet of Ministers. This executive committee, elected by the Congress or the Presidium of the Deputy Assembly, should have an executive apparatus, provide the link with government organs,

and organize the executive activities of sections and groups under the deputy commissions of the Soviets of People's Deputies at various levels or in the executive committees of local soviets, i.e., right through the executive branches of the system of the soviets at all levels.

I have dwelled at great length on the "technical" details of how a system of self-government for the Peoples of the North could be set up and made to function. Soon, such a system will be formed in the USSR, and it will be important to have detailed discussions right up to the final decisions. It is perhaps worth noting that, in recent times, quite a few decisions have been made without the necessary discussions about the mechanisms for their implementation and about the possible social consequences.

The first three options mentioned above could supplement the proposed system or act as transitional models for a radical reform of the system of self-government for the Small Peoples of the North.

Today, in the USSR and in our republic, the necessary conditions do actually exist and there are real possibilities for establishing a system of self-government for the Peoples of the North; but the realization of these possibilities in practice demands preliminary legal and scientific studies and proposals. The proposed system of self-government is based upon the principles and structure of a revised political system, at the centre of which are the Soviets of People's Deputies.

The system of self-government for the Peoples of the North will not be set up as a structure parallel to the existing political system but as an inherent part of it. A combination of the two systems is envisaged at all levels – from that of local settlements right up to the Soviet of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and RSFSR. This will enable the Peoples of the North to resolve their own problems within the context of the general activities of the soviets at various levels.

The proposed mechanism will include the Peoples of the North in the general process of state rule, minimizing the risk of isolationism and confrontation. The Peoples of the North can be included more directly in both devising and implementing large-scale programmes for their own development, worked out by the government.

Unfortunately the State Programme, adopted in 1980 to cover the period up to 1990, "did not reach" the Peoples of the North; "it got waylaid" en route in towns and district centres and on central estates. Although in name the programme is oriented towards assisting the Peoples of the North, it tackled general rural and settlement problems and not the specific problems faced by the Peoples of the North.

Now a new government programme has been adopted for the period from 1991 to 2005, and the establishment of a system of self-government could in an essential way change the manner in which this programme is implemented and direct it towards finding effective solutions to the Northern Peoples' problems. A special mechanism is required in order to help accomplish and control the programme and to ensure that allocated means actually do reach the Small Peoples of the North.

To a certain degree, the proposed system of self-government has a universal character and can be adapted to the problems of ethnic and national minorities in other regions of the country. The order established by the proposed system of correlation and interaction between the local ethnic interests and the general interests on republic and union levels makes it possible to combine the administration of the affairs of an ethnic group with those of the whole society.

The Peoples of the North have never been protected in either a legal sense (equal rights means above all protection for the weak) or an economic sense (the volume of production in all the traditional branches of the economy of the Peoples of the North is being reduced and the people engaged in these branches are still being deprived of the results of their own work, and to a certain extent transformed into social parasites), or a social sense (the glaring evidence of this is the extent to which the indigenous communities have disintegrated).

The most terrible thing is that even today there is no clear-cut state policy for the regulation of the social and economic processes or the demographic development among the Small Peoples of the North.

Even today, we repeat the former regime's noisy and victorious statistical statements regarding the "future development" of the Small Peoples of the North. There is still no clear legal status for the Small Peoples of the North as a social group.

The difficulties come from the fact that there are forces at work – in particular, under the present conditions of decentralization, transition to market economy, and growth in competitive infighting – that are counteracting the processes aimed at obtaining economic and social protection for the indigenous communities of the North.

The legislation war in the RSFSR is also doing a good deal of destructive work and causing considerable confusion. As a result, the northern communities suffer and the indigenous peoples suffer, as they also suffer from the confrontations between some of the regional and territorial soviets and their autonomous formations, the latter striving to attain genuine self-government and not only declared autonomy.

Among the main tasks of the Assembly are the following: to put a stop to the alienation of our peoples from the paths of civilization; to draw on the experience of foreign countries where legislative protection of small groups of indigenous peoples has been established, particularly in the Arctic regions of the planet; to take part in the preparations for the ratification by the USSR of the ILO Convention 169 ("Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries") and of other international acts that are relevant to the Small Peoples of the North.

(V. M. Yetylen, Chukchi economist, is vice-President of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North)

ANXIOUS NORTH

In Moscow, 22nd of February, 1989, a meeting took place in the 'Anxious North' group of the Ecological Union of the USSR, the Committees on Ethnography and Medical Geography of the Moscow Branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR, and the Section for the Sociology of National Political Relations of the Soviet Sociological Association of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. At the meeting, the following recommendations were adopted:

It is one of the most important tasks of our government, and an international obligation of every citizen of the USSR who loves his country, to take good care of and make grow everything that serves the aim of consolidating the Soviet Union as a society where different peoples can develop freely and different cultures blossom.

The 19th Party Conference (from the 28th of June to the 1st of July, 1988, Moscow) defined the essence of truly socialist national relationship with the following words: "It is crucial that economic and social progress in the national areas be accompanied by spiritual progress based upon the cultural distinctiveness of nations and peoples." This approach complies with the hopes and expectations of the 26 Peoples of the Extreme North and Far East of the USSR.

In 1988, meetings and conferences took place in Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk, Yakutsk and other cities, at which the Northern Peoples' current problems were discussed, together with perspectives for future development. This gave rise to a great deal of critical as well as constructive material in the mass media. An important event in the ongoing scientific discussion of the problems of the Peoples of the North was the publication of a number of articles in the journal of the Central Committee of the CPSU Communist *(1988, No. 16), and in the newspaper* Sovetskaya Kultura *(11th of February, 1989).*

The meeting of the 'Anxious North' group was conducted as an initiative taken by a group of concerned scientists inspired by these publications, and as a response to Mr. M. S. Gorbachev's address to a group of social scientists at a meeting with representatives from the world of science and culture in the Central Committee of the CPSU in January 1989.

At the meeting, the most acute problems facing the Small Peoples of the North today were reflected in the participants' speeches. It was said that the Provision of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR "On Measures for the Future Economic and Social Development of the Regions Inhabited by the Peoples of the North" (dated the 7th of February, 1980, no. 115) has not been implemented and

undoubtedly will not be by 1990 as intended. The authorities have not succeeded in completing the settling of nomad families (in the Tyumen region alone, about ten tousand people lead a nomadic way of life). They have not been able to provide full employment for the indigenous population. No proper professional training has yet been organized that takes into account national traditions. The living conditions among the Peoples of the North are still extremely poor and new negative processes are appearing, adding to the acute regional and local problems.

The reason for this is the mistaken scientific and theoretical orientation of above-mentioned Provision No. 115. It bases itself on a non-dynamic, stagnant approach characteristic of our system of administrative command. In a situation where the Peoples of the North have been deprived of the possibility of solving their own problems and making plans for their own future development; where all administrative power and financial means have been put into the hands of unconcerned authorities; and where the question of controlling these authorities and making demands on them has been put in a wrong way, it has become impossible to evade today's acute problems. From among the problems and question that have remained unsolved or unanswered or become even more acute since the passing of Provision No. 115, the following ones were specified at the 'Anxious North' meeting:

1. The question of establishing national autonomies for all the Northern Peoples has not been solved. The process of constructing national-territorial areas for the Peoples of the North came to a halt in the mid-1930s and no attempts at further development have since been made, not even in the more favourable circumstances that have prevailed since the 1960s. At present, only 7 out of the 26 nations have their own autonomous areas, yet a total of 50 per cent of the indigenous Peoples of the North live outside of these areas or do not have their own autonomous formations. Consequently they do not have any of the special rights, privileges and benefits granted to them by the law "On Autonomous Areas in RSFSR", the law "On the Election of Peoples's Deputies in USSR", and others.

2. Traditional branches of economic activities that previously employed the Small Peoples of the North are collapsing. The reduction in the number of domestic reindeer and the reduction in fur procurement and fish catches are giving cause for serious concern. Another alarming fact is that a large proportion of the farms in charge of agricultural and other kinds of production in the northern regions are unprofitable (or to be more precise, unprofitable compared with the plans), which contradicts the policy of the government to promote self-sufficiency and self-financing in public production. There have been no radical changes in the politics of the State Department for Agricultural Industry (*Gosagroprom*), the Ministry of Fisheries (*Minrybkhoz*), the Russian Consumption Union (*Rospotrebsoyuz*), the State Directorate for Hunting

(*Glavokhota*), and other official bodies. Therefore, the social conditions in the northern settlements deteriorate and the gap between the standard of living and the quality of life of the Peoples of the North and those of the rest of the country is widening.

3. The tendencies in the employment situation for the northern indigenous population are alarmingly unfavourable. Growth in the unemployment as a permanent social phenomenon gives serious cause for concern as does the fact that the number of indigenous people employed in the traditional economic branches is decreasing; this while at the same time there is a growth in the number of unskilled or semi-unskilled workers employed in the service industries (cleaners, drivers etc.). This process causes many other social problems.

4. There was an increase in drunkenness and alcoholism among the indigenous Northern Peoples, especially in the period before the dry decree of 1985 (limiting alcohol production and consumption), and even now the problem is still acute. There is a link between this problem and the large number of accidents, poisonings and fatal injuries, with suicide now representing up to 25 per cent of such cases. According to the results of sociological studies, the overall suicide rate among the indigenous Northern Peoples is three to four times higher than the average level for the whole of Russia, up to 70 to 90 cases per 100,000 people. It is even likely that the suicide rate for the indigenous peoples is higher than that of any other Soviet people.

5. The weak material foundation of the indigenous Northern Peoples – and the poor organization of health services that does not meet the requirements of the way of life, culture, and psychology of the indigenous peoples – put them into an unfavourable position when compared with other population groups with regard to many diseases (tuberculosis, pneumonia, otitis, etc.). the poor physical and mental health of the indigenous peoples is the main reason for the increased mortality rate and the alarmingly low average life expectancy (around 50 years).

6. The demographic situation has continued to deteriorate as can be seen from the sharp decrease in the population growth rate for the Northern Peoples in the 1970s. This decrease occurred as a consequence of the extremely high mortality rate that remained high (especially among persons of working age) while the birth rate decreased and the process of assimilation began to take hold. As a result, the indigenous peoples who are already few in number are still faced with the threat of depopulation and an irreversible demographic crisis.

7. The Peoples of the North are losing their languages, traditions, arts, craft skills and folklore and this in conjunction with the other negative processes that they have already experienced, is leading to the disintegration of their spiritual culture and ethnic self-awareness.

8. The state of the air, water, plant and animal life, and the ecosystem as a whole is deteriorating, although the components of this system are of vital economic significance for the Peoples of the North. The natural environment in the northern regions is in a state of overall degradation as a result of irrational industrial development, construction, and exploitation of natural resources.

At the 'Anxious North' meeting, it was also pointed out that there are a number of problems of a local nature or problems that are acute only for certain social or professional groups or certain Northern Peoples, such as the problems connected with nomadism, the problems of the indigenous inhabitants of the Yamal Peninsula in connection with the construction of new gas pipelines, the problems of the Evenks connected with the construction of the Turukhans Hydroelectric Power Station, to name but a few.

The meeting put forward the following proposals for guidelines to be followed when working out the principles of a new national policy in the regions inhabited by the Peoples of the North, and of a new state mechanism to ensure their realization:

1. *National administrative and territorial structures:*

a) The meeting recommends to higher state bodies, in particular to the Commission for Legislative Proposals of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, to consider the drafting of a new special legislation for the regions inhabited by the Small Peoples of the North. In particular, it is recommended to change the law "On the Autonomous Areas" in accordance with the proposals from the soviets of people's deputies in the autonomous areas themselves (this type of project has already been brought forward in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area), and to take into account the international legal guarantees as set out in the Convention No. 107 of the Internationa Labour Organisation dated 1957 (in the USSR 1959) "Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries".

b) To address the concerns of the ethnic groups and Peoples of the North who do not have their own autonomous areas or inhabit areas outside of their autonomous areas, the meeting proposes that former areas or national districts (e.g., the Okhot, Even, Vitim-Olekminsk, Evenk, Lower Amur) be re-established or that new administrative-territorial units be created.

c) Where this is impossible, the meeting recommends that direct or indirect representation by northern national groups (through the deputies from the appropriated autonomous areas, territories and regions) be established in the highest government bodies and that the necessary supplementary clauses to the law "On the Election of People's Deputies" and to the law "On the Autonomous Areas" be made accordingly.

2. *The sphere of economy.*

a) The meeting recommends that the system of production be organized in a way that will give priority to the development and strengthening of the traditional occupations of the Peoples of the North – reindeer breeding, hunting, fishing and other forms of professional activity that are the economic basis for the ethnic livelihood of these peoples.

b) This should be done in a way that does not exclude but rather promotes the use of modern equipment and technology in the traditional economic branches, in particular in such areas as raw material processing (here the purchase of small technological production lines from abroad will be necessary), in order that finished products can be processed in the northern settlements, e.g., meat, fish and other derivative products such as fully finished deer skins, fur, craft goods and national folk art.

c) The meeting considers it important that production and trade should be as free as possible in the areas inhabited mainly by the indigenous peoples. There should be no obligatory (and indeed enslaving) provisions of cheap raw material to other enterprises in which mainly newcomers are occupied (run by the Ministry of Fisheries, the State Directorate for Hunting, etc.).

d) The meeting proposes that the functions of organizing and planning economic production in the northern economic branches at local and regional level should be gradualy transferred from the state departments and ministries into the hands of the indigenous peoples themselves. In order to do this, radical changes are necessary in the work of the administrative bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Fisheries, the Russian Consumption Union, the State Directorate for Hunting, and others. These changes would be facilitated by the introduction of socio-economic forms of production organization – family contracts, collective leasing, self-financing, etc. It might be possible to re-establish independent collective farms (*kolkhozy*) instead of the existing unprofitable state enterprises that are unable to provide the Peoples of the North with an adequate standard of living.

e) The current situation whereby everything indispensable is taken away from the indigenous peoples (i.e., fish, meat, hides, furs, etc.) while unnecessary goods are being imported (non-traditional drink products, bad-quality industrial food products, alcohol, etc.) should be changed. In order to do this, it is necessary to develop domestic and inter-trade links to prevent essential goods from being exported from the national settlements and, instead, to make them available locally. To the same purpose, it would seem right to reverse the existing restrictions on the number of vacancies available for women in reindeer-herding brigades; to encourage an increase in the head of deer held by individuals or by cooperatives; to establish a market,

however limited, for free fur trade and to ensure a supply of fresh fish for the national settlements including these supplies in the amount of fish, necessary for fulfilling the production plan of the fish-processing plants.

f) The accumulation in the settlements of semi-skilled and unskilled indigenous people who are working on subsidiary or temporary projects or who are unemployed should be stopped. Where necessary, these settlements should be officially declared national ones and priority right to job vacancies available in the local administrative bodies and infrastructure should be given to the indigenous inhabitants.

3. Education, preventive health care and protection of the environment:

a) The quality of the education received by the children of the indigenous peoples is low; the boarding schools are overcrowded and lack material resources. The children are being brought up apart from their parents, which has negative social, cultural, and psychological consequences. Therefore, the question of working out an alternative educational model (or possibly alternative models) that takes into account the traditional lifestyle, culture and psychology of the peoples involved should be put before the Ministry of Education, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, the Research Institute for National Schools, and the Research Institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. The perspectives for the future schools should be schools of broad specialization for nomad children, and schools for children in the small settlements where the curriculum includes the teaching of practical skills indispensable for working in the traditional branches of the northern economy and for maintaining the infrastructure of the northern settlements and towns.

b) In the regions that have undergone the most intensive industrial development (the Tyumen region and others), training should be made available for the indigenous inhabitants so that they can learn how to use modern equipment and those interested can be recruited to work in the new industries that have sprung up on the primordial lands of the indigenous peoples. This type of training, and the organization of national and mixed work collectives, should be introduced at the expense of the authorities who have developed and exploited the areas. The responsibility for so doing should be compulsory.

c) In order to improve the health of the indigenous peoples of the North, large-scale emergency medical examinations and preventive health-care work should be organized for thousands of people, as was done in 1988 by the Children's Fund and the USSR Ministry of Health in Tadzhikistan and the Chita Region. More control is required in order to

ensure that a larger part of area and district health budgets is spent on the regions inhabited by indigenous populations and especially on the indigenous populations.

d) Medical care in the regions of the North should be based entirely on the concept of *community* health-care while still preserving, of course, close links with the higher regional health-care structure. International experience from northern territories outside Russia and from other sparsely populated areas with extreme natural conditions can be useful in this connection. It will be desirable to provide general practitioners and specialists with supplementary training (for example, in connection with rotation) in order that they might get a better understanding of the specific problems involved in practising polar medicine and become better acquainted with the basic history, culture, and ethnography of the Northern Peoples. After this, they should live among the indigenous peoples, either permanently or temporarily (three to four month). Special social and medical assistants from among the local indigenous inhabitants also need to be trained. The question of how to bring our medical services in the northern areas up to a better standard, such as that seen in the USA, Canada and the Scandinavian countries, should be put before the Ministry of Health of the USSR, and the possibility of setting up a special regional administration group within the Ministry should be considered.

e) Following the increase in the number of violent deaths among people in the northern national settlements, the question of organizing a network of permanent centres for social and psychological help should be put to the Ministry of Health of the RSFSR. These centres should be manned with experts on drug-abuse, psychiatrists, specialists for patients with suicidal tendencies, and specially trained social and medical assistants working together under a joint programme.

f) In order to improve the demographic situation and ensure a stable rate of reproduction among the Peoples of the North, apart from measures to improve health and to reduce the mortality rate, efforts are required to stop the fall in the birth rate. A regional demographic policy could be implemented at the local level by a Family Planning Association, the establishment of which is currently being examined.

g) In order to ensure nature conservation and normal conditions of the environment, human ecology, and sanitation in the settlements, complex studies should be carried out on the influence of human (especially industrial) pollution and destruction of the natural environment in the northern areas and their effects on the life and health of the indigenous peoples. A network of biospheric reserves, national parks, and other forms of protected territories should be furthered; there the indigenous peoples could live undisturbed, practise their traditional professional activities, and take part in preserving nature.

4. Additional measures:

a) In the summer of 1989, a new draft of the ILO Convention (No.169) "Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries" will be signed. Therefore, it would seem appropriate to put the question of setting up a consultative working group on the application of the new Convention in the USSR to the State Committee on Employment of the USSR and to other relevant state bodies. It would be expedient also to involve scientists, representatives from the autonomous areas, and members of the national intelligentsia in this work – in particular, possible deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. It is already necessary to coordinate the documents concerning the Peoples of the North with the new draft of the ILO Convention.

b) It is necessary to consider to question of working out a "Law on Priority Right to Land Use for the Peoples of the North", consulting the existing ILO Convention and the new draft. This law should:

- recognize special rights and privileges for the Peoples of the North to exploit areas and natural resources on their primordial territories,

- ensure that territories and natural resources of vital importance to the indigenous peoples are protected from the destructive influence of industry,

- work out the procedures for the establishment, and the rules for the activities, of economic and cultural bodies of self-government and development of the Peoples of the North (Associations), and acknowledge them as the legal subject of the rights,

- work out the procedures for establishing agreements between the industrial enterprises (ministries, departments) working in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples and the local soviets and the organizations of the indigenous peoples,

- determine the size and form of material compensation to the indigenous peoples in return for the industrial destruction of the natural environment and the territories used by them for professional reasons (hunting and fishing areas, reindeer pastures, etc.),

- become a basis for the development of new and progressive social and economic relations and economic self-determination in the traditional economies of the northern regions (through leasing, cooperatives, self-financing). This type of law would help guarantee the principle of social equality in the relationship between state and nations in the North and would provide for stable social, demographic, and national development of the Peoples of the North under the difficult present-day circumstances.

c) One of the most important unresolved issues is how to find a suitable way to ensure that the Peoples of the North themselves

participate in defining their problems and working out solutions to them. The meeting recommends that the government encourage the independency, initiative, and cooperation of the citizens and make this the basis of its policy at the present state of the development of our society.

In connection with this, the meeting supported the Northern Peoples' own national intelligentsia (speech by the Nivkh writer, Mr. V. M. Sangi) and its proposal to organize an inter-regional Soviet Association of the Small Peoples of the North.

The recommendations were prepared on behalf of those present at the meeting by:

The President of the Committee on Medical Geography of the Moscow Branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR, Doctor of Geography B. B. Prokhorov

The Academic Secretary of the Ethnographic Committee of the Moscow Branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR, Candidate in Historical Sciences I. I. Krupnik

The Co-chairman of the Section of the Sociology of National Political Relations of the Soviet Sociological Association of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Candidate in Historical Sciences G. V. Starovoitova

The representative of the 'Anxious North' group of the Ecological Union of the USSR, Candidate in Historical Sciences A. I. Pika

TRAVEL ACCOUNTS FROM THE 1920'S AND 1940'S

THE MALYGIN STRAIT AND THE WHITE ISLAND

BY ALEXANDER PIKA

Long ago, in the 1920s, quite a few courageous people with a Communist Party membership card in their breast pocket or a komsomol badge on the lapel of their jacket made their way across the ice at the shores of the White Sea, roamed the tundra on sledges, explored the taiga, the mountains, and the polar deserts. Many of them became, if not the actual discoverers, then the first explorers of these distant lands unknown to the scientists except as areas on a map. They measured the winds, the land, and the water. They drew up maps, constructed schedules and statistical tables, searched for ores, minerals, and gold. They healed men and animals, dug into local issues of a social and political character, organized the first soviets, cooperatives, and collective farms.

The man whose story I am going to tell came from this restless tribe. "Yamal-kharyutti" – inhabitant of Yamal – was how the nomads of Yamal called him. Even today, there are people in the North who remember something about him. I got a letter from Yamal, that was an answer to my request for information concerning the "Yamal-kharyutti" and his fellow travellers. Okatetto, the head of the village soviet at the extreme north of Yamal, provided this brief answer: "The above-mentioned persons have lived on our Yamal Peninsula, but it is difficult to relate anything about them."

Never mind, maybe I will find out for myself. For a long time I have walked in the footsteps of the expeditions of the 1920s. I have worked in the tundra, talked with people in the settlements, done research in the archives in Salekhard, Tobolsk, and Moscow. Good luck did await me in Sverdlovsk. The family of Yevladov, the son of the "Yamal-kharyutti", had kept Yevladov's field diaries, letters, maps, and old photo plates. Here, I also learned the biographical facts.

Vladimir Petrovich Yevladov (born in 1883) was from the Urals. He grew up in the Ufa Province. He studied at the Institute for Communications Engineering in St. Petersburg. He participated in the events of the February Revolution in 1917 in Petrograd. In 1918, he was a delegate at the 4th Extraordinary Congress of the Soviets, where he voted in favour of ratifying the Brest-Litovsk Peace Agreement.

The Civil War brought him to the East. In Mongolia, he took part in the military operations crushing Baron Ungern's gang of White Army guards. In 1921, Yevladov returned to the Urals. Only 28 years old, he had already been an engineer, a soldier, and a party worker, and he had seen the remotest parts of the country. But the most important journeys of his life lay still ahead.

When the Ural region was established, it was made to include the distant tundras of Yamal and Gydan, as well as the never-ending West-Siberian taiga. The population in these remote areas – the Nenets, Khanty, Mansi, and Selkup – had been only superficially studied from the economic and ethnographic points of view. And yet such information was necessary for the carrying out of the new Soviet national policy, for providing economic and cultural aid, and medical care to the Small Peoples of the North.

In 1926, Yevladov visited Yamal for the first time as part of a medical research team. In March 1927, he was appointed member of the Ural Committee for Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (*Uralkom Severa*), the local branch of the Committee of the North at the Presidium of the All-Union Executive Committee, headed by the renowned Communist Party politician P. G. Smidovich.

From 1928 to 29, Yevladov wandered with another expedition all over Yamal. He crossed the Malygin Strait and stayed for a while on the White Island. Hitherto, no one had visited the island in summertime, no one had seen the topography of its rivers and lakes, nor its vegetation, birds, and animals. In 1933, the first description of the White Island appeared in the Ural Soviet Encyclopedia. Its author was Yevladov.

To reach the White Island had not been among the main goals of the expedition. But without it the 1928-29 expedition would not have become so important. This is why the expedition decided to go to the White Island. The expedition's old field diaries tell us about those few days of the the year-long stay in the Yamal tundra...

The explorers had to do something; they had to make up their minds. The wakeful night and the long monotonous ride with reindeer across the Lapta-sale promontory was exhausting. Sleep was all they wanted, but of sleep they could not think. Nerves were stretched to the limit, minds were anxious and bitter.

So many difficulties had been left behind – cold and hunger, fear for the lives of people and reindeer. The worm of self-doubt gnawed continuously: would it be possible to reach the White Island? And not to mention the internal disagreements in the team: did they absolutely have to go to the island? It was difficult to maintain a firm resolve. And look, it was all in vain! There were no boats and there would not be any. At the Malygin Strait, they were welcomed by the old man Ngedruy Yadne. He smiled and wanted to kiss the hand of the "red boss", who hardly got his hand back again. Everything had seemed fine. And now this old man said that all the boats had left for the island. The letter from the leader of the expedition, with instructions to hold back the hunters until his arrival, had gone astray (now, could you believe that?!). The boats were gone and it was impossible to get to the island.

Yevladov walked out of Yadne's *chum* (tent) to clear his mind. He sat down near the shore on an old broken sledge and began to fill his pipe. He let out a cloud of smoke, rolled himself further into his *malitsa* (mens's

fur coat made of two reindeer hides with fur on the inside and outside, with a hood), got hold of the leather-bound notebook with gold print letters, the field diary. This had always a calming effect. You could tell everything to the paper. Without hurry, you could think over the whole situation and put everything in the right place. A grey day was dawning. The steel-grey waters of the sound were not very friendly. From the sea, a light but cold wind was blowing.

He opened the diary and looked over the previous notes. It was interesting to read, as if it had been written by someone else. That was how long this difficult journey on Yamal's tundra had lasted. Every day brought in so much of the new.

It was already the fourth month on the road, and the three of them had been constantly on the move. The beginning had been like this: they had left Obdorsk (after 1930, Salekhard) on the 17th of April with a caravan of 60 sledges. In front was the guide, Filippov; after him the veterinary specialists, Kolmakov, Korolev, and Tikhonov; then Spitsin, specialist in hunting; Kargopoltsev, commodity expert; the interpreter Yadopchev; the Nenets herders with their families; and attached to the expedition as "hunter's apprentice", the fifteen-year-old Vasya Terentyev in search of adventure.

They journeyed on the tundra in a string of sledges that was one to two kilometres long. Spring caught up with them on their way to Yuribei, the biggest river on the Yamal Peninsula. Even in the frost, the midday sun warmed their backs through the *malitsa*, reminding them that they might not be in time to cross the Yuribei before the river thawed. That would mean the end of the expedition. They might then just as well return home. The exhausted people and reindeer strained to their utmost, moved in the night on the frozen snow, and in the daytime made their way through the porous snow-mush, choosing the spots most covered with snow. It was much easier for the reindeer to pull the heavily loaded sledges through the snow that was left than on bare ground.

Sometimes they had to go along without guide. The Nenets herders did not trust the strangers, and when Kargopoltsev was sent beyond the Nei-to lakes to the littoral of the Kara Sea to study sea hunting, he returned having learned nothing. For some days, the Nenets had been taking him around to various *chums*, trying to get rid of him as quickly as possible. They had given him almost no opportunity to talk with people and offered him neither food nor rest. In a thick fog, they brought him back to the expedition camp. With astonishment the members then understood how the Nenets viewed the expedition: "Taras Fedka (Filippov's guide) comes with his old boss, he who took away the reindeer in 1921, and they bring along the 'black document case' – this means war. They have come to seize the reindeer. Yet another Russian walks along the Ob." The old fears were still alive and the old offences not forgotten. But the "black document case" was just the common notebook with the calico cover that had been handed over to Vasya Terentyev, who travelled with Kargopoltsev, for making notes.

Once again, they had to repair relations with the Nenets. They talked about the Soviet system, about doctors, trading stations and credits; and then they received smiles, gifts, bread, tin cans, butter and tea. Lots of tea. Gradually, things improved.

At this point, Yevladov at last found the field notes he had been looking for. They were from the middle of June. By that time, they had been moving on the "estate" of Yenzeda Okatetto. He possessed 3,000 reindeer. When paying the expedition his first visit, Yenzeda said:

"I am of course a bad man because I have reindeer. I am rich."

Such an opening did not promise anything good, and Yevladov answered:

"You are wrong. We do not think in that way. Not all rich people are bad, and not all poor people are good. Everybody has his sorrows in life. The poor have one grievance – they have no reindeer. The rich have many grievances – the spring is bad, snowstorms turn little calves into ice, the wolf eats the reindeer, and if a meagre year comes all the reindeer will die."

"That's right," he answered, and seemed to calm down.

After this, Yenzeda became a great help to the expedition. He took a detachment to the upper reaches of the Tiutei-yakhi (Morkovaya River). When it was time to say goodbye, he said:

"I see that you speak the truth. You do not touch anything and you do good things. On Yamal, you will find our greatest chief: the god Seru Iriku on the White Island. Do not touch anything there either."

He explained that Seru Iriku stands on the White Island right in front of the sacrificial altar, Yaumal-khe, and is guarded by three Nenets of the Yamal family: Seiko, Narechi, and Nenzy. Narechi was a kinsman of Yenzeda and they were to tell him that they were sent by Yenzeda, so that he could take them to Seru Iriku and Yaumal-khe. There, they were to kneel before the White Grandfather and offer him "yabe-i", fire-water.

After they had said good-bye to Yenzeda, they sailed in a boat along Yamal's western shore. On the floating ice, they hunted seals and took refuge from the storms at the river mouths.

Even then, the Nenets spoke very little, and very reluctantly, of the Master of the White Island. So what to do if it was he, the White Grandfather, who was the reason why the Nenets did not want the strangers to get to the island.

A plan for action quickly took form in Yevladov's mind. Of course it would be possible to make their way across the Malygin Strait on *kaldankas* – small, nimble, unstable boats made up of three planks – had not Nansen and Johansen paddled on the sea among the ice floes in canvas kayaks? But it was extremely dangerous, and their death might discredit the whole expedition. This solution Yevladov would only try in extreme need, if there were no alternative.

The words of Yenzeda suggested to him another possibility. After all, they had arrived at the "gates of the White Island". The Nenets were always trying to keep strangers off the "holy island". Now it was necessary

to get past the "gate", and this was best done head-on, in a frontal attack. The attitude of the first *chum* on the coast towards the expedition would decide also that of all the others, and therefore it was necessary to settle all matters in detail now. It was better to drop the diplomacy and the indirect ways, and to have a direct conversation with Yadne immediately. Yevladov returned to the *chum* and began the talks.

"Listen, *veisako* (old man), to what I have to tell you."

"Speak out, I am listening. What is wrong?"

"Before us, two Russians have been here, one you will not remember, the other you know. The Nenets did not permit either of these men to go to the White Island. Now you tell me that there are no boats and that I cannot go either. The great elected leader who has sent me here has ordered me to go to the White Island and I must go there. Whether or not you will help me, I shall arrive in any case."

"How will you make it if you have no boats?"

"I have noticed that you have three *kaldankas* on the sledges. You will probably not miss them, so I will tie them like rafts, set the sails, and await the wind."

"You will not make it that way. The water is wide, and you cannot see to the other shore."

"Well, if we do perish, no one will ask anything from us. For me, this will be easier than not to go the White Island. But what happened to Yaptikov and Yamalov's three boats?"

"Three days ago, they went off to the White Island to hunt for reindeer."

"Why did they not wait for my arrival as I had told them in my letter?"

"The letter went astray. It did not come my way. I do not know whether they received it."

"Veisako, don't play games with me. You know the fox is cunning, but it ends up in the trap. Shall I tell you why it is that you will not let us, the Russians, go to the White Island?"

"Tell me."

"On the White Island is the dwelling of your most important god, Seru Iriku. There are many other idols there too, and you are afraid that we shall touch, destroy and profane the holy earth with our feet."

"But how did you learn about this? Many Nenets do not even know it!"

"I know many other things too. I know how the sun makes its way across the sky. I know why you have long nights. I know why light may occur at night-time and many other things. So do not try to play games with me. I know what you are thinking."

"Ya-voi, ya-voi" he said, astonished, and superstitious fear flickered in his eyes. He sat down quietly to his tea. His four sons, all hunters, sitting in front of him, remained silent. The women were fussing about the tea. Our hunting expert watched this peculiar fight with interest.

"Veisako! Tell everyone that we have come here not because of the gods but because of the people. We will not touch your gods, not even look at them if they do not happen to be on our way. On the island, we

must see how many wild reindeer are left and whether they will feed you for a long time yet."

Many more conversations followed before the old man finally said:

"However, someone must help you."

"How can anyone help if there are no boats?"

"There is one. It arrived yesterday."

"There! I see you are a real friend, and so I will tell the great elected leader."

"I will give you my son. Let him go with you. He knows everything on the island. He shoots well. There he is..."

In this way, we got a boat and with it, also, reliable guides. The passage to the White Island lay open!

On the night of the 30th of August, all who were going to the island underwent a purification ritual. They were fumigated. A woman held a can with smoking reindeer tallow under each sledge carrying a person. They fumigated for an especially long time under the sledge of the hunting expert, Spitsin. There was a rumour that he had not observed the rituals. Then the small expedition set off and after only two hours arrived at the boat. The night was calm and clear. The weather was unusually favourable for sailing.

They went down the river Yakhady, alternately by sail and by oars, and at dawn they reached its mouth. From here, from the promontory of Yakhady-sale, the White Island was already easy to distinguish. They set sail at six o'clock in the morning and by noon they were already halfway across the strait. Both shores were visible. The island looked like a mirage, whereas Yakhady-sale was sharply delineated. Water entered into the boat in streams along all the seams. Every minute, it was necessary to bail out water. The shore of the White Island came slowly closer.

Seals capered around the boat. Knowing their unusual curiosity about and interest in music, Yevladov and Spitsin began to lure them with singing. The Russian folk-song "Down the Volga River", sung in duet and at full strength, was warmly received by the listeners on board, the Nenets, and by those alongside, the seals. *Nerpas* (ringed seals) and *lakhtaks* (bearded seals) came ever closer, letting down their guard. Only the lack of experience in sea hunting on the part of the riflemen saved the whiskered (but earless) song-lovers from a certain death.

Finally, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, the anchor was dropped on the banks of the island's southern shore. Within an hour three small *chums* had been put up on the beach. The place was green; the warble of birds sounded more lively there than on Yamal. With the binoculars, they could sight a herd of wild reindeer, and on the beach, the footprints of a polar bear were clearly visible. All this gave the impression of a reserve. The first evening on the island ended with a refreshing cold bath in the stream and coffee with lemon and brandy. After this, everybody lay down to sleep. The Nenets warned that everybody should keep his rifle ready and have it next to him, especially at night-time, as the polar bears like to

attack people while they are asleep. Yevladov fell asleep amid pleasant thoughts of the romantic possibility of having to suffer an attack from a polar bear.

From early morning, the Nenets went hunting and with them went Spitsin. Yadopchev was preparing the lunch and making *lepyoshki* (flat cakes). Yevladov loaded the arms, prepared the photo plates, and wrote his diary. This took all the time from low to high tide. In the evening, he went out to hunt for birds and inspect the location. It was warm. At the last moment, though, he decided to put on his cloth hunting jacket. He took with him an ammunition belt, his camera, a bag for game and a surveying compass, just in case. As a professional land surveyor, he was sure that with the compass he could not lose his way.

He began by walking north-east from the camp. A chain of lakes stretched out one after the other. Shallow lakes, their bottom firm and sandy, the topography everywhere uniform and smooth, no rises in sight. The vegetation consisted mostly of sedge, and in places reindeer moss.

His feeling of happiness because they had finally succeeded in reaching the cherished goal had not left him. Yevladov walked around the bigger lakes and crossed the smaller ones easily at the fords. The thought that he was the first among the explorers of the North to walk on the ground of the uninhabited and unstudied White Island filled him with emotion. "This is the White Island," he thought, "the island to which it is so difficult for us Russian mortals to arrive. Its flora, fauna, and reliefs have not yet been described by anyone. What hindrances did the Nenets place in the way of those before us, and why has it been rather easy for me to cross all barriers?"

It was indeed strange. Zhitkov, the head of the Russian Geographical Society's expedition to Yamal from 1907 to 1908 had written: "Late in the evening, we gathered the reindeer and equipped the sledges for the journey to the White Island. It was no easy task, not because of any difficulties in the travelling, but for religious reasons. I sensed that the Samoyeds (Nenets) were by no means willingly taking us to the 'sacred island'. We got as far as 15 verst (into the island), saw only a few bullfinches, and then the Samoyeds implored us to turn back."

The same had happened in 1827 to a naval officer, Ivanov, who wrote: "It was my intention to get across to the White Island and make a description of it. But the Samoyeds refused to help me, so I placed a cross with our names on it next to a sign set by earlier explorers and then set out for Obdorsk on the 27th." In Obdorsk, he tried to persuade the local leader Sadi Bukatich to go for a journey to the White Island, but Bukatich refused. Ivanov then promised a sack of rye flour to anyone who would accompany him. But that did not help either. In the end, he decided to "force his way". Having arrived in 1828 at the last signpost, he started the journey to the island on the 26th of April. Having convinced himself that there was no reindeer moss on the island, he ordered the Nenets to take a supply with them from the mainland. But they did not follow his orders. "Then I did not know what to decide," wrote Ivanov.

Zhitkov had spent from morning until afternoon on the snow-covered island. On the 4th, of May, 1828 Ivanov travelled for a short time to the southern shore to measure the latitude, while his assistant Ragozin in two short rides had mapped the western shoreline as far as the 75.25 latitude onto the map. Now he, Yevladov, with the full cooperation of the guides – the three young hunters, Paadi Yadne, Uli Adera, and Tabkoche Yamal – could remain on the island for as long as would be necessary. There was neither snow nor ice. The island lay open to the researcher's eye. How good it felt to be the first!

A thick fog had imperceptibly floated in, but that did not disturb Yevladov, for he had his compass. It was getting time to return to the camp. The bag with the eider ducks had begun to weigh heavily on his shoulders, and the camera wore him down.

He turned towards the coast. Night was closing in on the tundra. The pince-nez got covered with water from the fog. He had to take them off. In the fog, now as thick as milk, all of the objects changed character: the little lake seemed endless, a hummock looked like the shadow of a low mountain. A huge, mysterious bird landed on a hill nearby. Yevladov fired his gun and ran to the prey. It turned out to be an ordinary ruff, a sandpiper, the size of a fist. Wonderful! If he were now to meet a bear, he had only a supply of small shots and one Zhakan bullet left.

The night grew thicker on the tundra, and the outlines dissolved more and more. His hope of quickly reaching the sea dwindled. He kept walking for a long time without changing direction until he finally stumbled upon a fin. Somewhere ahead he could hear the sea, but in the darkness he could see nothing. Here was the shore. Now where should he go? To the left? To the right? Definitely not to the west. He had expressly gone towards the west when he went for the shore. This meant that he had to go to the left, towards the east.

After he had walked for half an hour in the fog, the outlines of a high promontory with a sacrificial altar came into view. Now what was that? If this was the "White Grandfather", then he would have to go in the opposite direction. That couldn't be right. Yevladov climbed up onto the promontory. He had never seen such a huge altar. There was an enormous pile of reindeer horns, in the middle of which tall sticks stood out: idols with roughly carved faces all covered with sacrificial blood. In the very centre stood a bigtarch log. Smaller idols surrounded it, dressed in special sewn *malitsa* and *yagushki* (women's fur coat made out of reindeer skin, without a hood). Skulls of polar bear lay scattered around. In the last rays of the dim sunset, he glimpsed another promontory not far away with yet another sacrificial altar. Now there was no doubt. This was Sidya-khaen-sale, the "Two holy promontories", as Yevladov had learned from Zhitkov's book. It meant that he was more than ten kilometres from the camp. How much had he already walked? At least 30 kilometres on the tundra. His legs refused to walk. He picked up a dry fin for making a fire and considered whether to take a sacrificial hide to spread out on the wet



The most important sacred object on Yamal Peninsula is the sacrificial place "Khaen-sale" on the banks of the Malygin bay.

sand, but he did not do it. The traces of Russian boots would betray the violator of the "holy place". The fire began to crackle merrily. Yevladov roasted a duck on the fire, had his meal, and lay down to sleep on bits and pieces of old sacrificial hides after he had loaded his gun with the Zhakan bullet.

The cold did not permit him to fall firmly asleep. As soon as the day began to dawn, he got up and walked along the coast to the camp. All of his clothes were soaking wet, his legs were sore and hurt. And yet he carefully examined the coastal eruptions in search of argillaceous schists, where it might be possible to find minerals. He came across only a few jackdaws and a piece of coal. In places, the steep shore went right down to the waterline and he had to walk in the greasy mud, his feet getting stuck in it.

Finally, the sun showed its pale circle through the fog. He glanced at his compass, corrected for magnetic deviation, and established the hour: around 9 o'clock in the morning. They were probably already worrying in the camp. He began to walk faster, with his last strength, and by noon he had arrived at the camp. After drinking hot coffee with *lepyoshki*, prepared by Maksim Yagopchey, he rolled himself into the *malitsa* and slept until the evening.

The first day on the island had been tough, but these were only the initial difficulties. After that, everything went smoothly. Together with the Nenets Aptsin went into the tundra and made calculations as to the

number of wild reindeer on the island. On one of the trips he discovered two big hitherto-unknown lakes, which the Nenets called Paga-mal-to (lake at the end of the river Paga) and Nyaby-Paga-mal-to (lake at the other end of the river Paga). Yevladov placed these lakes on the map according to Spitsin's directives, and following the guides' drawings, he added the rivers that flow from the lakes to where they flow into the sea.

After that, they worked at surveying the coast line, which had not been measured for more than a hundred years, since Ivanov's description. The differences between the old and the new maps turned out to be significant. The southern shore was cut into ravines. High promontories, reaching far into the sea, were divided by ravines and valleys carved out by rivers and streams. The promontories were composed of sand and occasional mighty streaks of peat and loam. In some places, folds could be seen in the various layers, indicating that the White Island was not free of geological dislocations. Nowhere did they find rock layers breaking through to the surface.

Evening talks with the Nenets around the fireplace brought out much interesting information. The White Island was uninhabited, but the southern shore had been well appropriated by the people from the north of Yamal. They would cross the Malygin Strait with boats in the summer and with reindeer in the winter to pick up wild stock. This was a great help to their household economy. But it was forbidden to bring women to the island or to put up a *chum* – the master of the island, Seru Iriku, would not like that. At rare moments the Nenets would go as far as the eastern and the western shores, but to the north they would never venture. They were frightened: "At sea the waves are high, the boats will not make it." The two main holy places on the island – the Sidya-khayen-sale and Veisako-khege – were the dwelling places of the "White Grandfather". The Nenets also treated with respect the "yezelutsen-gya": the iron post on the Schubert headland, raised by the members of the Great Northern Expedition in the 1730s.

At last came a convenient opportunity to search for the site of Seru Iriku or Veisako-khege, "The Old Man", as the Nenets called him. On their way they imagined how they would arrive at a huge hitherto undreamt of sacrificial altar. But everything turned out to be rather more simple. On the holy promontory, they found only a small heap of skulls of bear and wild reindeer. In the centre stood the idol, the Old Man's image. His head and mask had been more carefully done than usual. Two branches with knots served as his arms. Around the idol, dry larches had been stuck into the ground. Red ribbons were tied to them. There were also small idols, *syadai*, carelessly and recently worked. There was no visible sign of sacrifice. Yevladov and Spitsin, disappointed, spent the night on the tundra around the fireplace and did not return to the camp-site until noon the next day.

During these days, they collected plants for a herbarium and prepared a collection of birds. After a week, almost all of their projects had been

completed. They began to wait for a favourable wind to set sail. Yevladov and Yadopchev also raised a memorial sign for the expedition at the camp-site on the Vidya-Vangutte-sale (The Two Sandy Holes) promontory. It was a big larch trunk on four supports. The Nenets called it "Yevlad-yumb": Yevladov's sign.

On the night of the 30th of August, the Nenets woke Yevladov up and told him that it was "*khas-tara*" – time to leave. Within half an hour, they had loaded the boats and set off from the shore. The wind was favourable, but the weather was not promising. Heavy rain clouds gathered close, threatening rain from all sides. However, the rain did not come. The day grew brighter. The high shores of Yamal were already clearly visible. Reflections of the sun's rays sparkled on them. The sea was hardly moving, and the blue line of the serene sky grew larger. After two hours the boat entered the mouth of Yakhady-yakhi. They sailed upriver to the arranged meeting place. There, reindeer relays should be waiting for them.

Far away on the hill stood the triangular silhouette of the old man Yadne's *chum*. Yevladov remembered his own anxieties on the first day after the arrival at the Malygin Strait. That was half a month ago. And now the White Island lay behind. Half of the journey was over. Now they would be heading south, towards the Nei-to lakes, and from there, along the Ob to distant Obdorsk.

On this day, the summer came to an end. The brief Arctic autumn would now set in, and after that the harsh winter. Eight months of heavy field life in the taiga and on the tundra lay ahead.

Geographic territories, as well as people and events, have their memorial dates and anniversaries. Nineteen-eighty-eight was an anniversary year for the Yamal Peninsula. It so happens that geographic expeditions to the peninsula have always been carried out in years ending with an "8".

1828 – the naval hydrographers Ivanov and Ragozin made a description of all the coast lines of Yamal.

1878 – E. Nordenskjold went ashore on Yamal while passing with the "Vega".

1908 – The Russian Geographical Society's Expedition to Yamal and the White Island, headed by B. M. Zhitkov.

1918 – R. Amundsen visited Yamal while passing with the schooner "Maud".

1928 – the Expedition of the Ural Regional Committee to Yamal and the White Island, headed by V. P. Yevladov.

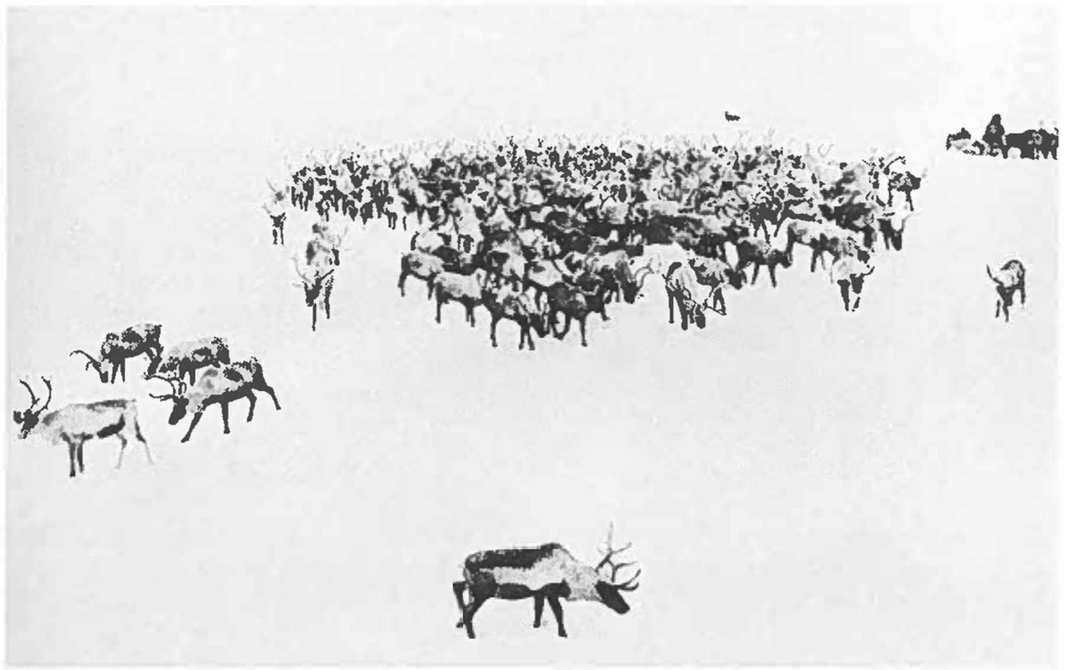
1928 - the First Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition to Yamal, led by N. A. Kotovshchikov.

Will the men who led the two biggest scientific expeditions to Yamal ever have their names on the map of the peninsula: Boris Mikhailovich Zhitkov and Vladimir Petrovich Yevladov?

(Alexander Pika published Vladimir Evladov's diaries and field reports in the book "Across the Tundra of Yamal and Toward the White Island", Tyumen 1992 (in Russian))

PHOTOS BY VLADIMIR PETROVICH YEVLADOV



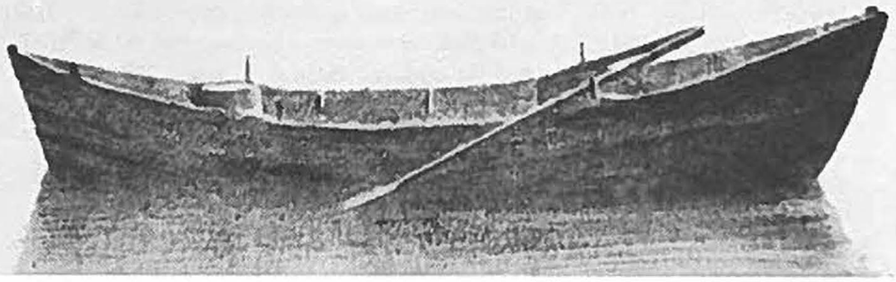












LIFE ON YAMAL DURING THE WAR YEARS (1941–1943)

V. I. Osmolovskaya

The war found us on Yamal. After having finished our studies in biology at Moscow University, Tatiana Nikolayevna Dunayeva (later to become a doctor of biological sciences) and I went on to do PhD work. In the spring of 1941, we decided to go to Yamal to collect material for our dissertations. We were zoologists; I was interested in the birds of prey of the tundra and Tanya, who had already been on two summer expeditions to Yamal during her student years, had decided to devote her dissertation to the small tundra rodents – the lemmings.

We left Moscow on the 3rd of June, 1941. In those years, the journey to Yamal was difficult – four days by train to Omsk, then by steamer along the Irtysh and the Ob rivers to Salekhard before continuing by motor boat along the Shchuchya River to the trading station where Tanya had worked before. Everything was organized: we had a tent, a small canoe, a gun, and a small-bore rifle, and we were not afraid of anything. We were to return to Moscow in September.

We arrived safely in Salekhard, and on the 21st of June, we boarded a tug towing a heavy barge with supplies for the trading station and set off upstream the Shchuchya River. On the 24th of June, we arrived at the trading station. From the small snippets of information that managed to get through the wireless operator at the station, we learned that war had broken out. What should we do? What would happen next? No one could answer these questions. Our position turned out to be very difficult. We were so far away that it was practically impossible to return. We decided that the only solution for the time being was not to change our plans and to work in the tundra until autumn. By then, the situation would have become clearer and we would decide what to do next.

Our first field work

The motor boat on which we arrived took us about 20 kilometres further upstream to the trading station "Upper Shchuchya". Here everything was completely calm and still. The Nenets had left with their deer when the tundra was still snow-covered to move to the northern summer pastures where there were fewer mosquitoes and other midges. At the trading station, there were only the shop-manager and his family. Nearby stood the tents of some Nenets and Zyryans (Komi), who were fishing. We set up camp in an empty bakery, setting our belongings out on the wide empty bread shelves and thus began our new expedition life.

Taking our canoe – loaded down with tent, sleeping bags, and food for two to three weeks – we moved upstream along Shchuchya and its left

tributary, Khe-Yakhe, until rocky rapids began to bar our way. Here a very pleasant surprise awaited me. The majestic peregrine, a champion of aerobatics, turned out to be the most common bird along the Khe-Yakhe. We found the nests of the peregrines on sandy ledges along the main river bank at a distance of one to five kilometres apart and observation of them filled my life. Tanya, with the help of a little fox terrier called Ponka who had come with us from Moscow, busied herself with studying the distribution and numbers of lemmings. The zoological fieldwork of which we had dreamed for so long had finally begun.

The sun shone 24 hours a day and we lived in a state of timelessness. Sometimes we spent the whole night out on the tundra, only returning to our tents the next morning. With such a complete absence of "routine", we were afraid of muddling up the date and worried about this a great deal, making notes in our diaries so as not to get confused. At first the mosquitoes aggravated us terribly. People who have never been on southern Yamal will not know what "real mosquitoes" are like. On still, calm days it was impossible to stay outside even for a few minutes without a mosquito-net; clouds of mosquitoes were swarming around like swaying, grey shrouds. We wore suede gloves, but the mosquitoes still bit our hands through tiny holes in the suede. The entrance to the tent was covered with an extra piece of gauze painted green. We had to crawl into the tent on all fours and then very carefully tuck up the gauze under the floor of the tent. We spent a great deal of time trying to swat the mosquitoes that had penetrated the tent and only after this was done could we sleep peacefully. However the mosquito nuisance, which was one of the few things to spoil our happiness, soon ended. On the 15th of July, the temperature dropped to -2 C and the mosquitoes began to disappear.

The tundra amazed me with its abundance of life. Along the sand banks of the rivers whole flocks of geese could very often be resting; on the islands, broods of ducks; in the thickets of Arctic dwarf birch we often heard the rush of wings as willow grouses, frightened by us, flew up; the whole tundra was full of the melodious cry of golden plovers. All the birds were busy, living a tense life, entirely independent of people. At such times, it was difficult to imagine that somewhere a war was going on and people were killing one another. However all this became reality when we returned to the trading station and received one month old letters and newspapers. I remember how Tanya and I, having returned from our trip into the tundra, took our letters and newspapers and retired each to her corner of the bakery where we sat for several hours reading and eating bread, breaking off pieces of a fresh loaf. Then we exchanged letters and newspapers and started all over again. We only came to our senses when we had read everything and eaten all the bread. It certainly gave us something to think about. Smolensk had already been taken and the Germans were moving towards Moscow. Moscow was being bombed every night and many people had already been evacuated. How we wanted to be there in the thick of it all! We wanted to be with the others

doing lookout duty on the roof of the university, ready to put out incendiary bombs. Who needed our falcons and lemmings now when war was raging and people were dying? But we could do nothing to change our fate. It just so happened that we were far away in the tundra and so we had to carry on doing what we were doing to the best of our ability. This way of looking at things helped us to carry through during the whole of our stay on Yamal.

In the beginning of September, autumn arrived and the tundra was transformed. It seemed that all the colours of an autumn forest were contained in the low tundra vegetation, yet everything was much more bright and varied. All of this covered the tundra with the most wonderful combinations. The hills and inclines came to look like colourful flowerbeds or expensive Persian rugs. The nights became dark and sometimes the northern lights bathed the sky in fantastical patterns. We decided to get going for Salekhard. When we arrived there on the 24th of September, we heard about the surrender of Kiev and it became clear to us that we would be staying for the winter.

Back in Salekhard

The first place we took shelter was at the local field station of the Institute for Polar Agriculture, where we had stopped once before on our way to Shchuchya. The researchers there were very sympathetic towards us and helped us a great deal in trying to sort ourselves out. We soon found a room for ourselves, Tanya was offered work at the technical school for reindeer breeding, and I managed to find a job in the local procurement office. After a short time, I was sent off upstream the Polui River to some Nenets and Khanty camps. I was to find out how the procurement of furs and pelts was going and, as far as possible, to help in getting them to the trading station as quickly as possible. There was a war going on and the country needed the fur. Already by the end of November teams of reindeer had started to appear in the streets of Salekhard. Some of them raced around, the drivers shouting and whooping and the bells on the deer harness clanging loudly. I was told that I was to travel with this kind of sledge and reindeer team.

Procuring fur

I left on the 19th of December at six o'clock in the evening. Night or day is all the same to the Nenets as far as travelling goes. We drove through an entirely white "darkness". There was white snow on the ground, the sky was white and the air was full of whirling snowflakes. There was no road and around us there was absolutely nothing visible apart from the black silhouettes of the reindeer further ahead. The reindeer bounded with long strides along the hard, compressed snow, while the driver sat calmly in front on the left side of the sledge and sang a slow sad song without words or tune. In his left hand, he had a long pole with a rounded hook or *tiur*, in his right a trace from the bridle of the bull leading the team. I could not

see whether he was guiding the deer, but it seemed as if they ran on by themselves. I sat behind the Nenets on the right side of the sledge with my feet on the sledge runners, listening to the driver's singing and trying to make out something, anything, through the eternal mist, but without success. It seemed as if we were driving through some kind of white "nonexistence" and that our journey would never end. Then suddenly I heard the sound of dogs barking, and from out of the white darkness, the triangular silhouettes of three tents appeared. We had arrived at our destination. Then, and again later after this first drive, the thought often occurred to me that instead of studying the flight and transmigration of birds, and trying to understand their astounding ability to find their way, I should have tried to understand how the Nenets find their way out in the tundra.

The whole population of the tents spilled out to meet us, among them, like little, white succulent mushrooms, the children with their deerskin coats, sewn from the hide of young deer, wrapped tightly around them. The words of welcome were loud and the conversation incomprehensible to me. Everyone went into one of the tents. Inside a fire was burning brightly and over it hung a large pot and a kettle. Smoke from the fire rose directly upwards and went out through an opening between the poles forming the triangle at the top of the tent. On the outside, as I found out later, the opening is covered by a piece of hide that can be adjusted by ropes hanging down, depending on the direction of the wind – this is how the ventilation system works. Around the fire wide boards were laid out in twos; further out there were mats made of twigs, covered with deer hide. Everybody took his seat. As a guest I was seated at the front, my driver sat next to me, then the host, his wife, their children and, right at the entrance, the dogs. The host had his hair braided in two small plaits, and this showed me that I had come to a Khant tent. Obviously there were two families living in the tent. The wives of the two hosts, each from her side, placed low wooden tables on the boards. With a knife they sliced raw reindeer meat directly onto the table. The meat curled up in thin strips – the so-called "stroganina". Then they cut bread, placed a saucer with pieces of sugar on the table, and finally poured very black tea. They began to eat and to drink the tea slowly while talking about the deer, hunting, and all sorts of other important things. I listened with interest to their language, which I did not understand, and looked around, trying to find out what life was like among the nomadic peoples of the North. After a short time the host stood up, tied his *malitsa* around him and went out to guard the deer. "There are lots of wolves," my driver explained to me. The host's wife started to make up beds out of deer skins. Everybody settled down and some covered themselves with the skins, others with women's *yagushkas*, which are made in a similar manner to our coats, with the opening at the front. The fire burned down and the people in the tent sank into a deep sleep. I woke the next morning from the cold that was penetrating in from under my *malitsa*, making even the thick reindeer



V. I. Osmolovskaya

skin cold. It was dark in the tent, but the host's wife was already making a fire that soon began to light up the figures of the children, huddled from the cold. Gradually, their tousled heads started to appear from under the reindeer skin and the tent was again filled with the sound of many voices. We drank tea again until we could see the dawning sky through the smoke hole. When we came out, it was daylight.

The shouts of the people and the barking of the dogs again filled the tundra. Quickly the dogs rounded up the herd of reindeer, and my driver separated his own bulls by deftly throwing a lasso over their antlers. The

team was ready and we could continue our journey. The deer immediately set off at a gallop. Lumps of snow from under their hooves flew up into my face and, at the turns, the sledge skidded so much that it took a great effort to stay in it. At times it bounced over bumps as though we were on a trampoline, or it got stuck in the deep snow of a narrow gully, but the deer, without so much as reducing their pace, immediately pulled it out onto the hard surface again. All of this went on against the background of the driver's whistling and shouting. The driver's voice, the snorting of the deer, the clanging of the bells on their harness, and the creaking of the sledge filled the silent tundra with sound. When the deer stopped, the only noise that could be heard was that of their heavy breathing. When this calmed, the eternal, unbreakable silence of the tundra reigned again. Deer can keep up a gallop or a brisk trot for about 10 to 15 kilometres. This distance is called a "burst". The size of a "burst" depends on the strength and stamina of the deer and on the difficulty of the path. Our deer ran on and on until we approached another group of lonely tents, and every time we arrived somewhere new there was hot tea waiting for us and frozen deer meat or fish. Inside the tent with the fire burning, everything was warm and comfortable. In winter, the tent has a double covering of deerskins, or *nyugi*, around it – one covering with the fur turned inside and the other with the fur turned outside.

My driver spoke some Russian and with his help I did my best to carry out the task that had been entrusted to me. I looked at the skins of ermine and squirrel, told people about the war, and explained that the furs and pelts should be taken to the trading station without delay and that this was how we could help our country. They all listened very carefully, nodding their heads approvingly. The rest of the visit I spent observing with great interest the lifestyle of the nomadic reindeer herders, a lifestyle that is very similar among both the Nenets and the Khanty. I was particularly fascinated by the small children. In all their games, the influence of the life on the tundra with the reindeer was immediately evident. Any piece of rope or string in the hands of a boy was immediately transformed into a lasso, *tynzyan*, which he then threw over any dog that happened to be in the tent. A little girl, sometimes not even two years old, upon seeing a small piece of hide, would immediately begin kneading and grinding it, imitating her mother preparing deer hides. The Russian game "horses" was here replaced by a game involving reindeer. The children learn how to handle a sharp knife surprisingly quickly. Even in early childhood, a knife is not a forbidden thing to them. Usually the Nenets eat meat by holding on to it with their teeth and ripping off a chunk right under the nose with a quick, upward movement of their sharp knives. Only after long and cautious practice did I learn to master this custom, whereas small children of three or four years did it quite naturally.

When I returned to Salekhard about one month later, news from Moscow was pouring in. When the last steamer had left in the autumn, our post had stopped completely and was renewed only in the winter when

post was transported from Tyumen by post horses. At that time, there were almost no planes. Only in the middle of January did we learn about the panic in Moscow on the 16th of October, about the seige of Leningrad, about the death of close friends and relatives. It is true that by that time more cheerful news had also started to come through. The reports from the Information Bureau were full of accounts of the liberation of towns and villages around Moscow. However, the liberated areas had been practically transformed into wasteland, and a large part of the European territory of the Soviet Union was still occupied by the Germans. So how could you possibly think about a pending victory? It became clear to us that we would not be able to return home in the spring. It was at this point that we decided to carry out our idea of accompanying some Nenets reindeer herders to their summer pastures and continuing our zoological fieldwork there. To our great surprise, everything was easily arranged. At the technical school for reindeer breeding where Tanya was working, the students in the upper grades spent the summer gaining practical experience in the tundra with the reindeer herds. Tanya was to go with them as a student engaged in practical work. I was allowed to join her.

Fieldwork at the summer pastures

On the 17th of April, together with the students from the school, we left for the district centre of Yar-Sale where a string of horse-drawn carts was heading, loaded with sacks of flour and barrels for fish salting. The sledge road ran on the ice of the Ob river, the right bank of which is hilly and steep, and covered with forest. Good news awaited us when we arrived at Yar-Sale. To ensure the supply of meat to the front, the district procurement office, *Raipo*, had decided to buy deer in spring and send them out to the summer pastures. A herd of two thousand head had almost been gathered and it was suggested that I went with it to spend the whole summer moving around from place to place as an accounting clerk noting changes in the livestock. The herdsmen for the new herd were hired from the Budyonny collective farm. The herd was now standing near the trading station of Pors-Yakha and would soon start moving northwards. We hurriedly made our way there.

Trading at Pors-Yakha

The Pors-Yakha trading station consists of four small black dwellings. One of them, the smallest on the bank of the river, is the bath house. The others are a bakery, a warehouse, and a shop. The distance to the nearest settlement on the bank of the Ob River is more than one hundred kilometres, and all around are the white expanses of the tundra. Somewhere out there are the tents of the herders, the reindeer grazing, the Arctic foxes and wolves prowling, yet the total mass of human and animal life is lost amid the snowy wastes. It is possible to travel for a whole day in the tundra without seeing either a tent, deer, or any trace of either Arctic foxes or wolves.

The Nenets come to the trading stations with their families, wives and children. It is a meeting place for people who have come from the most far-flung corners of the tundra, a place where they can exchange news and tell stories. The trading station acts as a social centre for the collective farms that are situated far from one another. Here people buy food and supplies, and drink endless cups of tea. The deer, with their heads hanging low, stand for many hours, sometimes even a whole day, before their owners finally go home. Meanwhile from beyond the river, new guests constantly arrive. A black dot in the distance turns into a sledge, which grows and grows in size until suddenly from over the high bank of the river a group of five snorting deer bursts into view, pulling a light sledge and its fur-coated driver to the top of the hill without difficulty. The driver's clothes are made of fur and at shoulder level he has two strips of red broad cloth about 30 to 50 centimetres in length sewn onto his outer garment. They blow about well in the wind and, when the Nenets is dashing along with his reindeer, look particularly striking against the background of the white snow. This elegant *sook*, as it is known, is worn when going to the trading station. The Nenets jumps down while his sledge is still in motion, throws down the pole, and turns the whole team sharply before tethering the leading bull to the sledge. Now the deer will stand quietly tied to their sledge and he can go off to the shop. The Nenets takes off his *sook* to reveal his *malitsa*, covered with black material and a wide leather belt. He has metallic pendants sewn onto the belt and at the back white bear canines sparkle. At his side, on a chain, hangs a scabbard made of mammoth bones and containing a large hunting knife. He heaves two snow-white Arctic fox pelts out of the sledge, roughs them up, and goes into the store. The store is full of people. In the corner, on a bench, women are sitting with babies in their arms while the men crowd round the counter. Some are examining metallic rings for their harness gear and other metal articles. This is something new – until now the Nenets carved these things out of bone. Others are buying bagels, butter, and sugar to have with the tea. The shop assistant, Vasily, deals with several customers at once. One of them wants to see something, another one is waiting for his question to be answered, a third person needs help to count the money for his purchases. Vasily doesn't need to worry about keeping an eye on the goods that the Nenets are examining, or about the money on the counter. Here nobody touches anything. Vasily, who is used to working amid such commotion, clicks the beads of the abacus backwards and forwards quickly and accurately while answering questions simultaneously. A recently-arrived Nenets pushes his way into the store and in silence holds out the fox pelts he has brought with him. Vasily takes them, shakes them out, defines the species, makes a reduction for the paw that has been cut off, hangs them up to one side behind the counter, and starts to write out a receipt. Then he counts out the money and lays it out in piles on the counter. The Nenets pushes the money back to Vasily with the sleeve of his deerskin overcoat: "Please give me 20 loaves of bread and

two poods (one pood = 16,38 kilograms) of flour." Vasily counts out the money, takes what he needs, and pushes the pile of money back towards the Nenets again before beginning to count out the loaves of bread. They are put into sacks and dragged over to the goods' sledges by the Nenets' wife and children, who have just arrived. Other goods are bought in the same way – sugar, butter, tea, tobacco, salt, matches, a metre of red material, beads, buttons, and finally, a bottle of spirits. The pile of money being moved backwards and forwards across the counter gradually disappears. It takes a very honest man to do business with the simple-hearted Nenets people. The Nenets buys some more bagels for his tea and walks off into the tea room.

Here Vasily's wife, Lyudmila, keeps the kettle on the boil almost 24 hours a day. On the table there is a large samovar that she can hardly manage to keep filled. The reddened faces of the Nenets people fill the tea room. They sit with their *malitsas* undone and drink tea and eat slices of butter. The whole room is filled with the sound of their guttural voices, which reminds me of the scream of swans or the honk of geese more than the human speech that I am used to.

After a while I grew tired of the noise and went into the other part of the building, where Vasily lived. An old woman was sitting at the window knitting a sock. Now and then she glanced disapprovingly out of the window at the new sledges arriving all the time. Beside her chair, holding a large doll in her hands, stood three-year-old Zoya, watching everything with shining eyes.

At Pors-Yakha I met the chief herdsman or brigade-leader of the herd assigned to me. His name was Seratteto Pari. He was a small, elderly looking man whose flat face was covered with wrinkles. His eyes were intelligent and penetrating. Pari was at the trading station almost every day while the deer were being bought for our herd. Usually deer were taken from the Nenets as payment for taxes (agricultural, cultural, war tax, and so on). Naturally, the Nenets brought for sale the weakest deer and those that were ill. Pari would just shake his head and mumble "Khalmer... khalmer" (it will die, it will die). Nevertheless Vasily still bought all the deer, following the order he had received. Particularly pitiful was the sight of some of the young deer whose skin had been badly infected with gadfly. Gadfly cause the deer terrible suffering. During the second half of the summer gadfly give them no peace at all. The flies do not bite them, but buzz around them, and lay their eggs in their coat, usually around the hind leg area where it is not so thick. The gadfly larvae penetrate the skin and go down into the body of the deer, where they travel with the blood flow until they position themselves under the skin on the deer's back. Here they grow and transform into white maggots the size of a small acorn. In the spring when the snow melts, the maggots bore through the skin and fall to the ground where they later turn into adult insects. After this the cycle starts all over again. During the period when the gadfly begin their attack, the strong deer run around ceaselessly, twitching their legs to

get rid of the dangerous insects. The weak ones cannot put up resistance against them and end up becoming so infected that in the spring, when the maggots start to come out, they often die. During the first few days when we began to move across the tundra with the herd, we were leaving behind almost every day deer which had died of gadfly. They were so weakened that the Nenets did not even attempt to slaughter them in order somehow to use the meat. Neither did they take their skins, which had been ruined by the gadfly maggots. On the deer's backs there were round holes, up to one centimetre in diameter, where the maggots had planted themselves so close together that they were only separated by thin strips of skin. Without having seen this, a person cannot imagine how such a hide looks and later I regretted very much not having taken one of them with me as an example.

At the trading station we met Ivan Klementyevich Krasnobayev, the veterinary surgeon of the Yamal District. He instructed us on how to vaccinate against malignant anthrax.

Finally the day came for our departure. Pors-Yakha was the last place of refuge with a solid roof that we were to see for many months. Only late in the autumn would we return, when everything would again be covered with snow and the deer, by then in good form, would be able to run up to one hundred kilometres a day without difficulty. From the early morning onwards, the goods' sledges of our herders surrounded the trading station. The buying of food began – bread, tea, salt, sugar, butter. For the money we had received in Yar-Sale Tanya and I also bought stocks of food. The Nenets put all our purchases and belongings into the sledges, covered everything over with deerskins and bound it all fast with ropes. We certainly didn't have to worry about the smallest item being lost.

Tanya had already left with her group of herders but mine were still having tea. I was surprised by the way that they were nibbling small pieces of butter as they drank their tea. Later I understood that butter frozen solid out on the sledges was otherwise impossible to eat, but eating it with hot tea was very pleasant. The Nenets drank their hot tea, loudly slurping it out of the saucer. Everyone chatted cheerfully. A bottle of spirits had already appeared and this was measured out with the accuracy of a chemist's dose. Then they had another. I watched their faces with interest as they came to life under the influence of the wine and the hot tea. They seemed to become almost copper-coloured under the light of the kerosene lamps. I listened to the loud talk, which I did not understand. I was going to spend almost six months with these people, having no contact at all with friends, acquaintances, or relatives of mine. It was interesting and terrifying to enter a new and almost primordial lifestyle, involuntarily having been snatched away from all that was familiar. Meanwhile Pari was already fishing out the third bottle from under his deerskin coat.

"You musn't drink any more, we have to get going. Tomorrow we've got hard work to do," I said.

Pari, who understood some Russian, looked at me in surprise. "What do

you mean by musn't. I must drink – I shall soon go through the whole tundra and not see any wine at all," and in a more conciliatory tone he added: "I won't lose my head. Today I shall drink wine, tomorrow I shall work hard."

I smiled. These people drink alcohol twice a year at some trading station and for them it is the greatest form of entertainment in life, something that they look forward to like children. They have no knowledge at all of the great, distant world outside the tundra, which I had recently left behind. Finally I fell asleep on a bench in the tea room amid the drunken voices of the Nenets.

"*Hos tara, hos tara* (it's time to go)," said a young Nenets, gently pulling my sleeve. He was already dressed and ready, his short *malitsa* belted with a wide strap from which at the back hung the customary pendants, scabbard, and bear's canines. As Pari later explained to me, the bear's canines on a man's belt are a form of talisman – just like medicine, as he said. With bear's canines hanging on his belt, a Nenets will not be afraid of anything, neither wolves nor snowstorms. He will be strong and brave, and he will not be afraid when keeping watch over his deer on dark winter nights. We went outside. It was probably already two o'clock in the morning, but it was not dark. A dense twilight, typical of the last days of April, enveloped the tundra. Dawn was already breaking again, not in the East but almost in the North, where only two hours ago the sun had gone down. At the foot of the hill beside the trading station, the guttural voices of the Nenets could be heard as they harnessed the deer. We went up to a sledge. One of the Nenets helped me to draw an unusually large deerskin *sook* around me, pulling it down behind me and adjusting the fur of the Arctic fox tail that trimmed the hood around my face. The Nenets showed me how to sit on the little sledge and how to hold on, so as not to fall out at sharp turns. Although I had already travelled on a sledge during the winter, this training was by no means unnecessary. He did all this with a polite smile, explaining everything so well with gestures that I forgot that I did not understand one sound of his guttural language.

I sat in the sledge while the Nenets brought up the deer in front. He flicked the reins and the deer immediately broke into a gallop. Once we were in motion, he sat down adroitly in front of me. We flew over the hill and soon we were rushing along through the tundra, the surface of which had been polished by the winter winds. The reindeer, who had become restless from standing for so long, ran quickly and smoothly. Chunks of snow flew up from under their hooves and now and then the sledge bounced over a snowy hillock. The movements of the sledge have to be followed and anticipated all the time, so as not to lose one's balance. People said that it sometimes even happened that the Nenets lost their seats and fell out while the deer galloped off. Then they would have to lie in the snow for a long time, unable to move in their heavy winter clothes.

As we sped on, the Nenets struck up a song. He was very cheerful that day; he had had something to drink and he had a fast team of deer. I

listened to the monosyllabic, incoherent sounds. Who would ever have thought that of all the places in the world I would end up travelling goodness-knows-where out into the tundra with a half-drunk Nenets, listening to his monotonous singing. Meanwhile the deer ran on.

Life in the *chum*

Suddenly dogs began to bark and, as if from under the earth, the black silhouette of a tent loomed up. The sledges stopped suddenly. Having turned the team around sharply, the driver tied the front deer to the sledge. We went into the tent. Inside there was one old woman who had been left alone. Yesterday everyone, young and old alike, had gone off to the trading station. She had made ready for our arrival by lighting a fire, which was blazing brightly, in the middle of the tent and she had put two large copper pots on to boil. I was shown a place in front of the fire where I could lie down. I settled myself among the soft furs, covered myself over warmly, and slept quietly for the remainder of the night.

By the time I awoke, the whole population of the tent had returned. Beside me sat the Nenets who had brought me to the camp – a man called Lousoma. He had strong features and a large nose and his face had nothing "Asiatic" about it, but rather something of the North American Indian. He had a young and pretty wife who looked very Japanese. She had a flat face, a dark complexion, a slightly protruding forehead, and a tiny nose. Her smooth, black hair was gathered in two plaits intertwined with strips of red cloth. It was not possible to see where the real hair finished but the ladder of plaits with beads, buttons, and other trinkets threaded into them extended right down to her knees. She looked at me askance with her shining, black, and slightly slanted eyes.

In the other corner of the tent was Seratteto Pari's family. It was his mother who was the old woman whom I had already seen. His wife, who had a typically flat Nenets face, was holding their little four-month-old daughter. The small child lay wrapped in the soft hide of a young reindeer, strapped to an oval wooden board – a Nenets cradle.

The women kept house each on her side of the tent. They brought a small, low table and silently set out the cups, wiping them with handfuls of wood shavings. The men reclined, sprawling on fur beds and talking about their affairs. The most crucial time of the year was about to begin – the calving period, and it was important to move on as soon as possible to places where the does and newborn calves would be protected from the cold winds.

The women poured tea and a bowl containing seal oil was placed on the table. Everyone drank tea and dipped pieces of bread into the oil. It was decided to move on that day, but no one appeared to be in a hurry. They all drank their tea slowly, with visible pleasure. After all, it would be late in the evening before the tent was put up again, somewhere far away in a new place, and only then would everyone be able to sit down again for something to eat. The mistresses of the tent carefully saw to it that the

cups did not become empty and refilled them silently time and again with the strong, black tea. Nobody here asked for tea to be poured and no one ever said thank you. The cup just kept on being filled until it was turned upside down, and this was all. The women would silently clear away all the upturned cups from the table.

After tea I went out of the tent, involuntarily screwing up my eyes at the brightness of the light that hit me. "How bright and sparkling everything seems here in May", I thought, remembering that today was the first of the month. How far all this seemed from the festive pre-war streets of Moscow on the May Day public holiday, from the fragrant smell of the birch trees in bud, and yet at the same time how beautiful everything was. In front of me stretched the quiet expanses of the tundra, its pure, glistening snow sparkling with a thousand lights. A fine snowy dust was carried on the air and the lights danced before my eyes. In the distance a soft haze, almost like a light snowy mist, hung low over the tundra, softening the contours of the landscape. The hollows containing lakes and the slopes rising away from them were hardly discernible, while in places the snow had created odd outlines and shapes that had been stiffened by the winter winds. The sharp edges of the snow drifts were of a fairy-like whiteness against the background of the clear-cut dark blue shadows behind them. The whole herd of two thousand reindeer was lying around the tent. Another tent stood alongside where some other herdsmen working with our herd lived. There was an old man, Pudi, who spoke reasonable Russian and called himself by the Russian name of Ilya Ivanovich. He was older than Pari and he had a large protuberance under his lower lip, where he had constantly placed tobacco. The Nenets do not smoke tobacco. They carry dried and finely ground tobacco leaves in special tobacco boxes made of mammoth ivory and sniff them, stuffing them into their nostrils, or chewing them, placing them under their lower lip and now and then spitting on the ground.

In Ilya Ivanovich's tent lived one other herdsman, young and handsome, called Mesik. Mesik had a fine face with strong features, and looking at him, I was reminded of some of the old pictures in the Hermitage. The faces of the Nenets vary greatly and our generalizations about the Peoples of the Far North all looking alike are incorrect.

Moving on

Now the preparations for our move began and the whole population of the tents came outside. There were so many children and dogs in Ilya Ivanovich's tent that I could not even attempt to make out who was who. A semi-circle was formed with the sledges and ropes were dragged out and given to the women and children to hold. This semi-circle forms a type of trap or *ior*, as it is known, into which they began to drive the draught bulls. Most of the bulls went into the *ior* quietly, but some of the others ran away and were caught with a lasso or a *tynzyan*. It was a pleasure to watch how Lousoma, bending low with a *tynzyan* in his

hands, stole up to the deer as they ran past and suddenly slipped a noose around their neck. Pari did not catch reindeer with a tynzyan anymore. He limped on one leg and walked around like a gnome among the deer who had been chased into the *ior*, choosing the bulls he needed for his team. The men have teams of five bulls, which they harness in the shape of a fan to the light passenger sledges. The goods' sledges have two bulls harnessed to them and five to six goods' sledges make up a chain, or *argish,* as it is known. The team pulling the first sledge of the *argish* consists of three or five bulls, depending on the weightload. These goods' sledges are driven by the women or teenage children. The last sledge of the *argish* carries the poles for the tents, the floor boards, and the heavy coverings, *nyugi*. Pari's wife placed the cradle containing her little daughter in her sledge. The little girl was wrapped up tightly in extra skins. The old woman took four newborn puppies on her sledge, while their mother ran along at the side. The herd stretched out into a long line. In front were the stags, who had already lost their antlers and thus their looks. Their movement was regulated by Pari and Ilya Ivanovich, riding a light sledge. Behind trotted the hinds, many of them heavily weighed down with the calves they were about to bear. Bringing up the rear of the whole herd were Lousoma and Mesik, who gently urged on the stragglers. The dogs, could not be used at this time and they ran tied to the goods' sledges. Behind the herd came the chain of sledges making up the *argish* with the women and children riding on them, and it was here that I also rode. We moved slowly and covered only 20 kilometres in a whole day.

Soon the tents had been erected in a new place. The men, in expectation of tea, sat in a circle on the snow in front of the tent and checked the notches on their counting planks to see how many pregnant hinds they had counted during the trip. During calving regular checks of this kind were made. Each herdsman had small well-planed planks tied to his belt on which he kept a record of the deer by carving notches.

The women again took over the household duties in the tent. The fire was lit and began to crackle and spit cheerfully; the deerskins were laid out around it and once again everything stood in its place as though no one had touched anything since morning.

I began to comb my hair. Lousoma's wife came over to me and examined my loose hair with interest. She reached over to touch it gently, saying something in her soft, guttural language. I looked at her in surprise.

"Too black... too bad..." she suddenly said in her poor Russian, showing me her plait that was as black as tar and had been interwoven with bright red and orange strips of material and a multitude of rings and beads. I understood. She liked my light-coloured hair, which for her was very beautiful and unusual.

"Shall we change?" I said, taking her plait into my hand and extending my own toward her. She started to laugh in a gay, childish manner. With this, our friendship was established. After my head, she took to examining my feet. "*Oi vai*". My deerskin boots were completely wet through. At the

entrance to the tent, there was a special stick that was supposed to be used to shake off the snow properly. This I had not done. She helped me to take off the boots, turn them inside out, and dry them over the fire, slipping her hands inside them and holding them out. From time to time she crumpled them with her hands, so that the inner side of the hide did not shrink or warp. Then she carefully examined the boots and, finding a little hole, quickly mended it with some deer sinew. She made a new insole out of wood-reed straw, stored up from last summer, and gave the boots back to me.

"*Tarem savo, tarem savo* (very good, very good)", I said, repeating my first Nenets words as I pulled on the boots. My feet now felt warm and comfortable. When the fire was burning well, Pari's wife finally unwrapped her little daughter. She moved closer to the fire, laid the little girl on her knees, and after warming one hand over the flames, she started to rub down and dry out all the little folds on the child's neck, arms, and legs. During the journey, the mother had fed her several times by undoing the ties on her jacket, but otherwise the little girl had been lying in the deerhide covers all day on a bed of dried sphagnum moss, which is very good for absorbing moisture. The time had now come when the moss could be changed and the child dried.

"Varya," Pari asked me, "how do Russian children grow up? There is no fire in their house."

"Russians" I replied, "wash their children every day and put new clothes on them every time."

He looked at me mistrustfully, "Nenets children could not take that – *khalmer* – (they would die)," he said, looking convinced.

And indeed it seemed improbable to me, too, sitting here in my thick deerskin overcoat, that a child could be bathed every day.

Pari's little daughter had a name – she was called Savone, which in translation means a good or beautiful woman. Adult women do not have names, or to be more precise, their names are never spoken. I asked Pari many times what his wife's name was. He always made excuses or refused to say but then later he told me to call her "Pukhotsya Pari" – the wife of Pari. Asked what her name was, Lousoma's wife replied: "Call me Nyabuku – sister".

Ilya Ivanovich explained to me that these were the rules. The name of a Nenets woman must not be pronounced, and he added: "Maybe she will take it as a curse".

Some of the older women had Russian names and they could be pronounced but the Nenets names remained strictly forbidden. There are in fact very many restrictions placed on women. Women, for example, are not allowed to cross from one half of the tent to the other behind the fire, nor are they allowed to step over a stick or a rope. If, while forming an *ior*, a woman gets her feet entangled in a rope she must cry out and everyone must wait while she unravels the rope and throws it over her head. There is evidently one main reason for all these prohibitive restrictions – to

protect the people from evil spirits and bad luck. But why restrictions were imposed on women only remained unclear.

We were now moving on every day, trying to reach a sheltered site for calving at Talbe-Yakhe as soon as possible. On one occasion, I did not wait until the tents were put up but went out into the tundra. I walked, keeping the sun on my right, fully convinced that I was heading South, entirely forgetting that at this time of the year the sun went down not in the West but almost due North. Stopping to look around, I realized that I could not see the tents anywhere. Suddenly I noticed a black spot on the horizon, a spot that grew in size until I could make out the shapes of the reindeer running speedily, and then I recognized Pari sitting on the sledge. Drawing a large circle around me he approached in a dashing style, stopped the sledge, and waited while I got on. Then, having turned the deer, he headed off at a complete right angle from the direction in which I had come. There was not one question, not one word of reproach. I was ashamed.

"Why did you come looking for me, your business is to look after the reindeer," I said.

He turned around to me with a kind smile "If I lose a deer, it will cost me money. If I lose a Russian girl, I may be taken to court."

I said nothing in reply. Approaching the tents I asked, "How did you find me?"

"Karakum, karakum (round, all round), I just looked around," he answered.

When we were drinking tea back in the tent, Pari said seriously: "When you disappeared, it was terrible, I could not eat, I could not sleep." Then he added kind-heartedly: "Oh I have so much work, I must look after the deer and I must look after Varya..." .

Everyone burst out laughing.

Calving

On the fifth day of our journey three of the hinds refused to walk. They were left lying on the snow and a 15-year-old boy, Eku, remained with them. The next day he came to the tent and joyfully informed us that three small calves had been born. Two days later he and his little brother, Pyriko, caught up with the herd with the newborn calves and their mothers. By this time, we had already reached the Talbe-Yakhe River, where we were to stay for the whole period of the calving. At the beginning of the calving, the herd was split into two groups, stags and hinds. The does were herded by Pari and Lousoma while Ilya Ivanovich and Mesik went with the stags. Usually the two herds were not far from each other and the tents were put up together. Between 10 and 15 calves were born every day during this period and Pari attached a new wooden stick to his belt where the notches recorded the appearance of every new calf. When 10 notches had been carved, they were planed away and a cross was carved in their place, which signified ten. Everything was going very well until suddenly a strong snowstorm blew up. Then the herders

started bringing two to three frozen calves to the tent every day. A new stick had to be brought into use for marking the number of dead calves. Pari cut notches on one stick for the live calves and on the other for the dead. The Nenets' accounting system became more complicated. The herders were constantly moving around among the herd, helping the hinds to locate their newborn calves and digging them out of the snow. They were helped by an old dog called Ikcha who was the only one of her kind. She found the calves covered in snow, but did not touch them, only alerted the herder by barking. The herder very carefully cleared away the snow from around the calf with a spade and moving off a little distance he began to call to the hind, mimicking the voice of a calf. The agitated hind would come running up, sniff over the calf, lick it, and nudge it slightly with her muzzle, trying to get it to stand on its wobbly little legs. The sound of the hinds' worried calling was audible throughout the herd whenever they lost their calves.

One morning, I had only just woken when Pari came in from the herd. He dropped two dead calves at the entrance to the tent and a third, suffering badly from the cold but still alive, he held out to me. I took off my jacket and wrapped it around the soft, helpless little calf. Out of my jacket, the only thing that could be seen was its little black snout and large surprised-looking eyes.

"Very beautiful eyes," said Pari, "like a baby." His tired face broke into a smile. He squatted down and stroked the calf on the nose. Then he said in a serious tone: "It is useless to keep it alive. It is a young deer and it will make a good hide."

"It will get warm again. Maybe its mother will take it back", I said.

Pari shook his head. "If a human being touches it, the mother will not take it. Another hind might take it, but the mother will not feed this little one any more."

After we had drunk tea, Pari rose to return to the herd. I went with him. No sooner had we come out of the tent than a strong wind almost whipped us off our feet. It seemed as though the sky were all mixed up with the earth, day with night. Everything was filled with whirling snow. Pari strode out in front confidently. Soon, we began to see the shapes of the reindeer. Some stood, others lay half covered in snow. Somewhere farther off we could hear the worried, roaring call of a hind who had lost her calf. Suddenly Pari stopped. In front of us was a small lump in the snow from which protruded a pair of black ears. Pari carefully raked aside the snow with a stick and then slipped it under the calf and gently began lifting it up. The calf stood for a few moments on its unsteady legs and then fell over again. Pari lifted it up again and then moved off to the side and started calling to the hind. From somewhere off out in the white haze, a worried-looking hind suddenly appeared. Lowering her head and breaking into a bold trot, she came up to the calf and started to sniff him. He immediately came alive, flicking his tail, and stretching himself toward her. We didn't need to worry about him anymore.

We walked among the herd for two hours, uncovering calves buried in the snow, and I had already long ago lost all sense of where our tent was. I knew it was somewhere here about five hundred metres from the herd, but it seemed inconceivable that we would find it in this milk-white whirlwind. I was reminded of hundreds of stories about how people froze to death in snowstorms only a few feet from their own houses.

"Let's go and have tea," Pari said, and without even stopping to think, he turned in his tracks and headed off. I followed him. The wind was now blowing into our faces, tearing at them and burning them. Prickly ice dust blew into our eyes and mouths and took our breath away. I could hardly make my way forward and tried to cover my face with my mittens.

When I looked, Pari had disappeared. But then suddenly, I stumbled upon him lying face downwards in the snow. I heard his voice from somewhere far off saying, "One has to lie down a bit. It's very hard to walk."

I lay down beside him and immediately understood the point behind this small breather. With my head drawn in under my *malitsa*, I felt the relief that came over me as I breathed in the warm, still air inside, and I listened to my heart gradually calming itself until I was breathing normally again.

After a few minutes, we took up the battle with the snowstorm with renewed strength, but before reaching the tent we had to lie down one more time in the snow for a breather. How welcoming and comfortable the tent seemed, with its fire burning brightly in the centre and the soft skins lying all around it. Pari squatted in front of the fire and began to warm his hands, which were stiff with cold. From time to time, he raised a warmed hand to his face, smoothing it over the wind-chapped, wind-taut skin.

"Do this," he said. I tried, and indeed it was very pleasant.

On the table in the tent, there was a small wooden trough full of the light-pink meat of newborn calves. Nyabuku sat in the corner where she was skinning the last one, probably my calf. She stripped the remaining skin from the legs, using her teeth to help. Having stripped the leg, she ate all the remaining bits of meat from it, cutting them off with a knife, and then she threw the bones to the dogs. In a few minutes the hide, stretched out on a frame, was lying on the floor on the cross poles of the tent with the other hides.

We sat in the tent and drank tea. Suddenly the dogs started barking and slipped out of the tent. Everyone stood up and strained to listen.

"Someone is coming on a passenger sledge," said Pari, but I had not heard the slightest thing.

True enough, a few minutes later the scrape of sledge runners could be heard, and someone jumped down from a sledge, tied the deer, and poked his head, covered with hoar-frost, through the opening in the tent. A few abrupt exclamations were heard and the head disappeared.

"Irit has arrived," said Pari and calmly tucked into his food.

Soon Irit himself appeared. He had left his white *sook* on the sledge and came into the tent in a short, thin black *malitsa* that was belted around the waist. At the entrance he very carefully knocked the snow off his boots with the stick, then silently made his way to the place that had been freed up for him beside Pari. He too started to tuck into the food. He was poured tea and drank one, then another, then a third cup and only after that did the conversation finally start. Irit was the chairman of the collective farm. Not only did he know all the tents scattered across the tundra but also all the Russian settlements along the Ob River and he had been to Salekhard several times. A calm intellect shone in his deep-set eyes. One could sense that he knew and understood his business well, and it was not without reason that his collective farm had ranked first in the region for the second year running. He had come to find out how things were going with the calving and how the herders were coping with the difficult work. No one was surprised that he had come right in the middle of a howling snowstorm. Pari, using the notches on his sticks, started to tell Irit about how things were going with our herd. He told him how many calves had died, how many had been born white and how many mottled, the hides of which would later be used for the smartest festive *yagushki* and *gusi*. Then they turned to a discussion of plans for the future. It would soon be time to leave the heavy winter sledges and thickly covered tents and change to lighter summer equipment. It turned out that the summer sledges had been left in the tundra beyond the Yuribei River where Pari had been herding the year before. It would be necessary to send someone for them immediately while the river was still frozen. Irit asked where they wanted to leave their winter sledges so that they would not have to travel too far to get them in the autumn. I pulled out my map. All the Nenets leaned over it with interest. They were not interested in the distribution of rivers and lakes – they knew all this in detail -but in how correctly the Russians had drawn everything. On the map they found a whole load of errors and vied with one another in eager rivalry to explain to me how a certain river flowed and what shape a particular lake was. But on the map we nevertheless did find the place where the summer sledges had been left. I estimated the distance and brought out my compass. Everyone was absolutely fascinated by it. Irit was the only person who knew what it was and he quickly and clearly explained its use to the others. However, he had never seen a compass with glowing phosphorous arms before. Everyone in turn put the compass inside his *malitsa* to see how this wonderful piece of equipment glowed in the dark.

"Give it to me," said Irit.

"What do you need it for," I asked, laughing, "You know everything without a compass."

"I need it. If a Russian comes, and he does not believe me and he is frightened, I will give him the compass and say: Check for yourself."

"How can it be that you don't get frightened riding around in a snowstorm like this? How did you find us?", I asked.

"The storm is not very strong yet. One can move around, so why should I not find you? I knew where you would be."

"But surely you might pass by the tents a few metres away from them and not see them", I said.

"Anything can happen. Sometimes people can't even find their own tents. But here the wind was in my face. I saw tufts of reindeer moss fly up and I knew that reindeer were feeding nearby. They rip up moss, so I knew that I was going in the right direction. And suddenly my deer felt the tents. They brought me here. They do not go past a tent."

Meanwhile Irit had taken off his wet boots and thrown them to the mistress of the tent. In silence, she handed him a pair of dry boots and a warm, dry *yagushka*. Men usually sleep covered with women's clothing – the *yagushka*.

Irit took off his *malitsa*. Underneath he had a dark satin shirt, something that few of the Nenets have, and black woollen trousers. Evidently he had already rejected the traditional Nenets trousers sewn from home-made suede, which are usually worn by both men and women.

Lousoma started to get ready to go out to the herd. Pari was staying home in the tent that night. The women spread out large deer skins, *khobi*, which during the day had lain rolled up around the edge of the tent. Everyone started to settle down for the night. The fire slowly burned down and the tent quietened down.

When I woke up the next morning, the cheerful rays of the sun were coming through the opening at the top of the tent. I went outside. The blindingly bright sun forced me to screw up my eyes for a moment. The snowdrifts, driven by the wind, were piled into a mass of fantastical shapes. Everywhere a seemingly unshakeable stillness made itself felt and it was impossible to believe that, the day before, this snow had been chaotically whirled around in the air by the wind.

Far away, the voice of Lousoma could be heard calling to the deer. He was bringing the herd of stags to the tent. Irit and Pari came out of the tent. They quickly formed an *ior* with sledges and ropes into which they started to chase the approaching stags. The whole population of the tent came to their aid. The women held onto the ropes, gradually tightening the circle. The men went into the *ior* and started to pick out their deer for the teams. First of all Irit's deer had to be found, as he was going on to another of the collective farm's herds today. How he immediately found his own deer among the sea of reindeer heads was a mystery to me. But what was even more surprising was that Pari and Lousoma, who had never seen Irit's deer before, immediately singled them out. For them the reindeer were not a large, monotonous grey mass. They knew their own deer very well and they immediately noticed alien reindeer.

As soon as Irit's deer were caught, it was decided that Lousoma would set off that same day on the long journey to get the summer sledges. Not one good day was to be lost. He had to pick out the very best and

strongest bulls to take with him. The herders went around the *ior* and carefully examined every deer. They felt around to see if there was any fat on the deer's breast-bones and probed the base of their ears. In this way, the herders were able to determine the deer's nutritional state and fitness. The deer only flinched slightly at the touch of the Nenets' hands. Finally, 70 bulls were chosen. They were harnessed to the sledges and stood with their heads hanging low while the remainder of the deer were freed.

After a few days, two more Nenets came to visit us. They sat down to drink tea.

I asked: "Which collective farm?"

"Sumit Collective Farm," one of them answered. I did not understand.

"Sumit, Sumit," Pari said, re-affirming. Still I did not understand. Suddenly it dawned on me what they were talking about. The "Shmidt" collective farm.

"Smit, Smit" the Nenets nodded joyfully. They had great difficulty pronouncing the silibants of the Russian language.

"Do you know who Shmidt is?", I asked turning to Pari.

"No, no teneva (I don't know)", he replied.

"You know the sea", I said to him then and waved my hand towards the North.

Pari nodded his head affirmatively.

"Over there", I said, waving towards the East, "and over there", towards the West. I was trying to depict the Great Northern Passage. "Ships sail. Hard work, sea, snow, ice. Well, Shmidt was the leader of this work."

"Work" and "leader" are two Russian words that the Nenets know well and they all understood. Pari thought for a while and suddenly asked: "What leader is Budyonny?"

My mouth dropped open and my brows slid upwards in an expression of surprise. The best herdsman on the Budennyi collective farm and he didn't know who Budennyi was? It would have been interesting to see whether Irit knew who Budennyi was.

"Did you see his portrait at the trading station?", I asked.

I moved my finger around my face, laid my hand down on my notebook, and placed my notebook up against the side of the tent. This was an attempt to explain a portrait of Budennyi, which had been hanging at the trading station of Pors-Yakha.

"I know, I know," said Pari, "Stalin."

There you are! My amazement knew no bounds. Could I ever have imagined when getting ready to come to the tundra that I should have thought to bring portraits of our leaders with me.

"No", I said, "It is Budyonny. Stalin has shorter whiskers." I showed them on my own face how Stalin's whiskers looked.

"And he has black hair that sticks up on top," and I jabbed my fingers up against my forehead.

Pari again understood everything and began explaining to the other Nenets that at the trading station there was a portrait of Budyonny and that the portrait of Stalin was at another trading station...

"Stalin is everybody's leader," I continued. "The principal leader. Budyonny is the Red Army *verv.*"

Pari thought for a while, then waved his hand somewhere over to one side and said: "Over there is the collective farm of Front-ranker. Which leader is he?" he asked.

There was no end to my amazement.

"Front-ranker is not the name of a leader", I replied. "It is the name for a person who works hard and well, like the stag at the front of your team."

"A-ha..." light dawned in Pari's face, and then he asked: "Collective farm 'shock-worker' – what leader is he?"

I struck the table with my fist, to show a strike or blow and said: "A 'shock-worker' is someone who works very well."

Once again there followed the "a-ha", indicating comprehension, and then a new question: "Collective 'Communard' -Communard – who is he?"

The prospect of trying to depict a communard left me devoid of imagination and I answered that a communard was simply a good person. In this inglorious manner, our "political discussion" came to an end. The Nenets started to talk about their own affairs and I became lost in thought about how far these people were from the world I had lived in until now and about how difficult it was to explain things to them.

The Nenets were well-informed about the war and at one point Pari himself started to talk with me about it.

"Varya" he said, "why this war? I like my tundra, I don't need other places. Here there is enough space for everybody. So why occupy foreign land?"

"You're right, Pari", I said. "And I don't understand the reasons for this war anymore than you do."

Some fine weather came... More of the tundra was liberated from the snow with every passing day. The snow did not melt – it simply disappeared, evaporating in the sunlight that was now constant, 24 hours a day. The deer fed themselves entirely from the tops of hills cleared of snow. The hinds with their young calves also kept to the thawed patches, where the dark earth was warmer. The calving came to an end. We began to move on. It was high time to find new pastures. Now as we moved, the dark, awkward figures of the little calves toddled alongside the hinds. By the end of May, snow remained only at the lower levels, in gullies and on the northern slopes of lake hollows. Moving on with the sledges the Nenets used the remaining patches of snow to the maximum. Although the reindeer were almost falling over in the slushy, melting snow, it was nevertheless easier to pull the heavy winter sledges on it. The lakes were still frozen and they stood out on the tundra as dark blue patches. Where possible, we travelled across them. Willow grouses were performing courtship rituals everywhere. The male birds fought furiously. They always tried to attack each other from the side, and the attacked one would turn his breast toward the attacker. In this way they alternated running ahead of each other, while moving on in the same direction. I

observed how two grouses crossed the whole mirror-like frozen surface of a lake in this manner, stopping from time to time to attack each other.

At the beginning of June, the lakes started to reappear from under the ice. The first openings in the ice developed where small streams and riverlets flowed into the lake. In these areas different species of migrant ducks appeared, such as pintails, teals, and long-tailed ducks. On the isolated lakes, the ice remained for considerably longer, and as late as the 19th of June I observed long-tailed ducks lying on the ice where they warmed themselves in the sun's rays. The geese that had arrived at the beginning of June fed on the grassy shores of the low lakes. They ripped up sedge and ate the juicy root of the plant, which grows beneath the earth. Eku and Pyriko went out hunting geese. They laid traps directly in the water in some of the marshy areas and scattered sedge around them, so that the area resembled a feeding place.

Swans come to the lakes before they open, and according to the Nenets, by the end of May they are already looking for a place to nest. On the 21th of June I found a swan's nest containing four eggs. The nest had been made on the edge of a grassy cape extending into a lake. By that time, more than half of the ice in the lake had thawed. The water flowed freely only around the edges and through a narrow canal that led from the edge of the cape to the opposite bank. The nest was built on a lump of sphagnum moss and measured about 1.5 metres in diameter. The pair of swans were swimming near the bank. I moved back a little and watched these magnificent birds in awe, especially when the female got out of the water and climbed majestically onto the nest.

The clamorous black-throated divers appeared later than all the others (9th of June), by which time there were already big openings on many of the lakes. These birds land only on the open water and take off only from the water. They cannot move on solid ground, and this was why they had arrived later than the others.

Now when the herd was moving from one place to another, I did not ride on the sledges but walked, observing the many varied forms of life in the tundra. White wagtails ran chirping along the exposed sandy hillocks, and wheatears began to appear. In the mossy areas of the tundra, red-throated pipits and Lapland buntings settled and began to make their nests. There were particularly large numbers of the Lapland buntings. They took wing at every step and planed back down to the ground, singing their simple song. This is the bunting's display flight. The cocks arrive first. Like the grouse, they often sit on small elevations, looking very spectacular and proud of their black necks. Sometimes two of the buntings would get into a fight and become a tangle of feathers.

The red-throated pipits flew much higher than the buntings in their display flight. In the tundra, most of the birds generally sing in the air although in bad weather I did see the Lapland buntings singing on the ground. But most of all, I was amazed by the bluethroat. In the tundra, this beautiful bird nests in the low-growing dwarf willow and sings not only

sitting in the bushes or on the ground but also while ascending high into the sky. In the air its flight resembled some kind of dance, accompanied by whistles and clicks. So varied were the many tones of its song that it even reminded me slightly of that of a nightingale.

In addition to this, there were the cries of various sandpipers, the golden plovers whistling, the Terek sandpipers flying with a light trill. One could also hear the resounding voice of the redshanks, the wood sandpipers, and others. If one adds to this the cry of the black-throated divers, the screech of the long-tailed ducks, the honking of the geese, and the occasional cry of the swans, then it is possible to imagine what a great clamour of sounds was to be heard in the tundra at this time. It was not a sweet-sounding choir; each bird utters its song or cry in its own way, but in each sound and each song there was a resounding affirmation of life.

"If the old world perishes," I thought to myself, "if I were never again to see all those people who are close to me and dear to me, would I be able to live on alone?" And it seemed to me that here in the tundra, in utmost unity with nature, I would be able to! I would lead a nomadic life with the Nenets, struggling against the wind and snowstorms, and in spring I would enjoy the light, the sun, and the incessant birdcalls. I never again experienced such a feeling of total freedom and total liberation from all earthly cares. In fact, I am almost ashamed to admit that the spring of 1942 was the happiest in my life...

In the middle of June, Lousoma finally came back. Nyabuku was leading the *argish* of summer sledges and behind Loumosa's sledge was another one with a boat on it. Now we would also be able to catch fish. Lousoma jumped off his sledge, took out a thick packet of paper from under his jacket, and extended it to me saying,

"A present for you."

I unfolded it and to my joy found that it was a letter from Tanya. She wrote that Lousoma had visited their tent and that she had asked him about me, not knowing that he was a herdsman from my herd.

> "You should have seen how pleased he was", she wrote, "on hearing your name, he immediately started to tell us all about you – about how you drink tea with him every day and sleep in his half of the tent. Today I met him again in the tundra. He took off a mitten and produced a goose egg from under his *malitsa*, and holding it out to me, he said:
>
> "Mai Varya khupta, pygar optike Varya (Varya is far away, take it – you are like Varya)."
>
> "Everything is going very well with my fieldwork. Ponka and I catch between 10 and 15 lemmings every day. There are already a lot of buzzards flying in, so they will probably be nesting soon and you will also have plenty of material. Not too long ago, something happened here that upset everybody. While we were putting up the tent, one light, sunny night, a wolf, *sarmik*, appeared ammong the herd. The deer ran towards the tent and the wolf, hiding from the

people, ran among them so that it was impossible to shoot. Everyone started to shout and brandish the poles from the tent. The wolf seized a hind by the back leg but the people and dogs chased it away. Having run off some distance, it stopped on a sandy incline where the ice had melted away and the dogs, with Ponka among them, ran up to it. The wolf bared its teeth and growled fiercely, snapping at the dogs, and one after another they rolled back down the incline.

"Afterwards I examined them carefully but found no sign of any bites. Two days later the Nenets found a dead wolf, very probably the same one. Edaiko (one of the herders) was very concerned and said: "Sarmik evil, rabid." The next day Olga (Khasov's wife) spent a long time telling me about how the wolf had attacked the herd because I had stepped over the rope and the pole and walked behind the fire in the tent. She said that although I was Russian, I had to do everything that Nenets women do as long as I live among the Nenets people. I began to understand their superstitious fear of wolves, and now I am trying to observe all the restrictions imposed upon Nenets women so as not to bring further misfortune upon them. In a few days, Ivan Klementyevich should be arriving at our camp to administer vaccinations against malignant anthrax. I asked Lousoma to bring you over to us and then afterwards we can go back to your herd together to do vaccinations there. Lousoma said that from now on, we will be moving on pastures close to each other and he promised to come.

"Until we meet very soon,
"Yours, Tanya."

Bread days

There were now only a few days left before my planned departure for Tanya's herd. Those days made a strong impression on me that has stayed in my mind ever since. They could be called "the bread days". On leaving Pors-Yakha, we had bought a whole load of bread and taken it with us tied on the sledges. Throughout the whole of May, the bread was frozen and kept very well. The women brought frozen loaves into the tent and cut them into thick chunks. Frozen bread was very tasty when eaten while drinking hot tea. In June when the warmer weather began, the bread thawed out and started to go mouldy. With this began the rush job of not so much saving but destroying it. In the heat of the day, the women dragged all the bread out of the sledges and began to cut it and lay it out on the empty sledges to dry. During these days, everyone ate as much bread as they could. The children ran around with lumps of bread in their hands; the dogs ate bread; and even the reindeer came up to the sledges and feasted with great pleasure on the bread that had been laid out. It is true that they were sometimes chased away, but this was done more out of

a sense of order than anything, and usually without even getting up from one's seat. I was very surprised by such wastefulness and the prospect of being left without bread worried me. Yet that was how it was to be. Through the efforts of everyone at the camp, the bread was eaten within the space of a few days. For a while after this unleavened, corn cakes were baked, and then the Nenets lived very happily without bread. This was just the way things were, and I too had to get used to this. The Nenets never economize on food and do not keep any stores. Having eaten up one thing they start to eat something else, some type of food that happens to be abundant at that particular time. The only exceptions to this rule are tea and tobacco, which they did actually try to buy enough of for the journey. Yet bread was another matter. How necessary is bread when there is meat and fish available? It actually turned out that it was quite possible to live without it. After all, how can it be kept? Where and how could the Nenets make rusks? It is not possible to dry out bread under the northern sun.

At the end of June, I departed for Tanya's herd with Lousoma. In summer, the Nenets usually travel alone in light sledges pulled by three bulls. In order to take me along, Lousoma attached five deer to the sledge. We sat in the same way as we had sat in the winter, he in front, I behind. Lousoma chose to drive through soft moss-covered, low-lying areas and the deer, as in winter, went at a brisk trot.

In the tent of Khudi Khasov, where Tanya lived, order reigned. Everything was supervised by Khudi's older wife, Olga. A tall, neat woman in a beautifully embroidered, tightly belted *yagushka*, she walked with long strides and held herself with exceptional dignity. The second wife, who worked in the tent helping Olga, was a small, nondescript woman without a name, who went about her hard work in silence. Who's to say, perhaps she ruled at night, but during the day she was totally subordinate to Olga. Nenets women have a great deal of work and many duties to perform. They are responsible for preparing the skins and hides and for the sewing, starting with the tent covering and going right down to the children's clothes. They sew the hide from the inner side, using deer sinew, and attach pieces together with fine, smooth stitches. For decoration, they add pieces of white hide and sew in strips of red broadcloth, creating complicated and beautiful patterns that make the women's clothes in particular stand out. They also cut out the hide from the inner side with a sharp knife and bite off the sinew with their teeth – scissors are not used here. The day-to-day work of preparing fire wood and doing the cooking is also carried out exclusively by the women. In summer, the fire is fuelled with dwarf birch, which burns very well. Many of the mosses and grasses of the tundra are characterized by a so-called physiological dryness. Low temperatures prevent too much water's being absorbed by the plants and therefore, despite the abundance of water, the bushes and grasses never become saturated with moisture and their green branches burn like straw. Usually after having moved to a new site – as soon as the tents are set up – the women head off to collect fuel and bring it back in

enormous bundles. In addition to this there is also a lot of purely seasonal work, such as the preparation of the soft wood shavings or *varav,* as they are known, which are used instead of cloths, towels, wisps of bast, wadding, and so on. The *varav* are prepared in the spring before leaving the forest-tundra. In order to do this, a piece of damp wood about the thickness of a hand is taken from the trunk of a tree. Upon peeling the bark, one places the knife perpendicularly against the wood and scrapes the bast so that a fine layer of the wood is removed. The result is fine shavings that look like our wisps of bast. They can be used to wipe the table after eating, to wipe out cups and glasses, which are not usually washed, to wipe the hands and face after an infrequent wash and so on. The dirty wisps are thrown onto the fire and everything seems to function quite hygienically. It is also the women's duty to gather wood-reed straw for the inner soles of boots and sphagnum moss used for babies, etc. Sphagnum is prepared in the summer. It is laid out to dry on the sledges and then placed in sacks.

In the second tent of Tanya's herd, lived the family of the herdsman Edaiko. In their tent, it was dirty and uncomfortable. The firm hand of a woman could certainly not be felt here. The crockery was wiped with a piece of dirty netting. Evidently, they had not managed to prepare *varav* the spring before. Edaiko was Nenets but, like Lousoma, he strongly resembled a North American Indian, although his face had finer features and he had sly, somewhat roguish eyes. Edaiko in the Nenets language means "new". I asked why he had been called so.

"A child was born, and they just called him Edaiko," he answered playfully. True or not – it was difficult to tell with Edaiko.

Arriving at Tanya's herd, I met Ivan Klementyevich who was already preparing to move on to another herd. Under his guidance, I began to learn how to vaccinate the reindeer against malignant anthrax. We only vaccinated the stags and the young deer, not the hinds with their calves. The vaccination was injected under the skin on the neck. The Nenets caught each stag in turn, laid it down on its side, and held it tightly. My job was to grasp the skin on the neck of the animal, which trembled with my every touch, and to pinch the skin with my left hand, while sticking the needle in with the right, letting the vaccine be drawn up under the skin until a small lump appeared on the deer's neck about the size of a pea. This had to be repeated three times and the deer was then released with three "peas" on its neck. In Tanya's herd, the vaccinations were finished quickly and we went on to my herd. Here we experienced a lot of frustrations. There were frequent cases of deer dying with obvious symptoms of malignant anthrax – a swollen stomach, legs spread wide, etc. "Posa, posa (malignant anthrax)", the Nenets anxiously confirmed. We remained silent. Well what could we say? It was quite possible that the weakened deer in my herd would not be able to bear up to our vaccinations and would perish from the terrible disease. We heaved a great sigh of relief when the vaccinations were finally finished.

This did not, however, bring to an end the misfortunes of my herd. Throughout July it was very hot, and the so-called *kopytka* (necrobacillosis) started to rage among the deer. If a reindeer's hoof was injured, or sometimes without any evident cause, a necrosis of the tissue occurred. The animal's foot and leg then swelled up and there were many limping deer in the herd. The deer, exhausted by the attacks of the mosquitoes and the gadfly, did not feed properly and some of them died. Sometimes it happened that a suppurative inflammation of the tissue caused their internal organs to seize up. The post-mortems we carried out on such animals left a terrible impression. It was hard to imagine how a deer could live at all with such inflammation of all its organs.

I wrote out reports every day about reindeer that had died, checking with Pari that my information tallied with his notches.

Pari took my work very seriously and all the time he kept saying: "Put it on paper, put it on paper, pabar tara (paper is what we need)."

He knew that my reports would serve as a full justification for all our misfortunes. Of course it was necessary to make allowances for the fact that there had been many sick and weak deer in our herd right from the start.

One day, yet another of the deer, a young hind, started to limp slightly. By the next day, her leg had swollen up and she could hardly stand on it.

Pari called me and said: "Varya, we must slaughter it. It will die in any case. Today the meat is good, tomorrow bad and dangerous to eat."

I agreed. For a long time now we had not had any meat. The news that we would be slaughtering a deer immediately circulated in both tents. Everyone filed outside and there followed a somewhat loud and animated discussion before the wooden troughs were pulled out and the knives sharpened as the Nenets carried on conversing with one another. The unfortunate hind was caught and brought to the tent. So as not to lose one single drop of blood the deer was first strangled with a *tynzyan*. Then with a sharp and accurate stab of the knife, the heart was pierced so that all the blood remained inside the body.

Quickly arming themselves with knives, the Nenets took off the skin, broke open the peritoneum, ripped out the inside, and laid it in the trough. The hind was laid on her side and they divided the upper part of her rib cage, cutting it along the breast and the spine. Like a bowl, the lower part of the rib cage was left on the ground, filled with blood. Into this natural bowl they began to cut up pieces of the liver, the heart, the long spinal cord, and other soft parts. Then they sat around this feast-meal and, fishing out with a knife pieces of meat saturated in blood, they popped them into their mouths and ate them with evident pleasure. Everyone's face was smeared with blood. Nyabuku's pretty little face was covered right up to her ears, only her white teeth gleaming in a happy smile. I watched this bloody feast with interest and surprise and they laughed at me, suggesting that I try first one, then another piece of meat. Some of them even ladled the still-warm blood into cups and drank it.

However, all this can be justified as a natural part of the historical development of the nomadic northern peoples. The consumption of raw meat and blood from freshly killed animals protects the Nenets from scurvy, a disease from which they never suffer. Neither scurvy nor the many catarrhal illnesses are a problem to the Nenets. Life in the severe conditions of the North has helped the Nenets to work up a certain resistance to them. The Nenets have been more affected by other diseases brought to them by the Russians, diseases against which they have no immunity whatsoever – above all, tuberculosis.

That evening in the tent, we had a whole pot full of deer meat from the hind. The Nenets deftly cut off pieces of meat with their knives right up under their noses. I also tried to eat in this manner. Pari, watching my very cautious attempt, said: "Varya, you should cut off just a little piece." He showed me on his own face how I should cut off the tip of my nose. My nose is not particularly turned-up, nevertheless the tip does stick up some way and this, according to the Nenets, was entirely superfluous. Everyone burst out laughing. "Nyaby pya", said Lousoma, depicting on his own face the shape of my nose. Then he made a small circle with his thumbs and index fingers putting both hands up to his eyes, and said: "Khaniptsu seiv." Thus I had been given two Nenets names at once – "Nyaby pya" or "duck nose" and "Khaniptsu seiv" or "owl eyes".

My eyes, again by Nenets standards, were also extremely large. The Nenets were also amazed at my height. At 1 metre 68, I was a half a head higher than the Nenets men and Pari only came up to my shoulder. In the winter when I first put on my large and shaggy *sook* over my *malitsa*, the Nenets had remarked with surprise and a certain sense of irony: "Ooo, Varya optike mya (Varya, you are just like a tent)."

Tanya spent almost the whole of July with our herd and we were able to go out again, as before, into the tundra in our threesome: Tanya, myself, and Ponka, the dog. Our work progressed very well. There were a great many lemmings and I found a considerable number of rough-legged buzzards' nests, all of them at intervals of two kilometres. Finding the nests was not difficult. When catching sight of a pair of buzzards flying, we approached the area they were flying over. When we came close they got agitated, thus indicating the presence of a nest. Then it was only a matter of examining all the surrounding inclines and the nest would soon be discovered. The material seemed to just fall into our hands.

We now stayed in one place for up to a week at a time and then moved on to a new one 10 to 15 kilometres farther north. During our stops, Tanya and I examined the area around the tents very closely, and when on the move, we did the same all along the stretch of tundra covered on our journey. As a result, we were able to map out the distribution of the nests of birds of prey for the whole of the studied territory.

At the end of July, the cloudberry started to ripen. Its reddened berries covered the mossy tundra like a carpet. The berries were still not quite ripe and crunched in the mouth but they were so tasty that it was hard to drag

oneself away. It was at that time that I became convinced, through my own experiences, of the existence of vitamins, and I understood how necessary they were for the organism. I remember how, instead of looking for nests, I sometimes got taken up with the cloudberries. The nest was somewhere very close at hand, yet the buzzards screeched and flew around directly over my head and I could not even bring myself to look around. I just ate cloudberries and kept repeating over and over inside my head, "Yes, wait a moment you devils, don't screech, just let me eat a few berries." Finally, having forced the poor birds into a prolonged state of agitation for more than half an hour, I raised my head and saw the nest right there beside me.

The Nenets, too, greedily devoured the cloudberries. I noticed how Lousoma, going to round up deer that had strayed, jumped off his sledge and, holding the reins with one hand, with the other began hurriedly to tear berries from a bush and stuff them into his mouth. Then he slipped back into the sledge and drove off.

Our little Savone grew very quickly during those three months. She could soon sit up in her cradle dressed in her first little set of fur clothes that her mother had made for her. Into the little girl's hand Pukhocha Pari put a big boiled reindeer bone on which there were leftover bits of gristle, sinew, and meat. The little girl dribbled over it for a long time with her toothless gums and smeared it all over her face. Suddenly a large black hound got up from among the dogs lying at the entrance to the tent, very cautiously approached the cradle, and began to lick little Savone's face all over. Seeing my amazement, coupled with horror, Pukhocha Pari started gabbling: "Serny savo, serny savo" and the rest of her hurried speech she accompanied with such expressive gestures that I understood everything. She was telling me that the black dog was good, that he never bit and would not do little Savone any harm. He only licked and washed her round the cheeks.

In general washing was something that didn't go over too well with the Nenets. They washed only in exceptional circumstances. Sometimes they might wash their hands with soap, the remnant of which would travel with them all summer, but nobody would wash with it on a regular basis. The little children always ran around with dirty faces. I did notice in Ilya Ivanovich's tent that the mother caught one little girl, and holding the child's face firmly in the crook of her elbow, filled her mouth with water, drained it into her rough hand and wiped the girl's puckered screwed-up little face with it. Dirty tears flowed down the little girl's face as her mother wiped it with a handful of shavings before releasing her offspring, whose cheeks had flushed red.

"But what about her *ngebt* (hair)?", I asked, pointing at the mass of uncombed hair.

The mother shook her head and rummaged around in her knapsack before pulling out two long rag plaits with various metallic decorations and buttons on them. These were the little girl's future plaits. Her mother

held them up against the little girl's head. The girl stood still and smiled happily. She knew that these plaits had been made for her. But the plaits were too long and they draped to the floor. When the girl grew up, they would comb her hair and attach these beautiful plaits, which were just like those of her older sister.

Pari loved his little Savone very much. When he came into the tent, he often sat down beside her fur cradle and his face immediately broke into a smile. He would say something and the harmonious sound of incomprehensible words blended together into what seemed like an ordinary, everyday conversation with the tiny baby, which everyone understood.

Pari was not that young; he was over 40, and so I asked Lousoma: "Does Pari have any other children?"

"He had... all khalmer (dead)", Lousoma replied.

With great interest, I spent many hours observing the life of the Nenets children. Pyriko, the 12-year-old boy, tried to imitate the men of the group in everything he did. He already knew how to use a *tiur* and could drive a sledge team with ease. When he played around the tents, he always had his *tynzyan* in hand and often threw it over the tame deer or simply up into the air, making the loop twirl around. He had a small pair of men's boots, embroidered not only at the bottom like the women's, but also at the top, so that the embroidery could be seen from under his belted *malitsa*. He already had a small scabbard with a knife hanging on his belt but at the back, instead of the customary bear's canines, he had a set of reindeer molars.

Pyriko had his own herd of toy reindeer. He had made them out of rectangular wooden pieces. He carved along the top of these rectangles with a knife, taking off thin shavings but without going right to the end, so that the shavings curled up into the shape of an antler on the imaginary head of the deer. By repeating this several times, he made something that resembled the many branches of a set of antlers and then looked happily at his work.

Ilya Ivanovich's daughter, Khapi, a girl of about 12 years of age (the same as Pyriko) already knew how to repair boots, and sometimes she would lean over the boards where the deer hides were being prepared and scrape at the unfinished hides. However, she was not too fond of this type of woman's hard work and she preferred to play. She had several dolls, the heads of which were made out of a goose beak. The beak was sewn on to a piece of woolly material from which the doll's plaits, twisted together out of woollen thread, hung down. The doll was dressed in a small *malitsa* and the whole thing had been made and decorated by Khapi. She had a small needlework kit-bag made of hide that she had embroidered very beautifully and in which there was a compartment for needles and thimbles. It was just like the kit-bags the grown-up women had. Khapi sometimes teased Pyriko and then he would attack her with his fists and she, laughing, would free herself and run away. At times like that, they looked like the most ordinary 12-year-old children at play.

Khapi was very inquisitive. She was always hanging around me when I was weighing the birds or lemmings that I had caught, and she was very interested in the chemist's scales. One day I took the largest weight, two hundred grams, and said "Ilya Ivanovich". Khapi laughed gaily. Then she gathered together all the weights, set them all out, and gave them names. Two 20-gram weights were Pyriko and herself. Ten grams was her younger sister, Khantoni, and so on.

Khantoni, a little girl of seven, was nothing like Khapi at all. She was very serious, a little shy of me and spent all her time helping her mother. Ilya Ivanovich said: "Khantoni *savo* (good), Khantoni works in the tent. *Khapi lek* (lazy). Khapi must go to the boarding school."

In Yar-Sale there was a boarding school for Nenets children, but parents were reluctant to send their children there. After all they did not learn how to herd deer, how to throw a *tynzyan* or how to fashion clothes from deerskin at the school. Neither did they learn about the difficulties of life in the tundra; here literacy was of little help. It was difficult to know what was for the best, but perhaps literacy could be a good and useful thing for an inquisitive little girl like Khapi. Unfortunately, I never heard what Khapi's future destiny was to be.

One day I was sitting in the tent with Nyabuku and Khapi. I was writing my diary, Nyabuku was sewing a boot, and Khapi was examining my ears. She became very distressed when she realized that they had no holes in them. She proudly showed me her ears, which already had large holes pierced in them through which pieces of rag had been threaded.

"Why do you do that? You shouldn't," I said.

"What do you mean, shouldn't?" Nyabuku suddenly interrupted our conversation. She herself had two metal bracelets from wrist watches fixed to her ears.

"Look, how beautiful!", continued Nyabuku and inclining her nice little head, she began to shake it from side to side. As she did so, the metallic bracelets tinkled and glittered. I watched her, involuntarily admiring her beauty. Everything she did was so elegant that indeed it did seem that she was right and that she would not have been as beautiful without the bracelets. But then Nyabuku became tired of sewing, put her work aside, and stretched out for Lousoma's snuff box. She picked it up, together with the special little spoon, and throwing back her head, she placed some tobacco under her lower lip. Then she sat with an expression of complete satisfaction on her face and from time to time, not quite so elegantly now, spat right across the tent.

From mid-August we stopped moving north and began to head towards the south east. Our goal was the small trading station Tarko-Sale on the upper reaches of the Yuribei River. There we would be able to buy bread and sugar again and deliver the hides of the deer that had died. Tanya's herd was moving in the same direction and we were to meet her at Tarko-Sale.

Until our arrival at Tarko-Sale, we had been living in complete isolation from the events of the outside world. Not even the smallest echoes of what

was going on had reached us out in the tundra. The last newspaper we had seen was one containing Stalin's May Day speech.

Tarko-Sale, a small trading station about 120 kilometres from the nearest post office, did not however live up to our hopes. Here nobody knew any more than we did about the situation at the front. Then one day, we suddenly heard the sound of an aeroplane flying overhead. Everyone ran outside. A small four-winged plane circled over the trading station and threw down some kind of packet. Everyone raced towards it. It turned out to be a booklet containing a list of new state prices for goods, wrapped up in two July issues of the local newspapers. From these we learned that the Germans were at Stalingrad. This was almost impossible to comprehend and it became clear that we would not be able to hope for anything good to happen in the near future.

Tanya and I spent about two weeks in Tarko-Sale while our two herds resided in the neighbourhood. Once again we were able to savour the delights of living under a solid roof, being able to sit on chairs and drink tea out of proper glasses at a table. The Nenets, however, having arrived at the trading station seemed to lose their beauty and magic. They seemed somewhat clumsy and ungainly and their figures, sitting on chairs, looked awkward. They themselves felt inhibited here and preferred to return to the tents as soon as possible, where they were free and at ease.

Autumn in the tundra

After our return to the tents a new quiet phase – melancholic autumn life – began in the tundra. How often we found that all our thoughts flew south together with the rows of migrant geese, and yet there was no possibility of hearing anything or receiving the slightest bit of news from home.

Early autumn is the quietest time in the herds. The deer feed well and put on weight quickly. The herdsmen have considerably less work to do and one of them can usually keep watch on the herd alone. One day we were sitting in the tent. Nyabuku was lighting the fire. No sooner was the fire blazing than the tent became warm and comfortable. Nyabuku moved away from the fire and sat down to repair some boots. Lousoma was carving some new fastenings and decorative pieces out of bone for his sledge team. Staring at the cheerful tongues of fire that twisted upwards towards the opening at the top of the tent, I started to sing an old Russian song:

"His eyes are clear, his brows are black,
His dearest face is whitest white..."

"You sing", said Lousoma, brightening up at the sounds of the new and unknown tune. "What do the words mean?"

I translated.

"Your boyfriend?", he asked sadly. "Where is he now?", and in his voice I could hear a note of deep sympathy.

He did not doubt that I was singing about my own personal joys and griefs as the Nenets did.

In September, the rains started. The summer tents were not very good at holding the heat and the rain seeped in. It became cold and damp inside. I began talking about how in Moscow the houses were large and beautiful, and about how cars drove down the long, wide streets. However in answer to my question as to whether they would like to see all this, Pari shook his head.

"I cannot live in another place... khalmer (I would die)," he said, sounding convinced.

"But surely it cannot be very pleasant to live in the tundra all the time. Look at that rain!", I said, moving away from a hole in the tarpaulin through which a stream of water was dripping into the tent.

"The winter is cold, there are snowstorms. In winter it is better to live in a house – it's warmer", I continued.

"I don't like houses. They are too hot", Pari answered. "I like everything in the tundra: the mosquitoes, the rain, the snowstorms...The only thing I don't like in the tundra is the *sarmik* (wolf). Except for the wolf, everything in the tundra is very good."

The subject of wolves caused a lot of anxiety at this time of the year. With the dark nights closing in, everyone feared their attacks. I remember how one night there was an alarm. Everybody leapt out of the tents and ran around, shouting and beating on iron plates with sticks. In short, all hell broke loose. I still don't know whether we frightened the wolf away with all the noise or whether it was a false alarm, just that everything turned out all right.

Important events

Around about that time, two important events took place in our tents. In the summer, I had noticed that Nyabuku was collecting and drying sphagnum moss and immediately understood why.

"Achika tonya (I expect a baby)", she said happily, and smiled shyly. There was also to be a new addition to the already large family of Ilya Ivanovich. By that time Tanya had finished the work in her herd, and from the beginning of September she travelled with us and lived in Ilya Ivanovich's tent. One day Ilya Ivanovich said: "We shall move to another tent – there will be a big event in this one."

Everyone except two Nenets women moved over to the other tent and the next morning we were told that a little girl had been born.

"Noliku Tanya (a little Tanya)," Ilya Ivanovich announced. However we were not allowed to go into the tent.

Tanya lifted up the flap at the back of the tent and carefully dragged her bag out. Then she went off into the tundra. I spent the night in Lousoma's tent. When we returned from the tundra we found ourselves in the middle of a ceremony. The women were going around the tents, sledges, deer, and dogs with an iron plate with smoking coals on it. The heat and smoke from the plate they carried had to waft over everyone and everything. They covered Tanya and me and even Ponka with smoke. However, we never found out what all this meant.

The next day Ilya Ivanovich calmly moved on with the deer, leaving the tent with his wife and the newborn baby alone in the tundra.

"This is how it must be", he told us. "She has got deer and meat; for two weeks she must live alone and then she will catch up with us."

Ilya Ivanovich moved more quickly with his herd of stags than Pari with his herd, and therefore I moved over to him. Tanya and I naturally wanted to move ahead as quickly as possible in order to reach post, newspapers, and letters from home.

Around the the 20th of September, we stopped at the highest point on the southern Yamal, a hill with the poetic name of Tir-Side (*tir* meaning "cloud", *side* meaning "hill"). At the top of the hill there was a complicated pyramid-shaped structure built out of deer antlers, to the branches of which were attached pieces of cloth and rags. We turned to Ilya Ivanovich for an explanation.

He said: "Here the Nenets pray to God." We became more interested.

"What do you mean by pray?"

"You do like this with your head...(Ilya Ivanovich bowed his head several times)...and pray for the reindeer not to fall ill, for wolves not to come, for everything."

"Did you pray for our deer?", Tanya asked.

Ilya Ivanovich smiled cunningly. "Now Varya must pray – it is her herd."

We did not manage to penetrate the secrets of the Nenets faith, to find out to which gods they prayed or how they prayed. But the pile of antlers at Tir-Side resembled a Mongolian *obo*. An obo is a pile of stones placed at the summit of a pass. Around it the Mongols leave their modest offerings to the gods.

A few days later, we moved on again and stopped again on the bank of a small river. Ilya Ivanovich said that we should not move on any farther before the first snowfall. He explained that farther on there was a great deal of undergrowth and that, with the dark nights, the reindeer could not be seen at all and neither could wolves. It would be very difficult to pasture the deer there until the snow came. Then everything would be white and light and it would be easy to keep watch over the deer. This all sounded very reasonable and so we waited.

The snow came on the 5th of October and two days later we had already arrived at the trading station. Waiting for us there were two packets of letters and some wrapped newspapers sent on from Yar-Sale. How terrible it was for us to open these newspapers. However the letters did not bring any bad news of a personal nature. In the second year of the war, people had already somehow got used to the difficult living conditions, and in the letters there was none of the alarm that we had sensed in earlier correspondance. Neither was there any news of the deaths of close friends and acquaintances. The Moscovites had made their contribution in the first year of the war; now others were fighting and dying around Stalingrad. After having read the letters first in the wrong order and then in the correct one, Tanya and I grew more cheerful. We drank tea with fresh

bread and went to the bath house – something that we had been dreaming about for a long time.

Pari and Lousoma also arrived at the trading station and we learned that Nyabuku had given birth to a daughter.

"Noliku Varya (little Varya)", said Lousoma smiling.

However the tent with the newborn child had once again been left out in the tundra, and Tanya and I did not get to see our little namesakes.

Soon after this, we went off to Yar-Sale with our reports while the Nenets started to move in the direction of Salekhard to the Khodyta trading station. At Yar-Sale it was decided that the sick and weak deer should be slaughtered and that the rest of the herd should move on to Salekhard. Tanya set off for Salekhard at once and I went back to the Nenets. In order to pick out the weak deer, we made the whole herd run around in a circle and then Lousoma and Mesik caught the deer we wanted with the *tynzyan*. The tundra was filled with the shouts of the Nenets, the barking of the dogs, and the very special noise that is created by a whole herd of deer running.

I never overcame my surprise at the strength and dexterity the Nenets displayed when catching the reindeer, but what amazed me most was their very accurate knowledge of the deer's anatomy when they slaughtered and divided up the carcass. They kill the animal with a sharp and accurate blow of a knife directly to the heart and then with the same knife (their only tool) they skin it and divide the carcass up according to all the rules. Everyone goes around with his face smeared in blood up to his ears and drink the blood in unlimited quantities. My duties were to see to it that everything that was procured was undamaged – the liver, heart, lungs, and kidneys separately. With regard to the kidneys, my job was particularly difficult. After the hard work of skinning and cutting up the carcasses (the carcasses had to be presented in a "marketable form", i.e., frozen with the legs outstretched), the Nenets would allow themselves a minute's rest, during which they would cut out a kidney and eat it on the spot.

A representative came to us from the procurement office in Salekhard to inspect the slaughtering and skinning, and I complained to him that I couldn't cope with this aspect of my duties – more than 150 deer had been slaughtered and we had only 52 kidneys in all. He reacted to this quite calmly.

"But of course. It is 'optike apelsin' – like an orange, you see", he said, holding a kidney in his hand. Still he did help me to try and explain to the Nenets that the kidneys had a different price and that they were to be collected separately.

After this, instead of resting after having cut up the carcasses, a Nenets came looking for me in the slaughter area, led me back to his deer, and said: "*Potska tonya* (there are the kidneys)."

Apart from the kidneys, the Nenets also liked very much to eat the gristle from the ears and throat of the deer, which was not forbidden.

The head and the feet of the deer were not procured and the Nenets kept these for themselves.

On the 30th of November, 1942, at the Khodyta trading station, there were 80 sledges containing meat from the slaughtered deer; and this string of sledges with me at the head and with a herd of one and a half thousand live deer set out for Salekhard.

In Salekhard our herdsmen received full payment and went off home to the distant tundra. It was very sad for us to part from the people whose tents we had lived in for almost seven months. They had always shared with us everything they had and we had received their constant care and attention.

The slaughter of the deer was now being done by a new group of Nenets from nearby collective farms. The slaughter took place in the immediate vicinity of a canning factory, and the deer meat was processed at once. The plan to supply meat to the front had been fulfilled and the whole experience of forming and pasturing a special herd, despite our great losses in the summer, was recognized as successful by the procurement office. As a result of this, the office in Yar-Sale once again began to buy up live deer and to form several new herds that were to be put to winter and then summer pastures. They asked me to work as supervisor of the herds, accompanying them both to the winter and summer pastures, until October 1943. This last suggestion did not appeal to me at all. The thoughts I had had during the spring about how I could spend all my life living and moving with the herds across the tundra had completely flown away and I wanted to get back to Moscow. After the defeat of the Germans at Stalingrad, our long but certain path towards final victory had been assured. It was possible that we would soon be allowed to return to Moscow and we sent a letter to the university with a request that they send for us. So I arranged with the procurement office that if a call should come for me to return to the university before the beginning of the summer pasturing, I would not be detained.

Tanya was offered work at the silver fox farm in Katrovozh and on the 10th of January we went our separate ways – Tanya to Katrovozh and I to Yar-Sale.

This time I went to Yar-Sale by post horse, which meant eternal waiting at every station. This means of transport I knew only from having read Pushkin and had never imagined that I myself would sit at a station, listening to the howl of the wind and straining to hear the sound of the long-awaited coach bells. It was a true picture of the former century. The only thing I did not see was the station inspector and his beautiful daughter, Duna (from Pushkin's novel *The Station Inspector*).

I worked for three months at Yar-Sale, or more precisely, in the Yamal District, going around to tent camps and trading stations. The winter herd was acquired and handed over to new herdsmen for winter pasturing. The Nenets counted and re-counted the deer they had received. This was difficult work, especially when a large herd had to be re-counted, for example, a herd of a thousand animals. In this case, all the reindeer were driven in smaller groups past two herdsmen who counted them independently. If their calculations tallied, the herd was accepted; if not, the counting began all over again. Often a whole day could be spent on this.

Sometimes in order to check that their total was correct, the Nenets counted the deer while they were still lying down in the morning, covered in snow. I usually passed this time in the tent. There the kettle would be on the boil and there was plenty of deer meat. The greatest delicacy from the well-fed winter deer was the bone marrow. Usually the master of the tent split the large deer bones with a sharp blow of the blunt side of the knife; then he divided up pieces of the marrow among the guests and the children. But I never saw him give any to his women. After the meal was finished and the men and the guests had left the tent, the women split the remainder of the bones for themselves.

After the counting of the deer had been finished, I signed a document for the receipt of the herd, and beside my signature the Nenets also put their *tamga*. At that time the Nenets had no written language but each had his own signature that everyone knew. Usually this was some kind of line or stroke with a flourish at the end; or two lines that crossed at different angles, also with flourishes at the end; or some kind of half cross with a tail on it, and so on. I met an old acquaintance of mine – Irit. I do not remember why, but I sent two hinds, one *khor* (sire), and one stag to his herd. I compiled a document and sent it to him, together with the deer, to be signed. The herdsmen brought me the signed document back, together with a "wooden" receipt from Irit. On the two sides of a small wooden plank Irit had carved his *tamga* and across the edges he had made notches marking the number of deer received. I still have this "receipt" to this day.

I liked living in the tents. Once again, the outer world was totally removed and everything was quiet and peaceful. The evenings were long and, sitting in the tent, we had long conversations and sometimes told one another fairy tales. The Nenets love fairy tales but do not have a lot of good story-tellers. I remember one of them, whose name was Nyaku. In Nyaku's tent in the evenings after tea, everyone would stretch out for sleep on *khobas* (winter deer hides) spread along the walls of the tent, and Nyaku would begin to tell tales, which often did not end until midnight. Nyaku told his tales in a slow and drawn-out manner, pausing after every sentence, at which point one of the listeners would repeat his last word. Evidently this showed that his audience was not asleep but listening intently. The stories were all much the same. About how there was a Nenets who had three thousand deer, about how he went out and caught geese. His wife sang him a song about how he shouldn't go out and catch geese – that it was going to get him into trouble; and Nyaku, in a long, drawn-out screeching voice, imitated the woman's song. But the Nenets did not obey his wife and went off to hunt geese, and caught a lot of them, even filled a whole boat with them, but on the way home another Nenets attacked and killed him, and took his wife and the geese and all the deer for himself. So the brother of the murdered Nenets decided to seek revenge. He searched for the murderer far and wide for a long time and then finally found him, but he could not kill him because the man was a shaman; and so the two men shot at each other for seven days and seven nights with bows and arrows, and so on...

I also told tales. One that was particularly popular with the Nenets was about the fisherman and the golden fish, which I adapted to the local style. I explained that after the first wish, a trough (which the Nenets know from their own household), the old woman asked for a new tent, then two thousand deer, and then she wanted to be the big chief, *yerv*, of all the tundra. I told it in Nenets as well as I could. Irit, who was staying with us in the tent at that time, reacted strongly in Russian, and with every new wish that the old woman made he said in a grieving voice: "Oh what a wicked, wicked mind."

I wrote home that I did not know whether Pushkin had reached the Tungus (in his famous poem "Memorial", A. S. Pushkin (1799-1839) writes about how he will one day become famous all over Russia and even among the wild Tungus of Siberia), but that I had brought him to the Nenets.

On the 17th of March I received a letter from Tanya saying that our call to return to Moscow had arrived from the Ministry of Education. It is difficult to describe the feeling of joy that overwhelmed me at that moment, but at the same time I understood that I would soon be departing from the tundra and the Nenets for-ever, and everything around me began to seem very close and dear. With sadness I thought about how the willow grouses would appear on the first exposed patches of high ground, how the flocks of geese would start moving slowly north, and how the voices of the newly arrived black-throated divers would once again carry across the lakes of the tundra – without me.

In the last stretch of my stay in the tundra, I lived in the tent of a man named Puiko Toya, and I would have been moving on with him if I had not received the call to return to Moscow. Puiko was an elderly and fine-looking Nenets who in some strange way reminded me of Mister Pickwick. He was very grieved to learn of my impending departure and seriously tried to persuade me that I ought not to go, because I was now *optike khasova*, which meant
that I had become a Nenets and would not be able to live in Moscow, where it was too hot and where there was no fresh meat. He, like Pari, was convinced that all Nenets can live only in the tundra and that they will die if they leave it.

I continued to live in the tents for one whole month more and at the end of April, with the last snow, I went to Tanya in Katrovozh. When I left, the whole population of the camp came to see me off. I said goodbye by shaking hands with everyone in the Russian style, while the Nenets sighed and moaned, waving their arms in a funny way and clapping themselves on their *malitsas*. This was their way of expressing their sincere sorrow at my departure.

I got into the sledge. As it started to move away, I looked back and saw for one last time the dark three-cornered tents and the stocky figures of the Nenets in their wide *malitsas* before waving a last goodbye to these honest, kind, and unusually trustful people.

LOCAL ACCOUNTS, 1988-92

A SAAMI WOMAN'S LETTER TO THE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES OF THE RSFSR

BY A. ANTONOVA

28th of December, 1988

To the Chairman of the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR
The Lovozero District (*raion*), the main town of which is Lovozero, is part of the Murmansk Region (*oblast*). In the Lovozero District, Saami, Nenets and Komi tend 19 herds of reindeer. Nine of these herds belong to the "Tundra" state farm and 10 to the state farm "In the Memory of Lenin" (the villages of Krasnoshchelye, Kanevka, and Sosnovka).

Lovozero is the heart of the ancient Kola land, which was inhabited by the Saami until 1929. The Saami are the natives of this land. In 1929, the Saami village (*pogost*) of Kildinsky, close to the town of Kola near Murmansk, was the first Saami village to disappear in connection with the building of the October Railway line and Murmansk. The inhabitants of the area moved away to all parts of the Kola Peninsula. The majority of the population from this *pogost* found a stony place in the mountains 40 to 50 kilometres from Lake Lovozero and made it their permanent residence. They called the new village Chudzyavr, after the lake on whose banks their new settlement was situated. They thought that this place would never be attractive to anyone, and they lived here unnoticed until the 1960s.

But when the politics of enlarging production units was implemented, the settlers were once again uprooted. The village Semiostrovye in the Lovozero District disappeared, as did all of the other Saami *pogosts* west of Murmansk. In the early 1960s, the land around the settlement of Voronye was flooded. Over a period of 4 years, people were resettled in Lovozero from the villages of Chudzyavr, Varzino, and Drozdovka. In that, they were all deceived: they had been told that housing had been made ready for them in Lovozero, but then they had to move in with relatives or acquaintances and, until recently, they had all been living crowded together.

The local authorities had received relocation means from the geological exploration organizations but these were not passed on to the resettled people.

The Saami in the village of Chalmne-Varre moved to Krasnoshchelye. In this way, about 10 or even more exclusively Saami villages – yes, in fact all Saami villages – disappeared forever. As a result, there was only one village left, Lovozero. Lovozero is considered a national Saami village, but the Saami make up only one seventh of its inhabitants (650 people).

In the Murmansk Region, reindeer breeding is the traditional livelihood of the Saami, Nenets and Komi people, although the latter settled on the

Kola Peninsula many centuries later than the others. For the past 70 years, the reindeer breeding business in the district has developed, along with intensive construction work on the tundra and intensive exploitation of natural resources. This has had and still has negative effects on the forage supply of the deer herds and has caused unwanted results throughout the reindeer breeding sector. The carrying capacity of the pastures is decreasing; the profitability of the branch, which employs a large sector of the indigenous population, is decreasing; and young people are leaving reindeer breeding.

Yet according to the "Principal Directions for Economic and Social Development in the USSR from 1986/1990 to the Year 2000", adopted by the 27th Congress of the CPSU, the further development of the reindeer breeding sector is absolutely necessary. Moreover according to the plan for economic development in the Murmansk Region, the number of deer on the Kola Peninsula should have reached eighty thousand by 1990. The biggest state farms for reindeer breeding, "Tundra" and "In the Memory of Lenin", are situated in the Lovozero District. The decisive factor for obtaining the indicated number of deer is the extension and improvement of the forage supply, as reindeer do not need capital constructions such as farms or other kind of buildings. They live from the natural vegetation and demand no expenses for fodder. In fact, reindeer meat is the cheapest meat available in terms of production costs. Bearing in mind such plans for the development of reindeer breeding, and considering that reindeer breeding is the cornerstone of the life of the indigenous peoples all over the Soviet North, further construction work for industrial purposes should not be allowed in the Far North.

The reindeer breeding sector could be highly profitable. Yet the unprofessional and blind attitude of the Agroprom (the Agro-Industrial Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture) means that only meat is favoured and the remaining products are barely used. If a more professional attitude were assumed, profitability could be increased by 100 to 200%. But how? By opening a workshop in Lovozero for manufacturing deer hide and making clothes in the national style – jackets, shoes, *malitsy* (a traditional long fur-lined man's garment, usually with a hood), lassoes for catching deer, bags, boxcalf, tawed leather, and many other things. In fact, in the 1920s there were leather factories in Lovozero, so why not also sausage and meat factories, souvenir workshops, factories for manufacturing high-quality glue from antlers, and other types of enterprises? Reindeer breeding most certainly also means employment for the population.

In the past, the Saami used everything that came from the deer so that reindeer meat made up, as it still ought to, a large part of the Saami diet. However, nowadays in our district it is thought better to let the meat rot than to give it to people, even if their lives depend upon it. The Saami used to prepare home-made sausage from the blood of the reindeer, adding meat, fat, and flour to the blood, and later on they also added onion; they made fritters and they drank the fresh blood for medicinal

purposes. The deer fat was used to prepare jellied specialities and also for medicinal purposes. The contents of the stomach were used for treating the hide, and so on.

Nowadays, instead of raising standards within the sector and providing a suitable level of technology for the processing of its products, its total destruction is underway and, along with this, the disappearance of the indigenous population of the Kola territory. The natives have started to get mixed up with the big multinational family. Fear for the future of reindeer breeding in our district has seized the Saami, Nenets, and Komi peoples.

Material from the meeting of the Murmansk Regional Executive Committee on the 23rd of September, 1988, shows that a large-scale programme is being prepared for the mining of minerals in our Lovozero District, this in an area that makes up the pastures of the "Tundra" state farm. The territory of the 8th reindeer brigade, with a head of livestock numbering 4,300 has, for example, been singled out for the construction of a village for up to eight thousand people. On the territory of the 1st brigade, with a head of livestock numbering 4,050, there are plans for the construction of a village for around two thousand people; and on the territory of the 6th brigade with a head of livestock of 3,850, in the area around the river Kharlovka, the construction of yet another village is being planned. In total, there are plans to build four villages, with a population of between two and eight thousand each.

Moreover, roads will be built leading to these villages along which there will be a constant flow of traffic and people.

In addition to this, a motorway is to be built leading to the village of Gremikha. This means that the area used as a summer pasture will be completely destroyed.

A letter from the Regional Executive Committee of the 18th of July, 1985, informed the local soviets that permission had been given to the *Soyuzmorgeo* (the Marine Geological Exploration of the USSR) to choose a piece of land and begin work on the construction of a testing area. However, at present these lands are used by the state farm as pastures for its reindeer. This means that a huge territory will be occupied by people and machinery, leaving no room for the deer.

Furthermore, in July 1986 it was made known to the "Tundra" state farm that on the territory of the 8th or 9th reindeer brigades, along the river Ionkanga, the building of a series of staggered dams was being planned, together with the construction of the Iokanga Hydro-Electric Power Stations (two of them). This will involve flooding the territories of the reindeer brigades – in other words this will bring about their elimination.

In addition to this, every year, without the approval of the Lovozero District Soviet or the state farms, the Regional Executive Committee has been designating certain areas of land for the construction of military posts and for other purposes, such as various scientific and exploratory expeditions, causing hundreds of hectares of pastures to be taken out of use every year. The situation is not better for the state farm "In the Memory of

Lenin", also situated in the Lovozero District (around the villages of Krasnoshchelye, Kanevka, and Sosnovka).

Issues such as these are worrying the administration of the "Tundra" state farm, since it is threatened by ruin. I am enclosing a copy of the speech made by the director of the farm, Mr. A. G. Yefimov, at the party forum at the District Party Conference in November 1988 in Lovozero (quoted from the district newspaper *Lovozerskaya Pravda*):

> *"Another sore issue is our reindeer breeding. It is a well-known fact that following the coming five-year plans, further development in our district will take place, first of all through exploitation of deposits in the central part of the district. The construction of two industrial complexes is being proposed with accompanying big settlements, together with the building of a road to the village of Gremikha and a hydro-electric station on the Iokanga River. What will all this mean for our state farm? Well, I can give a sample picture that looks like this: The 9th and the 1st deer brigades will be practically deprived of their territory. The 8th brigade, with a head of livestock amounting to more than ten thousand deer, will be partially divested of its territory. Where can they go when at present we already have a very strained situation with regard to pasture and grazing space? Before it is too late, we have to tackle the future development of the reindeer breeding sector in a way that makes it profitable. In my opinion, there is no great need to build the Iokanga hydro-electric power station. The Kola Peninsula at present exports energy abroad, so why block yet one more river and flood an enormous amount of land that is perfect for grazing deer?*
>
> *I am generally concerned by the fact that these issues are decided in government offices and not put forth for discussion among the people involved.*
>
> *Another problem in our sector is how to survive in the area where the Serebryansk water reservoir is situated. What is going on there at the moment can be described in one word – robbery. Herds No.5, No.3, No.4 and No.7 are located on this territory are constantly raided by poachers."*

Visitors often ask us, the representatives of the Saami intelligentsia, why the Saami drink, why the young people do not continue their studies after finishing school, why the young men don't get married, why the young people are not interested in getting involved in cultural activities, why there is such a high suicide rate among the Saami, and so on.

It is embarrassing for us to hear these types of questions 70 years after the Great October Socialist Revolution. Nevertheless, it is a fact that these negative phenomena have become the standards of life for the Saami – a fact that is irreparable as long as the extremely intensive industrial development and exploitation of natural resources go on.

Our future, the future of the Saami, the Nenets and the Komi, looks so problematic that it is impossible to find words to describe it. However strange it may seem, the last 70 years have stifled the laughter and joy in the Saami people. When the older generation recollects the past and how life was then, joy appears in their faces. They worked hard, but in the evenings they gathered for fun and games: to dance, to listen to Saami tales, to make needlework as eagerly as though competing to see who could produce the most beautiful articles. Every young man settled down to married life. Today, all of this represents a distant and, it seems, irretrievable past. What happy memories will there be to talk about if the last plot of land is taken away, if the future brings about the disappearance of the Small Peoples in the European part of the Soviet Union? If, before 1917, the Saami were living throughout the whole of the Kola territory, then why were they driven together to one place, to Lovozero? And yet now the situation is such that even this little patch is rapidly disappearing. There is no time for laughter and happiness here. Large-scale construction work is beginning. Strangers will arrive from all over the globe with their customs, morals, and traditions. Will they care about our problems, our traditional occupations, our food? They are coming here to earn big money. Poaching will increase as will the destruction of nature. To them everything will be alien, so why should they regret its destruction? They will be temporary residents on our land. In summertime, they will go back to where they come from on holiday, to places where everything blossoms and smells sweet. *They* have somewhere to go, somewhere to relax.

But what about us? Who will think of us? The Saami do not like to go away in the summer. We do not want to miss even one of the light polar days – we do not want to be separated from our land, from our familiar food, from our customs and our language. Our territory is so small that there is hardly any place left for us to move into with our deer. The only thing that remains for us is to leave this world that has already for several decades been so ill-intentioned toward us. We all feel this very strongly. Didn't we love our land and its nature? Didn't we take care of it? So what is left for us to do?

Nobody takes note of the problems concerning skills and training for the indigenous inhabitants. Even if one of the locals has completed his studies at an educational institution, he will not find work in his subject area. He will not be offered any because everyone except the indigenous inhabitants has many relatives and acquaintances all over; but our young people, though, do not go anywhere. Like other people in the world, they are attracted to their native land, the tundra, to the memory of the smell of soup made from reindeer meat; and so they stay, hoping to have one more chance to taste it. In the expectation of something good, they sit around and become spongers and alcoholics, and after some time, they end up taking their own lives.

This year, the District established a post in the District administration for national issues. The post was given to a new-comer who was not

interested in our problems, who had never met a Saami family, let alone a deer brigade. This person gets his pay, so why should he bother about national problems, when he has none? Does this person understand what reindeer breeding means to us? That it is a necessity of life and has been such for centuries, not just here and now? Newcomers to the area need vegetables and fruit, and we need fish, meat, deer, the forest, the lakes, the mountains and all that has surrounded us from the cradle. Will he understand that it requires 10 years or more for the lichen in the tundra to regenerate? Otherwise, it will not regenerate at all and its disappearance will have a negative influence on my health, my life, and my well-being. Well, so what? It is all the same to him. The most important products for him are vegetables and fruit, and they are everywhere. He has what he needs to live. Newcomers to the area and Russians are surprised – how is it possible not to like fruit and vegetables? To them, it seems mad that I prefer a cup of reindeer blood to a piece of fruit; and that after having eaten vegetables, for three days I don't know what to do to wash them down and take the taste away in order to feel right again. Who is capable of understanding all this? Probably only a Saami.

Even without the new construction projects, the Saami have for a very long time been surrounded by military camps, hydro-electric stations, and a multitude of new settlements under construction, all of which have already damaged the topsoil and vegetation, destroyed a lot of deer pasture, polluted the water, reduced our fish catches to zero, and severely limited the number of animals we can hunt. All this has already undermined the economic and social basis for the existence of the indigenous peoples on the Kola Peninsula. How much is it possible to destroy? The new construction projects will finally ruin all that was left for the Saami to live from in the Murmansk Region.

In order to confirm what I have said so far, I shall call attention to some of the delegates' speeches:

1) In the report (i.e., of the District Committee) very little attention is paid to the protection of nature. Questions of ecology are not dealt with by the District Committee and are not given due priority. Yet the problems draw closer and closer. Although our District covers a large area and although there are still clean lakes, if we do not realize the importance of protecting the environment today, in 10 or 15 years' time it will be too late. We will not be able to catch any fish in lakes such as Lovozero and Umbozero if we do not insist on the construction of water treatment installations at the Lovozero Mining and Ore-Dressing Plant to rinse the flourine from the shaft waters. The new staff of the District Committee needs to pay particular attention to this problem. We cannot leave our children without a future.

2) A speech called: "If Fish Could Talk".
   An accidental remark had jogged the imagination of one of the speakers. So he attributed magical hearing and a human voice to the

   classical pike (classical, because the pike is a much-used figure in Russian proverbs and fairy tales). With a flash, the predator appeared before one of the directors of the Lovozero Mining and Ore-Dressing Plant:

   "Aha! Caught you red-handed! Now you won't get away again, my dear!"

   "But I'm not planning to either. I shall probably not be alive tomorrow anyway!"

Up-to-date information is available in the first issue of the journal *The North* for 1987. On pages 86 to 87, there is a commentary by Mr. V. V. Kryuchkov, doctor of biology and head of the Laboratory of Nature Protection of the Kola Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. He writes:

> *"The Lovozero Mining and Ore-Dressing Plant discharges waste-water into the Lovozero and Umbozero lakes. The chemical content of the water in the Sergevan River has changed significantly. The mineral content of the water – made up of fluorine, sodium, and hydrocarbonates – has increased almost two-fold."*
>
> *"Part of Lake Lovozero has been exposed to many years of waste-water discharge from the Lovozero Mining and Ore-Dressing Plant with a telling effect. Five to ten per cent of the fish are anaemic and suffer from diseases of the skeleton. An area of polluted water has also been identified at Lake Umbozero."*

Thus we get an impression of the contradictions that exist in connection with the industrial activities. In theory, the state has supported, and even taken the initiative, to make progressive declarations and resolutions in various international organizations. Yet in fact the ecological situation in many districts, ours included, has got worse. Methods of purification turn out to be untrustworthy and there is little understanding of environmental problems as being political problems. This is probably why the authorities in charge, the medical stations and other bodies involved, have said yes to ecologically harmful projects, although reluctantly. Now there is increasing hope that stormy discussions will help to eliminate this approach that has been so typical throughout the years of stagnation, and to replace it with *perestroika* attitudes.

We are deeply upset by the fact that once economic robbery has been planned, it will actually break out. Every day, we await an offensive by an army of conquerors of the Kola Peninsula, of the Kola North. This army will most certainly fulfil its plan in time. But what about the Saami? How will they be able to live on afterwards? This will probably be of little significance to the destructive army of construction workers.

Maybe some people will say: "This is sheer emotion". But I think that any honest and good-willed person should be concerned not only about his own fate, but also about the fate of every other group of people or nation. Such a person should imagine himself in the place of human

beings in want, of human beings who, through someone else's fault, now stand on the brink of the precipice. He should not remain indifferent, but take all possible measures to save these doomed people. Hereby he, would do a very moral and humanitarian deed.

The Saami are feeling more and more sorry about what they have lost instead of appreciating the "comforts" that they, according to a speech given by the First Secretary of the Party District Committee at the District Party Conference, have obtained.

The First Secretary, Comrade V. A. Strakhov's speech:

"Our district is by right considered a national district. Among the 17 peoples and nationalities living here is the major part of the Saami population – a people of the Far North – participating actively in the implementation of economic and social tasks. In accordance with the existing party and government provisions, the Saami enjoy all of the privileges to which they are entitled.

"This year, the boarding school was conferred the status of a national school. In the primary classes of the schools of the District centre, the Saami language is taught. Collections of poems by the Saami poets Oktyarbrina Voronova and Askold Bazhanov have been published. In accordance with the decision of the Executive Committee of the Region and the District Executive Committee, practically every Saami family in the District centre is guaranteed a comfortable flat. This is a very positive development."

"Every Saami family" – that means several families together, sharing 28 to 38 square metres; in other words, parents with small children and grown-up sons and daughters with their children. This is the "positive development" he is talking about.

Mr. V. A. Strakhov goes on to say:

"However, we are also seeing some alarming tendencies. On the one hand, the granting of privileges to the Saami and Nenets is not always correctly interpreted by the Komi, who also consider themselves to be indigenous inhabitants of the Far North. On the other hand, certain representatives of the Saami intelligentsia have recently been speaking out about the need for national exclusivity and special privileges for the Saami population. (This is something that I know nothing about).

"Thirdly, there are still many unsolved problems among the Saami – alcoholism, bachelorhood among a large percentage of the men, and a high death rate due to acts of violence.

"The questions of inter-ethnic relations and inter-national education require a serious and balanced approach. Let us reflect together on what the problems are and how we can solve them in order to use the multinational composition of our district to encourage the development and the mutual spiritual enrichment of all the different nationalities."

The Saami live in a state of constant low spirits due to the problems mentioned by Mr. Strakhov, whose speech thus confirms what I have been writing about from the very beginning of this article. These are the only lines that the First Secretary devoted to the indigenous population in his report, which takes up three columns in the district newspaper. Nevertheless he, too, raises the question of the terrible problems facing the Saami.

Nobody knows how to solve the problems, so that the Peoples of the Far North can live and be happy in their traditional ecological surroundings, but everybody knows how and with what speed it is possible to create the destructive problems that threaten to wipe out the Small Peoples from the face of the earth. Meanwhile, every day more and more of these types of problems are created.

Every day brings only disappointment. All that has been said in this context serves as an answer to the questions that visitors to our region like to put to us.

More than 25 years have passed since the Saami were resettled from their native villages to Lovozero. The Saami still lament their destroyed settlements, as well as the old wooden village of Lovozero, which was destroyed by the implementation of the general plan. The Saami regret that they have lost their nomadic way of life. The answers to the questions posed by interested visitors are all to be found in these circumstances.

It is necessary to take every possible measure to ensure that under no circumstances should further large-scale construction work be allowed in the one small corner left for the Soviet Saami. Sites other than the reindeer breeding district of the Kola Peninsula will have to be found in order for the construction organizations to carry out their plans.

People to whom vegetables and fruit are the most important kind of food will always be able to find a piece of land somewhere to grow them – even around their own houses. They will always have their traditional foods. But for us, the Peoples of the North, the most important thing is to preserve our pastures. A pasture is not, however, only one *desyatina* (1.09 hectare) of land – hundreds and hundreds of hectares of land are needed for just one herd.

Other circumstances, too, give occasion for alarm: when someone comes forward with a problem and tries to have it solved, then the high authorities interpret this as an expression of emotion and as a preconception or an ambition on the part of the initiator. The authorities behave as if they have been humiliated and offended; and to spite the persons who came forward with problems, the authorities carry on their own plans without any thought for anyone else. They forget about morality, humanity, democracy and *glasnost*, to show people that *they* are the bosses, that *they* are in power.

Nobody wants to take our problems to heart. This callous attitude is leading to the complete disappearance of some peoples under the socialist system. And nobody cares – which was never the case before the

Revolution of 1917, and which could never have happened then, because at that time families were growing and young men settled down to married life. Did they have a harder life then? Perhaps, but we do not live any better today. The wages of the Saami are miserable; many do not have any earnings at all. There has never been a time during my life when our wages matched prices. What about my 130 roubles per month? Yet the authorities will not pay a pension of 120 roubles per month – it is not the done thing in scientific institutions. The pension I have accumulated by honest work has already been waiting for me for six years. Meanwhile, I continue to earn 130 roubles per month although the work has become much too hard for me. But there are no qualified persons to take over my job, the administration and teaching of Saami language studies.

A teacher of the Saami language cannot find any work. She sits at home unemployed because the newcomers are not supposed to learn Saami, but only their own mother tongue, Russian. And how many of them there are! And how much construction work they palm off on us! Will we ever be happy? Everybody's heart is broken and we will be released only through death. This is how we, the Small Peoples live.

According to the will of the heartless local officials at all levels, we yield everything to the newcomers so that they will not call us enemies of the people and of everything progressive and forward-thinking, or nationalists, chauvinists, and many other things.

I have lived my life, and yet what have I got from it apart from sickness? I have only experienced joy from my work. The rest of the time my mind is overwhelmed with thoughts about our problems – sadness, melancholy, and pain fill my heart and leave me alone only when I lose myself in work to get rid of them, while hundreds of my fellow countrymen at similar moments get drunk on vodka. Along with two other colleagues, I have preserved myself in order to be able to express my pain in written words. I have made myself a lot of enemies who think I am a "saboteur" and I have a lot of enemies among the local authorities. For a long time they have been looking the other way when they see us, or they take vengeance because we want to live on this land in ordinary human conditions.

We appeal to the great Russian people, our older brother as peoples have called it, to help us solve our problems. We hope that the great Russian people will take upon itself this mission and responsibility in this time of difficulty and not leave us halfway, so that we will all dissolve into one big mass, in the manner that the strong call "the way of lesser resistance."

We don't want to dissolve, we want to survive, to sing our songs, dance our dances. We want to listen to the radio in our native language, to look after our grandchildren, to see the sun in the sky out of the windows of our flats as before when we saw it from our tents. We want to eat fish from the lakes, wear our national dress, drive past our reindeer in the tundra, and be happy and rejoice like other people. We would like to feel the

superiority of the socialist order to the primordial community, because in primordial community the Small Peoples lived a full life: were actively employed, looked after their children, wore fine clothes sewn with their own hands, brought up children properly, and ate their favourite food. Nowadays, we have been deprived of all this, and we have got nothing in return. We have no occasion to buy beautiful clothes for, and we do not know how to make them nor what from. We have no reindeer; young people have no children; they do not get married; they have forgotten what this is all about. Blocks of flats are built in such a way that nothing can be seen from the windows because the houses are built so close that they encroach upon one another. What is more, these flats are primarily given to the indigenous inhabitants. This is what is known as being buried alive, as though we would not have enough time to enjoy the darkness in the other world.

In order to solve our problems more quickly (they admit no delay; people die in their 50s; a few live until their 60s, and suddenly they are gone, taking everything with them, which is terrible to think of), we must ask the other peoples in a brotherly way what is necessary to solve our problems quickly or at least to get onto the right track and break the deadlock. People are ashamed to express their wishes because they have been driven into a state of numbness.

PROPOSALS

1) To take all the necessary measures to ensure that permission is not given to build the planned industrial projects in the Lovozero reindeer breeding district in the Murmansk Region. Industry is draining the lifeblood out of the reindeer breeding sector, which provides the indigenous population with products and employment. To give permission would mean that a people would disappear, along with its culture and language, a people that is on the verge of disappearing as it is. The reindeer herdsmen are in fact the main preservers of the language.

   People of other nationalities living among us also like reindeer meat and clothes and footwear made from reindeer hide, and they even come to work in reindeer breeding as herdsmen.

2) To create in the village of Lovozero a workshop for manufacturing products from reindeer: sausages, souvenirs, clothes in the national style, leather, high-quality glue from antlers, and other types of projects.

3) To modify the general plan for construction in the village of Lovozero, the only national Saami village in the European part of the Soviet Union. In accordance with the existing plan, closely packed houses are being built about 5 to 12 metres apart. The houses encroach upon one another to such an extent that it is impossible to see either a clump of earth or a bit of sky out of the windows.

   The elderly, sick people, and small children sit in the flats as if in a tomb. The flats are given primarily to Saami, Nenets, and Komi people

who have spent all their lives under an open sky where they had a lot of sun, light, and fresh air. The reindeer herdsmen do not want to leave the tundra to go and live in one of these flats.

People will have darkness enough in the other world. Town planners have forgotten that a comfortable flat raises peoples' spirits and improves their efficiency at work.

Our local authorities allotted such a flat to me and my elderly mother and brother, who is a herdsman, while providing themselves with something better in the same house.

It seems that it ought to be the opposite, so that the local authorities, who approved such building-projects, would choose the dark flats for themselves. They have been summoned to make things better for people living here, but in reality things get worse, and these flats are primarily given to indigenous inhabitants, who do not dare to complain.

In some of these flats they have put in not windows, but slits, 80 centimetres in width. We have asked them if they could install windows, but no, this would be impossible – the project cannot be spoiled. But has anyone asked for permission, and from where, to spoil people's health? People live in such flats under electric light even during the daytime. You just do not want to walk into a flat like this. Three years have passed and we have not had any pleasure from this flat. On the second day, my mother started to sleep outside because of the grief she felt when she discovered that it was impossible to see anything out of the windows of the flat, but then her legs could not carry her outside the house anymore and she died with a heavy heart, oppressed by the flat we had received. My mother who was a work veteran, one of the pioneers of socialism, a mother of many children, the mother of a son killed at the front, had deserved better. I am not ashamed to talk about her. She was a truly hard-working person: the type of person whom it is difficult to find today among the Saami, who have been taught not to work. Now my brother and I suffer in the flat and cannot get used to it. Let it be damned, together with the designers who probably won state prizes for the way they economized on resources in building it at the expense of peoples' health.

Such flats should be used as hostel-rooms for young people who spend most of their time outside their flat and only live in it for a short period.

4) To train representatives of the Small Peoples so that they can work in the soviets and party organs.

5) The Saami's most urgent problems are the lack of trained, experienced, and skilled persons and specialists; the problem of how to strengthen the national culture (Saami folklore group); the failure to marry; the need to encourage in people a love for their native tongue, so that the children will master the Saami language; how to ensure that our

children continue to study after secondary school and go on to further and higher educational institutions; the need to maintain the non-competitive entrance system for natives; the need to increase the interest in the reindeer breeding profession, in particular among girls, for whom even the term "tentworker" evokes aversion, having become old-fashioned. It should be replaced by something like "brigade deputy responsible for domestic affairs" or "brigade deputy responsible for herdsmen's accommodation."

In order to solve these problems strong stimuli are needed to make Saami life move forward, for example the possibility of getting one's own flat or an increase in wages depending on individual need.

For the Peoples of the North in the European part of the Soviet Union (the Saami and the Nenets), an individual approach is necessary because the problems of the Saami have been terribly neglected.

Extensive rights are at present being given to the local soviets. The soviets could solve all of these problems on their own but they lack the courage, the decisiveness, or possibly the simplest thing of all – the desire to help the people in their area, the natives. They do not want to see them really happy.

It is impossible to obtain the simplest things, such as premises for Saami folklore groups, where participants in Saami folklore ensembles could meet as our parents used to in order to play, dance, listen to songs and tales, do needlework and so on.

The soviets should be an authority to which people can turn with their grievances and their positive comments, hoping to find sympathy, support and advice, but very often this is not the case. The soviets should represent a parental home, and in a parental home the children have always got and still get advice, help, solutions to problems, and hope for the future.

Before the Revolution, there were no soviets – everyone solved his own problems. If a bigger tent was needed, one was made, for a young family, for example, or the old one was expanded. People tried to do everything to make things better and easier for everyone. But our soviets are like a family in which there are children and stepchildren. The children take advantage of the all benefits, but the well-being of the stepchildren depends on the mood of their step-parents. Therefore, they are afraid of turning to their angry "parents" and in order to spare themselves, for the sake of their health and well-being, they resign themselves and comfort themselves by thinking that everything will be all right in the end, which is better than being punished yet again.

(Mrs. A. Antonova is Secretary at the Administration of National Schools under the Ministry of Education and is teaching at the Centre for Native Languages and Russian in Lovozero)

HYDROELECTRIC POWER ON THE KOLA PENINSULA: WHO ARE MASTERS OF THE LAND?

A letter to the editor of the district newspaper "Lovozerskaya Pravda", 10th of December, 1988, from S. Galkin, V. Sorvanov, V. Galkin, I. Yakovlev, N. Lukin – reindeer herdsmen from the state collective farm "Tundra", representatives of the indigenous peoples of the North (Saami), and V. Filippov, I. Chuprov, Y. Fillipov and L. Artiyev (Komi).

Although we reindeer herdsmen seldom go to the "civilized world", which means any kind of settlement outside of the tundra, alarming rumours have nevertheless filtered through to us recently. It appears that a provision of the CPSU Central Committee on the development of the Murmansk Region has paved the way for the construction of a hydro-electric power station on the Iokanga River.

How can anyone after this believe the nice words about the people – in this case the indigenous inhabitants of various regions – being the true masters of their land? How can such a serious and crucial decision as the construction of a hydro-electric power station be taken without the people concerned being consulted – those who were born on this soil, whose ancestors it reared, and whom it still feeds and clothes, although poorly and scarcely by virtue of its sadly decreasing capacity?

Do the influential officials who have been provided with such unlimited power and who have taken upon them the responsibility, or rather irresponsibility, for a highly arbitrary decision that bypasses the people concerned, do they imagine the damage their decision will cause to the ecology of our district?

The impression is that this does not bother them at all, and this is why we consider it essential to come to the defence of our tundra against, in our opinion, such rash decisions.

One does not need to be a specialist to know that the construction of this type of energy-producing system will entail the flooding and swamping of many hundreds of hectares of reindeer pasture currently in use. In the given situation, this means practically the whole territory of the 9th reindeer brigade. This will lead to a significant reduction in its head of livestock. It is a well-known fact that, even under the present conditions, our pastures are feeding a number of deer that is considerably higher than the calculated optimal figures.

Another industrial complex has already been planned to be built in the very near future at Keyvy: new mines, new plants. We can imagine for Keyvy a fate similar to that of Monchegorsk, and we know what this will

mean for our region. The fishing that has been practised since time immemorial will soon belong to the past. It has, by the way, almost disappeared anyway "thanks to" industrial waste from the mining plant already in existence. It will also mean that once again we, the local inhabitants, are to be deprived of our main livelihood – reindeer-herding.

We are left to imagine an area around Keyvy of several kilometres where the vegetation has died off due to harmful gasses...

We are also alarmed by plans to construct a road to the north coast in connection with the industrial development of the district. This road, intersecting all of our pasture lands, will seriously damage the agricultural balance in the whole area. A sad example of this type of intervention in the environment can already be seen in our district around the Teribersk Hydro-Electric Power Station and the Serebryansk Road. Because of the violent intrusion of various enterprises, two brigades in the area have been deprived of their best reindeer calving areas.

The damage that such "transformations" will cause to our land is not limited to what we have already mentioned. The fish spawning-grounds and the tundra sanctuary will also be affected.

All this has forced us to make an appeal through the press to the prudence of those who, instead of us, hold the fate of our land in their hands: think, consider what you are doing, stop!

"LET US SAVE OUR HOME"

BY MARIA NIKOLAYEVNA UDINKAN

The North is our land and the land of our ancestors. It is as precious to us as a true fatherland.

The land of our ancestors is in a catastrophic condition. The natural surroundings of the Peoples of the Amur region are being destroyed.

During the Soviet period from 1930 onwards, Small Peoples such as the Nanai, the Nivkh, the Oroch, and other Peoples of the North suffered greatly. During the Stalinist repression and the years of the Second World War, we lost the best of our sons. During collectivization, the People of the Amur hoped for a renewal of life. However, the work of the collective farm workers turned out to consist only of the fulfilment of the state plan for fish catches, fur skins and agriculture – a plan that became more ambitious with every year. Yes, these were the most difficult times of all. In winter and summer, in frost and blizzard, in pouring rain and the heat of summer, the fishermen were out fishing. They had neither holidays nor days off. They were wet and frozen and had no special work clothes or shoes.

We, their children, hardly saw our fathers and mothers under such difficult conditions. The exhausting work drained people's strength and health.

Families were poor and the means for existence were sparse, despite the fact that the head of the family went out fishing both in winter and summer to fulfil the state plan.

My father, Odzal Kiso Zakharovich, died in 1944, his life cut short at the age of 44. Thus we, his children, were left to ourselves, too young to get work and to earn a living. This is one of the examples of how our Small People lived under Stalin from the time of collectivization and after the War.

Today our land, the land of our ancestors, impoverished and injured, is threatened by new dangers.

As a daughter of the Amur I, together with all my kinsmen, am worried about the future of my native land. We therefore turn to the Congress of the Peoples of the North, firstly to get the construction of the planned nuclear power station stopped. If a place must be found to build it in the Far East, it should not be in the Khabarovsk or Primorye Territories. The only rich (at least so it was once) river, with plenty of water, is the Amur River, which must remain crystal clear as a source of natural wealth for the Khabarovsk and Primorye Territories. We want to safeguard the Amur River and the taiga, in other words our people, and to create conditions that will help to revive our national culture, language, and traditions.

Our region is very rich in all the resources necessary for the life and normal development of the Peoples of the Far East. Only a rational

approach to our natural wealth (timber, furs and fur-bearing animals, game and wildfowl, wild berries and medicinal plants), to the enormous expanses of rivers and lakes, to our fertile soil and to the riches underground (coal, natural gas, gold and other precious metals) can secure the life of the Small Peoples. Yet we are so poor that our standard of living is three times lower than that of our ancestors. It is very rare that you meet a one-hundred-year-old man in the Amur region. Yet our ancestors lived to be a hundred or more, and grew to a height of over two metres. They were true masters of the soil; they loved it, they spared its riches and yet knew how to use them. From the age of seven, children were taught how to use the land properly. Compare the older generation with the younger one. What has become of it? There is nothing left. The riches of our fatherland are nowhere to be seen – they are virtually disappearing. The land has been emptied of timber and of furs, and the rivers have become shallow. There are no more fish, and if there are any to be found, they are poisoned. Moreover, the Amur River is state property. The native peoples are not allowed to exploit the riches of their own river or the taiga for their existence, as all this belongs to the state. The inspection (fisheries and hunting) fines people, who show up at the Amur or in the taiga. The people, deprived of natural resources and of its traditional forms of food, is dying out. We read a lot about saving our forests, rivers, and lakes. Saving from what? From unreasonable people? It is possible to preserve the riches of our lands of the Far East, and scientists have to listen to the voice of the people. The people is the master of the land.

Therefore, wise people and scientists, stop the construction of the nuclear power station. We have natural resources in the form of gas. In our Far Eastern regions it is possible to exploit this energy instead of nuclear power, so that it will be possible for us to continue living on this land, the land of our ancestors.

I am a resident of the town of Amursk and in the town I have 25 grandchildren. In the name of the lives of the children I demand that the building of the nuclear power station be stopped. We, the Nanai and other peoples, are also suffering from the effects of our industrial enterprises that throw harmful fumes out into the atmosphere and the water, poisoning both children and adults and causing them to die.

Why have scientists not finished working on their proposals for ecologically safe industrial production? Who is responsible for this? Having not even finished a plan for ordinary, safe working operations at the factories in Amursk, they should not be thinking of building a nuclear power station and of locating it in and around the region of the Evoron Lake, which is linked to the Amur River. Why are the scientists not listening to the voice of the people?

We are against the building of the nuclear power station and demand the dismantling of the Amursk cellulose paper plant, the activities of which have not only caused the deaths of so many people but have also destroyed the natural resources of the Far East. Trees have been felled and

are still being felled; the rivers have begun to dry out, the fish are dying and yet nobody is concerned about the regeneration of these natural resources.

We demand legal intervention!

My proposal is as follows:
A self-governing body should be created in the territorial centre of the Far East, in Khabarovsk. The body should be made up of representatives of the Small Peoples who would protect the entire generation of Peoples in the Amur region and the North, so that the land of our ancestors could flourish once again.

(*Maria Nikolayevna Udinkan is a Veteran of Labour, pensioner, member of the "Ilga" club and of the Association of Small Peoples of the North in the town of Amursk*)

THE UDEGE PEOPLE EXPELLED FROM THE LAND

BY VICTOR A. SHNIRELMAN

The bloody events unfolding before our eyes in the south of Russia and the adjoining former Soviet republics have for some time overshadowed the problems of the indigenous peoples of the North, which were being widely discussed in our press during the 1980s. At that time, the situation in the North was recognised as being close to catastrophic and in danger of developing into true ethnocide. This year's visibly deteriorating economic conditions in Russia and growing social and ethnic tensions have added new questions to old ones: What will a market economy bring to the Small Peoples of the North? How can the new economic development be tied in with their traditional social structure and use of nature? What new traits will now appear in their social and political behaviour?

From an international, ethno-political point of view, complicated conditions in Arctic areas are by no means surprising. While carrying out field studies in Alaska last year, I was surprised to come across a whole mass of conflicting interests – those of the Federal Government of the United States, the local administrations, big business, and the indigenous inhabitants in the area – all fraught with potential and real social and ethnic conflicts within the framework of the Western economic model. At that time, it occurred to me that Russia too would not be able to avoid conflicts – between the interests of the indigenous peoples on the one hand and those of big business and local administrations on the other – during the transition to a market economy. Add to this that in the North American nations the possibility of avoiding or ironing out such conflicts is conditioned by highly detailed legislation worked out by generations of law-abiding Americans and Canadians. This is not the case in Russia. Therefore, it was possible to predict that during the process of social and economic reforms, the lack of clear-cut legislative guidelines would cause conflicts to take on more acute forms and have a tendency to escalate because of the absence of legal mechanisms to prevent or at least soften them.

Unfortunately, these predictions have recently started to come true. An example of this is the "Udege affair" or the case of the Russo-South Korean joint venture "Svetlaya" which is already being widely and emotionally discussed in the press of the Primorye Territory (Primorsky Krai), but which the public in Central Russia has hardly heard about. Yet this is an important precedent, giving occasion for serious reflection on the changes to occur in the fate of the indigenous Small Peoples and on the prevailing euphoria, according to which any joint venture enterprise is indiscriminately attracted to the exploitation of Russia's natural resources.

The fate of the Udege people in the valley of the Bikin River in Northern Primorye shares in many ways the fate of other indigenous Peoples of the North. Semi-nomadic hunters and fishermen, inhabiting until 1936 12 small villages, became subject to mass collectivization at the end of the 1930s and were resettled, first into two settlements, and then at the end of the 1950s, into the area that was to become their permanent residence – the village of Krasny Yar. At present, the indigenous inhabitants of the village live side by side with Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Koreans, and others, but the majority of the population (six to seven hundred people) is Udege and Nanai. As before, the forest and the river are important food resources for the villagers and provide them with employment at the local state hunting farm. The significance of their traditional economy has recently grown in connection with failing state deliveries, and the inhabitants are now relying more and more on traditional economic activities, alongside the cultivation of personal plots – a phenomenon that has become increasingly popular over the last 10 years. Meanwhile, the state hunting farm is only capable of providing employment for up to 100 people, and the village has a high level of unemployment. This forces the local inhabitants to rely on a subsistence economy to an ever-greater extent.

The possibilities for making one's living from the natural resources of the area – the mid-stream and upper-stream region of the Bikin River – are limited. According to calculations by specialists, this area can support the activity of around 77 to 86 hunters, whereas in actual fact there are 55 state and 170 seasonal hunters. This puts an increased strain on the natural environment, which is particularly evident in the nut-tree area of the mid-stream river valley. The upper reaches of the Bikin River represent an extremely important natural reservoir that provides the rest of the area with fauna for hunting and fishing. Yet the Udege people's supply of meat evidently leaves much to be desired, and a drop in the rate of fish catches in recent years has only aggravated the situation.

The situation in the social and cultural spheres is little different from that of the other Peoples of the North. An intensive process of Russification, which has increased over the last 10 years, has led to a perceptible loss of traditional culture and language. Alcoholism is growing, criminality increasing. The rate of tuberculosis is five to six times higher among the Udege than among the non-indigenous population.

All of this would have created a very depressing picture, were it not for the Udege's recent efforts to revive their culture and language. An important role is being played here by the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Primorye Territory, which was set up about three years ago. Thanks to the energy of its leader, Mr. P. V. Sulyandzig, the Association has, at its own expense, built homes for Udeges having large families. This year (1992), it has achieved the introduction of the teaching of the Udege language for the younger pupils into the local school; and very recently, from the 18th to the 20th of September, at the beginning of the hunting

season, it organized the first Udege festival for many years, bringing in elements of the traditional rituals that even today are of great significance in the life of the Udege, particularly in hunting practices. Thus the small Udege people has gathered all its strength and is attempting to overcome its unfavourable situation. It would seem that their courageous fight should give rise only to genuine respect and desire to help, but...

The origins of this story go back to the late 1980s when the idea of setting up a Soviet-South Korean joint venture called "Svetlaya" was first introduced. At that time, in an attempt to avoid the economic crisis that was imminent in the region, officials from the local forestry industry suggested setting up a joint venture, which would pave the way for increased trade in timber on the world market and supposedly promised large profits. The idea was also substantiated by a desire to make efforts to avoid an impending ecological catastrophe. What had happened was that quite unexpectedly, even from the point of view of the experts, the silver-fir forests in the upper reaches of the Bikin River and neighbouring regions had over the previous 5 to 10 years begun to dry out and die. The forests were all the same age and very dense. This meant that they might die over a very short period, no offsprings having taken root. Consequently the local forestry officials decided to fell them as fast as possible, all the more so because the non-exploitation of these forests led to annual losses of tens of millions of dollars. Of course, it was the intention of the authors of the project to regenerate the forests through new plantations. This was to be done through a special Scandinavian nature-conserving technology, which would protect the young shoots and provide other special methods for the regeneration and care of the forest areas. Furthermore, what made the joint-venture idea so attractive was the promise of roads and timber mills to be built, together with big sums being put aside for social purposes. In short, as one of the initiators of the joint venture, the General Director of the territory forestry company "Primorsklesprom", Mr. E. F. Grabovsky, put it: the aim of the joint venture would be "to strengthen and develop the northern regions of the Primorye Territory while observing the legal rights and interests of the indigenous peoples."

At first glance, all this looked rather convincing and seductive, and plans to set up the joint venture received support from a number of central ministries and departments, and from the Territory administration. The project was even approved by some specialists. However, there were a number of people of a very pedantic and utmost inquisitive nature who could not forget their concerns about what the real economic returns from the joint venture would be, in particular in what concern the Primorye Territory and its northern regions; they wanted to know what the ecological consequences of the activities of the joint venture would be, and ultimately how these activities could be coordinated with the interests of the indigenous inhabitants of the region. Therefore, the plans to set up the joint venture and the initial stages of its activity were repeatedly discussed at the Territory Soviet of People's Deputies and in different

committees, where it must be said that from the very outset they met strong opposition.

So what was the problem? The fact that the Peisk Plateau situated on the upper reaches of the Bikin River is a region unique to the whole of Russia with regard to its natural resources. The most southerly areas of permafrost in Asia are found here, where they are linked with a system of marshes that, together with the virgin forest reserves, is capable of condensing moisture even from fog, feeding the Bikin River and its tributaries. Massive clearing of these forests would lead to landslides and intensive erosion, destroy the delicate ecological balance, and cause local rivers to shallow or dry up. In addition to this, the dwelling-places of rare birds would be destroyed (of, for example, endemic species such as the scaled finch and Lakiston's fish-owl). The natural breeding grounds of important, marketable, fur-bearing animals would also be destroyed (in particular, the dwelling-places of the population of female sable at the upper reaches of the Bikin River). The migratory paths of a number of animals and birds would be disturbed, along with a number of spawning grounds in the upstream areas of many rivers. Finally the clearances would also affect the natural habitat of the Ussury tiger, which is protected by international law. All of this would also have a negative influence on the neighbouring Sikhote-Alinya, on protected fauna and flora and, according to experts, have negative ecological consequences, the nature and extent of which are difficult to predict.

Many experts who had analyzed the documents of the joint venture drew attention to the lack of clarity of many highly important technological elements, which seemed furthermore to lack proper elaboration. The distinguished forestry specialist of the RSFSR, Mr. V. A. Rosenberg, for example, was of the opinion that in the areas where the silver-fir forests were drying out, there were sufficient young shoots to ensure the natural recovery of the forest. However, recovery could only be guaranteed if at least 60% of the young shoots were preserved during felling. In the documents presented by the joint venture "Svetlaya", there was no description of any type of technology guaranteeing this.

Unfortunately the venerable specialist's anxiety turned out to be justified. According to experts' calculations made at an even earlier point in the history of the project – at the beginning of 1991 and on the site – the Finnish nature-conserving technique had already been put out of action and felling was being carried out with Russian methods that did not ensure the protection of the young growth. Where saplings had been preserved, they had dried out due to over-exposure to sunlight and damages that another independent expert, Mr. R. V. Vinnik, had already warned against. According to the experts' documents from the 3rd of April, 1991, live forest had been felled in the Terneisk District and not only dead wood as had been promised. Furthermore, a temporary camp for the construction workers had been set up not far away from spawning grounds. Other kinds of infringements of the laws regarding felling and clearing of forest in Russia had also taken place.

Since one of the most obvious weaknesses of the project was the inadequacy of its ecological measures, two special ecological commissions were brought into the region in 1990: one from Moscow headed by Mrs E. A. Gayer, people's deputy of the USSR and member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and the other a Commission of people's deputies from the Territory Soviet. Both commissions stated that the project documents were insufficiently elaborated, in particular with regard to ecological measures and economic prospects. In a resolution from the Soviet of Ecological Experts of the State Committee of Ecology and Nature Exploitation of the RSFSR of the 22nd of March, 1991, it was noted that the joint venture had not given adequate documentation for its ecological and nature protection measures, had presented incomprehensible economic forecasts, and had not taken into account the interests of the indigenous peoples. It was recommended that a protest be lodged against the ongoing activities of the joint venture on the grounds that they were illegal. It was also recommended that all work be suspended and that the area around the upper reaches of the Bikin River be unconditiionally excluded from the activities of "Svetlaya".

The question of exploiting forestry reserves in the upper reaches of the Bikin River (the Hunting and Forestry Area of the Verkhneperevalsk Forestry Collective Farm) played a special role in the battles that flared up. In a span of 30 years, the joint venture had proposed to exploit an area of about 440,000 hectares in size, preparing 48,800 cubic metres of timber, the lion's share of which was in the upper reaches of the Bikin River (62% of the area and 66% of the timber cutting). In encroaching on these resources, the joint venture relied on former practices where departmental interests had taken priority over those of the indigenous inhabitants. Its opponents had set their hopes on the changes that had taken place in recent years, changes that had strengthened the role of public opinion significantly and also the self-awareness of different nationalities, along with their efforts to stand up for their sovereign rights. In other words, the joint venture had laid its plans without the agreement of the Pozharsk District Soviet of People's Deputies, under whose jurisdiction the upper reaches of the Bikin River fell. It had not taken into consideration the opinion of the inhabitants of the districts or their needs for carrying out traditional economic activities. Neither had it studied properly the ecological consequences of the tree felling and it had made no efforts to work out plans for the processing of timber on site (and this last point made the contract disadvantageous as a whole for Russia and in particular for the Territory). By the way, on the 9th of August, 1990, after one of its regular discussions of the joint venture project, the Territory Soviet passed a resolution that "according to preliminary calculations...it is possible that similar or even larger sums of foreign currency could be earned with less harmful effect on the environment by gathering wild plants, hunting, developing tourism, etc., than through the proposed clearing and felling of timber..."

But what about the Udege themselves? Did they remain indifferent witnesses to the heated strife? No. Aware of the threat that was facing them, they came out against the plans for forest clearance in the upper reaches of the Bikin River together with the rest of the inhabitants of the Pozharsk District. As soon as the plan to set up the joint venture was brought before the Primorye Territory Executive Committee, the inhabitants of Krasny Yar held a general meeting and took an historic decision to confer upon the Krasny Yar Village Soviet the status of a national village, with all the territory of the valley along the middle and upper reaches of the Bikin River under its jurisdiction (20th of March, 1990). It is important to point out that this decision, taken to reinforce the indigenous peoples' rights to the territory, was upheld by the Executive Committee of the Primorye Territory Soviet (5th of April, 1990) and the Pozharsk District Soviet (30th of November, 1990). The fairness of such a decision was confirmed by ethnographers from the Far Eastern Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, who emphasized that the exploitation of the upper reaches of the Bikin River for tree felling would deprive the Udege of around 50% of their hunting territory and inevitably lead to a rise in social and ethnic tensions.

In their actions, the Udege people of the Bikin valley proceeded from two extremely tell-tale precedents, which had led to different results. They knew very well that in the past when timber was felled in the river valley of the Great Ussurka (Ima), the local Ima Udege were forced to resettle. Their former community dispersed, and they dissolved among other population groups. On the other hand, when in 1988 the question of forest felling arose in the region around the Samarga River the local Udege from the village of Azgu protested loudly, as a result of which the State Timber Industry withdrew their claims on the local forest areas, which were consequently put at the disposal of the Udege. However after having revealed a week spot in the case of the Samarga Udege, the still all-powerful forestry authorities were not prepared to step back any further. So the Ministry of Forestry of the USSR objected to further exemptions of forest reserve areas from industrial exploitation, referring to the unfavourable consequences for the forestry industry, in particular, the risk of a reduction in employment for workers in the branch. The same argument was used by the chairman of the Primorye Territoryl Soviet, Mr A. Volintsev, and by the chairman of the Primorye Territory Executive Committee, Mr. V. S. Kuznetsov, in a letter to the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR on the 3rd of May, 1990. The letter openly stated that the granting of the land around the upper reaches of the Bikin to the indigenous inhabitants went against the interests of the agro-industry and the state forestry industry and made it impossible to establish the joint venture. (At this point, one might very well have remembered E. F. Gra-bovsky's promise "to observe the legal rights and interests of the indigenous peoples"!). In connection with this, it turns out that the actions of the Primorye Territory Executive Committee – represented by its Deputy

Chairman, Mr. B. F. Bespalov – were highly dubious. On the 5th of April, 1990, he signed a request for the exemption of the forest areas of the upper reaches of the Bikin River from industrial exploitation, while at almost the same time (30th of March and 3rd of April) approving the establishment of the "Svetlaya" joint venture. The contradictory decisions by the Executive Committee enabled the question of these forest reserves to be pushed aside, and this played a fatal role in the further development of events.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to get the Udege out of the scrape, the Primorye Territory Soviet, through its resolutions of 11th of March and 14th of April 1992, obliged the head of the Territory's administration, Mr. V. S. Kuznetsov, to draw up a decree about areas designated for traditional land use along the Bikin River, and recommended the inclusion of both the mid and upstream area of the river in the ethnic territory. But it was only after the decree of President Yeltsin, "On urgent measures for the protection of the places of residence and economic activities of the Small Peoples of the North", had been issued on the 22nd of April, 1992, that Mr. V. S. Kuznetsov finally issued his resolution No. 165, wherein he designated as areas for traditional land use only the midstream area of the Bikin River, which is 407,800 hectares instead of the 1,250,000 hectares that the Udege had justly requested. Regardless of the presidential decree, the resolution was taken without preliminary consultation with the Association of Indigenous Peoples or any regard for the opinion of the local Udege and even in defiance of their opinion, as Kuznetsov without a doubt was fully aware of. There can be no doubt that in taking this step, the head of the Primorye administration was guided primarily by the interests of the industrial magnates of the timber industry.

Resolution No. 165 gave a free hand to the industrial magnates who had overestimated the timber reserves in the neighbouring Terneisk District and were in danger of suffering great losses if they lost the upper reaches of the Bikin River. Bearing this in mind, V.S. Kuznetsov issued directive No. 455-r on the 21st July, 1992, demanding that wood cutting areas be designated in the upper reaches of the Bikin River for the "Svetlaya" joint venture. This was against the recommendations of experts, the decisions of the Pozharsk District Soviet, the decision of the Primorye Territorial Soviet, and finally in defiance of the interests of the indigenous inhabitants! What legal standards was V. S. Kuznetsov guided by in taking this step? Unfortunately, he could lean on the inconsistent (to put it mildly) policies of the State Forestry Committee, which in the beginning repeatedly declared that the timber felling in the upper reaches of the Bikin River was inadmissible, making reference to the absolute necessity for the respect of the rights and interests of the indigenous peoples (letters from the Deputy Chairman of the State Forestry Committee V. I. Sukhikh, of the 2nd of April, 1990, and the 3rd of July, 1990, and the Deputy Chairman of the State Forestry Committee, B. K. Filimonova, of the 4th of June, 1992, and the 10th of June, 1992). Yet on the 26th of June, 1992, the Deputy

Chairman of the State Forestry Committee, Mrs. P. M. Barsukova, in answer to a request by word of mouth from the Ministry of Economics, allowed felling work to begin in the district concerned.

Kuznetsov's directive signified new heights in the escalation of the conflict. On the 8th of August, armed Udege began to picket the area designated for clearing and from the 10th of August onwards, they mounted their protest at the building of the Territory Administration in Vladivostok. Here, it is worth noting that the actions of the Udege were fully supported by the population of the Pozharsk District and that they also met with understanding from the population of Vladivostok, as well as the Ussury Cossacks. The presidential adviser, Mr. A. V. Yablokov, came out in their support as did the Chairman of the State Committee on Nationalities, Mr. V. A. Tishkov. The Territory Soviet of People's Deputies, at its meeting on the 24th of July, 1992, repealed the Directive No. 455-r as being contradictory to the legislation of the Russian Federation and the resolution previously taken by the Territory Soviet. On the 26th of August, the Small Soviet of the Pozharsk District Soviet issued a special directive prohibiting any kind of activity by the joint venture "Svetlaya" in the upper reaches of the Bikin River. One of the most forceful reactions to the joint venture was that of the administration and population of the village of Svetlaya in the Terneisk District. The village had formerly agreed to the "Svetlaya" joint venture's forestry project but now, in light of recent events, it was declaring its dissatisfaction with the joint venture, which had not kept its promises concerning nature conservation and the development of the social spheres of the village community. Discrimination had also been noted against Russian citizens employed in the joint venture.

Meanwhile the other side was not idle either. Mr. V. S. Kuznetsov went to the Primorye Territory Court to have the decision of the Territory Soviet on the repeal of directive No. 455-r declared invalid. He won the case in that the court relied on his resolution No. 165 and also on outdated orders, according to which the timber reserves in the upper reaches of the Bikin River belonged to the Svetlinsk Forestry Collective Farm. In so doing, the court failed to take into account present-day attitudes to ecology, the existence of territories designated for traditional land use, and the appeal of the Association of Indigenous Peoples to the court to have Mr Kuznetsov's directives in these matters recognized as invalid. The case will be examined by the Primorye Territory Court on the 8th of October, 1992. At the same time, the Territory Soviet has sent an appeal to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, which will also be examined in the near future.

Meanwhile the Udege are in a very determined mood. They are appealing to the public and all people of good will, once again making the point that the valley of the Bikin River is the homeland of their ancestors and should unconditionally be recognized as an area for traditional land use. "The taiga," they write "is our saviour. It cannot be evaluated in monetary terms. It is our life, our native home, our wet-nurse. If the taiga

is cleared, the Bikin Udege will disappear." And these are not empty words. The Udege are a small but courageous people brought to the point of despair by bureaucratic procrastination and red tape games. The elder Udege are ready to defend their forest with weapons in hand, for they understand that without the taiga neither the Bikin River area nor their grandchildren will survive.

And while these events are unfolding, the American company Weyerhauser is looking closely into the protected area of the Oroch people at Sovetskaya Gavana. This company has already caused irreplaceable losses to the forests of North America...

Isn't it time for Russia to examine seriously the question of how to protect its precious, irreplaceable natural resources and work out guarantees (not only in words but in reality) for the rights of the indigenous peoples to preserve their unique and sustainable relationship to the natural resources and their unique cultural heritage?

1st of October, 1992

(V. A. Shnirelman is Doctor of Historical Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow)

LETTER FROM PYAKU-TO

A letter from the inhabitants of Pyaku-to to Alexander Pika. January 1990.

Dear Alexander Ivanovich Pika,
I got your address from Dmitry Ilyich. It is very nice that you have not forgotten us. Dmitry Ilyich told me that you visited him 10 years ago. There is now no one here who, like you, has been around the nomad camps. Our Surgut District newspaper correspondents never visit the nomad camps. They write about the oil workers and about how nice it is in our district; they write about what has been built: oil pipelines, highways, electric power-lines, and so on. They don't write about us at all. Once a year, in March, people come to our village of Russkinskiye for the hunters' and fishermen's festival. They arrive on one day and they leave again on the next, and they write only about the festival: about the concerts, the national games, the gathering...

Nowadays, we have got motor boats. In the winter, we also have the deer as a means of transport and, in addition to them, our *burany* (snowmobiles). The journalists might have come to Russkinskiye, approached any Khant, and said: "I am a journalist and I would like to go around your nomad camps and see how you live, what you do, what difficulties you experience." But they don't go anywhere. I think that they want warm cars and soft seats. They do not want to go very far. When I go to the Surgut fur-processing farm, our bookkeepers and the other workers ask: "How are you out there? Isn't it cold for you? Maybe it would be better to move to town and to live there?" I tell them that our people have lived for centuries in the forest and on the tundra, generation after generation, hunting and fishing, and that we would like our children and grandchildren, too, to hunt and fish and breed reindeer.

Alexander Ivanovich, please forgive me for not having introduced myself. My name is Pyotr Dmitriyevich Lozyamov and I am 35 years old. I would like to tell you about the past life of our people, the Khanty and Nenets.

In our region around Lake Pyaku-to, it is indeed true, as you write in the newspaper, that our life has since 1983 become difficult. I do not mean that there is less food, but that the oil workers interfere. However, I do not think that the workers themselves are to blame - it is the Ministry that is responsible. The Ministry considers only the future and not the past. The oil workers get orders from Moscow - to draw up plans urgently; to build installations, motorways, oil pipelines, and temporary roads for the transportation of the oil rigs. These days, our life is difficult. In the past, ministries in the Soviet Union never thought about the people. I don't mean just the Khanty or the Nenets or the Mansi, but of all the peoples

who live in our country - the "nationals". Thanks goes to Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev for having slowed down somewhat the activities of the ministries, which have been building communism so deficiently and so negligently. I am a semi-literate person, an inhabitant of the tundra, a hunter, a fisherman.

We see with our own eyes how the construction workers are building roads. They begin by clearing narrow belts in the forest of trees, so that the tractors can get in. The tractors fell as much wood as is needed for making space for the road, and then bulldozers from both sides push the wood into the middle of what will be the road. Then the construction of the road begins. It is laid directly on top of the felled wood. The workers simply cover it up, first with sand, then with concrete slabs. A commission goes out to approve the road; the road is approved and everything seems to be O.K. The wood seems to have been taken away, yet it is actually under the road. How can you do things in this manner? Both the road builders and the other organizations have their own saw mills, and they fell wood for the saw mills. In the areas where they are building roads, they could use the wood for the saw mills instead of covering it with sand. In other places, where oil pipelines or electric powerlines are being built, the wood just lies around, left to rot. We see this with our own eyes when we go hunting. Once I heard, on the radio, a Japanese person saying that our timber could be very useful to his country. If our people let the Japanese clear the construction-site areas, they would take all the wood, right down to the last wood chips. Yet we in the Tyumen Region spoil so many good natural resources, and this is foreign currency that is being thrown down the drain... And you say that we need computers and tape recorders...

Next, I am going to write about the rivers and lakes and about pollution. Thirteen years ago, in the Pyaku-pur River we had plenty of fish, but now there is very little left. Soon after they discovered the Karamov, Sutormin, and Krainie oil fields, these began to yield oil. I have met many oil workers - some of them I even know quite well. They say: "If our managers continue to work in this way how are you Khanty going to live? We, we will be going away again, back to the continent, but it will be difficult for you to continue living here. In another 10 to 15 years, there won't be any fish left at all."

Even the oil workers themselves say that oil flows into the streams and rivers. Some people ask when all this will end? And if the fish die, how will we feed ourselves? Since 1976, the forest has been burnt off over an area of about 80 kilometres by sportsmen and anglers. The forests from the Pyaku-to lake to the Pyaku-pur River were very good for hunters. There used to be a lot of wood grouse, elk, deer, squirrel, and sable. Nowadays, we hunt in the Nadym District.

Alexander Ivanovich, you wrote in the newspaper that we live in the Purov District, but earn our money in the Nadym District. Yes, because we have nowhere else to hunt. All the forest has been burnt down along the Pyaku-pur River and is one mass of scorched, burnt earth. In the



This Khanti family from Piaku-To does not have a house in the village. They built themselves a house in the taiga 1900.

newspaper, you wrote that we hunt in the Nadym District. If we did not hunt in the Nadym District, then how would we live? We would gladly hunt in the Pyaku-pur River area, but we cannot; the whole place is one big fire site.

I would like to write about the oil and water pipelines. The oil pipelines are being built very badly. They very often spring leaks into rivers, lakes, and swampy marshland. Reserve pipelines ought to run through the large rivers, so that if there is a leak, oil can be sent along reserve pipelines. This would be better. There should be monitors situated at the wide rivers and large marshes, so that if a pipeline bursts, a controller can call up and warn about falling pressure in the pipeline. When they find out that an oil pipeline has burst, they spend days and days assembling an emergency team before finally arriving at the site of the spill three days later, and by that time God knows how many cubic metres of oil have already poured out!

They are also illegally pumping out water from our rivers to the drilling sites. The streams become shallow and the lakes too, and in the winter a lot of fish die. It is as if they were pumping water out of the rivers and oil into them. We, the people of the forest, are also living beings. To continue living in this way is impossible. There will be no forest or even clean water for our children and grandchildren. If they need so much the water that they are pumping out into the drill-sites, they can take it from the Moscow River. Why don't they take it from there?

And then there are the oil jets that pollute the snow. We are hunters and fishermen. We drink water from melted snow in the winter. The deer eat the snow and the polluted reindeer moss. Around the jets, an area of about 30 kilometres in radius is being polluted. I believe that this sort of thing should be stopped in our territory. We are, after all, also living beings.

Honourable Ministries, if you really need the jets so much, put them in the Red Square. Perhaps I speak incorrectly and you will say that our home, the USSR, is very large. There is a Russian proverb, "The house is small, but there is always room for one more." Our home is very large, and nevertheless we offend one another.

In continuing, I would like to write a little about the directors of our cooperative fur-processing farm. They do not fulfil the duties of their posts. The most important thing to them is to take our furs, fish, wildfowl, cowberries, and cranberries. In exchange they ought to bring in food for us, the hunters and fishermen of Pyaku-to. If we have to go with our reindeer to the village of Kochevye for food, it is a distance of 160 kilometres. Is it really right that they should take from us, while we receive nothing in return? They could bring the products in from Noyabrsk. They do not even bring us matches. In our cooperative, the situation with regard to flats is very bad. Over the last three years, nobody has received one, not even the specialists. If the directors provided flats for the specialists, then they would hold out longer when they come out to us to work, and we would be able to manage better.

Another point is medical service. I do not think that the Surgut District's medical service is in a position to treat us in our tents, to fly around in the Pyaku-to area; the distance from Surgut to the Pyaku-to is 250 kilometres. To give vaccinations they flew here only once. The district doctor told me that we do, after all, live a long way away and this involves very great expenditure. A helicopter costs eight hundred roubles an hour. I think that medical service should be made available from the town of Noyabrsk, because it is only 90 kilometres from Pyaku-to. However, today if one of us falls ill and there is no communication, then the only thing to do is to go by reindeer to a near-by oil rig, or in summer on foot. Our leaders have been promising us communications for five years. In spring, it will be six years.

Something else. Our Pyaku-to area is now considered to be part of the territory of the town of Noyabrsk. In the town of Noyabrsk and the area around it, there are many poachers and anglers. I know that people in Noyabrsk go hunting around the oil rigs all year-round. One among every four of them has a gun. The hunt inspectors are not in a position to work properly in their own district. I sometimes go to Noyabrsk and therefore I know about the hunt inspection, but other hunters do not even know that there is a hunt inspection in Noyabrsk. I believe that the inspectors do not work as they should. They ought to go to the tents once in a while; after all, the tents are part of their territory. I think they should be obliged to get acquainted with us hunters.

I also want to point out that the drilling technicians shoot domestic reindeer. Some of them have threaded-barrelled rifles and unlicensed weapons. I can quote figures for these sport-hunters. In 1983, there were five hundred of them, and since then so much time has passed that their number has probably increased. I think that if the hunt inspectors are unable to carry out their duties, we need to do the following: a poacher caught with a gun out of the hunting season should be fined one thousand roubles; if caught a second time, two thousand roubles. Yet as it is, very few fines are given to poachers. If they were fined large sums of money, they would soon learn when not to hunt.

I would like to write about the town of Noyabrsk. The civil aviation service brings berry pickers, anglers, and sportsmen to our area. I think that where the "nationals" live in the Pyaku-to District - along the upper reaches of the Nadym River - and in the Sugmut District, holiday-makers should not be admitted. Can it really be right that there is a law that permits sportsmen to be flown in by helicopter, so that they can shoot our deer? If one of us approaches the police about this, they do not even want to talk with us.

I know these people in Noyabrsk. Some of them I've known since 1979. The managers and directors even fly to the Krasnoselkupsk District to fish and hunt and even to the Krasnoyarsk Territory. They fly to Krasnolselkup, where they refuel before flying on. They find excuses for ordering a helicopter by saying that they must inspect a gas pipeline or electric power-line or that they have to fly somewhere on an official trip. I would say that in Noyabrsk there is no public prosecutor and no Soviet power. Noyabrsk is considered to be the youngest town in the Tyumen Region and everyone thinks it is the best town. Well, I think it is the worst! And I'm sure that these sorts of goings-on are not just limited to Noyabrsk.

We, the inhabitants of the Pyaku-to lake area, think that those residing temporarily in the region - the anglers and sportsmen - should not be allowed to come into our areas. These areas are, after all, that on which our livelihood depends. Honourable Ministries, please help us in this regard.

From all the inhabitants of Pyaku-to.

Pyotr Dmitriyevich Lozyamov,
Khanti-Mansi Autonomus Area, Surgut District

WHO OWNS THE LAND?

BY V. LEBEDEV

"Every human being has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..." (From the Declaration on Human Rights, art. 25,1, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 10th of December, 1948.)

In the night, the noise from a cross-country vehicle woke us up. "At last the fodder has arrived!" Anufry Platonovich cried with relief and went outside.

The director of the Novorybinsk state farm, L. Stoicheva, was sitting in the vehicle's cabin, and from the rear the district club agitbrigade (propaganda brigade) jumped out, headed by S. Porotov, the third secretary of the Party's district committee, together with L. Baikalova, the state farm Party organizer.

"Please, go inside." Anufryi pointed towards the door of his tundra *balok* (a log-house placed on sledge-runners), while he himself threw a quick glance into the back of the vehicle. Empty!

But of course, how would the leadership and the *agitbrigada* know that mixed fodder was the only rescue for his (private) reindeer, who could hardly stand on their legs any more and all looked as if they might drop dead at any moment. And those who had already dropped dead had been so skinny and meagre that even a polar fox wouldn't eat them.

The reindeer pastures in the Eastern Taimyr tundra were destroyed in 1970, when the Chief Directorate of the North under the Ministry of Agriculture of the RSFSR (now the State Agro-industrial Committee, Gosagroprom) ordered the state farm to graze ten thousand reindeer in order to produce marketable meat on the hunting territories, where people had for centuries been catching polar fox, fish, and wild reindeer, and had only kept small herds for transportation.

The people working in the tundra were not asked whether such a thing could be done. The directorate just gave its orders. But after only one year, four out of five animals in the state farm's herd had died from fodder shortage. And even today, the hunters are still suffering from problems with forage, and so it will continue for another 20 years until the reindeer moss has regenerated.

The *balok* has become crowded. But the guests remain silent and so do the hosts. Elena Trifonovna lays the table. "We are taking the *agitbrigada* to the herders," the party organizer explained. "But we know the rules of the tundra: when passing by someone, you must always make a stop and have a cup of tea."

Stroganina (raw, frozen, and very thinly sliced fish or meat) was prepared for the guests, together with cooked meat from a wild reindeer,

the last one they had and on which they should have lived another few days. They drank the tea and ate the food. And then the vehicle rushed off again to the herders' brigade, whirling up clouds of snow. A snow-storm had recently raged, and people had been struggling hard to save the remains of the herd. They did save them, but a month later, during the calving, all the calves died because of the weakened state of the hinds.

At that moment, Anufry Platonovich understood what was in store for the herders in the near future. He followed the landrover with his sad eyes, then gathered his reindeer team and went off..

Anufry went to the settlement with his pelts to deliver them to the state farm. Not long before this journey, he had been very lucky: he had, among other polar foxes, come upon a unique one – a fur with a blue tint and with black hair at the tip of the tail. Such an animal was believed to bring luck. Yelena Trifonovna had worked this fur with special care, although even without this the preparation of fur-skin in their family was not a handicraft but an art. To every pelt, Yelena Trifonovna would then attach the label "A. P. Uksusnikov". This was how she had been taught from childhood.

But many wives of tundra workers have stopped working furs. Many do not even know how to do it. It is a hard and thankless task. Now their husbands bring furs to the state farm office as they are, damaged by the traps, frozen stiff and bloody, and throw them all on the floor in a corner.

Yelena Trifonovna would never permit her husband to deliver a polar fox in such a state, although she more than once, puzzled, has said to herself:

"Isn't it strange, you work the fox, the state farm pays you three roubles for a pelt and then it collects the same three roubles from your husband! For the very same pelts!"

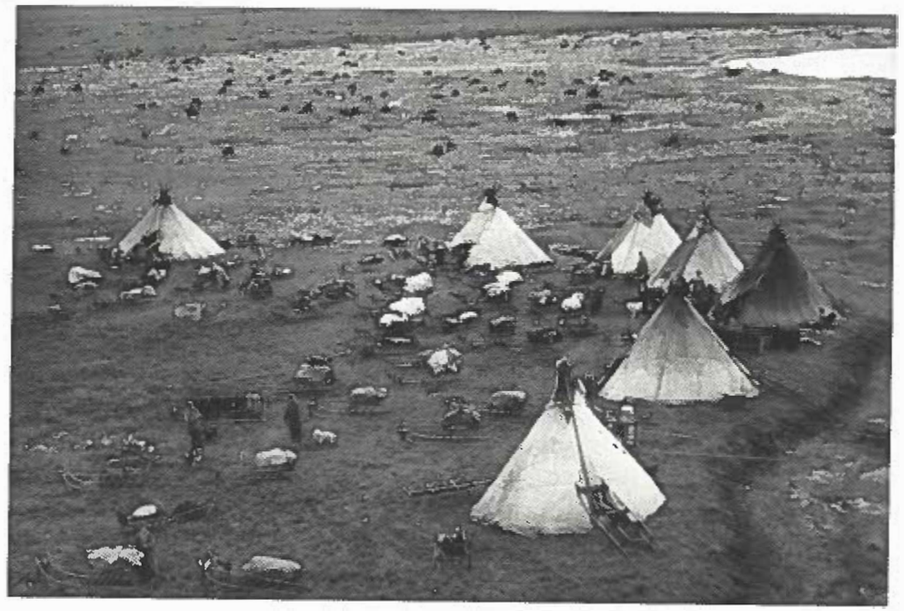
Sheer reason will not master this kind of arithmetic. I will try to explain. For the state farm there is no such thing as the family Uksusnikov. There is the hunter Anufry Platonovich and the unskilled labourer Elena Trifonovna. The hunter pays the unskilled labourer for working up his furs. Only he does not do it from his own pockets, but through the state farm office.

Now let us return to that same office. Anufry spread out the furs in front of the engineer responsible for hunting. The man did not even look at them. All the furs, including the unique blue pelt, were thrown on to a heap of sorted and unsorted furs, and the labels ended up in the garbage can.

"Thirty a piece!"

Anufry remained silent, as always. At the counting house, he paid for four bags of mixed fodder and hurried home, to the tundra, to the reindeer, as far away as possible from the dark yellow snow of the settlement, from the soot, from rubbish heaps and air that left a pungent taste in the mouth.

In the Uksusnikovs' absence, people call them *kulaks* (a pejorative term for well-to-do peasants). Everything in Anufry's household is his own: one hundred reindeer, the *balok*, the sledge, the gear, the nets, the traps, the tools... There is not one single nail that belongs to the state farm. And the family roam where their forefathers roamed.



Nenser camp (Photo: Martin Sne).

Seen from the settlement, in which half of the people have neither work nor a household by which they can live independently, the tundra may look like a place where the last *kulaks* have gathered. Only what kind of *kulaks* are they? Anufry Platonovich talked to me somewhat along these lines:

"When I was young, few people lived in the settlement. Everybody lived in the tundra. Now only a few have remained in the tundra, and all the others live in the settlement. But what can you do there? What good are such settlements?"

I had to answer him as I saw it: "Probably they are there in order to provide the tundra workers with medical care, education, culture, consumer services... The people who work in the settlement should take care of the tundra workers, and the tundra workers in their turn should catch fish, and go hunting, and manage the reindeer."

Andrei, Anufry's third son and the only one out of six to have returned to his father in the tundra, intervened in the discussion: "In the settlement there are eight hundred people, and in the tundra only one hundred. This means that eight people should be taking care of me. Why then do they send us the *agitbrigada* instead of mixed fodder? Do they really not know that our reindeer are dying?"

Andrei continued: "I got a tooth-ache and had to fly to Khatanga. There was a queue there, at the dentist's, and I had to wait for two weeks before I finally got in. All in all, I had lost more than a month's time."

He is right. But to his statistics I have to add, also, the district centres like Khatanga, where for every tundra worker you will find another 15 to

20 people, all of them newcomers. And further up in this pyramid you have the area, the territory, and Moscow. You simply cannot count them. How much does all this amount to? And who is paying?

These questions disturb the tundra workers, too, and make Anufry Platonovich ask the following question:

"How much do they sell our polar foxes for on the "continent"? How much does one get, for instance, for a beautiful one?"

"The exact price, I do not know." His question caught me unprepared. "But in the shops of Moscow I have seen gold-tinged foxes at four to seven hundred roubles a piece, and fur coats made up from bits and clippings at up to ten thousand a piece. In West Germany, a polar fox will cost four to seven hundred marks."

"And the fish?"

"The state price for a smoked one is seven roubles fifty kopek, and according to prices agreed upon, fish can be as much as twenty roubles a kilo. In America, up to 20 dollars."

"And we get 20 kopek from the state farm. Who gets the rest? Why do they not allow us to sell our furs and fish ourselves?"

Since the tundra workers are not allowed to sell furs and fish themselves, even in a successful year, the Uksusnikovs will – with a catch of maybe 50 polar foxes and a ton of fish – receive only 1,700 roubles from the state farm for their family of three. This comes to 47 roubles and 50 kopek for each person per month. And if they come across only 20 foxes, then their *kulak* pay will come down to 19 roubles and 20 kopek.

What could I answer Anufry? I could only admit that workers' wages in attendent spheres, as based on stable salaries plus local northern allowances (allowances meant to make it attractive for people to move to the North to work), were until 1989 10 times as high, and are now even higher. For example, the head of a village soviet will receive four hundred roubles, the secretary three hundred, plus allowances. All in all, up to seven to eight hundred.

Neither have the leading workers of the agroprom any reason to be dissatisfied with their salary, although I heard a state farm director complaining: "How is it possible to equate the pay for the work of a village soviet secretary with that of a state farm director! She has only middle-range training, whereas he has a higher education!"

But once it was different. Just look at the material from the 1926 to 27 Polar Census. It shows that an average household would then buy goods imported from other parts of the country and food for 76 roubles 12 kopek a year, and that a polar fox would be worth 40 roubles. Two foxes would be enough for a family to maintain itself. Every fox more would mean a net income.

But all this was before integrated cooperation, before collectivization. At that time, there was private trading in furs. There were northern fairs, balanced prices, and the necessary goods.

Now a family can hardly make ends meet, not to mention savings... By

the way, even the 19 roubles 20 kopek that the state farm agrees to pay the tundra worker will be delayed for many months, from the first until the fourth quarter of the year. The state farm is a constant debtor to which the bank will not give money until there are receipts on the production sales.

As to what can be bought, Andrei had the following story to tell: "We had saved money to buy a *Buran* (snow scooter). The old one was disintegrating. We ask the state farm to provide us with a *Buran*, but they do not provide it. I fly to Khatanga to the fishing cooperative and ask, but there they do not sell it. And we cannot rely exclusively upon our reindeer; they are too weak from fodder shortage."

On the reindeer herders' day, A. Volos, first secretary of the Communist Party's District Committee, instead of pay and *Burans* brought the workers the challenge order, the Red Flag, and presented it to the director. And he added in an address to the tundra workers: "You have to work well. Do not expect help from anyone."

And people sat silent, with stony faces, because they had no words, neither in Dolgan nor in Russian, to express what was boiling inside them.

At this point, I will permit myself another digression into history. The administrative apparatus of the North was created and gathered strength as the state monopolized the right to dispose of the local production. In the 1930s, the building of collective farms began. Fur hunting fell into the hands of the state, fur being a valuable export article. In the 1940s, factories were build, and the fishery was monopolized to such an exent that the fishermen were neither allowed to eat of their catch nor to take home even one fish. Such crimes were punished with either execution or labour camp. According to the archives of the local public registration office (ZAGS), eight out of ten who died in those years were children. The diagnoses said: dystrophia, tuberculosis, stillbirth. The average life expectancy was 22 years. In the 1960s, the state farms were created. They began to deliver meat to the industrial centres, at any price.

And this whole many-storeyed social building grew upon the shoulders of Anufry Platonovich. And now it devours about 99% of the gains from his production.

His son has a lively and inquisitive mind. He remembers his school lessons well, which is why he remarks: "At school we were told that in the time of feudalism the highest tax would be the church tithe. This meant 10% ?!"

Now let us imagine that a fox with the badge "A. P. Uksusnikov" is sold at an international auction for dollars. And the price has been settled in agreement with Anufry and the income tax has been paid to the state. In one word, what would happen if the tundra worker established direct market contacts? The state farm office would collapse, and not only that, but the entire administrative colossus mentioned above. It would collapse, left without any means of existence.

The tundra workers would have liked to organize cooperatives, but the state farm leaders and the managers of the district agroprom said: "There will be no cooperatives in our Khatanga District."

And the district committee and the district executive committee agreed.

But then the inter-state farm procurement association was created, and it turned out to be an even bigger monopolist. With it came added jobs for newcomers in the district centre. When Anufry learned about this, he was right in suggesting: "Maybe it's because of them that the mixed fodder has grown more expensive?!"

Leasing might break this vicious circle. Yelena's brother, Spiridon Trifonovich Zharkov, an old fisherman, explains: "We are hunting and fishing on our tribal lands. Everything we have here is ours. We now want to rent our own land, but we are not allowed to." And he justly asks: "Why?" The Gosagroprom of the RSFSR is also in favour of leasing. Its 75 pages "Recommendations Concerning the Organization of Work Relations and Payment under the New Economic Conditions" try to convince us that it is most profitable for the lessee to deliver his production to the leesor – the state farm. But the tundra workers from the Novorybinsk state farm would want this less than anything. They have already tried this kind of "leasing".

It is well-known that for a long time industry has not produced the boat-motor type "SM", without which fishing with a sweep-net is impossible. In Novorybinsk, you can't get it either. And so the state farm and the agroprom decided to pay the fishermen not 20 kopek per kilo of fish but one rouble, and then left it to them to find out what to do. If their fishery was ruined, too bad for them; but there would be no demands from the authorities. The calculation was right. The fishermen did find out what to do. Spare parts, kept for 20 years by thrifty old men, came into use, and Spiridon Trifonovich could show up with an entire motor. And the fish? It remained in the hands of the agroprom, which thus kept dictating the conditions of life.

The Gosagroprom does not intend to give up its position. It tries to preserve its monopoly allowing leasing only to brigades and not to individuals. And this is understandable, because free leasing would make furs and fish the property of Anufry Platonovich, Spiridon Trifonovich and the other tundra workers.

The leaders of the agro-plant "Taimyr", to which the Khatanga District belongs, will not let go of their monopoly either. In plenty of time they sent a telegram to forbid the selling of furs and fish other than to the state farms. And the Krasnoyarsk territorial executive committee forbade the export of fish and reindeer meat outside of the limits of the territory, although even the Agroprom acknowledged the right of the lessee in the case of free leasing to sell his production in any part of the country.

And the Dolgan elders humbly ask the managers arriving from the outside to be allowed to lease the land where their forefathers of seven generations were born and died, where they themselves grew up, got married, and had children. They ask permission to lease their forefathers' land from well-paid strangers who are there only temporarily. And the answer they get is "No".

Returning from one of his journeys, Anufry Platonovich complained: "I cannot bend my hands." So his hands were rubbed with Vietnamese "Little Star". They had begun to grow stiff a few years ago, and now, after a working day, they become gnarled and frozen. His forearms, grown thin like those of a youth, get cold. And he is only 50.

This is the tribute Anufry Platonovich has had to pay to the winter cold. The frost is so hard that metal becomes brittle, and you cannot harness and unharness the reindeer with mittens on, neither can you set the trap, nor take the fish from the nets. And add to this all of life's being spent in a *balok*.

Polar night. Tempest. The *balok*, this light, fragile house upon a sledge, covered with reindeer hides, shakes from the blows of the wind. It seems as though if it blew just a little more strongly, it would throw the *balok* down the precipice on to the ice of the lake.

"Has it ever happened that a *balok* was carried away by the wind?", I ask.

"Yes, it has," Yelena Trifonovna answers. "About 10 years ago, there was a fierce hurricane. It destroyed one *balok*. The people ran out. There was a woman with a child, and an old man. The old man had succeeded in bringing a *sokui* (men's garment with the fur outside and with a hood) with him. He wrapped the young woman and his grandchild in it. He himself remained as he was. He froze to death."

Our *balok* was lit by an oil lamp with broken glass. There was nowhere you could buy a new one. The little flame barely flickered. One had to economize on the oil. People usually spend the time playing domino, cards, or reading, but their eyes quickly get tired. Tales and stories are best. But we had just arrived from the settlement, where we had watched the parliamentary debates on leasing, land, and property. We had even succeeded in getting hold of some newspapers. So the conversation could, of course, only be about this.

"We are hunters and reindeer herdsmen," Andrei said, dismayed. "Where in this legislation do they write about us?! Or maybe we are just cottagers doing kitchen gardening?!" He scornfully threw a small book over to me. I was mentioned in it as an author, together with a group of scientists from the Department of the North of the Ethnographic Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The book was called: "The Ethno-cultural Development of the Northern Peoples under the Conditions of Scientific and Technical Progress until 2005. A Concept of Development." I had brought the book with me from Moscow to show it to the tundra workers for the sake of curiosity. Now, I felt less happy about it.

Andrei showed me the lines where it was suggested that one might equate the tundra households with the cottage plots around Moscow and consider social services to the people there non-obligatory.

There was no way I could argue back. And although this philosophizing was not mine, I had to blush.

Andrei's fears regarding the cottage owners were not altogether unfounded.

According to the Law on Property, he, the owner of furs and fish, may deal with them as he wishes.

The basic legislation on land says that the citizens of the Soviet Union have the right to possess land for the duration of their lives. This would include Anufry Platonovich, but only if the Supreme Soviet added a special article to allow his kind of work to be considered as "farming" and not "cottage gardening". But such an article would contradict the following article on the state and collective farms' right to possess land. Farther on, the law speaks again of the priority rights of the citizens and a little before it states, that land for those who want to be farmers can be taken from all kinds of agricultural enterprises.

Even for all its inherent contradictions with regard to the citizens and the state and collective farms, the law nevertheless creates the hope that Anufry, if he makes the necessary applications, may become the owner not only of his production but also of his land.

But these are not the only problems. The following article goes on to state that the village soviet is to present Anufry's application to the district executive committee, which must then decide whether or not to give the permission.

And here begin the important "buts". In the winter time, Anufry nomadizes to the area around Lake Kyukyul, a hundred kilometres from the settlement, and during the summer he is three hundred kilometres away, at Kamen, in the foothills of the Anabarsk Plateau, an area as big as the whole Moscow Region. The settlement Novorybnoye, seat of the Village Soviet, is two hundred kilometres away from the District Centre Khatanga. In the tundra, the people hunt, catch fish, and herd their reindeer. In Novorybnoye, people work when there is work to be had, or drink if there is anything to drink. And Khatanga is in the hands of newcomers. Thus there are three ethnocultural and social niches, interconnected only as a conveyor belt carrying the tundra production. The Khatanga citizens speak of the national village settlement of "the periphery". And those who live in this "periphery" look to the tundra with distrust, because they don't know how to live there.

Three different population groups who do not understand one another. And the smallest of the three is the tundra workers. They make up only 3% of the total population, if we are to believe the material in the village soviets' books on economic conditions. Who will decide questions about land in their favour? The district executive committee? You have only to walk the corridors and offices there to realize that the indigenous people have no representatives, least of all the tundra workers – they are in the tundra.

This means that new and very necessary laws for the tundra workers do exist; but in the capricious hands of the local administration, the laws are just reinforcing the power of the apparatus.

I have talked with the District Agroprom. In reply to the question of who might become a landowner in the Taimyr tundra, there was a very brief answer: "the state farms."

"And what about the law?"

"The law concerns farmers, and here we have only hunters."

It is difficult to argue with the law, even more so with those who are entrusted with interpreting it. One thing is clear: It is necessary to return to the tundra workers the right to ownership of the land that was taken from them by force at the dawn of the Soviet regime, and to return also the land itself; in the same way as the KGB now, in the *glasnost* epoch, returns to the area the names of the tundra workers, the Dolgan and Nganasan, who were repressed in the 1930s during the collectivization campaign.

The list is long.

(From: *Severnye prostory*, July-August, 1990)

TWO LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL SEVERNYE PROSTORY

The Land Law Does Not Yet Mean Land

"Throughout the whole of last year, your journal has written about events on Yamal, about the scandalous activities of the oil and gas ministries. But as you know, many reindeer herders live and work in the same area and the fact is that their work is appreciated neither by the agro-industrial authorities nor by the collective farms. And yet everybody keeps silent about it."
S. Prostov, Salekhard

Is anyone in the Soviet Union being paid so miserably as a reindeer herder on Yamal - 60 roubles a month?

Until now we have been living exclusively from our reindeer, who have provided us with covers for our *chum* (tent), a bed, clothes, meat, and transport.

On Yamal, they have at present started to take our private reindeer away from us. The superiors say that there are too many of them. This means that the reindeer of the state farms are left untouched, while the private ones must be slaughtered and the meat delivered to the state. I think, however, that they ought to consult the reindeer herders. The problem is, you see, that it is never too late to reduce the number of livestock, but it is always difficult to re-establish it afterwards.

The chairman of the Yamal District Executive Committee, comrade Yezangi, has decided that 17 reindeer are enough for a reindeer herder. Where did he get these figures from? As a reindeer herder and a resident of the tundra, I can assure him that one will not get far with 17 reindeer. A family needs 70 draught-reindeer just to move to another place, to transport the tent and the household, and add to this another 20 for replacement. But this concerns only the reindeer for transportation. Yezangi is completely forgetting that the reindeer feed and clothe us, and that in one year you must not slaughter more reindeer than you have reared. Only if you have a minimum of two hundred reindeer, will you not be lost.

Yezangi says that the herders use state farm reindeer for food. But these are sick reindeer that zoo technicians sell to families with few deer in order not to waste the meat. This happens even though everybody knows that you should not eat the meat from sick reindeer; not even dogs should eat it. When a herdsman has few deer of his own, however, he is ready to eat even this without thinking of the risk. And what about the zoo technicians? For them it is simply a question of making money for the plan.

Yezangi also says that the herdsmen take clothes from the workshops of the state farms. We have never done that. Even the zoo technicians order



(Photo: Alexander Pika).

clothes from the tent-keepers *chumrabotnitsy* (women working in the tents in the tundra).

A herdsman clothes both himself and his family from his reindeer. In 1989, there was an article in the journal *Severnye prostory* by Anna Nerkagi, who described in detail how many deer it takes to clothe a family. A herdman needs seven reindeer for a *yagushka*, five for a *malitsa* and four for a *gus* - which makes 16 in all, and then there are his wife and children. Young reindeer herdsmen want to dress elegantly and therefore need different types of hide - white, mottled, and black.

As you can understand, it is impossible to live and work in the tundra without your own reindeer. If we begin to live from the state farm herds, the state farm will probably have nothing to deliver to the state and it will not be able to fulfil its obligations. The state farm simply does not have the capacity to provide for the herdsmen. And when it does not have enough reindeer to fulfil the plan for meat delivery to the state, it will take ours. Therefore, I would like to say to comrade Yezangi that he should first personally experience the life of a reindeer herdsman, and then make the calculations as to how many reindeer should be left to whom. The herdsmen will leave, little by little, if they are deprived of their own deer. They will simply not be able to live in the tundra. And who will do the work then?

Zoo technicians are at present driving around the tundra, observing our work. They do not guard the herds, they do not sit for days and nights in the rain; they are not freezing in winter or devoured by mosquitoes. They sleep in a warm *chum* prepared for them by a tent-keeper and yet they say that the tent-keepers are a burden to reindeer herding and pay them only

30 to 40 roubles a month. The zoo technicians do not understand that without tent-keepers there would be no herdsmen. And still they take work statistics and keep records of absentee herdsmen and tent-keepers.

How can one be absent in the tundra?! Herdsmen and tent-keepers do their work, even if they are ill, as long as they are alive. That is how we were brought up.

Who can tell us how to save our reindeer? We have never kept too large herds and we have always handled our pastures with care. The state farms have to fulfil plans and the plans get more ambitious every year. Let the state farms reduce their deer and not deprive the tundra workers of their only means of existence. This is why we had to turn to you, because your journal is our national one - you write about us.

Perhaps there is no use trying to look for the truth. Perhaps the truth does not exist; maybe it is only words and nothing real. Perestroika has not come to us. And it never will!

P. Klimov

The village of Panayevsk,
Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area

Who Has Too Many Deer?

Old Nenets reindeer herdsmen from Panayevsk say that their parents' generation kept about two hundred reindeer per family. This was considered normal before collectivization. Today, specialists from the "Gosagroprom" (the State Agro-Industrial Committee) are arguing about whether or not a reindeer herdsman's family should be allowed to keep its own deer or not. The paradox is that during the last ten years, the number of private reindeer in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Area has increased by 126,000 to almost 600,000. The pastures, however, do not allow for more than 400,000 deer. In the long run, the tundra will not make it, and neither will the reindeer. A similar situation occurred in Alaska in the 1930s. Uncontrolled growth of the number of livestock led to a sharp reduction in numbers and to a degradation of the herds.

In order to save the tundra, the number of reindeer has to be reduced. But whose? The private ones or those of the state farms? Reindeer herding on Yamal means the state farm herds and the private herds of almost three thousand Nenets.

The "Law on Property in the USSR" established full and equal rights of ownership for state property, collective property, and the private property of citizens. However, the leaders and specialists of the local agroprom are all of the same opinion: the private herds must be reduced. And why? It seems that the "marketability" of the state deer is significantly greater than

that of the private deer. Based on calculations for one hundred deer, the marketability is almost three to four times bigger. However, the calculations are based on the annual accounts of the state farms. In reality, the indicator of marketability includes meat procured from domestic herds on the "account for restoring losses", which means meat bought by contract from the tundra workers. Besides this, the herdsmen's private deer are used by the state farms as an "insurance fund". If the state farms cannot fulfill the plan for delivery of meat, if a state farm deer dies, then the herdsman must give his.

The reindeer herdsmen are hired workers without rights. They do not possess any means of production, and they do not participate in the realization of their products. Nobody thinks of improving their working conditions. Their wages are low, and yet even under such conditions they manage to pull the state farms out of their recurrent financial holes; but not out of the crisis that state reindeer herding is in at present. Here, the problems are countless. Every year the state farms of the area slaughter seventy to eighty thousand deer. Only a fifth are processed in special premises. The rest are being dealt with in the open air, in piercing winds and at temperatures of minus forty.

So what is the quality of the meat delivered? Out of every ten tons, only three tons are approved as category one. It turns out that the state pays the state farms subsidies for the delivery of young reindeer. But why? The result is that it becomes profitable to deliver underfed deer, especially calves. The farm gets an undeserved profit, and the consumers and the reindeer herders are the losers.

I can therefore answer the question as to whether state farm reindeer herding is necessary in the North with a firm "no"! Concepts related to state farm production such as "marketability", "state orders", "amount of subsidies", "social development", exist not for the sake of the tundra worker but in spite of him.

His entire fortune consists of his private reindeer that provide him with food, clothes, shoes, and housing.

The private reindeer sustain the life not only of the herdsmen, but also of the hunters. The average wage of a hunter, including all allowances, amount to eight hundred roubles a year. Is it possible to feed a family on 60 to 70 roubles a month (hunters' wives as a rule have no job)? The reindeer are the main means of subsistence and the best means of transport in the tundra. The more reindeer a hunter has, the better he lives. A simple calculation makes it clear that a household has to slaughter at least 40 reindeer a year to get meat for food, hides to replace worn-out clothes, and a cover for the *chum*. This is only possible with a herd of 200 to 250 reindeer. This was already the norm at the time of the Polar Census 1926-27, as the census material shows. But the local agroprom and consumers' cooperation do not agree with this. They oppose such norms, for the incomes from the reindeer herds belonging to the hunters will not end up in their pockets. The hunters do not want to sell their reindeer, and

all the more so today, when the rouble is worth nothing. People in the tundra do not need roubles. They need goods: weapons, snow tractors, tarpaulins, and many other things. The managers of the state farms and the consumers' cooperation know this very well, but they do not deliver the goods.

The hunters are thus forced to live by the principle "one good turn deserves another" and to exchange fur and reindeer meat with anyone who can get them the goods they need, including "fire-water". Nowadays, it is not advantageous for them to deliver their products to the state. But instead of finding ways of supplying the tundra workers with the necessary goods, the agroprom and consumer cooperation managers are demanding the liquidation of the private reindeer, leaving only those of the state farms. They are convinced that this is the only way to control economic processes in the tundra, and they do not understand that this is exactly the way to the complete elimination of herdsmen and hunters and therefore also to the elimination of reindeer herding and hunting as professional occupations.

Is there a way out of this situation?

Of course there is. The hunters and reindeer herders must unite in cooperatives of their own in order to decide by themselves how to preserve and restore pastures, how many reindeer to possess, and how many to slaughter for sale or for personal needs. This, all the more so since the tundra workers have on their side the "Law on Property in the USSR", as well as the "Foundations for the Legislation on Land". For who other than they could be the real owners of the reindeer? The managers having arrived from outside, perhaps?

Such a reindeer cooperative, the Yalemd, already exists in the Ural region of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Area. It has been established on the territory of the former collective farm "Naryan Ngrem". It seems to be one possible way to solve the problems, through healthy competition and not through administrative pressure. I think that the reindeer herders and the hunters would gain from this competition, because reindeer from the private herds are of better quality than reindeer from the state farm herds.

Salekhard A. Yuzhakov,

Vice-President of the Association of the Small Peoples "Yamal for Our Descendants"

(From *Severnye prostory* 1990, no.5, Sept. Oct.)

WHERE IS MY SHARE?

BY ANASTASIA LAPSUY

Since the word "privatization" was first heard in the Yamalo-Nenets area, both reindeer herdsmen and inhabitants of the state farm settlements have waited for an answer to this issue.

"We have worked all our lives on the central farm, so are we supposed to become the owners of reindeer?" the farmers anxiously ask.

The herdsmen also worry: "The entire state farm is living off of us. The reindeer breeding covers all losses. Could it be that we will be cheated again?"

People talk mostly, of course, about land. To whom does it belong? Who is the master? How should it be divided? And what does the very concept of "land" mean from a "privatization" point of view?

I do not think that I exaggerate much by saying that at the moment every person born on Yamal would like to possess his own plot of land with pastures, rivers, and lakes, just as he did formerly the tribal lands. We are, of course, talking about those people who are ususally called "indigenous peoples", about the Nenets people who, alas, is in practice deprived of rights in its own home, and bears no influence on its own destiny. For this reason I decided, when the opportunity came, to have a talk with the agricultural specialists, who are influential people in the area.

"How do You imagine privatization," I asked Mr. N. A. Babin, the director of the state farm of "Baydar".

"It is hard to imagine how to conduct it here in the Ural district, not to speak of really doing it," he answered. "What is actually 'land'? Summer, winter, and spring pastures, fishing grounds - in one place salmon, in another pike, in a third place just water. Hunting-grounds create the same picture. First of all, their value must be estimated, but in this we have no experience.

"Neither have there ever been calculations as to how much land a rural inhabitant needs for a normal existence, and how much we will be able to give him. There are families with approximately a thousand private reindeer, and there are others with just a hundred. How should we divide the land among them? The nomadic routes are up to seven hundred kilometres long. In the Ural Mountains, there is black ice at the moment, so that the herds have been sent off to the spring and summer pastures of the state farm. But if we divide the land? A tremendous enmity will begin."

The only possible option, according to the director, would be to reorganize the state farm into a joint-stock company or a joint enterprise with shared property. And the shares would be defined exclusively in terms of money and by no means in kind.

"We have examples," he said. "In the south of the Tyumen region, people divided the cows among them. The balance value of a cow is one and a half thousand roubles, but the meat plant pays fifteen thousand

each. So everybody took his cows to the plant, and a massive slaughter began. Reindeer herding provides us with both a plan, food, and clothing. If we divide the reindeer among us, we will never again get what we are getting now. Last year we prepared three hundred tons of meat from twenty-four thousand state farm reindeer, whereas fifty thousand private deer only rendered fifteen tons to the state."

"So what can be done?" I asked.

"Some kind of firm stance must be taken. Most probably we will make a joint-stock company, even though this will generate unemployment. We cannot count on subsidies. We will have to make it on our own. We have 650 workers, but maybe only four hundred carry out the production. One hundred and two hunters, for example, will immediately find themselves overboard."

"The main thing is not to hurry," says director V. A. Vakhnina from the state farm of "Russia". "It is madness to privatize all unprofitable farms within three months and the rest within a year, as according to the presidential decree. It is the same as throwing people who cannot swim into a lake. Some, undoubtedly, will not drown, but they will be very few. You cannot treat all alike in such a vast country as Russia. In different regions, you find very different conditions of life: economic, climatic, ecological, and national.

"Hotheads propose to give back the land to those who held it before collectivization. But what, then, about those who have never possessed land? Resettlement of the indigenous inhabitants has occurred in the North, even if not on a vast scale. How should this be dealt with? Many newcomers have arrived from other regions. They have lived in the North for decades; their children have been born and raised here. For what should they be punished?

"It is very difficult to untangle this complex knot of problems. Let us consider the matter thoroughly and carefully. We have ended up in a deadlock. No one questions the necessity of changing the production system, especially the economic relations. But how can this be done with minimal losses and human suffering ?

"It would not be difficult to privatize the dairy production, the fur farms, the electricity plant, the boiler-house, the construction department with the power-saw bench in a settlement. All that is needed is to make people interested, so that they will feel like their own masters, be responsible for everything on their plot, and earn according to their efforts. A person who works conscientiously should live better than a person who works badly. But the paradox is that people in the settlement are in no hurry for changes, for everyone has a guaranteed salary and needs not worry about anything.

"The situation is different with reindeer breeding. Here, the workers decide all production matters themselves. The herders get money in advance throughout the year. In the end, after the products have been delivered, all expenses are deducted and the remaining money is distrib-

uted among the members of the brigade. It would seem as though the brigade should be interested in producing more, selling it at a higher price, and minimizing expenses (for medicine, various veterinary preparations, salt foodstuffs, air service, tractors, cars etc.). After all, the difference in outcome can be substantial. By the end of 1991, the fourth brigade alone received an additional salary of 147,000 roubles, whereas the third got only 29,000. The herders, however, were not very disturbed by this fact. Well, those who had done a worse job received less. But the herders know that they will get the necessary products anyhow, that they have their own reindeer and all that is necessary. In such cases, the psychological factor is the most important. The fact that they came in last would hit harder. When a man has his own deer, he does not need our money.

"Reindeer herding provides a stable return off which the entire state farm can live. A hundred reindeer, slaughtered in January, may render as many as 3,000 kilograms of meat. This is a high figure. There is but one problem: the pastures are overexploited. Two and a half times the number of reindeer there should be must feed themselves off these lands. There are pastures with high-quality reindeer moss, average pastures, and pastures that are good for nothing. I am certain that even if the brightest man tried to divide these pastures among the herders, they would remain discontented anyway. But it is the herders themselves who are to decide whether or not to leave the state farm."

R. R. Ershov, director of the Antipayutinsk state farm, is a more decisive man. "This year," he says, "reindeer herding, motor transport, and the sewing workshop will become financially independent. But in order to do this, the area administration must find the means to hand over the social and cultural institutions to the local soviets, having freed the state farm from these worries."

V. A. Koshelev, director of the Nydimsk state farm, also makes claims, but to the district administration. The Nadym District is industrial, and the local leadership gives priority to the gas and construction workers. Much land has been given away for oil and gas fields; two new ones are under construction, and another two are under discussion. What will happen to the local population?

V. A. Koshelev did not say a word about privatization, about private farming. But what he said meant that the sole defender of the local inhabitants was the state farm, and to leave it was to finish yourself off.

It would seem as though the monologue of each of the four directors were full of concern for the people and their well-being, and that they embraced the same purpose: that of not causing damage. However, these irresolvable matters, or most of them at least, have perfectly clear solutions.

It is the Area Committee on Land Reform, and not the state farm management, who must appraise the land and make the necessary calculations. References to the "Law on Agriculture" as not taking particularities of the North into consideration are not founded, either. "Provisional Rules on the Privatization of Reindeer Herding", issued by the

Russian Ministry of Agriculture, have been in force since June 25th of last year. They specifically mention: "... Herders, fishermen, and hunters who are directly involved in deerbreeding have priority right to the allotment with reindeer... The gathering decides about further allotment of reindeer to specialists and workers directly or indirectly contributing to the development of the branch, as well as to the service staff: doctors, medical personnel, schoolteachers and cultural workers from the indigenous population, widows and pensioners... The upper limit of a single family's private herd must be set to five hundred in the period of privatization and seven hundred thereafter."

In the rules, there is a paragraph about how to organize nomadism in a rational way.

Reindeer herders, by the way, never fought among themselves in pre-collective farm times. They continually helped one another; so the presuppositions about internal strife are, to put it mildly, exaggerated.

For what reason? The directors, it would seem, simply fight to maintain their state farms or at least to postpone their dissolution. I also heard them bring forth such an explanation: "Maybe we should maintain the existing structures? We live in a land of experiments. So let us experiment with having two ways of organizing production: one in the tundra zone, another in the taiga zone."

They cannot imagine themselves outside of their director's chairs. The joint-stock companies and collective enterprises, based on shares, of which they are so fond, are nothing but the same state farms; well let us say collective farms. This is also the reason for their talk about unemployment. One hundred and two hunters will become farmers, if they are allowed to, but the office worries only about itself.

Another person who, by the same token, seems to worry about the office, too, is Comrade Dranchuk, head of the Area Committee on Land Reform.

He said: "We cannot yet work systematically on privatization. We do not have the localities necessary nor enough qualified people. There is, in the final analysis, no law yet on the preservation and rational use of natural resources on the lands where the Small Peoples live."

I did not want to end my conversation with the directors in a sad mood. But that is life, and it is necessary to face the cruel truth. There is no use waiting for a better share in the near future. The powerful Moscow politicians are not interested in the fate of the individual; they are "concerned" about mankind. Sixty-four per cent of the Russian territory is the primordial lands of the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East. Therefore, it would be logical to begin privatization by passing the Law on the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East and to ratify the ILO Convention No. 109 on tribal and nomadic peoples.

From *Severnye prostory*, No. 7-8, August, 1992.

(*Anastasia Lapsuy is a Nenets journalist from Salekhard*)

TO LIVE OR TO DIE?

BY M. ETTYRYNTYNA AND A. KORYAGIN

Tuberculosis. For many people it is a disease of the past; however not for the indigenous inhabitants of the North. For a long time it was advisable to keep quiet about this. People thought that tuberculosis had been wiped out once and for all, and the official statistics on the disease did not cause alarm. Yet what about the reality? How does the disease of the past threaten the Peoples of the Far North? This is the subject of this letter. We, its authors, have been involved in the problem each in our own way. One of us is a doctor who has for many years supervised work at a tuberculosis clinic; the other is a journalist who has observed the social symptoms of the disease. The illness has cruelly touched the lives of our relatives and friends, and such a fate has befallen all or almost all the Peoples of the North. The question being asked here is quite simple: are we to live or to die?

Every day in our country, 57 people die of tuberculosis: on a yearly basis, more than 20,000. Many believe these official figures from the Ministry of Health of the USSR to be patently understated. To establish an objective picture for the regions of the Far North is even more difficult. It is known that the incidence of tuberculosis is six times higher than the average for the whole country. However in addition to this, the disease has niduses in the North that are threatening, in the very near future, to break out into epidemics. One of the most dangerous areas is Chukotka.

Let us once again return to the official statistics and compare the figures. The incidence of tuberculosis – 42 cases out of a population of 100,000 – is considered high even for our country. Amongst the indigenous inhabitants of Chutkotka, the figure is eight times as high! According to the number of bacilli carriers who constitute a source of infection, the average indicator for the whole Republic has already been exceeded 15 times on Chukotka: 224.6 out of 100,000. Taking into account that a bacilli carrier is capable of infecting from 10 to 20 people per year, the situation can be considered critical.

In some districts of Chukotka, tuberculosis is already out of control. The first serious warning came from a local epidemic in the village of Neshkan, which broke out six years ago. The efforts to wipe it out failed and in fact the epidemic continues. In 1986 yet another epidemic broke out, this time in Lorino, and in this as in the first case the disease claimed human lives. The number of bacilli carriers hardly needs to be mentioned – entire villages became niduses of the disease.

The threat of similiar local epidemics is constant. There are many villages in the zone of increased risk in the Anadyr, Bilibino, and Chukot districts.

Why is it that a disease that many people believed to have been wiped out is rearing its ugly head again and again?

In the years immediately after the Second World War, the incidence of tuberculosis in our country increased significantly. This was the difficult heritage of wartime. People who had survived captivity during the war, who had survived life in the destroyed frontline towns or hunger in the country's interior now fell ill and died from tuberculosis. In 1960, the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR passed a directive that aimed to combat tuberculosis. Many resources were made available; the best scientific and medical personnel were enlisted; sanatoriums and clinics were built. The results quickly became apparent. Both the incidence of the disease, the prevalence, and the mortality rate began to decline. The rates of decline were also impressive on Chukotka. However, they did not come close to the average for the country, remaining several times higher.

Meanwhile after a few years, the anti-tuberculosis campaign moved away from action to the contemplation of its achievements. Victorious reports of how tuberculosis had been eradicated overshadowed the true situation, especially in the outlying areas of the country. As a result, the financial input was significantly reduced and the disease was mentioned more and more infrequently and reluctantly.

Almost everything that is available today on Chukotka for the treatment of tuberculosis patients was received in those already far-off days. All the anti-tuberculosis clinics in the area are located in decrepit buildings constructed in the 1950s or even in the 1930s. The X-ray apparatus is partly out of date, partly home-made. The mobile medical units that appeared in the 1960s and which are indispensable to the conditions in the North, are working practically without equipment or mobile fluorographic units. The situation is also bad regarding personnel. As yet the issue of doctors' salaries has not been resolved, and they have not received social support nor benefits.

In short, the system that once contributed to the control of tuberculosis is now collapsing. Just for the record, over the last nine years the authorities have suceeded in setting up in all 20 new mobile medical units throughout the whole of the Northern region, but even these are poorly equipped.

Yet the situation would not be so hopeless if it only depended on medicine. Today almost all the doctors' efforts come to naught after the patient, having undergone a course of treatment over a period of several months or been under observation at a clinic, returns home.

What is peculiar to tuberculosis is that even if a patient receives full and attentive medical treatment, the disease will not be conquered. Tuberculosis, as is well-known, is a disease associated with social conditions. People living in an environment of poverty are the most vulnerable to it. Therefore the Chukchi and the Eskimos are constantly at risk. Many families of reindeer breeders do not have a permanent dwelling. Those who have somehow settled down are more often than not huddled together under the most dreadful conditions with two, three, and sometimes even four generations living under one roof. Under such circumstances, if there is someone who is a bacilli carrier then it is to be expected

that the whole family will become infected with tuberculosis. Just for the record, those infected have the right to additional living space, and those who carry the bacilli must, without fail, be provided with isolated living quarters. Yet who will give them these quarters? Building work in the villages of Chukotka has practically come to a halt.

Alcoholism also plays a role. Is an alcoholic infected with tuberculosis able to observe even the most elementary rules of hygiene? His own children will crawl on the floor boards where he has spat, will eat up the leftovers from unwashed plates, and will become new victims, a fact that their guilty parents probably do not even begin to realize.

Apart from the social risk group for tuberculosis, there is also the risk group that includes people whose health has been weakened, or those who suffer from chronic non-specific diseases of the respiratory organs. Almost all the indigenous inhabitants of the North fall into this category, in more recent times even from the very moment of birth. Many children do not receive the necessary nutritional substances in their mother's womb, because everything, it seems, has been done to deprive the indigenous inhabitants of their traditional natural food. There is no fish. The hunting of sea mammals is not permitted in sufficient quantities. There is a shortage of reindeer meat with its valuable biological qualities that provide the human organism with everything that it needs. For the indigenous Peoples of the North, who have for hundreds of years lived off fresh meat and fish, an adequate substitute for these products simply does not exist. With regard to the consumption of vegetables and fruit, our region has the lowest rate in the country. These products are practically not delivered to the villages. As a result children are born weak, and rickets (rachitis) has become almost a standard phenomenon. As a consequence, children are born suffering from immuno-deficiency. And the organisms of the adults too, as a result of constant biological and vitamin deficiency, lose their immunity to diseases of different types, including tuberculosis. It would not be an exaggeration to say that for many years in the North, a population has been evolving whose health does not promise it a full life – for these people it is simply a question of survival.

Amidst such extremely unfavourable epidemiological conditions on Chukotka, the opinion is that tuberculosis is not dangerous and that it is possible to do away with the district anti-tuberculosis clinics, leaving one area and one or two inter-district clinics. If such a decision is implemented, the number of indigenous inhabitants left without observation and treatment facilities will increase sharply. The results of this are difficult to predict. The consequences could turn out to be worse than expected; epidemics could break out all over the place. Doctors will not be able to cope with such a situation. The village populations, i.e., the indigenous population, will be left alone, face to face with tuberculosis. However, at present the idea of doing away with the clinics is receiving support both from officials in the medical profession and from directors at various levels.



Forest Nenets (Photo: Alexander Pika).

The main argument for so doing is the deplorable state of the anti-tuberculosis district clinics and the absence of resources for their upkeep. It is even too late to make repairs. The construction of new buildings is required – in other words, money is needed. Therefore it was decided, that to do away with them is simpler, but at the same time this also means economizing on the health of the Chukchi, Eskimos, and Evenks. The "reformers" cover themselves by quoting average indicators for tuberculosis amongst the indigenous and non-indigenous population as a whole, but these indicators do not genuinely reflect the situation.

It is time for a competent commission of independent specialists to be created to investigate the real situation.

It is not necessary to produce evidence proving that the opening up of the North took place and is still taking place at the expense of the indigenous Peoples of the North. Life expectancy for the indigenous population is being sharply reduced. Even now, on average, it stands at between 40 and 45 years, and tuberculosis is only one of the many reasons for this.

For many of the Small Peoples the process of disappearance, or to speak in more realistic terms, extinction, has gone so far that there seems to be no road of return. To stop the process is extrememly difficult. Yet saving the lives of specific human beings is still possible. There is still time left. The Peoples of the North must get compensation (as is the case in all other civilized countries) for the losses that were inflicted on man and the

environment during the subjugation of the Artic expanses. This requires the adoption (and not postponement) of a programme of social protection and compensation for the indigenous Small Peoples of the Far North at both Republic and Union level, based on serious financial investments for the development of their economy, the construction of living accommodation, social facilities, and infrastructure. The task of compiling a programme and presenting a draft for this type of legislative initiative should be undertaken by the next Congress of Small Peoples of the North.

But whatever may have happened in the past, the deaths of people today weigh heavily on our conscience.

Anadyr – Moscow
M. Ettyryntyna, A. Koryagin.

(Letter to *Severnye prostory* 1991, No. 37)

(M. Ettyryntyna is a people's deputy of the RSFSR and was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic. Before that, she was the Head Physician of the Anti-Tuberculosis Clinic of the Chukot Area. A. Koryagin is a journalist)

THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CHUKOTKA AND THE REALITY

BY L. I. ABRYUTINA

I am a doctor working on Chukotka in a mobile medical team. Together with my colleagues I attend reindeer herders, hunters, and fishermen in the areas where they live and carry out their work. It is probably well-known that the state of health among the Small Peoples of the North (SPN) is far from ideal, and that standards of living continue to deteriorate. We must try to find solutions to all these problems, but even if the native peoples become healthy, well-fed and well-dressed, this will still not eliminate many legal problems. I shall provide a few examples.

For many centuries the Evens have been living on the banks of the Big Anyui, one of the rivers in our district. One of the settlements, Pyatistennoye, was even mentioned in the old chronicles. When the state farms were established, all the Evens were removed from their ancestral lands. Pyatistennoye was closed down as "unpromising". As time passed, state fishermen and state farm hunters settled into these territories, and later cooperators (businessmen such as small tradespeople, shopkeepers) arrived from other places. When *perestroika* began the, indigenous peoples asked for permission to return to their ancestral lands. And finally, in 1991, the District Soviet in Bilibino decided to allot land to them; certainly much less land than they had asked for, and with the reservation that it be "on an experimental basis". Nevertheless the attempt was succesful and people took heart. But so far it has been the only success.

There have been less succesful instances, especially with reindeer pastures. One of the reindeer brigades of the Omolon State Farm, for example, decided to leave the state farm and applied for pastures as common property. But it turned out that the Land Code of the RSFSR excluded such a possibility. Employees of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR promised, after having visited the area, to give special permission in this particular case, and on an experimental basis.

Another example: having taken a firm decision to become a nomad hunter like his parents and grandparents, a young reindeer herdsman left the state farm. He and his wife and children have now been roaming the taiga for three years working as hunters for a state hunting farm, still waiting for permission to take into possession their own hunting-grounds. You can probably imagine that when it is difficult to have pastures turned into private or common property, then it is twice as difficult to obtain the right to possess hunting-grounds that are part of the pastures of the state farms. Perhaps this young hunter, too, will succeed in getting permission for an "experiment". But what shall the other herdsmen, hunters, and



This grey whale was caught for a polar fox farm in the Eskimo village of Novoye Chaplino, Chukotka, 1993 (Photo: Alexander Pika).

fishermen do, who are less active and less insistent, but who also want to become landowners?

Our District Committee on Land Reform maintains that these problems are caused by the fact that when the Land Code was worked out, the deputies of the RSFSR did not take into account the specificities of reindeer breeding in the North and the modern needs of the herdsmen, fishermen, and hunters belonging to the SPN. Probably they are right. In confirmation I will quote the words of the people's deputy of the RSFSR from Chukotka, V. I. Zhigulin: "Herdsmen who wish to become owners of reindeer will also demand pastures. That is fair. On the other hand, would it be wise to turn vast areas into private property? Fences make no sense in the tundra. We must think well."

And there is another aspect of the problem. Member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and head of Chukotka, V. M. Yetylen is of the following opinion: "The small nationalities in the North did not have private property in the past, neither land, nor pastures nor hunting-grounds. For this reason it would be better now to talk of introducing collective or communal property." Talking about the past, I will allow myself a consideration. Whatever form of property has reigned among native reindeer breeders in the past, the important thing is that individuals or groups should not have rigidly defined territories or be strictly tied to one specific piece of land. All this only came later on. People, reindeer, pastures, and land were reshuffled and redistributed at will between

regions, areas, districts, and state farms. Family units of reindeer nomads were turned into production brigades and jostled on to arbitrarily and not always successfully established pastures. In this way the rights of the SPN were violated, as were the naturally developed migration patterns and the whole system of relationships between the land and and the people and among the people themselves.

It is as important to be aware of this specificity as it is to take into consideration whether the land has been held privately or commonly, because in some years, when the land has been turned into property, needs for changes or re-allocations will arise for natural reasons. And demarcations, whether private or communal, will cause big problems.

While the authorities are working on improving the Land Code so as not to permit abuse, and while the herdsmen are patiently waiting, enterprising people are however already managing successfully on the pastures in an absolutely legal way. They simply lease land from the state farms. In the Bilibino District, for example, one private firm leased three hectares of land from a state farm in the coastal area of the East-Siberian Sea: land that had been the primordial pastures and hunting grounds of native peoples. The private firm received these hectares as three separate parts, each of one hectare, with a distance of 10 kilometres between them. This conforms closely with the law, the interests of the state farm administration, the Soviet's executive committee, and the entrepreneurs' ideas and plans.

It would seem to present no problem. But it means that the indigenous population will play the part of unwanted guests or undesired witnesses in their own home. For the entrepreneurs, burdened with heavy taxes, are forced to fish and hunt in an injurious way.

Recently, decrees have been passed on various levels that speak with precision about the SPN having preferential rights or even exclusive rights to their "property", i.e., to the native species of domestic reindeer, to the biological resources and their uses; and having the exclusive right to engage in traditional economic activities, etc.

But what happens in practice? Almost everything that surrounds the reindeer herders – both what's movable and immovable – i.e., also the reindeer, belongs to the state, to its local agents, the local agricultural authorities. And, just as they like, the authorities deal with both the property of the SPN and the peoples themselves.

At the moment, the higher echelons of these authorities are preparing the rules for the privatization of reindeer. But to work out these rules without the participation of the reindeer herdsmen makes no sense. Many herders are resolutely against part of the rules. They believe, for example, that reindeer should be handed over (or sold) only to herders. I am not sure that the authorities will take the herders' opinion into account. The wilfulness of the lower echelons of the same authorities showed itself very clearly in the antler business. From 1990 to 91, the state procurements of antlers rose drastically. Various state farms made a lot of money on this,

and it was considered a big success. But it can only be considered so from a purely arithmetic point of view. The success allowed only for repairing the economy of the central state farms. But to repair the problems of the central state farms of the so-called ethnic settlements and to purchase processing technology does not necessarily solve ethnic problems, at times it even aggravates them. The massive cutting of antlers, in some state farms the antlers of almost the entire herd, has already this year caused diseases and deaths among the reindeer, although blame is put on meteorological conditions.

The effect of this cutting will only show "in full force", as the elders put it, after some years – probably exactly when the reindeer are finally handed over to the herdsmen as their property. Who will make up for the losses that have just been inflicted on the reindeer, the breed of which has been developed through centuries of careful selection?

Many managers have concluded long-term contracts with foreign firms and indebted themselves. Do the representatives of the foreign firms involved know that the contracts are being concluded without the knowledge of and sometimes even against the wishes of the native herders? Will this not counteract the privatization process? Who will be the legal heir to the state farms, to their commitments and their debts? But not only agricultural and other state authorities make use of the property of the northern nationalities. A lot of different entrepreneurs have shown up, trading in everything: horns, antlers, hides, furs, sea mammals, fish, medicinal plants, mammoth tusks, etc., and secretly even the snow ram and the polar bear. They organize hunting safaris and tourism. They arrange the production and sale of souvenirs, pretending that they are of "local origin".

So if yesterday it was the state farms who dealt the first blow to the spiritual world, lifestyle, and environment of the SPN, then today the entrepreneurs are dealing a second devastating and, possibly, final blow. Everybody knows that northern nature is fragile and vulnerable, and that the traditional economy is of low productivity. The RSFSR law on firms and entrepreneurial activities makes no exceptions or adjustments in this regard. Anyone who wishes may step over any claim on part of the SPN or Siberian nature to obtain instantaneous profits, regardless of the consequences. What a strange logic: with one hand laws are signed leading to the destruction of people and nature in the North, while with the other hand billions of roubles are counted out in order to revive them.

In the past children belonging to the SPN were torn away from their families. Now it has been admitted that this measure was wrong, that the boarding-school system was a failure. Much is being said about the importance of making the children return to the places where their families live and work, and of starting small mobile nomad schools. These schools are, in fact, a necessary precondition not only for a cultural revival, but also to restore the legal rights of the parents. So far, unfortunately, neither material nor legal foundations for creating such schools exist. On



A Chukchee boy in the village of Enurmino, Chukotka, 1981 (Photo: Alexander Pika).

Chukotka, for instance, the first tundra school saw the light three years ago. The impossibility of deciding even the most simple problems is at the moment threatening the school with closure. This is a most reliable example of the hollow rhetoric of our programmes and rights.

As a doctor I can certify that the health institutions in the North have been copied from the central regions of the country and have not at all been adapted to the peculiarities of attending herders, fishermen, and hunters of the North. These people may, essentially, only receive first aid or hospital care when they are already ill. A full-scale prophylactic, polyclinical, and educative medical care is not available to them. Therefore, no proper solutions are found to existing health problems, even though this is quite feasible. Both concept and experience exist.

I have tried to illustrate the problems of the SPN in our region. Not all of them, of course, but some of the most important ones. I believe that the main reason for these problems is the fact that the SPN have been looked upon as mere objects to be administered, who could at best hope for an "understanding of their needs" and for the "benevolence" of the state system.

In 1990 hopes for changes appeared – the Association of Small Peoples of the North (ASPN) was created. Within the first one-and-a-half years of its existence, an awakening and consolidation of national self-awareness can be noted. However, many of us had expected the ASPN to be more plenipotentiary. Unfortunately its status is limited and, in my opinion, in a rather artificial way. Now a second association – for the revival of economic acitivities of the SPN – is being founded at the local Agricultural Department. One gets the impression that this Department, by using the Association, does not so much wish to preserve and revive the SPN as it

wants to preserve itself. Probably, these are compatible tasks. But I believe that all activities of this body must take place under the aegis and control of the ASPN. In 1991 yet another mighty organ was created: The Assembly of People's Deputies of the Small Peoples of the North. The goals, tasks and first decisions of this Assembly have been very earnest. Without doubt, the status and powers of this assembly are higher than those of the ASPN. However, strictly speaking, the delegates from the SPN who participate in this assembly (including me) have not been elected according to ethnic principles. Furthermore, there are the Herders' Association, the Polar Explorers' Association, and various other societies and foundations.

Some people believe that the more we have such organisations, the better it is for the native peoples. But they lead to fragmentation, lack of control, and dispersion of means and strength. Could it be that this was planned in order to leave questions of rights, administration, and finances in the hands of the previous administrative organs that have no connections to the SPN? Recent events confirm this idea. Despite the wise resolutions and voluminous programmes, one can fear that the native peoples, as before, will remain nothing but objects of paternalism.

In July 1991, a new "Association of Autonomous Areas" was founded. This association has worked out a bill on "National Autonomy in the RSFSR". One of the goals is to increase the independency of the SPN. The paragraph on the forms of government and administration envisages representatives of "peoples living in traditional ways" to be guaranteed a quota in the ruling organs of the national autonomies.

Without doubt a passing of the bill on "National Autonomy in the RSFSR" will improve the status of the areas, strengthen the independence of their leadership, and possibly, secure the economic and social rights of the "peoples living in traditional ways." But if we speak of a special group, of the SPN, then these measures are not sufficient.

I am afraid that the introduction of quotas will only create the illusion of radical measures. In reality, we will continue on the very same road of good intentions and concealed assimilation. We shall need to go in a qualitatively different direction and to use specific measures.

I shall briefly mention my proposals:

On the basis of the ASPN or in addition to it, there has to be created a representative governmental body of the SPN according to territorial principles, elected from ethnic lists, independent, with the right to "vetoes" and to take the initiative to introduce new laws. It must represent the interests of the SPN all over the territories in all the soviets of different levels, from the village soviet to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Through this renewed Association, all development programmes of the SPN – including health care, education, and culture – should be carried out. To realize these programmes, financial and other means from local and central sources must be channelled through this renewed Association only. I believe that this organization will also be able to deal with the problems of allotting land and pastures.



A grey whale is being flensed for the use of a polar fox farm. Not very many people have come to take a piece of 'mantaq' - whale blubber. (Photo: Alexander Pika).

This could be done in the following way: all lands where the SPN actually live and carry out their work in a traditional way must be carefully defined and put under the jurisdiction of the Association, independently of the administrative and territorial divisions. Then it will be possible in the most democratic way – with the participation of the Soviet of People's Deputies, the Elders' Soviet, the Herders' Union and different kinds of specialists – to organise a pliant and fair division of land, pastures, hunting-grounds, etc. All the agreements should be internal and temporary. The right to land should not mean that industries must close down, and it must not infringe upon the interests of the settlers.

Corresponding changes will, of course, have to be introduced into the Constitution and into the laws of the RSFSR on the SPN, on land, on entrepreneurial activities. Such genuine and fundamental rights will allow us to hope, also, for the revival of the SPN.

(Larissa Abryutina is a Chukchi by birth and a doctor in the district hospital in Bilibino. She is a representative of the local Association of the Small Peoples of the North)

VIEWPOINTS OF THE SCIENTISTS

THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OR THE PROSPECTS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SIBERIA: INTERNATIONAL LAW AND SOVIET REALITY

BY OLGA MURASHKO

In recent years, the international organizations have focused their attention not only on the problems of protection of human rights but also on protection of the collective human rights of ethnic communities, which are, as a rule, small nationalities making up a minority on a given territory. International documents have been worked out accordingly such as the ILO Convention 169 "Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries" from 1989; the UN "Draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" from 1994; and the UN document "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" from 1992.

These documents consider special ethnic rights to be a means of protecting and encouraging the development of the cultures of non-dominant population groups, and they see ethnic autonomy as an instrument that can be used to realize these rights.

It is assumed that ethnic autonomy can be realized either on a territorial or an individual basis. The first, in the case of high density of the ethnic population, envisages collective ownership and disposal of territories. The second, in the case of a dispersed ethnic population, envisages the possibility of the individual delegation of one's rights to a kind of association, to be called upon to defend the collective rights of the dispersed ethnic community.

It would seem that the ideas laid out in the internationally recognized legal documents protect the rights of small indigenous peoples very well. But the problem is that putting these principles into practice is very difficult.

How Can the Subject of Ethnic Rights Be Defined?

Article 1 (2) of the ILO Convention 169 says that "Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply". Everything appears to be clear, but with modern processes of assimilation and inter-marriage it is often difficult for a person to define simply his or her ethnic affiliation. National self-identification is also made more difficult by the absence of conditions in our administrative practices allowing an individual to call himself or herself by the name of the people to whom he/she belongs. In other words, you can call yourself whatever you like but you will be registered according to official procedure. If you call

yourself a "Chulymets", they will write "Khakass"; if you call yourself a "Kumandinets," they write "Altai"; a "Kamchadal" becomes a "Russian", and so on.

This happens for two reasons. Firstly, because ethnic affiliation is defined by the police department, which issues us at the age of 16 with a passport for life that is both an identity certificate and a testimony of nationality. Secondly, because in our country there is an official list of the nationalities of the USSR - approximately 125 ethnic denominations - although there are hundreds of ethnic denominations in our country that are not mentioned on this list.

As a social anthropologist and specialist in Siberia, I am also aware of other difficulties preventing the practical application of the international instruments concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.

Some of the Peoples of Siberia, the Evens and Evenks for example, who are scattered in small groups from Yenisei right across to Kamchatka and from the shores of the Arctic Ocean to the Amur, were until very recently still unaware that they were considered one single nationality. The Evens, for instance, included in the concept "my people" only the name of the kindred living on a small territory and practising traditional forms of economy. The affiliation of similar ethnic sub-divisions into one or several peoples is more often than not the result of scientific classification and not of the peoples' own ethnic self-identification.

Another difficulty is how to define the borders of ethnic territories. Yet how can this be done with peoples who have never had a nation-state? The ethnic history of the Peoples of Siberia clearly demonstrates that ethnic processes throughout the territory are constantly evolving. Over the last three hundred years, the territories of ethnic communities and their composition have changed more than once, and separate clans and communities have changed their affiliation with one people to that of another by virtue of climatic, economic, and historical developments. One ethnically well-defined people practising different types of traditional economy often lives scattered among other ethnic groups, whereas ethnically different peoples with the same types of traditional economy often live alongside one another. In this situation, the right to property or ownership of the land where they live can only be arranged according to territorial and economic criteria, and not according to ethnic ones.

Privileges Instead of Rights

The question of ethnic territories for the Peoples of Siberia arose with the beginning of industrial exploitation in Siberia, which entailed the destruction of the places where the peoples lived and hence the possibility of their lending a traditional way of life and of preserving their ethnic existence. Neither of these can exist outside the framework of the peoples' traditional ways of utilizing the natural environment.

The traditional economic activities of the Peoples of Siberia are very flexible. When necessary, they can easily be adjusted to climatic changes,

and new methods of land use can easily be adopted. But this requires huge territorial reserves.

The Siberian landscape has dictated the necessity of low population density and dispersed settlement.

Methods of adaptation that have evolved over thousands of years made it possible for the Peoples of Siberia to survive any type of climatic change. It was only the consequences of industrial development to which they could not adapt. The problem is that industrialization has not only caused irreparable damage to the environment, but that it has destroyed the peoples' traditional adaptation mechanisms.

The conquerors of nature have taken away the indigenous peoples' natural rights, above all the right to preserve the way of life to which they were accustomed. In place of this, the peoples have been granted ethnic privileges, i.e., special rights, conceded according to ethnic criteria or, to be more precise, according to what was written in their passport under the heading "nationality".

What a lot of misfortunes these privileges have caused for the Peoples of Siberia! They were given the right to rent-free accommodation, but this accommodation was for some reason not built in the places where they lived, neither was it they who received it. Their children were taken away to nursery schools and boarding schools that were free-of charge, but children who had been to this type of boarding school found it impossible to return to the traditional way of life. Thus, the results of this privileged life were people turning into lumpenproletarians and alcoholics, and that life expectancy was reduced to between the age of 40 and 45.

The indigenous inhabitants were deprived of the right to pursue their traditional occupations - hunting and catching fish for the needs of their family. Instead, they received the privilege of feeding themselves from tinned bullheads in tomato sauce from the Azov Sea on the banks of their Siberian river; the fresh fish were caught and taken away by the State Fishery enterprises. Later on, the tins ran out, and during the years of *perestroika* they received once again the rights to a free fishing-permit to catch 70 kilograms of fish in a designated place at a designated time.

This privilege was, of course, granted on the basis of ethnic criteria. What this led to, I observed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky (the capital of the Kamchatka Region) this year. In the office of the Association of Peoples of the North (APN), at the Town Hall, the door opened and shut constantly as people (with a town look about them) came in to ask in a dissatisfied manner: "When are they going to give me a fish?" There turned out to be eighteen thousand persons of "indigenous nationality" in Petropavlovsk, all demanding the amount of fish they had been granted. They themselves could not catch fish (they had to go to work, they had no fishing tackle, many had forgotten the traditional fishing methods), and the APN branch in the town had to organize small enterprises for catching the fish and transporting it home.

It should be noted that out of the eighteen thousand inhabitants of Petropavlovsk privileged to enjoy their traditional foodstuffs, far from all

are descendants of the Itelmens and the Kamchadals. In recent years, representatives of various nationalities have started to register themselves as "indigenous", in order to receive some form of material benefit. It is highly possible that in a few years' time, people will have to show not only their passport but also their genealogy approved by the notary's office.

Why do attempts to return at least some of the natural rights to the indigenous Peoples of Siberia become more and more absurd? Firstly, because the subject of rights has been defined according to ethnic criterias and not according to way of life. A person who lives permanently on a river and leads a traditional way of life should have the right to catch fish in that river, and restrictions to this right shoould only be dictated by scientifically grounded fishery limits and quotas and not by ethnic affiliation. The inhabitants of towns - again independent of nationality - should have the possibility of buying fish in the shops. Secondly, because the freedom of ethnic self-identification is incompatible with the granting of special ethnic rights in the form of material privileges. Thirdly, because the freedom to choose the place where one wishes to live and the way of life one wishes to lead is impossible in a society where the right to dispose of the lands used for traditional economic activities belongs to the bosses in Moscow and their local representatives.

A great deal has been heard about the omnipotence of the central ministries and departments, and the terrible ecological consequences of their mismanagement of Siberia. However the new "democratic" leaders of Russia showed just how "concerned" they were about Kamchatka when they granted Japan offshore fishing rights for salmon. Now, in the spawning periods when the fish swim inshore, they happen to swim not upstream to the spawning grounds of the rivers of Kamchatka but into the Japanese nets stretched out 20 miles into the sea across the mouths of the rivers. In this way, fish stocks are being damaged for many years to come; stocks that represent the livelihood of the Itelmens, the settled Koryaks, and the Kamchadals.

Yet another more serious threat to the ecology of Kamchatka and the way of life of its peoples is represented by the preparations for gold-mining. Geological explorations and the taking of hundreds of "technological tests" at the Aginsk gold deposit, without any form of precautionary measures, being taken to protect the environment, have already destroyed part of the migratory paths of the reindeer herds and poisoned the waters of the spawning river, Icha.

If industrial development continues in this way, then in 10 years' time there will be neither gold (the deposits are not large) nor fish nor reindeer pastures on Kamchatka.

Ethnic Autonomy or Ecological Legislation?

The Association of the Small Peoples of the North of the Kamchatka Region has initiated a collection of signatures for a so-called "Appeal by the Indigenous Inhabitants of Kamchatka to the Session of the Regional

Soviet of Peoples' Deputies" in order to defend the rights of the indigenous population. I quote an extract from the text of this appeal: "We, the indigenous peoples of Kamchatka, the Koryaks, the Evens, the Chukchi, the Itelmens, the Kamchadals, and the old-settlers (*starozhily*, descendants of people who immigrated to Siberia a long time ago) of Kamchatka, categorically object to the development of the gold-mining industry in our region. The mining and processing of gold and other mineral resources will convert our territory into an uninhabitable lump of earth. The reindeer pastures will be destroyed, as will the spawning rivers and the hunting-grounds. This means that the traditional livelihoods of the indigenous peoples will fall into decline. With the disappearance of the traditional livelihoods, there will be no national culture, no native language. Without traditional sources of food the indigenous peoples of the Kamchatka will disappear."

It may seem as if signs of ripening ethnic conflict can be read in the document, in as much as at first glance the interests of the indigenous and non-indigenous Peoples of Siberia are opposed to one another. Yet the conflict has not occurred, and furthermore, the appeal has also been signed by the old-settlers and migrants of all nationalities who have made Kamchatka their permanent home, although these categories of the population were not specially asked to sign the appeal. The majority of the local population, having no affiliation to the power structures, are worried about their own fate and the ecological state of the territory, and are united in their attempts to put a stop to the uncontrolled exploitation of Siberia by the metropole and to preserve Kamchatka's resources.

So if it is possible today to talk about a conflict going on in the territories of the indigenous Peoples of Siberia, then it is a social and ecological conflict concerning the right to dispose of Siberia's natural resources. The parties in the conflict are the Centre, on the one hand, and the overwhelming majority of the local population of all nationalities on the other. However, there is a constant and growing threat of theoutbreak of inter-ethnic conflicts. Not only the strengthening appeals to divide the territory could lead to such conflicts, but also the differentiation of rights according to ethnic criteria.

Ethnic territory is an historical and geographical concept. Therefore, defining the rights of a certain group of people to a specific area of land is difficult in any part of the world; in zones populated by nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, it is simply impossible. The claims that they make as to their ethnic territory are usually based on mythology.

In Eastern Siberia, every nomadic people without a written history has a stock of historical legends about the times when "our campfires outnumbered the stars in the sky and our territories stretched from the Yenisei to the coasts of the Pacific Ocean". Each settled people, in answer to the pretensions of its neighbours, base its territorial claims on references to archaeological excavations of palaeolithic and neolithic sites, the ethnic affiliation of which is often uncertain and therefore open to any interpre-

tation. Such "scientific" debates usually go on in the capitals (both central and local) and as a rule among intellectual and political elites, indigenous as well as non-indigenous. However, the majority of the indigenous peoples maintaining traditional forms of economy prefer to tend cattle, bring in the harvest, and catch fish in their native lands. Normally, conflicts between neighbours are perceived by them as part of everyday life and are easily transformed into inter-ethnic cooperation. Serious conflicts only arise when a people's national consciousness awakens in it ideas of mono-ethnic sovereignty as a universal panacea.

Attempts to designate and distribute ethnic territory with the purpose of creating ethnic autonomies are also fraught with the danger of arousing bloody conflicts.

I am an advocate of the immediate ratification of the ILO Convention 169 by the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, but I believe that the rights granted under the Convention need not apply to only the indigenous peoples and peoples leading a tribal way of life but to all peoples, including those who were transferred against their will to Siberia and who are still practising traditional forms of agricultural activity. In this way, mines could no longer be established, oil wells drilled, oil and gas pipelines laid, and nuclear power stations built without the agreement of the people. Furthermore, instead of establishing ethnic autonomies under the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, it would be more expedient to speed up the passing of the laws on territories intended for traditional economic activities and industrial exploitation.

Under present conditions, with an ecological crisis pending, it would be worthwhile to appoint international organisations to examine projects for the creation of ethno-ecological refuges. Such areas of land, designated as zones populated by the indigenous Peoples of Siberia or Amazonia, should become international ethno-ecological reserves where the natural environment and the different types of adaptation methods practised by the ethnic groups living there could be preserved.

The countries to whom these territories belong cannot, however, manage economically without exploiting natural resources and do not have sufficient means to acquire the appropriate non-destructive technology. Therefore, an international foundation for ethno-ecological refuges should be established.

Global ecological legislation, directed not only towards the preservation of a country's own but also of the world's natural resources, and interconnected with ethnic legislation guaranteeing the possibility for development of various types of ethnic cultures, could help to provide a solution to the present threatening ethno-ecological situation in Siberia.

(From *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, the 12th of December, 1991)

THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE SOVIET NORTH: LIFE IN THE SOVIET EMPIRE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

BY R. V. RYVKINA, L. YA. KOSALS, K. A. KOVALKINA

Introduction

The state that was called the USSR no longer exists. At present, new sovereign states are forming on what was its territory and this process has seized both union republics and national autonomies. The status of the former autonomous republics is changing in Russia, too. The processes are similar everywhere – nations are trying to throw off the shackles with which they have been forced to live since 1917; raise their political, territorial, and national status; and obtain compensation for what was forcibly taken away from them by the "centre of the empire".

All the republics and peoples of the Soviet Union suffered under this regime in one way or another. Therefore, today they are all, without exception, counting their losses and contemplating the future.

An analysis of the soviet methods of finding solutions to national problems is not only of interest to the peoples of the former USSR. The study of unsuccessful social experiments, such as the communist one in our country, provides scientists with even more important and useful information than the study of successful reforms. An analysis of abortive social experiments tells something about what is not to be done, not even in the name of the "brightest" and "greatest" ideals.

Yet however tragic the fates of the peoples of USSR are, their destinies are not all the same. Up to the time of the Revolution in 1917, the levels of development of the various peoples were extremely different – from the European civilization of the Baltic nations to the patriarchal family clans of the Muslim peoples.

Among the various nationalities, a special place is occupied by the Small Peoples of the Soviet North[1]. They are unique from the point of view of the territory they inhabit, being dispersed throughout the whole of the Far North, Siberia, and the Far East and are unique also with regard to their numbers – in 1989, they totalled 181,600 people belonging to 26 ethnic communities. The smallest group among them is the Oroks (179 people) and the largest the Nenets (34,200 people).

Throughout the world, the existence within one and the same country, at the same time, of industrial society and rather secluded communities based predominantly on clan structure and subsistence economy causes problems. However, for a number of reasons the fate of the Small Peoples within the Soviet Empire has proved to be particularly tragic. These native peoples[2] not only lived under appalling circumstances in the former Soviet

Union, but were actually on the point of dying out. This has made all the more poignant the question of how these peoples, who have been living in Russia since time immemorial and have been famous for their unique traditional trade, have come to be found among the vanishing peoples and now require not only protection but immediate measures to save them from irreversible extinction.

The authors of this article have analyzed the situation of these peoples at the time of the breakdown of the USSR and have also examined various prospects for the future.

The analysis is based on information collected in a survey of 121 persons to whom the problems of the Small Peoples of the North are well-known. Among them were the employees of soviets and executive committees at various levels (including employees from the local soviets, directly connected with the population), members of committees and sub-committees of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, people's deputies of the RSFSR and the USSR, members of public organizations engaged in the problems of the Peoples of the North, specialists, directors of factories and plants situated in the regions inhabited by the Peoples of the North, writers, and journalists. This composition of experts made it possible for us to raise with them very complex and difficult questions about the past, present, and future of the Peoples of the North.

As a result of the survey, we have been able to obtain expert assessments, not only about the consequences of the policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Soviet government in relation to the Peoples of the North, and about the industrial development in the northern territories since 1917, but also about the state of these peoples in 1991. Moreover, the survey has afforded us expert evaluations of the changes that have taken place in the life of these peoples from 1985 to 1991. And finally, we were able to obtain the experts' opinion on the most desirable development models for the Small Peoples in the future, and also on the practical measures that are required in order to implement these models.

The Experts' Estimates of the Situation of the Small Peoples of the North

The current situation is a result of past social and economic processes. Of particular significance here were the changes that took place during the years of Soviet rule.

After October 1917, the Soviet regime began an active "nature conservation campaign". All the traditional activities of the indigenous peoples, in particular hunting for furs, were outlawed as being destructive. For them, this represented the beginning of state rule over their economy and life as a whole.

During the 1920s in the northern regions, political changes began to take place under the slogan of "socialist construction". The main elements were the creation of collective farms (*kolkhozy*) and state farms (*sovkhozy*), the building of settlements, schools, clubs, boarding schools,

children's nurseries, and other types of institutions. This was the soviet solution to the problems connected with the synchronic existence of societies at different stages of development within one country. The aim was the drastic inclusion of the Small Peoples of the North in the process of socialist construction. This policy immediately "bore fruit": "In the years of collectivization (1932-34), the number of domestic reindeer in the Soviet Union was reduced by almost one third. This evil turned out to be a bigger disaster than the epizootics of malignant anthrax and foot and mouth disease. The disturbance of the ecological balance in the extreme natural conditions of the North meant hunger, cold and death to many people" (Pika, 1989). But the distinctive age-old features of the Peoples of the North prevented the implementation of the policy that was being introduced throughout the territory of the USSR. According to the Communist Party ideologists, this policy could have no exceptions and, consequently, anything that impeded its progress did not have a right to exist. So according to this concept (which was elevated to the rank of state policy), the national features of the Small Peoples of the North could not in principle be preserved! Up until the mid-1960s, the industrial development of the northern territories was rather contained and did not to a great extent affect the traditional economic activities of the Northern Peoples (Sokolova, 1989). In the 1970s, however, industrial development began to spread into almost all areas. Geologists and prospectors were followed by construction workers and oil and gas workers. Oil refineries and mining and metallurgical processing plants were constructed, along with railways and hydro-electric power stations. The industrial works were carried out by state departments whose activities went almost totally unchecked and did not take into consideration either the peoples living in the affected areas or their interests and needs. The industrial expansion and development were not coordinated with the goals of the national policy, a policy that had serious defects.

As a result, the Small Peoples of the North were subjected to a kind of dual negative influence, namely the influence of the national policy of the party and the state, and that of industrial development.

So what were the consequences of all this? What kind of conditions are the Peoples of the North in today?

The experts' assessments are extremely pessimistic: 97% of those surveyed described the situation as disastrous. The following reasons were given: low standard of living (35%); lack of civil rights (35%); disappearance of distinctive national character and mother tongue (34%); loss of traditional forms of livelihood (25%); destruction of the natural environment (21%); physical deterioration (high incidence of sickness, alcoholism) (17%); assimilation with migrant population (4%). (The total number of answers exceeds 100%, as many experts gave not one but several.)

Thus the experts gave a very negative evaluation of all the main aspects of the Small Peoples' life, seen from a political, legal, and economic point of view, and with regard to the environmental conditions, standard of

living, physical and mental health, and culture. We will now concentrate on three main areas: 1) the political situation 2) the situation with regard to jobs and employment 3) the state of culture.

The political situation. Almost all the experts pointed out the lack of civil rights and the absence of political institutions to protect the interests of the Small Peoples. At the present time only one third of all the Peoples of the North have their own autonomous areas or republics.

However, as the Peoples of the North never made up a majority of the population in the areas where they live, the autonomies could not protect them from the encroachment upon their land, from the obligation to send their children to boarding schools, and from other measures which were part of the national policy of the Communist Party. Therefore, we asked the experts whether true national autonomy was essential. Between 70 and 90% of the experts (depending on which nation we were talking about) were of the opinion that true national autonomy is necessary for the protection of the Small Peoples' interests.

Jobs and employment. Eighty-five per cent of the experts questioned claim that the situation regarding employment is unfavourable. Here, they indicated the decrease in traditional types of economic activity (39%); the lack of job vacancies and unemployment (32%); the fact that the indigenous peoples' labour is held in low esteem compared with the labour skills of the settlers (16%); the low level of education and professional qualifications (16%); the lack of interest in work, apathy, and alcoholism (6%).

We then went on to ask questions regarding the general assessment of the unfavourable employment situation. In particular, we put forward the following question: "What proportion of the indigenous population is actually employed in traditional types of work – hunting, reindeer-breeding, fishing, etc.?" Taking all the answers into account, we received an average figure of 55%[3].

In order to obtain more specific answers from 39% of the experts on the decline in traditional types of work and from 32% concerning unemployment, the following question was put to them: "Is there unemployment among the indigenous persons of working age? If so, what roughly is the percentage?" The experts assessed the percentage to be 31% of the total. In their opinion, among those who can work about 15% do not want to work.

Therefore, according to the experts' evaluations, 55% of the working-age population[3] is employed in traditional economic activities and 31% is unemployed. Against this backdrop, it was interesting to establish the experts' opinion on what forms of labour those of working age would like to be engaged in – traditional or industrial. The estimated average proportion of the population wishing to work in the traditional industries was 65%, whereas the proportion of those wishing to work in industry was

13%. So a contradiction appeared – a certain proportion of people do not have the possibility of working in traditional areas of economic activity, although they would like to.

The state of the national culture. Eighty-two per cent of the experts consider that the Small Peoples' culture is on the point of disappearing due to the loss of native language (48%); the disappearance of national skills and trades, national forms of dwelling, means of transportation, and clothing (12%); the disappearance of the traditional lifestyles, arts and crafts and folklore (32%); the loss of religious traditions and the eradication of shamanism and sorcery (32%); the lack of interest among young people in their culture and their land and their "going Russian" (9%); the loss of general culture, degradation and alcoholism (5%); the small number of resources available for the development of culture (2%). (The totals give a percentage that exceeds 100%, as many experts supplied more than one answer.)

However, the loss of cultural traditions has not affected the whole population. Some representatives of the Small Peoples have been able to preserve their native language, their skills and customs, and there are more of them than might be expected – according to the experts, 40%. The remaining 60% have to a greater or lesser extent lost their national characteristics, and a proportion of them have even lost interest in the national culture (according to the experts, about 21%). These representatives of the Small Peoples have a very poor knowledge of their native language and a negative approach towards traditional occupations (hunting, fishing, etc). They are more attracted to urban ways of life. The proportion of people who could, under more favourable conditions, return to the traditional lifestyles represents around 39%. However, in order for this to happen special efforts would be necessary on the part of the state and society.

On the whole, despite the fact that the outlook at present appears gloomy, the experts' evaluations of the state of national culture are nevertheless optimistic.

How has the situation changed for the Small Peoples of the North in recent years? Is there a chance for revival?

Changes during the years of Perestroika

Perestroika has affected all aspects of the Small Peoples' life, and in ways that are not unambiguous. On the one hand, it has created new possibilities. However, at the same time it has caused old problems to become more acute while creating new difficulties. This is illustrated by the experts' answers to the question: "What changes have there been in the situation of the Small Peoples of the North during the period of *perestroika*? In which areas have there been improvements and in which areas deteriorations?" Forty-one per cent of the experts said that there had been improvements in the life of the Small Peoples and 71% indicated deteriorations.

The actual replies given by the experts were as follows:

Positive
- national self-awareness has increased (23%)
- possibility to express one's opinion (10%)
- standard of living of certain layers of the population has improved (5%)
- democratization of election procedures, emergence of representatives of the Small Peoples of the North in governmental bodies (4%)
- increased attention from governmental bodies and the press to the problems of the Small Peoples of the North (22%)

Negative
- standard of living of the Small Peoples has deteriorated (45%)
- the state of the traditional culture and language has deteriorated (9%)
- standards of moral and physical health have deteriorated (5%)
- ecological problems have become more acute (4%)
- all aspects of life for these peoples have deteriorated (10%)

However, it should be remembered that several of the changes indicated by the experts are neither unambiguously positive nor negative. By way of example, what has been identified as positive change, such as "the growth of national self-awareness" of the indigenous peoples, has become one of the reasons for increased national tension in certain areas.

An increase in national contradictions was evident from the experts' replies to the question: "How have the relations between the indigenous peoples of the North and the non-indigenous peoples changed over the last 5 or 6 years?" Only 8% believe that relations have improved. Forty-two per cent indicated a deterioration in relations, and 35% think that there has been no change. Fifteen per cent did not answer the question.

In order to acquire further knowledge of these circumstances, we asked the experts "How do the changes in relations between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations of the North manifest themselves?" It appears that the national contradictions were caused not so much by cultural barriers and differences in traditions, customs, and ceremonies, but rather by social and economic differences between peoples living in traditional agrarian communities and those living in an urban industrial society.

Over the past five or six years there has been a tendency among the Small Peoples of the North to abandon their traditional lifestyle and, unfortunately, this tendency has even been increasing. According to the experts, industrial development in the northern territories has become even more destructive. The question: "What changes have occurred in the character of industrial development in the regions inhabited by the Peoples of the North?" received the following answers: "In recent years, industrial development has become less destructive" (11%); "Industrial development is becoming more and more destructive" (43%); "Industrial development continues in much the same way as before" (46%).

However, against this backdrop of general negative tendencies, not all aspects of the life of the Northern Peoples have changed in a similar way. We asked the experts to evaluate the changes that have taken place in two areas: employment and culture. With regard to the first of these two, the experts stated that changes are taking place for the better (12%); changes are taking place for the worse (52%); and that nothing has changed (35%).

Answers to the question: "What specific changes have you seen in labour and employment trends?" were given as follows:

Negative
- growth in unemployment (52%)
- workers leaving traditional branches of employment (23%)
- deterioration in the employment situation among the Peoples of the North when compared with the settlers (5%)

Positive
- creation of new small enterprises and other commercial organizations (13%)
- revival of traditional forms of economic activity (3%)
- increase in salaries (2%)

The critical situation regarding employment is in keeping with the general exacerbation of the labour-market situation for the whole of the former USSR, which has affected the Peoples of the North to a greater extent than other nations. It is true that the Peoples of the North are less competitive in the industrial labour market. But as they have already, to a very large degree, lost the traditional habits of work, the ousting of the indigenous peoples from the more lucrative and prestigious industrial branches does not automatically lead to an increase in those employed in the traditional sectors. Moreover during the years of *perestroika*, the reverse flow of people out of the traditional sectors has even increased. Therefore, unemployment is on the increase.

With regard to changes in the national culture, assessments were more optimistic: 37% of the experts believe that the state of culture has improved and only 13% think that it has worsened (50% did not see any changes).

In answer to the question: "In what way exactly have changes taken place in the sphere of culture?", the following replies were given. "In the form of the peoples' attempts to revive their culture, in their wish to return to the customs and traditions of the past" (72%); "In the revival of traditional forms of economic activity and of national customs" (9%); "In the reduction of material and financial contributions to culture" (7%); "In the disappearance of knowledge of mother tongues (2%).

Alongside the positive tendencies in culture, experts have also noted some negative ones, e.g., reduction in financial contributions to cultural activities. This is a serious problem, especially under the circumstances of transition to a market economy.

So it appears that tendencies in the economy and culture are quite contradictory. While there have been certain positive shifts during the years of *perestroika*, old problems have become more acute, whereas new and no-less complicated ones have appeared.

In order to counteract the negative tendencies, specific political action is required. This includes the creation of national autonomous areas in the regions that have a high ratio of indigenous peoples. However, attempts to create autonomies often come up against serious difficulties, the nature of which is shown in the experts' answers to the question: "Are there difficulties in or obstacles to the creation of national autonomies?". The absence of a legal basis for so doing (35%); the indifferent attitude and incompetence of the local authorities (24%); local power struggles (4%); the isolation and apathy of the peoples themselves and the predominance of other nationalities (16%); other reasons (12%).

Each specific difficulty reflects a certain aspect of the political situation in the regions inhabited by the Small Peoples of the North. The total combination of difficulties illustrates very clearly these peoples' lack of legal rights under the political system of the former USSR.

But will it be possible to solve the problems of the Peoples of the North in the future? In order to answer this question, we tried to analyze the social and political mechanisms that have brought them to the point of degradation.

Social and political mechanisms

The main objective of this section is to show the experts' opinion on the results of the policies that have been pursued by the CPSU and the Soviet state relating to the Small Peoples of the North. The experts assessed the success rate of these measures or the lack of influence they might have had on the lives of the population.

According to the experts, the success rate is extremely varied – some measures received 90% positive responses and others just as many negative (see Table 1).

In particular, those measures seen as positive (i.e, more than 60% of answers received) were 1) the creation of literacy; 2) the creation of national areas; 3) privileges for the indigenous population. Meanwhile, measures seen as negative (more than 80% of replies received) were 1) the increase in mining and other industries in regions inhabited by the indigenous Peoples of the North 2) indigenous children attending boarding schools 3) the eradication of religious traditions.

Alongside both the positive and negative measures identified, there are four measures shown in the table that indicate widely differing assessments: 1) investment of resources in the development of the territories (correlation of positive and negative evaluations 58:32); 2) creation of collective farms (*kolkhozy*) (correlation of pluses and minuses 40:53); 3) creation of social infrastructure (55:34); 4) inclusion of the Peoples of the North into Russian culture 50:49). The reason for the differences in

evaluation is understandable: these influences on the life of the Peoples of the North have been dual, both negative and positive. However, on the whole the experts' evaluation of the policies of the CPSU in relation to the Small Peoples of the North was clearly negative.

Shown in the table are the political factors influencing the life of the Small Peoples of the North and the results of the influence of these factors. The main political factors are, on the one hand, the national policy (frequently social policy) and, on the other hand, the nature of industrial development in the northern regions (as a part of the economic policy of the CPSU).

The policies of the CPSU took into account neither the needs of the Small Peoples of the North and their distinctive national features nor the fact that the Small Peoples actually inhabited these regions. This policy has led to appalling social consequences, beginning with the loss of the traditional livelihood and ending with the danger of whole peoples dying out.

The political mechanisms described contain one fundamental defect – there was no desire or possibility for feedback. The state of the peoples and their environment never had any effect on the political strategy. The whole mechanism remained indifferent to the negative processes that had for decades been taking place among the Small Peoples of the North. The attitude of the Communist Party in relation to them did not change.

Table 1. Experts' evaluations of the national policy of the CPSU towards the Small Peoples of the North.

Influence of measures			
Measures	Mostly+	Mostly-	No result
Input of financial & material resources in development of areas and places inhabited by indigenous peoples	58	32	10
Creation of social infrastructure	55	34	11
Development of mining & other industries	7	93	0
Creation of collectivized agriculture	40	53	7
Transition to settled way of life	16	81	3
Children's attendance of boarding schools	8	88	4
Privileges for the indigenous population	61	27	12
Creation of national areas	79	16	5
Inclusion of the indigenous Peoples of the North in Russian culture	50	49	1
Creation of literacy	94	4	2
Eradication of religious traditions	9	86	5

These social and political mechanisms have now begun to change. CPSU structures are being dismantled and the Soviet state departments that ensured the implementation of the economic policy of the Party are being disbanded. National policy in relation to the Small Peoples of the North is beginning to take a new direction under the recently formed state bodies of Russia. However, the old system has left behind a painful legacy that has led to the loss of the peoples' traditional habits of work and lifestyle and to their alienation from the national culture. As a result, the Peoples of the North have reached a critical point whereby the problem is now to find ways to ensure their survival as ethnic groups.

It is evident that there are various solutions to the present crisis.

The experts' opinion on future alternatives for the Small Peoples of the North

The participants in the survey were asked to choose one among three possible alternatives, and their responses were as follows: a return to the traditional way of life, traditional occupations and traditional existence (58%); a combining of the traditional way of life and traditional culture with modern industrial production and urban civilization (41%), more involvement in industrial production and in the urban way of life (1%).

As can be seen from the results there was very little support for the third option. This, in the opinion of the majority, represents a dead end.

The next question was: "If the direction taken until now by industrial development does not change, then what will be the consequences for the Peoples of the North in 5 to 10 years?" The experts identified the following consequences: the Small Peoples dying out (38%); their disappearance as distinct ethnic groups (40%); disappearance of the indigenous peoples' means of existence resulting in unemployment, hunger, poverty (5%); degradation of the population, social apathy, increase in sickness rate, further increases in alcoholism (10%); destruction of the natural environment and disappearance of unique types of fauna and flora (20%). (The total percentage exceeds 100% in that many of the experts gave more than one answer).

Although the industrial development of the northern regions is assessed as having negative effects the experts were far from unanimous in their opinions as to which path to choose for the future. As the answers to the question about development alternatives illustrate, their opinions were divided between the need for a return to the traditional way of life and its combination with urban civilization, the majority being in favour of the first option (58%).

In answer to the question: "What are the main steps that need to be taken in order for the Small Peoples of the North to return to their traditional way of life?", we obtained the following replies: the establishing of special areas of territory for the Peoples of the North (74%), subsidies from the state budget for the development of the Peoples of the North (49%); the creation of national governmental bodies as the masters of the

territories (47%); the outlawing of industrial activity on territories secured for the Peoples of the North (43%); restrictions carried out by the national bodies on the entry of non-indigenous people into the Small Peoples' regions and on taking up permanent residence (36%). (The total percentage exceeds 100% in that many of the experts gave more than one answer).

The general opinion among the experts was that in order to return to the traditional way of life, it was necessary to remove the regions inhabited mainly by indigenous peoples from under the jurisdiction of the existing local authorities and to form in these regions a national governmental body consisting entirely of representatives of the relevant Small Peoples; in other words, to create what would be in essence reservations. According to the experts, the question of what form this government body should take, of the character of its specific bodies and their powers and authority, can only be decided by the Peoples of the North themselves in accordance with their traditions. Industrial activities in the national territories should be prohibited.

From the experts' opinions, it appears that if industrial activity by external (i.e. non-local) organizations were prohibited, then in the inter-

The policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet state	
Social policy National policy relating to the Small Peoples of the North Industrial development of	*Economic policy* Industrialization of the country the northern regions
Results of policy relating to the Small Peoples of the North	
Positive	*Negative*
Creation of national (autonomous) areas	Destruction of local environment
Creation of literacy	Lack of civil rights
Privileges	Loss of traditional livelihood
	Loss of prestige for traditional forms of employment
	Low level of education and qualifications
	Deterioration of population composition
	Deterioration of health
	Loss of religious traditions
	Loss of national culture
	Deterioration of moral standards
	Alcoholism
	Disintegration of family life

ests of the indigenous peoples it would be expedient to establish industrial enterprises directly connected with traditional types of work, for example, domestic and semi-industrial processing of fish, and dressing of furs and deerskins for sale outside of the national territories.

With regard to the combining of traditional ways of life and culture with modern industrial production and urban civilization, the following measures are required, according to the experts' opinions: a right of veto for the local authorities on the establishment of industries that do not correspond to the interests of the inhabitants in the northern regions (78%); industrial exploitation of small areas only (31%); introduction of privileges for the peoples employed in traditional types of economic activities (39%); special subsidies for cultural development (29%); the outlawing of large-scale enterprises (12%). (The total percentage exceeds 100% in that many of the experts gave more than one answer).

A return to a traditional way of life has a number of merits. Above all, it does not envisage radical changes to the direction in which the northern territories have been developing and therefore would entail less political and economic outlay. However, this would be very difficult to achieve in practice. The development of very complicated political and economic mechanisms would be required in order to regulate the relations among the Peoples of the North, state bodies, and the non-indigenous population. For example, for the veto mechanism to work successfully from the point of view of the Small Peoples' representatives, ecological and social examinations of projects would be necessary in order to substantiate the veto. Strong local authorities would be required that would be oriented towards the needs of the Small Peoples of the North and have the option and capacity to prevent the violation of an imposed veto by central state departments. It seems to us that the conditions for the creation of such a mechanism do not exist at the present time and that in the near future it will not be possible to create them.

As if this were not paradoxical enough, it would at the present time be simpler to create national territories isolated from external influence, in which the Peoples of the North could return to their traditional way of life.

The Small Peoples of the North are in a deadlock situation to which they have been brought by the communist experiment. This has caused significant losses of their traditional culture yet has not ensured their inclusion in modern industrial civilization. Having been transformed, in many cases, into marginal groups, they are now searching for a way out of this crisis and are trying to take their fate into their own hands. Will they succeed in so doing?

Notes

1 The Small Peoples of the North were identified as a separate group of Soviet peoples in 1925 by special resolutions of the Soviet of Peoples' Commissars and the All-Union Central Executive Committee. These resolutions were motivated by their small number, the unique character of their traditional skills, knowledge, and lifestyle, and their low level of social and economic development.

2 An indigenous people is defined as "the descendants of peoples who were the primordial inhabitants of a given area of all or part of any country at a time when people of other cultures or from other parts of the world of another ethnic origin came to this territory, subdued them, and placed them in a dependent or colonial position by conquering or colonializing them or by other means". (From the definition contained in the "Special Document on the Problems of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations", compiled for the UN Sub-Committee.)

3 In the answers given by the experts, a wide variation was observed, possibly caused by the dissimilarity of the conditions of the Peoples of the North from region to region.

4 It is probable that these evaluations are too high. In any case, they are higher than those put forward in the existing literature on the subject. Thus, in the recommendations of the scientific conference on "The Problems of Providing Rational Employment for the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East in Industrial Production" (Yakutsk, 18th to 19th of October, 1990), unemployment throughout the six regions inhabited by the Small Peoples of the North was estimated as being between 15 and 26%.

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(*The authors of this article are all prominent Russian sociologists*)

NEOTRADITIONALISM IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH: TO ENTER THE FUTURE WITHOUT FORGETTING THE PAST

By Alexander Pika and Boris Prokhorov

The article represents the position of the Moscow IWGIA Group towards the policy of the Russian government. It was written in March 1994. This version is condensed and edited by Susan Soule with the permission of the authors.

The End of the Old Policy

The state policy of total forced integration and assimilation pursued by the former USSR toward the Small Peoples of Russia has come to its dismal end. The current state policy pays lip-service to doing away with the old principles but has failed to produce any new ones. In fact, a limited form of the old "state paternalism" continues, i.e., in the guise of insufficient and unsystematic assistance from the state budget. Because of this, the so-called "revival of the Peoples of the North", their constructive political activation, has fallen into a recession compared with the period from 1987 to 1991. People in the villages and the tundra are disappointed with the present and not hopeful about the future. They are indignant at the corruption and plundering of the state farms and other economic units by those who continue to manage them. Apathy and hard drinking are spreading. Crime is increasing. Racism and nationalism are growing.

The Need for a New Policy

The policy in the "new" Russia is inconsistent and weak because it is not based on clear guiding principles. New principles to form the foundation of a new state policy are badly needed. The new principles should clearly put aside the goals of assimilation and directed modernization of the culture and the way of life; and instead offer native people the freedom, coupled with the legal and economic protection from outside forces, independently to develop their economy, culture, and forms of self-government.

"Neotraditionalism" has been suggested as a term to describe the new principles that would form the basis and establish the practical directions of this new policy. It helps to answer the basic question posed by the Small Peoples themselves: how to survive and save their ethnic and cultural character and identity in a rapidly changing world.

A Brief Look at Two Past Policies: Traditionalism and Modernization

From the very beginning of Soviet Russia, as early as the 1920s, both traditionalism and modernization had their exponents, both in the government and among scientists and practical workers in the North.

Traditionalists believed that the social and historical development of the Small Peoples was their own business. The state was only to protect them, their culture, and their physical environment from destructive outside influences, while at the same time gradually helping them to adjust to a more dynamic industrial world.

Modernists argued that the social and historical development of the Small Peoples was far too important to leave to the Small Peoples themselves. They believed that a socialist state had the right "for its own sake" to regulate and change all elements of the Small Peoples' way of life, so that great social ideals could be achieved in the future.

Traditionalism tended to dominate in the USSR in the 1920s. It left behind national (now "autonomous") areas, *okrugi* or ethnic districts, and the memory of "national" regions, "patrimonial"and "nomadic" soviets, and more than 120 laws, decrees, edicts, and ordinances protecting the interests and defining the rights of Northern Peoples. There are also numerous first-class scientific research articles and studies from this traditionalist period.

Modernization prevailed from the 1930s to the 1970s. It is closely associated with forced collectivization, and the suppression of armed resistence by some groups of Northern Peoples and communities, which took place in the 1930s; the large-scale evictions from small, ancient villages that occurred in the 1960s; the policy of moving nomadic peoples to a settled way of life in the 1970s. It also led to the nationalization of the traditional community economy; the destruction of native religions, economic activities, and traditions; the "Russification" of school training and education; and the introduction of a boarding school system in secondary education.

During the same period, native regions experienced a very large growth and development in construction, industry, transportation, communications, and mining. All this caused serious damage to the environment, traditional lifestyle, culture, and economic and social structure of the Northern Peoples.

During the period of Gorbachev's *perestroika* (starting in 1987), modernization was subject to sharp public criticism, much of it coming from the Northern Peoples themselves. Traditionalist forms of state policy, as carried out in the 1920s, were looked upon with new interest, and although the age-old debate between traditionalists and modernists continues in Russia today, it seem likely that some form of traditionalism will prevail. The general feeling in Russia, and the feeling among the Northern Peoples themselves, favours it. Such an approach is also more in keeping with world humanitarian and legal standards.

A Policy for the Present: A New Kind of Traditionalism

It is important to emphasize that a new traditionalism does not mean a return to the past. Rather, it represents a way forward. While there are valuable lessons to be learned from some of the better policies of the past, it is also important to encourage new, recently introduced forms of political, social and economic activities, and the further development of regional associations and the All-Russian Association of the Small Peoples of the North. It should also draw upon the experience of other circumpolar countries and international legal principles.

The new course should reject past patterns of "state paternalism", in which financial and material assistance from the state went to numerous ministries and departments rather than directly to the Peoples of the North. This assistance was at the discretion of the leaders and managers of northern territories and regions, who were far too distant from the needs and aspirations of the peoples themselves.

Under the new traditionalism, it is crucial to get assistance directly "into the hands" of the native Peoples of the North and to avoid middlemen. This assistance should include land, resources, and rights, as well as money. And all of these assets - land and water, priority use of the national environment, a share in profits from mining, stock in cash funds formed by compensation payments, etc. - should be given directly to communities, tribal groups, associations, and individuals. The creation of economic independence and the national/territorial self-government of native peoples - so that they may determine their own social, economic, and cultural development - should be an overriding objective of the new policy.

Since the new Russian policy with regard to the Small Peoples of the North will be directed at ethnically based communities rather than separate sections and categories of the population (for example, pensioners, parents of many children, etc.), with the aim of encouraging the survival of the different native groups as unique entities, these efforts should be traditionalist in nature. At the same time, one of the major challenges facing this policy must be the social and economic development. Therefore, along with traditionalism, the policy should incorporate new social, economic, and technological ideas and practical measures to improve people's living conditions. The policy must also respect Northern Peoples' special relationship to the land. This policy - which combines respect for traditional native cultures, values, social institutions and lifestyles, with new technological, economic and ecological approaches to improving the quality of life - could justifiably be named "neotraditionalism".

The Elements of Neotraditionalism

Politically, neotraditionalism involves self-government by native peoples. Economically and ecologically, it means giving people of northern communities the freedom to decide for themselves how they will use their natural resources and land, how they will carry out economic develop-

ment, how they will use for their own consumption or sell to others the things they produce. This might in turn lead to the development of non-traditional branches of the economy, such as tourism and related services, and the maintenance of village infrastructures - roads, power plants, etc. It also means that native people will be compensated for any industrial exploitation of resources.

Socially, neotraditionalism means the development of constructive relationships between levels of the Russian government, and the emerging native institutions of self-government: associations, elders' councils, communal corporations, etc.

Neotraditionalism assumes that the Russian government will be willing to find and keep a balance between: 1) the aims of economic development of the Northern Peoples; 2) the demands of resource development and the need to protect the fragile northern environment; 3) the responsibility to protect the rights of Northern Peoples to maintain their own unique cultures.

The Role of the Russian Government

Neotraditionalism supports the priority of the central Russian government (as opposed to the regional), in sorting out the Northern Peoples' problems, and in maintaining and strengthening a special relationship between the central state authorities and the Small Peoples of the North. This is particularly needed now to counterbalance the often unfair and unstable relations developing between regional structures (local soviets, representatives of territorial, regional and autonomous areal administration) and ethnic groups of the Peoples of the North.

The question of who has the major responsibility for protecting the rights of the native peoples - the central or the regional (in the United States, federal or state) governments - is one of the most important issues in polyethnic societies the world over. It appears that throughout the circumpolar region, central governments play the role of the chief law-maker, protector and guarantor of rights and agreements for the Small Peoples in their conflicts with regional and local administration and industries.

It would be inexpedient and short-sighted for the Russian government to leave the problems of the Small Peoples of the North in the hands of regional or local governments. To avoid this, the Russian central government must have an active policy not just toward the northern regions in general, but one specifically directed to the native peoples. Initially, the central government needs to support and strengthen the various organizations that represent the native Peoples of the North - associations, funds, national cooperatives, societies, etc. To a large extend, such efforts have been undertaken already.

On the regional level, there should be protection and, if and when necessary, direct and deliberate involvement to safeguard the Northern Peoples' interests in conflicts with regional and ministerial industrial

structures. The central government should render legal, political, and at least some measure of economic assistance as needed.

On the local level, the central government should support and assist local efforts and initiatives to develop "ethnic territories", "zones of priority use of the natural environment", and mono-ethnic communities. It is exactly there, on the local level, where most of the centralized federal funds (investments, grants, loans, etc.) should go, as opposed to going to regional entities and associations.

The Basic Principles and Priorities of Neotraditionalist Policy

It is vital to create circumstances under which native peoples, currently in the minority everywhere in the North, are able to gain numerical superiority or legal dominance, at least within the limited areas of native villages and native activities. It is far better to emphasize the development of self-government and local control at the level of native and economic activity, and to determine the way in which local government will relate to regional governments, than to delegate and further extend special "national" functions of currently existing layers of regional and territorial administrations and elected governing bodies.

From the standpoint of neotraditionalism, participation of native peoples in the work of regional and territorial bodies of power is not the main thing. No matter what decisions are taken in big cities and regional centres, the future of native peoples will depend primarily on how their life in the villages, in the taiga, and on the tundra is going to change. The major problem of the survival of the unique cultures of the Northern Native Peoples in the late 20th and 21st centuries will most likely be addressed at the small community level, close to the land, the water, and other resources. The problems will be solved not in Moscow ministries or regional offices, but in the little places where the majority of native people live.

It is better to encourage native People in the North to define their economic, land, and resource requirements, to guarantee them certain economic, land, and resource rights, and to support self-government at the community level, than to encourage and promote the development of the so-called "national statehood" of the Small Peoples of the North in the form of northern autonomous areas, *okrugs* (so far, practically useless and slipping out of their control). Issues of national statehood should wait until native people are stronger, with more rights and more property. It is better for native leaders to work within their local villages to build strong local communities with increased authority and power, so that problems can be dealt with at the local community level, than to lure native leadership into regional and central government positions that take them away from their communities.

Neotraditionalism believes that the majority of problems can and should be sorted out where they emerge. The development and encouragement of social, economic, and cultural activities of the Northern Peoples on the local level, rather than in "capital cities", is in many ways

the major aim of the policy of neotraditionalism.

Using the Past to Survive the Present and Build the Future

The Russian economy is in a slow, contradictory, and difficult period of transition from a centrally controlled command economy to a market economy. At present, economic life in the North, as everywhere in Russia, has both market and command features. There are also specific "transitional" - often unpredictable, unexpected, and even weird - features, and any period of transition and disorganization in the economy is certain to cause various problems, including recession.

In the distant past, native People in the North, relying on their traditional economic activities and natural resources, were independent and self-sufficient and therefore insulated from the economic problems of the central government and bigger society.

In the more recent past, however, the economic life of native people became bound up with national and regional economies. At present, northern native economies are suffering greatly. The death of the perpetually hungry "dinosaurs" of the old economic system, the collective (*kolkhoz*) and state (*sovkhoz*) farms, is dragging on and on, continuing to consume resources and energy that could be going into building something new. Prospects of the central government's providing that kind of long-term aid and support to build something new, such as low-interest bank credits and more supplies, are not good. Therefore, it is essential that the native people return to that which gave strength and stability to their lives for thousands of years, years before there were such things as bank credits and supplies from outside.

The Things that Must Be Done by Native People

As the death and disorganization of the *kolkhoz/sovkhoz* system drags on, the only winners will be those native people, communities, and groups that have the courage to quit this "alien game" and start their own serious economic agenda relying on their own abilities and resources.

To achieve this, it would be essential to remember and relearn the skills and knowledge of earlier generations: to ride reindeer and dog sleds when the gas and spare parts run out for cross-country vehicles; to catch, preserve, and live on just meat and fish during periods when the imported bread and sugar have run out; to learn to listen to and learn from the elders; to be once again willing to cooperate and share pastures and hunting and fishing areas. To ensure all this, decisions need to be made at the community level based on traditional wisdom, not by senior departmental chiefs on brief fly-in visits from their distant offices in regional centres.

There is no question of whether or not this is needed. The only question is whether it can be accomplished. Native people have lived too

long by the order of visiting authorities and by the sustenance of imported bread.

There is no alternative to the rebirth of traditionalism in the traditional branches of the economy of Northern Peoples. The liberal, humanitarian gimmicks offered by some ethnographers are not a substitute. Native people should neither whine nostalgically for the past, nor beg for subsidies for the future. Rather, native people need to use the increasingly severe economic conditions as a means of creating a genuine revival of native traditions in all spheres of life - the economy, the use of the land and the natural resources, community and family structures.

Neotraditionalism envisions the majority of native People in the North returning to their traditional subsistence way of life and occupations: hunting, fishing, reindeer breeding, handicrafts. This will help ensure the long-term survival of native cultures and traditions, and the preservation of native lands and resources.

It is exactly this painstaking rebirth of the traditional way of life that is vital for native peoples. The notorious "parasitic dependence" of natives in the North, if there is such a thing, exists as a consequence of and reaction to state paternalism. Today, the state has neither the intention nor the ability to play the great White Father. Native people now need to recognize that they should not expect help from the outside; especially not some kind of "miracle help" that will come all at once from somewhere and sort out every problem.

Unfortunately, though, one rarely hears any firm, clear statement as to the days of government support's being forever over. Instead, it is now quite common for government officials to blame current "objective difficulties" and to promise to "settle all problems" at some future time. And too many people in the North sit and wait passively for that time to come.

Neotraditionalism talks about what people must do for themselves in order to ensure their survival as native peoples and cultures. It suggests ways that native peoples can build a better future for their children. It says that the guidelines to be followed lie in their own cultural and historical heritage. It says that this is the only true way for the Northern Peoples to survive, develop, and move forward. It is the duty of the state to help and support these efforts with every possible means - with finances, with resources, with the guaranteeing of more rights. This is the essence of neotraditionalism as a new orientation for state, regional, and national policy in the North.

(*B.B. Prokhorov is the director of the Centre for Human Ecology of the Institute for Economic Forecasting, the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is a specialist of medical geography, and a member of the IWGIA group in Moscow*)

FICTION

"ABOUT THAT FOR WHICH THERE IS NO NAME"

BY ANNA P. NERKAGI

I fear some of my own predictions. I have already noticed several times that many of them come true and this makes me careful with words. In particular with words that cross my mind in moments of deep agitation, comparable only with a strange illness, when the brain flushes and the inner eye becomes feverishly sharp, seeing that which normally goes unnoticed. Hands and feet tremble with incomprehensible tension, the pen falters and something stirs inside, boldly and fearlessly. At such a moment it is possible to say anything. The mind seizes on the tiniest dust-speck of a thought, but I do not remember having seen anything in such a moment. I do not remember my eyes at all, as if I were blind. And the letters, words, lines – nothing of these is visible; there is only one pulsating thought, an awareness of the vital breath of what has been written, something that is not mine, but is contained within me. Something huge and stirring, agitating my soul to the point of breakdown.

It makes you shiver and feel uncomfortable when it suddenly seems as though someone is controlling your mind and soul and carrying out your will in the form of a word unveiled in a violent state of "sickness". This is the only way that I can describe the delirium that grips me at certain times.

I pray to God that I will not be passing sentence through such words on my people whom I love boundlessly. Whether it is the Devil or God who leads me I cannot say. If it is God, then it is his will. He alone knows his ways. And if it is the Devil?! He does not usually give such gifts away for free. But whose soul does he want in return? Mine? If only mine, then let him have it. For it is precisely for such souls that he has got room. But if he needs a greater sacrifice, then I am afraid, terribly afraid of my thoughts.

I see before me a breakdown, a breakdown that comes to us all. Not cancer, not AIDS, but an entirely different kind of disease threatens us. Inside us, our soul has begun to rot. In the same way that any other organ in our body might rot – the liver, lungs, kidneys...

There is no doctor who can cure the soul. Once there was God. But we cannot get him back because he has renounced us. I see the breakdown of the Nenets in the cruel killing of the deer. The deer have come to serve the stomach. The Nenets have reached a point where they no longer see in the deer a brother for life but only a piece of meat by which to stave off hunger. Yet hunger has always been a precursor of death. When a tree is felled, the sap in it continues to flow for some time from the force of inertia. The crippled trunk uses its ebbing strength to feed its branches, to give shadow that fades from day to day and finally withers, slowly, without any visible agony or convulsions. In the same way a people may

also dry up and wither. We try to persuade both ourselves and our people that they are still alive, healthy and prospering. Meanwhile they become but a shadow of the once- proud, courageous, and independent people that they were. This is what will happen if we do not come to our senses immediately.

Let me be wrong. Let my delirium be the delirium of a sick soul and let the words written below be only the product of a moment's despair.

A man had stopped at the foot of a high three-ridged mountain. He looked around. He did not know the place. Blocks of stone, like huge herds of deformed animals, surrounded him. They were overgrown with heavy black moss that looked like flowers. On the petals of the flowers hung succulent drops of rain or dispersing mist, which shone like a hostile glance from under half-closed eyelids.

The man shivered from the cold, hunching his shoulders and shifting from foot to foot. From his movements, a few heavy drops fell from a succulent leaf beside him and this made the stranger tremble all over.

It was impossible to tell his age. His face was pale like a rainy sky and the look of his eyes was despondent and cautious but not tenacious. There are people who have a short range of vision. When they look in front of and beneath themselves they can see very well, but the horizon and the stirring contours and curves of the Earth's body far away seem blurred to their eyes and covered in mist. Such people feel emotions such as danger and joy all of a sudden and therefore they become blunt and lose their heads, like an animal whose senses of hearing and smell are weakly developed.

Looking around him, stumbling over stones, bushes, and the dry twigs and branches scattered about among them, the man made his way down to the lake to the right of the strange three-ridged mountain. On reaching it, he plunged his pale hands into the water. His fingers looked like the roots of a plant that had been dragged out from under a stone, colourless, thin, and sickly. These hands had evidently never done any coarse or accurate work. They had not plaited strong lassoes, had not wielded an axe to make the parts of a sledge, and had never smelled of resin and shavings or been hardened by the wind and the sun.

In other words, the stranger was very much like a weird being that had just been dragged out from under a big glass jar where neither wind, snow nor sun penetrates, nor any of life's other inconveniences.

But at the same time, from the swift movements of his head, from the shape of his large, elongated, and very tired eyes, and from the way he sometimes nervously knitted his dark brows, one could sense another kind of quality, a delicate and resolute character, with a once excellent capacity to react and with a persevering and quiet strength. This was a wretched and weak copy of a man, strong in body and mind, but now so blurred and indefinite that it was impossible to say even what nation he

came from. What roots, what thoughts, what kind of shadow of a divine idea did we see in front of us? It was as if a sculptor had shaped a figure that he had seen in a dream or in a state of delirium, that had pleased him so much because of its integrity, yet his hands had been shaking and his soul had been so afraid to miss the image he had captured that all that came out was sheer cowardice. Because of haste or maybe due to carelessness, the sculptor had erred in the material he had chosen. Instead of the wood from a healthy, strong tree or a stone, which can contain all the wisdom of the world in one wrinkle, he had chosen dead grey clay.

It was obvious that the man was tired. After rinsing his hands and face in clear, sparkling water, he sank down onto a stone and slowly began to dry himself with the edge of his strange indeterminate clothing that resembled either a loose overall or a shapeless sack. Evidently at sometime this clothing had been perfect: a loose garment with a short hood sewn onto its wide shoulders and from these shoulders sleeves extended from tattered armholes. What was so remarkable about the garment was that it took a man only one unbroken movement to make it cover him from head to foot.

The coarse material of the overall, the colour of a mouse, was not brightened by any kind of pattern or design, making the colourless man all the more grey.

Silent and stiffened into a state of deep apathy, as though asleep, the man resembled one of the small idols that the Nenets, when they inhabited this land half a century ago, used to worship. The small idols were kept on *narts*, a kind of car made out of wood, but sometimes, during years of turmoil when gods were thrown down from their thrones by foolish people, the Nenets carefully hid their protectors. For this purpose, they chose the most inaccessible, dark, and secluded places, such as mountain crevices or the axils of old trees, and left the idols there until better times. The idols grew old, their faces cracked from dampness and darkness, their clothes rotted, their bodies decayed, and they became covered with a stinking, sore-like mould.

The wooden gods turned to dust, the stone ones disintegrated into tiny pieces, and their clothes, once so eye-catching with a multitude of amulets and tokens of omnipotence, started to give at the seams. And then, with the gods gone, the people became depraved, they dispersed and disappeared, destroyed by terrible tragedies – the very same people that had once warmed the rough ground, frozen solid for many kilometres down, with their life. With their disappearance, with no human fires burning, the land froze right down to the very core. Any dwelling without a fire turns into a pile of rubbish and the Earth into a lifeless desert, populated by wild blocks of stone covered with thick, gloomy moss.

On a second more attentive glance the man, sitting on a stone, looked very much like a silly monster. As he sat motionless, it was obvious that his look was not only despondent, but also that it contained a perceptible element of obsequiousness, like that of a dog that is perpetually beaten.

And at the same time every now and then an element of evil intent appeared in that look, ready at any moment to replace shrewdness by stupidity.

Over a period of some minutes his face assumed several different expressions, from evil to sweet despondency, in the latter case greatly resembling the grimace of an animal that had been taught to talk and to smile. There are dogs which have learned how to smile. A master, by coaxing, beating and rewarding with titbits, can teach his animal various tricks, including how to move its muscles to give the impression of something resembling a smile. But what is a smile? It is not a movement of the lips but the dictate of the soul. In life, there is however a particular school in which man and animals are taught not to be themselves. The man-monster had obviously been through this excellent and loathsome school. His face would sometimes stiffen for a long while as if glue had been spilt onto it, making it look like a death mask.

Suddenly behind him in the bushes there was a loud rustling and two enormous, fat lemmings shot out one after the other like bullets fired in succession. The man jumped up instantly. In fact jumped is not the word for it. Having displayed an animal-like dexterity, he snarled and it was not possible to make out whether it was the ghost of a smile or a sense of fear that distorted his pale lips. A hunter is not a hunter if he has never chased a predator down under a tree or a stone – in other words to the place of its death. Animals understand that – whether by consciousness, scent, soul, who knows, but they understand it -and the most uncanny thing at a moment like this is the face of the doomed animal. Every hair on the hunted creature trembles, its nostrils are taut, in its eyes there is an expression of agony, threat, and hope. With a hollow snarl, the creature looks down at the edge of the knife or the barrel of the rifle and, who knows, who can be sure, that the expression the animal chooses at this moment is not something halfway between a bribing smile and a counterthreat.

The flight of the two poor lemmings, who had evidently been fighting over some sweet root, provoked precisely this hunted expression in the man's pale face, which now turned white with fear.

It took him a long time to calm down and he continued to look in the direction in which the lemmings had disappeared. He sat down again, but his fear did not leave him. He seemed particularly scared of what might be behind his back, because time and again he looked around behind him. Fear of what was behind his back?! In bygone times, this type of fear was considered disgraceful and unworthy of a real man. Any man afraid of what was behind his back was a man, who had dirty stains on his conscience, and an enemy who would deal blows from behind did not do a man honour.

Who was he then, this man with the behaviour of a hunted beast, the chameleon-like face of a creeping reptile, the vulnerable back and the pale, flipper-like hands? Where had he come from? Where was he going?

And why had he stiffened in a state of indecisiveness at the foot of the three-ridged mountain, the great mountain that had once been worshipped by the Nenets, the grateful, hard-working tribes who were reared on its slopes, who were harmless to the highest degree, proud to the point of foolhardiness, naive like children and who had loved freedom more than life, more than their own mother?!

Now no one remembers the name of the mountain. It has been lost in the same way that a once good-quality thing becomes lost, when carelessly thrown into a pile of unnecessary rubbish. Thus the name had been covered with scornful oblivion, the name, at the sound of which in the past the Nenets would have inclined their heads, whatever important thoughts they might have had on their minds at that moment. The great mountain is now simply known as "the stone", like any dead block similar to so many other blocks that are scattered about the bosom of the earth, burdening it with their useless weight.

Far from the three-ridged mountain that has lost its name, and not in the direction of the frozen sea, but in the opposite direction, lies the Wretched Settlement. These are the only suitable words to describe the society in which a multitude of these pale-skinned people of undefinable nationality lives. The settlement resembles an enormous anthill where disorderliness of movement adds to the aimlessness of existence. Or rather, it is not exactly an anthill, for in an anthill order is maintained and the main law in force is the law of work whereby ant workers drag grass and dry leaves, but in the Wretched Settlement...

This dreadful settlement can only be compared to a swarming, voracious bunch of worms, eating away at the corpses of the deceased and afterwards throwing themselves upon one another.

How the community arose and grew is a long, complicated and sad story. It represents not only one, but several generations of people, or rather the shadows of people who lived on this land at a time when the root of a man's life was work, and when the strength, pride, and meaning of the earth was the Reindeer – an animal with four feet, a short bushy tail, and a remarkably beautiful and warm fur of different sometimes fantastical colours, ranging from a bluish black to pale blue like a morning mist on a lake.

The crowning glory of this creature was its antlers. They grew on the animal's head symmetrically. In the early spring, together with the rays of the rising sun, small, tender buds began to appear under the fur of reindeer's coat, and gradually, from pale blue, bushy coverage they became transformed into marvellously strong bone with a multitude of outgrowths, odd curves and smoothness. Only a song can be born like this and the antlers were the song of the deer, or so said the elders of the wretched inhabitants. The songs of the deer were the songs of their souls. In ancient times, all living beings had songs and the songs all originated from the soul. The songs were different, they sounded different, but in general they were the very same and unique song of freedom.

The inhabitants of the Wretched Settlement however live as they can – some of them have houses with large windows like eyes, in which winter temperatures are as cold as those in a wooded glade. Others live in small, half-blind log huts, and these huts are in a sorrowful and decrepit state. The oldest members of the community, who sometimes move bent on all fours, live in a type of dwelling that it is difficult, even impossible, to give a name to.

It is not a house or a log hut, neither is it a tent but rather a strange dwelling in the form of a cone pinned to the ground from above by a spike. These dwellings are often so decrepit that the roof covering on them gets ripped off by a strong gust of wind, as though it were made of paper. The poor occupants have to use their remaining strength to patch up the holes with whatever they can lay their hands on. In winter they rarely crawl outside. They all have the habits of moles, mice, and lemmings living underground. The young people of the settlement laugh at them and make their children laugh, too – even the very small ones. These mole-like members of the settlement live in a separate group in the most unfavourable places, for example, on the lower banks of lakes where the ground is wet, squelchy from dampness, and in winter frozen solid like asphalt. This group of wretched inhabitants are all equally old and differ from the other community members in their peculiar spirit. They more often than the others have talks in an unknown tongue about strange and fantastical animals and deer. But what is even stranger – they sometimes strike up songs, wonderful and long, like the silk thread on which the young women in the settlement dry their washing. And the nights become full of pain and anxiety, when a fine trembling voice, like a little bell in a cemetery, stiffened from grief, strikes up a sad and wild tune. The sound of this tune, together with the omnipresent cold, creeps into each dwelling and causes each and every member of the community, young and old, to groan in horror.

But it seems even more strange and sad to the younger group of the wretched inhabitants when the moles burst into an incomparably and inexplicably mournful weeping. As if hundreds of silly old loons (these birds used to exist but nowadays one must be lucky to catch a glimpse of one) have gathered and, sticking out their awkward necks, heave from the pits of their empty stomachs a slow and repulsive whining.

It is at this point that the younger community members, feeling an incomprehensible fear, send their children to silence the silly people. The children arm themselves with stones – some with small ones and others with big ones – from the bank of the river, and having stuffed the stones into their pockets they go to do a just deed, to drive away the moles who have gone completely mad.

The weeping is quickly cut short. Old women and old men, equally infirm, crawl away in all directions with short cries of pain. The stones are aimed well and hit their targets, the children firing quickly and accurately. (Where do they get this ability?) A multitude of bruises and scratches

appear on the moles; their skin is torn from the blows of the sharp stones; blood and ichor flow from injured eyes.

For a long time, the children chase after the old people as they crawl away and keep up the attacks. Working themselves into a heated frenzy, they surround their victims on all sides and, hardening themselves with cries and laughter, they hit their goals with astonishing certainty.

Often these battles go on late into the night. Meanwhile, parents sit and talk together about how late the children are out playing.

The next morning, after a night of such games here and there, one can see the corpses of the old moles scattered across the landscape. If it is winter, they have already stiffened into the most pitiful postures; if summer, they have been covered with flies and eaten by worms, of which there are a great many in the Wretched Settlement. The moles' dwellings are destroyed, household goods lie strewn about everywhere. The remaining moles bury their dead in silence, neither crying nor speaking. They lay them in the ground right there under their feet where they stand, having neither the strength nor the courage for more decent kinds of funerals.

The old wretched inhabitants of the settlement die a slow and painful death. Their faces are white as snow as are the wrinkles covering their foreheads, and their cheeks are pale as if while they are still alive their blood has been transformed from red to transparent water. At the moment of their death, everything about them is sad: their eyes, their lips, their hands... yet the infrequent words, spoken so unexpectedly but strongly and distinctly, are full of hatred. They do not like to die during the day in the light, and they cannot stand the presence of the young wretched inhabitants. They all try to pass away at night and – which is equally important for all deaths – to crawl away somewhere to "freedom". Therefore, the corpses are not found at once but only later on, under trees and stones, by streams or simply out in the plain.

Even the older moles, who still stand firm on their legs, have their peculiarities. One of the moles may go away, walking off into the distance that his eyes have been looked into so often, yet gazing only at the ground. Sometimes his face may liven up, flush, and become stronger looking, his eyes may sparkle, his pace quicken.

Yet what he sees are small, once-burnt, patches of the ground, visible only to him. Suddenly he falls down onto the ground and, in a state of wild grief, he begins to kiss each centimetre of the soil, lips trembling, nostrils quivering, like a dog having found a scent, as if he were imagining the unique, bittersweet aroma of half-burnt willow or the scent of an alder tree. And a weak but pure flame sanctifies his distorted features. Many moles walk off into the distance towards the places where they so often direct their gaze. They find tracks known only to themselves, they feel under their feet a particular firmness of ground, perhaps a path that was used long ago, and they do not come back. Nobody searches for them. Why should they? Who needs them?, these half-rotten, half-blind dregs of humanity?

The land far away from the settlement is alien to the young wretched inhabitants. This alienation began a long time ago. As a result of the disorderly murders of all forms of life on the land, the tundra became infertile, and therefore it started to revenge itself on people. The old union between man and land, based on joint work, had been broken, and anarchy prevailed, both on the land and in human society, from now on called by the shameful and disgraceful name of the Wretched Settlement. Both the land and the people rejected their mutual responsibilities towards each other, their duty to help each other, to understand each other's sorrow and joy, and as a result a feeling of embittered solitude was born in both man and the land.

Over the last 10 years the land of the wretched inhabitants has lost its reason and been overtaken by all sorts of incomprehensible oddities, like an old crazy and decrepit woman. The community has not always been called the Wretched Settlement, a name that smells of mustiness and dirtiness. In the old days, there had been Nomad Camps; several families had camped together, subject only to the law of survival, driving their already scanty herds from one place to the next. Then suddenly, the Earth began to swallow everything on its surface – people, dwellings, all that burdened its breast. Peoples' dwellings stood there peacefully. Suddenly there was a resounding, monstrous groan and everything and everyone – dogs, people, sledges, goods – disappeared in the blink of an eye into the frightful mouth of the Earth. After that the Earth closed up its jaws again, making a smacking noise like a child who has drunk its fill from its mother's breast.

Fear crept into people. Never before had the Earth swallowed people alive. Many said that it was angry at the people on its surface for their disrespect, cruelty, and callousness. Hurriedly, people began to offer up sacrifices. They strained their memory to recollect the old places of worship, they tried in vain to find traces of fire on them. And unable to recollect anything, they gave up and slaughtered their sacrificial deer on the first elevations they came across. They lit fresh fires and threw fine branches of *nerok* (a type of tree particular to the tundra) on the fire to give off a special smoke, the fragrance of which was not supposed to offend the scent of the gods. They prepared buckets of some unsalted liquid and poured it out upon silent stones, pieces of wood, and yellow and black moss. But nothing helped. The Earth would not accept these small, belated offerings. It wanted more, much more. People owed it a great debt and in a state of furious vengeance it swallowed and destroyed, singling out victims stealthily. A person would come driving along, and suddenly he would be gone, the only clue to his disappearance being the sedate groaning of the Earth as it swallowed its victim. On the plains, there turned out to be many hidden places from which the Earth, like an animal lying in wait, swallowed its prey slowly, as if sucking on a piece of sugar.

Intelligent people tried to understand what this was all about. Many said that the Earth's core had become empty, that the spirit had been

pumped out of it that is necessary to maintain firmness of body, that burning hot chimneys and pipes had been installed that had scorched its insides. Who knows, maybe it is so. But whatever had happened inside the Earth, it had rendered lifeless and soulless the land of the wretched inhabitants. The lakes on the land dried out. Some of them started to grow a colourless, sepulchral grass that gave off a bad smell for many kilometres around. The water in many of the lakes turned black.

In the evenings the mountain ridge, which had once shone in hues of pink or blue with a purity, coolness and allure that gripped the soul, had started to give off black smoke. This was the smoke from a multitude of small factories and drilling platforms. Like monstrous spiders, they had crept into the area along the railway, up the gravel roads and other roads, and now they were grabbing with their pincers more and more of the surrounding land. Cruelly and pitilessly, they exhaled their poisonous smoke, fumes, and excrement – and no purifying force of any kind could overcome their many tons of dirt. Yet the Earth would not take any more of their poisonous urine to her breast and the putrid filth spread itself over a distance of many kilometres, destroying everything around.

Near the small and big factories, drilling platforms and other conquerors, the wretched inhabitants huddled together in their miserable rubbish-heap camps. While there was still fish in the rare and fast-disappearing lakes, they caught it for the people at the factories and drilling platforms, and this was what they lived from. The wretched inhabitants could not find work at the factories or on the drilling platforms, not even the youngest and fittest of them. This was firstly because they could not accustom themselves to these circumstances – they were lazy and awkward – and secondly because the people there would simply not employ them. Work at the factories and other enterprises paid well, to say the least. In fact it paid very good money, and the factories could do with the abundance of migrant workers who wanted to work there.

However, there was another reason that the wretched inhabitants did not work in the factories... All of them were suffering from a strange disease – a peculiar longing for all kinds of wandering around. It got to the point where it was almost absurd. For want of transport, a wretched inhabitant would carry his fragile little dwelling by the sweat of his own brow to a new area as if he himself were some kind of a car. Then with the family's help, all the rest of the goods and chattels would also be moved. Having set up a tent-like dwelling on a relatively clean piece of land that still showed signs of life, the wretched inhabitant would say: "Well, there you are, so we have migrated." Migrated??! Idiot! How the young wretched inhabitants and some of the migrant workers would laugh at him.

Very strange phenomena were observed in the behaviour of the wretched inhabitants. One or another of them might light an open fire near his dwelling. He would sit down near it, drop his hands onto his knees, his head onto his chest, and there he would remain as still as an idol. He would sit for an hour, perhaps two, occasionally moving his lips

slightly and then... believe it or not, he would throw himself in the fire and without a sound start to burn like a dry, resinous log. In order to protect people, so as not to give everybody the idea of burning themselves in this horrifying way – it is, of course, a different matter when people "burn up" from drinking vodka, but just the thought of burning oneself up is ferocious – the authorities started to prohibit these strange fires by imposing fines and introducing other kinds of punishments. Then the wretched inhabitants gave up the pernicious and sickening habit of burning their bones on open fires. No reason to do so. For there are simpler and safer ways whereby you can easily set your hair on fire – just take a match and light the gas ring.

But let's get back to the settlement, that the weird person who had stopped in deep thought at the foot of the three-ridged mountain came from.

His Wretched Settlement does not have any name. It is the largest settlement in these areas. It has no factories, drilling platforms, or other new-fangled things in and around it. The community took its beginnings from the "period of stagnation", as people call one of the many delusions of humanity on its way to the present state of spiritlessness, the most terrifying of all diseases to which man has ever been exposed. But the delusion was extremely thorough and the means that were chosen to escape it were not the very best – that is, men were not put to work, not to the most ordinary physical work, and people became confused and entangled like helpless mosquitoes in the sticky web of a spider standing guard.

The wretched inhabitants did feel attached to their Wretched Settlement, for they were indebted to their forefathers for its existence. It was their political indifference, their sometimes lacking ability and other times lacking will to fight for their land, for their way of life, their mouse-like philosophy that water will only destroy the neighbour's mousehole, not mine, that led to the nation's present miserable state, deforming it beyond recognition.

In the beginning, the community had been a small national settlement. As land was being used for roads, factories and drilling platforms, impoverished people who had been left without reindeer turned up little by little at the settlement. The younger generation returned, after having tried to make themselves a way of life in the big cities but without success. Now they tried to take up the work of their fathers, but alas...there was nothing to take up. The ties to the soil had been broken.

The last ones to join the ranks of the settlement were those who came from the tundra. After a long and exhausting struggle, they ended up dragging themselves back to the settlement and herding all their deer along with them. Having arrived and set up their tents on a permanent stand in this shameful place of death, they stood before their draught bulls, tears running down onto the noses of the beasts who had been like faithful friends to them. They knelt before them, not knowing to whom

they should turn to ease their aching souls, then lifted the executioners' axe above their heads, still unaware that in killing these beasts they were killing their own souls. From that time onwards, a new era had begun...

The era of slavery. A people who loses its ancient work that has been intended for it by nature or God – this people becomes enslaved.

The present wretched inhabitants were the descendants of those who had not been swallowed up by the mad Earth and had been able to survive somehow by clinging to a scrap of their native land. There were only few of them who were able to remember the events of the last days of freedom. By and large, their memories were like dreams – very distant and very incomprehensible.

The wretched inhabitants lived in poverty. Hunger, diseases and drunkenness, the main offshoots of unemployment, accompanied them from the cradle to the last day of their lives. The means that the state provided from time to time in order to uplift their bodies and souls had the effect of a temporary painkiller or, to be more accurate, of sleeping draughts. Strangely enough, even the smallest amount of poorly paid work gave occasion for cruel fights and slaughter among the young inhabitants and even among whole families. There were no big employers like factories or plants. The wretched inhabitants' land had not been created for such giants, and why should they be there at all, with the harsh climate and the long desolate winters driving out even the most entrepreneurial persons. In fact, even that which had attracted all sorts of people in the past – the fur, fish, meat, etc. – all this had disappeared into an abyss. Now only the wretched inhabitants themselves remained and they had never been of any great value to anyone.

In the beginning, all the inhabitants worked for themselves, plaiting, sewing, scraping and carving, but gradually all these exhausting activities disappeared due to lack of any real demand, and then the wretched inhabitants started to die for no serious reasons.

The inhabitants' children, having learned one or another trade, sometimes went away to the large cities and disappeared without trace, never sending word of themselves and never coming back. People did not worry about them. They would manage to look after themselves and that was all. The women tried not to bear too many of them. All that was needed were a few little ones who could make some noise in the house and create an illusion of life as long as they were small, and then line up in the scuffle for work when they had grown older. For these purposes, one or two children were sufficient, no more.

The inhabitants were pale, nervous, irritable, greedy, and very ill. Doctors, sometimes on duty, sometimes following the dictates of their conscience, lived for months among them, studying corpses, illnesses, and living conditions. They said that there was a deficiency of a mysterious vitamin in the wretched inhabitants' organisms. This vitamin was necessary in order to survive in the North in exactly the same way that salt is necessary in bread or in dried foods.

This precious vitamin was, supposedly, only to be found in raw stuffs, not in cooked food, and it had a life-giving force. As the above-mentioned vitamin hardly occurred in the wretched inhabitants' food, they themselves did not live long and often as early as the age of forty they yielded up body and soul to god.

The doctors, strong believers in this vitamin, were not liked and therefore, in order to silence them, large loads of potatoes, carrots, watermelons, cabbages and other raw stuffs were brought in from the rest of the country. To boil, fry, or steam the vegetables was strictly forbidden. It was suggested again and again that they should be dipped into salt and eaten raw. But these extra measures did not help because the wretched inhabitants wrinkled up their noses, bristled, and in every possible way evaded the raw vegetable therapy; and because of their stupidity, they died like flies. However flies die only until spring, until the first warm rays of the sun appear. These people continued to die and ray therapy did not help them either.

But sometimes... although it would have been better if it had not happened... sometimes fish was brought from some strange seas far away, genuinely raw fish, smelling of living water and seaweed. So what happened?! The wretched inhabitants threw their potatoes on the rubbish heap (although they would go and pick them up again the next day) and their cabbage and carrots, too, and taking all the cash they possessed, they would go and stand in the queue at the shop. The raw food was sold strictly according to a ration quota, one kilogram per person, and therefore they dragged their sickly children into the queue with them and the little ones still in nappies. Sometimes only one third of them obtained the fish they all had been so longing for and that had sometimes gone rotten from the long journey. Bloody battles, bruises, slaughter, swearing – God knows what went on in the vile queues. Broken legs, abandoned, trampled infants, maimed faces, stomachs cut open... better not enumerate anything more. Getting to the fish, without even examining it, they quickly put it into their bag, or sack, and some of them, before even getting outside the shop would regale themselves with their purchase. Meanwhile, the queue would moan and groan and sway with impatience like the tail of an animal.

Then the feast would start! They ate their fill of raw, half-putrid, insufficiently salted, insufficiently prepared fish. They ate greedily, in silence, in a state of intense concentration. All doors were shut, locked, and bolted. Those who had a dog unchained it to keep guard. The families feasted until everyone had become drowsy and sick. By the next morning, in almost every family there was someone who did not get out of bed. But this was something they got used to.

The same happened, but to an even worse extent, when raw meat was brought to the settlement, whole frozen carcasses. Then brother no longer knew brother, father son, husband wife...only one accursed Devil, namely the passion for everything raw, had whole communities in its grip. The

benevolent state was beset with anxiety for the lives of the poor inhabitants who did not recognize their own good. It was ready to give mountains of gold to anyone who could save the wretched inhabitants from dying out, save them for history to keep the number of nations complete. But no such persons came forward, no matter how much you cried. There were no such persons among the doctors, sociologists, psychologists, or among the wretched inhabitants themselves.

But there was another kind of people, although there were few of them. Kings, tsars, sultans, politicians, and other strong men of this world have at all times kept at hand people who by nature possessed a sharp tongue. These intelligent people had the special privilege of speaking the truth – not the trivial, momentary, coincidental truth, which most people make suit themselves, like clothes that are altered here and there to please the onlooker. This was another type of truth – a divine truth, whereby God is the Truth and the Truth is God. And sometimes this truth was so strong that it could kill a person right there on the spot. These people were not popular. They were beaten, maimed, or crippled. But they were nevertheless generously fed with the leftovers from the table of the tsar or sultan.

Long, long ago among the ancestors of the wretched inhabitants, such people were often those who were mad or were said to be so. You also find such people among the wretched inhabitants. Every family has its Fool, and all times have their Fools with their heads crammed full of truths and their Judases called upon to take in the majority of the population called the People.

The wretched inhabitants did not like either Fools or Judases. Both of them worried their souls to no purpose, causing mental turmoil and giving rise to wishes, feelings, and thoughts, impossible, however, for them to realize. If a stone is warmed up until it becomes white-hot and then afterwards has very cold water poured over it, if not the first time then after the second, third, or fourth repetition the stone will develop a multitude of cracks and finally break into small pieces. When strong feelings well up for a second time, not having found their point of focus in the first instance, they lose their original meaning, just as uneaten food loses its taste.

But let us talk a little about the nature of the Judases. A Judas is cleverer and slyer than the righteous Fool. A Judas is shrewd, as shrewd as white is whiter than black, and his tentacles can reach into the very depths of a phenomenon, penetrate its underworld, and thus he becomes the possessor of the vilest secrets. Let us take another example that is easier to understand. Imagine that a Judas is let into in a warehouse to which no one has access, and inside he finds an abundance of gunpowder ready to ignite at the first spark. The Judas's hair stands on end at such a sight. Should he tell the truth, knowing that outside there are people, houses, and children? Everyone would be blown sky high, and all that would remain would be a mass of earth, burnt and stunted. Should he tell? A Judas thinks carefully, and his instinct tells him that in exchange for such

a truth people would perhaps break his ribs and then rip his head from his shoulders. So, smoothing his ruffled hair, he hurriedly fixes a smile on his lips and cheerfully goes out of the warehouse.

"There's bread in there", he says to those awaiting him, "a lot of bread. We will not be threatened by hunger." And people break up, feeling calm and safe. The good news has comforted them. There is something in reserve lest times become worse. There is no cause for concern and they can live on.

Judases have a considerable all-encompassing intellect and hold their nose to the wind like good hunting dogs, always knowing what their master wants of them. To unmask a Judas would be like trying to catch an eel by the tail just after it has been pulled from the water and is still covered with slime. They are even more dangerous than some people think. They contribute to bringing about the end of mankind almost more than anyone else. Like true depredators, they know the bottom of life well and if necessary they would be the first to dive into the deep, safe underwater depths, where would they remain unharmed if a storm suddenly passed by, shaking both the upper layers and the foundations.

When the righteous Fool comes up against a Judas, he will always lose. His intellect is bright but short, like a reindeer's tail. His tongue is sharp, but it is like a knife used to pick mushrooms – you cut off the cap but the root stays in the ground. Having got the right to tell the truth, the Fool will instantly receive a knock on the forehead (or sometimes even a hard blow) or a kick in the behind strong enough to make itself felt.

The righteous Fools are very sensitive, but they think in bursts, almost like flashes of lightning. In other words, they are like travellers who, having prepared for the long road ahead, set off on their way, but en route find themselves distracted by the smallest trifle – a rotting tree stump at the side of the road, blossoming trees, a bird in flight, and so on... As a result, the travellers arrive late, or expire without having reached their destination.

Fools worry people with the truth. This is just the same as showing a piece of bread and butter to someone hungry and exhausted and then not giving him even the crumbs. Such manipulations make a human being blunt and bitter. For a long time, the strong people of this world did not know how to make use of either the Fools or the Judases; for any current is strong only when all of nature's power is aimed in one direction and is not flowing in all directions. Yet by the time of the wretched inhabitants, and even quite a long time before them, lovers of the truth had found a special and valuable kind of work for the Judases and the righteous Fools.

Once a year, usually when the sun rises above a small group of trees, a meeting takes place in the settlement. The wretched inhabitants come on foot from the very farthest corners of their hapless land in order to listen to the word. Even the moles crawl out of their pitiful dwellings and the strong, young inhabitants gather, like wolves in a pack. Such meetings were dangerous in the sense that all of the people present, both young

and old, were seized by a feeling of alarm, because everybody felt that the meetings might be eventful. An emotional anguish, charged by the cold and the hungry dog's life that these people led, caused their frustration to reach a breaking point. The uncontrollable crowd, embittered for some unknown reason, in appearance like a herd of wild animals, seemed ready to destroy, to shatter, to pull down their own dwellings and the factories and drilling platforms, even at the risk of dragging themselves down with it all. At these meetings, the wretched inhabitants behaved dreadfully, and although everyone knew that the worst damage they could inflict would be to pull one or two of the rotting, empty sheds to pieces or to maim one another, the wretched inhabitants nevertheless provoked an annoyed apprehension amongst the authorities.

How should they deal with these people? Should they threaten them with weapons? God forbid. There were so few of them left. And they were indispensable. For a meadow is only a meadow when a low but high-eyed forget-me-not grows side by side with a sweet william, when a tender white-headed camomile leans against a big, well-rooted clover.

It is a well-known fact that in ancient times the remedy (and poison) that had the strongest effect of all on the wretched inhabitants' souls (at that time, they were called by another name – the Nenets) was the word. It is said that they listened to what was told to them with mouths open wide. One Nenets would go and visit another and bring him, as an expensive gift, as a pledge, the word. If you came without words, it was like deriding your neighbour, and you would lose other people's respect. Therefore words were used with care, just like the blade of a hunting knife. However, a good word was valued even more highly than a fast reindeer.

And it was words, spoken once from above by the chosen ones of this world, and bearing in fact a death sentence, that had brought the wretched inhabitants to their present state – to the state of constantly hungry worms. This is what blind worship eventually leads to.

If someone asked the wretched inhabitants how they had got into this pathetic state, many would remain silent with a stupid air; some would grin with a studied smile on their distorted silent lips, whilst others would snarl; and some would answer, while exposing their rotting teeth more than expected in an ordinary conversation:

"A blind person is surrounded by darkness and follows the person who leads him by the hand."

"But a blind person has ears..."

"Yes indeed, the ears of a blind person are just like the ears of a person who can see; the only difference is that for a blind person, words are everything – law, power, and sun."

In the time of the wretched inhabitants, words were used in a special way. When a child had hurt itself and was in pain, sometimes a great deal of pain, sweets would be used to distract it, or a shiny, clanging toy. And the child would forget.

When the wretched inhabitants met, they suddenly and abruptly realized, with their spoiled consciousness, that they had lost their substance and become genuine lickspittlers. Even young people, nursed on the milk of their times, began to understand that the Wretched Settlement was a shameful thing and that they had turned into wolves, ready to tear away prey even from a mother, brother or blind, defenceless father. The law of the wolves is not for people – they knew this. But with their pale, flipper-like hands and looks, vague from sickly excitement, they were still dangerous people. The women, who had abandoned their children, also gathered, and as a furious beast with many heads who does not know how to give vent to its rage begins to gnaw its own tail, they fell upon one another.

The Fools and Judases know how to bide their time. Like a toothless burbot who lurks in a clump of underwater plants of the same colour as its spotty skin, waiting for its prey, opening wide its loathsome jaws, whereby stirring its sole flexible sly whisker and creating the impression of a stupid, incautious worm, the Fools and Judases bided their time. They would sit in the deep and secure burrow of silence, their eyes darting about from one group of people to another, straining their ears in the necessary direction. Every hunt has its rules. Birds can be potted if you conceal yourself in the bushes along the shore and deceive them into thinking that all is calm and quiet. Then comes the shot.

A wolf must have the possibility of plunging its teeth into its prey and stupefying itself with the smell of fresh blood, so that it can close its eyes. A wolf never looks around when killing – so just grab it by the nape of the neck. A dog is first lured by a nice bone, and then you beat it quickly on the head. Man is also an animal, and the rules for hunting him differ very little. First you must steal into his soul, and then, after having found out how it works, decide whether to beat or caress, or perhaps to beat in the beginning and then caress.

The first to go out hunting is the Fool. Burning from fervent and righteous emotion, he jumps up and with strong, sharp words he tells the truth, after which no intelligent man will any longer be able to see the meaning in life. A person in weak health will hardly be able to stand on his legs anymore, and a person with a weak mind will become more stupid and not know what to think.

The wretched inhabitants listen with mouths open wide. The truth that ripens from the words of the Fool has the effect of an electric current, it shocks.

It is at this point that Judas crawls out, like an adder that has been hiding among slimy stones. Thrusting out his tongue, heavily loaded with venom, he slithers over to the Fool and challenges everything he has said. His words are unctuous, and sweet nectar flows like saliva from the corners of his frog-like mouth. The wretched inhabitants turn their heads in his direction and listen bewitched. His words are smooth, transparent, and sweet as a dream. The thunder that has ripened in their souls begins to abate and no drops of rain fall on the dry earth, cracking from thirst.

Meanwhile the Fool objects to Judas's words. Judas answers mildly the attacks of his militant friend, winding down from the sweet and agonizing feeling of having won the battle. The inhabitants, like simpletons, turn their heads, listening first to one then the other. Meanwhile the truth is gasping for breath in the abundance, sultriness, and sweetness of the words.

There is a wind that blows up ominously and then quietly subsides without having made any clearing-up work in the forest. It only plays amongst the treetops, counting the needles of the conifers, but at the bottom of the trunks, where it should have raised hell in order to uncover the decaying mould, it lies down caressingly.

Captivated by the play with words and bewitched by the bangs and claps of blank cartridges being fired, the wretched inhabitants forget about their anger. Their faces light up, their brains become woolly. The storm passes over. The child, having a sweet, quietens down.

The strong people of this world very quickly realized how useful the Fools and Judases could be. They began to pay them for their work. After all, should there not be a reward for the labours of the mind? Something must be applied to soothe the bruises and scratches received at the hands of the infuriated wretched inhabitants when, electrified by the truth, they begin to cudgel the Fool himself. Besides, although a tongue has no bones it needs to be lubricated so as not to squeak and become rusty. Similarly, a trap, in order to close its iron jaws at the right moment and not let go of its prey, must also be lubricated.

Thus receiving payment, the Fools and the Judases seized the word by its throat, each in his own way. They perfected their skill by using the very best and well-tested instruments of the intellect and became brilliant masters of their art. And never had the simple human word, so familiar and confidential, contributed so little to bring about the end of mankind as now, during the age of the wretched inhabitants. The noise of words, the fights over words, this cunning game each time distracted the wretched inhabitants from death, both physical and moral. Shaken by the words of the Fools and stroked like amorous cats until they purred by the Judases, the wretched inhabitants continued to potter about in their Wretched Settlement.

(*Anna Nerkagi is a Nenets writer. She was born in 1952 on the Yamal Peninsula near the Kara coast. From the age of six, she went to boarding school. In 1974 she graduated from the Tyumen Industrial Institute. In 1978 she published her first novel,* Aniko of the Nogo Tribe *and became a member of the Soviet Writers' Union*)

RUSSIAN WORDS

Administrative areas, official terms:

krai:	territory
oblast:	region
okrug:	area
raion:	district
gorod:	town
selo:	village
posyolok:	settlement

State institutions:

Agroprom:	Local departments of the Gosagroprom
CPSU:	The Communist Party of the Soviet Union
Gosagroprom:	The State Department for Agricultural Industry
RSFSR:	The Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic
USSR:	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

List of special terms, frequently used in the text:

artel:	before 1917 it was a voluntary association of people working together for some common purpose
baidar:	whaling boat
chum:	tent
kulak:	pejorative term for better-off peasant, used arbitrarily in the Soviet period to denounce and punish unwilling peasants, reindeer herders, fishermen and others working in agriculture
kolkoz:	collective farm
lepyoshki:	flat cakes
malitsa:	men's fur coat made of two reindeer skins with fur on the inside and outside, with a hood
sovkhoz:	state farm
starozhily:	oldsettlers, i.e. people who settled in Siberia a long time ago – in contradistinction to newcomers, more recent immigrants
yagushka:	women's fur coat made of reindeer skin, without a hood
yarang:	tent