

# Indigenous Soviet populations must survive

by Victor Zhuravlev

Northern News Service

Last June's week-long youth festival in Yakutsk was a highlight in the life of the Soviet Northern and Far Eastern peoples.

The Nenets, Chukchi, Evens, Komi and other Northerners gave performances while artists and writers displayed their works on the city's outdoor grounds and taiga clearings. All were welcome to visit a major applied art exhibition and a show of aboriginal skin-and-bark dwellings — yurts, yarangs, chums and tordokhs — at the village festival.

National wrestling bouts could be seen here and there; the Yakut traditional "ysyakh" holiday was in full swing. But merrymaking was not the only purpose of that festival.

Acute problems were raised at the seminar "Youth and the North: Its Present and Future."

Having won the unequal war with nature, the Northerners have proved powerless before the ministries and departments which have been rapaciously exploiting the natural resources of the taiga and tundra.

As a result, the ecology of such traditional occupations as reindeer-breeding, hunting, fishing and sea animal hunting has been seriously undermined. Ancient culture, languages, customs and traditions are in danger.

How can one untie this decade-old knot of acute problems?

The Northern News Service conducted an express poll on the North's

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most pressing problem and ways of solving it.

Below are a few answers:

Sergei Kharyuchi, a Nenets cultural worker of the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous district said, "I think it is most important to conserve the environment of the Northern ethnic minorities."

Anna Taskerova, an Evenk doctor from the Chita Region, said indigenous Northerners should be given the right to territory.

Olga Taskerova, an Evenk teacher from the Chita Region, said the conditions in which reindeer herders work must be improved.

"The problem of young families is most painful," Taskerova said. "Young reindeer breeders work constantly in the taiga and girls don't want to marry them. They prefer to live in the rich villages. Working conditions of reindeer breeders should be changed."

Vassily Kladkin, a Yakut director of the Tomponsky reindeer farm, said it

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is hard to attract young people to reindeer breeding because of the inadequate nomadic lifestyle.

"It is necessary to develop local processing industries, to supply the branch with modern technology and make use of scientific achievements. It is urgent to build modern houses on shepherds' routes," Kladkin.

According to Vladimir Sanghi, a famous Nivkh writer, the uncontrolled industrial intrusion into the Northern environment has destroyed the mode of life of the indigenous population.

"The migration of Eskimos, Nivkhi, Mansi and other peoples to district centers, industrial cities and ports has led to the destruction of the age-old economic, spiritual and linguistic links and has tore away the indigenous Northern population from their traditional, ethos-forming use of nature," Sanghi said. "That caused the irreversible assimilation process and other negative phenomena, which tells on the gene pool of the Northern peoples."

The Nivkh writer offers certain remedies. He considers it necessary to restore the State Committee on Northern Peoples which existed under the Lenin government, to create Northern associations which, together with ministries, should coordinate practical activities pertaining to these issues.

Sanghi sets major store by the adoption of a law on the priority of traditional nature use by Northern peoples in the districts of their historical residence, a law on guaranteed equality of languages and cultures of all the nationalities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Northern peoples' youth festival adopted an appeal to the government to convene a second congress of Northern peoples — the first such congress took place in 1924 — to deal with all of these problems.

Many hope that this congress may solve the problem — the consolidation of local bodies of authority so that the taiga and tundra might regain their true master.