

Soviet Nanai privileges draw criticism

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KHABAROVSK, USSR — In the village of Naikhin on the Amur in the Soviet Far East, besides the Nanai, who make up the bulk of the population, there are people of 24 nationalities who live and work at the collective fishery Novy Put (New Way).

They all maintain friendly relations, jointly catching fish and processing it, felling trees and breeding mink. They are an open-hearted lot, too, as one can see from their donation of several thousand roubles to the survivors of the Armenian tragedy.

Much is being done in the village to preserve and develop national traditions. Concerts by the folk group from Naikhin are very popular in the Khabarovsk Region, and competitions in national sports are another attraction.

Seemingly, there are no ethnic problems here. But the results of a recent poll show that relations between the Nanai and other nationalities are not that smooth. The reason is that the Nanai are given special privileges. For instance, during the salmon season, they are each given 20 kilograms of salmon caviar free while others have to pay 50 roubles for a license to catch just five fish.

Such measures are designed to maintain the declining salmon population, but locals of other nationalities think they are being discriminated against.

The Nanai are an agreeable people. Seeking to defuse the conflict, they offered to give up their privileges — for salmon caviar, privileged admittance to higher schools and others. A people's assembly was called to discuss this issue. Here are a few opinions from this assembly:

•Larisa Kuznetsova, a worker at the Novy Put fishery — We have ethnic problems, but I think that they can be easily settled. If unfriendliness develops mostly because of the unequal distribution of dog salmon, then the best thing would be to annul all privileges. If salmon privileges are needed, they should embrace all those who live on the Amur.

•Nikolai Beldy, a grade school teacher — Some people suggest annulling the privileges of local nationalities for admittance to higher school. I think this must not be allowed because local nationalities would come up against tough competition during entrance examinations due to a great gap between the urban and village education. This could deprive us of national intelligentsia, doctors, teachers and cultural workers.

I am very much concerned about the preservation of the Nanai language.

Only 33 percent of the Nanai know their language well, while 48 percent know it poorly and 19 percent have no command of their mother tongue at all. Many Nanai who know their language well hardly speak it.

Meanwhile, many of those who know it poorly or not at all would like to improve their knowledge. Other nationalities would also like to learn Nanai. I suggest teaching the language not only to Nanai children but to all those wishing, using radio and the newspaper for the purpose and publishing a Russo-Nanai phrase book.

•Lilia Kile, chief doctor of the local hospital — People of every nationality have their own national traits. The Nanai can't be said to seek higher education or to be eager to climb the social ladder. That is why there are so few national specialists.

From time immemorial, the Nanai were fishermen and hunters. But today these occupations have become mostly a hobby, and in some cases poaching, due to prohibitions. To

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preserve the nation, we must allow people to live according to their traditions.

•Grigory Beldy, a teacher — It would be good if during folk festivals not only the Nanai but also other nationalities showed their folk songs and dances. People of all nationalities big and small should know their culture and traditions.

After the assembly in Naikhin, it was decided to hold similar meetings in all villages of the Nanai Region.

The Naikhin assembly produced certain recommendations. It was decided to organize hobby groups of the Nanai language for all those wishing.

Cultural centers were charged to promote the study and upkeep of national traditions and customs. It was also decided to apply to senior organizations in order to settle the salmon issue in the interests of all, so that people of other nationalities were not discriminated against socially.