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FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by A. Tarasov, special correspondent for IZVESTIYA, filed in Yekaterinburg: ``The Battle to Get the Harvest In Ended With Victims: Once More About the Mystery of the Ural Fields``; first paragraph is source introduction]

2. [Text] After another massive poisoning of students at the Krasnoufimskiy sovkhos (see details in IZVESTIYA, No 221), the harvest contingents from Ural University abandoned the fields. But the chain of tragic and as yet unexplained incidents was not broken: soon after, new victims of the potato fields were hospitalized.

3. Ten of them were students from Sverdlovsk Institute of the National Economy. They had been gathering potatoes at the Chatlykovskiy sovkhos, several dozen kilometers from the fields in which, in 1989, the phenomenon of the poisonous phantom was first officially recorded and about the same distance from the fields the unusual event had happened with the university students that fall. Two more stricken-students from Ural Polytechnical Institute. One had been doing a ``working semester`` in Kamenskiy Rayon of the oblast, the other in the Beloyarskiy Rayon. Cases of the illness had also been noted in the Sysertskiy and Polevskiy rayons.

4. There are a great multitude of versions of the cause of the incident. Among them are these: the sickness is the result of violations in the procedures for use of pesticides; the result of a complex of chemical compounds; acid rain; technogenic pollution formed in the course of the decomposition and interaction of a poison

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unknown to science. And then there are these: the cause is an anomaly of geological structure of those territories; the specific composition of the soil; the mafia blocking the harvest of the potatoes in order to spiral up the prices for a "second bread"; intrigues of UFOs; poisonous mosquitoes. Not a single one of the suggestions has been proven, but none has been refuted.

5. Such an array of versions is remarkable in and of itself. After all, many of them, except for perhaps only the last few, are not at all far-fetched, and there's some basis for most of the suggestions. It's ridiculous, of course, to blame weakened immunity or avitaminosis of the city people as the main cause of the group's injuries to the peripheral nervous system. But the USSR Ministry of Health commission, in investigating the circumstances of one of the unusual incidents, could not help but note the acute deficiency of vitamins B and C and the weakened state of the bodies of those stricken. Some specialists indicate that isolated incidents of the strange ailment were noted long before 1989. And maybe the worsened supply of fruits and vegetables to the Ural people of recent years played a role of its own in the outbreak of the illness.

6. Or how about the entirely improbable "hypotheses" voiced "in a delirium," which bring into play the military, radiation, or some sort of natural anomalies? Were those versions born on arid soil? Issue No 162 of IZVESTIYA wrote of the Krasnoufimskiy storage facilities, where behind plank fences are kept ore that contain thorium—and the unusual incidents are occurring just a few kilometers from those facilities. The version about the military? The outbreak of anthrax in Sverdlovsk in 1979 is not forgotten, and that's why the attitude toward the military is particularly suspicious. What goes on behind the "postal box" fences is known to only a small circle of people. (It wasn't until 16 September of this year that the oblast executive committee allowed the oblast health-epidemiological station to visit, for "reasons of environmental protection," the facilities of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.) Natural anomalies? They exist, too. Above the fields of the village of Pridannikovo, where the students suffered the paralysis, local people observed a "tipsy" rainbow several weeks before the arrival of the city people—the ends of the arc rested not on the ground, but above, in the clouds.

7. But the most mysterious thing about the "potato" detective story is the position taken by the people in power. It remains unchanged, even though the people who formulated it have changed more than once. The people in power continue to fight for the harvest with the same valor. Two years ago, the number of those sent away could not stop the flow of new harvest contingents to the front with the unknown illness. It's the same today—the place where losses were

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taken and university students were demoralized on the Krasnoufimskiy fields has been filled with amazing persistence with students from the Institute of Railroad Engineers, local schoolchildren, and tank crews from the Volga-Ural Military District.

8. Two years ago, the Uralenergochermet enterprise refused to pay for the sick leave of Nadezhda B., a Uralenergochermet engineer who became ill after five and a half hours of work at the Khramtsovo sovkhov, despite the diagnosis made for her-the same one made for all the victims of the Ural fields, toxic polyneuropathy. Despite the note made on the sick leave chart ("production accident") and despite the paperwork, signed by the sovkhov director, which named the cause of the poisoning as combined action of pesticides. Today, Nadezhda is working at a different facility, but when we were talking with her about meeting her, she asked that we not call her at work and not use her name in the newspaper-"people who are sick aren't needed in the workplace, especially people like us." Just as in 1989, the state is still doing what it can to make Nadezhda herself feel guilty for the illness.

9. The unusual incident of this year happened on fields where the health-epidemiological station has yet to find any traces of toxic substances. That's why, in the words of the chief neuropathologist of the oblast, Prof Ye. Krupin, a fairly difficult struggle lies ahead in the attempt to prove that the students aren't dragging their feet out of capriciousness.

10. So, in the "Sverdlovsk syndrome," besides what's unique, there's also something that's standard, even hateful.

11. By the way, Krupin, who has seen those stricken with the mysterious sickness, has advanced his own version for the cause of the illness: the mystery lies in the incomprehensible use of a new generation of imported pesticides-pyrethroids. According to the professor's data, they have lost their ability to walk on the very farms in the oblast that have such toxins-particularly the neurotropic compounds tsimbush and sumicidin.

12. Indirectly supporting Krupin's version is this fact: in letters to IZVESTIYA about the mystery of the toxic fields, some readers have described in detail the symptoms they suffered after working in a field-and those symptoms are very similar to the symptoms of the Ural sickness. What's noteworthy is the return addresses on the letters-Belarus, Ukraine, the Volga region. There, as in the Urals, the use of pyrethroids has been sanctioned to control the Colorado beetle and other pests.

13. Krupin says this: there are influential officials who are

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actively obstructing the search for the causes of the tragedy, and powerful pressure is being exerted for the pesticides by the foreign firms that supply the pyrethroids. At the same time, people abroad can't even imagine exactly how the Soviet field managers can apply such powerful toxins. (In Khramtsov, for example, a concrete mixer is used to prepare the pesticide solutions.)

14. Obviously, the method chosen by the visitors from Moscow to study the problem—in assaults after each unusual incident—is ineffective. A systematic, comprehensive study is absolutely necessary. Leading specialists have to be involved. They have to have highly sensitive equipment. But what are the people supposed to do now, wait until next summer or fall? After all, there's no barrier at all today to protect against misfortune.

15. Whatever version about the cause of the poisonings turns out to be correct, this much can be said right now: The two-year drama on the fields is a drama about the Soviet state's stubborn neglect of the individual.

16. POSTSCRIPT: While this article was in press, a commission of the Russian Ministry of Health prepared a report on the results of work done in Sverdlovsk Oblast. The cause of the illness was said to be the combined action of a number of factors. The principal factors involved working conditions. Then there was weakened immunity, and adverse weather conditions. The pesticides were acquitted. Meanwhile, the "greens" don't agree with the conclusions of the medical people—they feel that the country's agroindustrial complex is a criminal organization, and they are getting ready to take it to court.

17. The commission's report did not bring any clarity to the matter—it failed to even comment on a number of things. What now? To a recent remark on the "Sverdlovsk syndrome" made by IZVESTIYA, the RSFSR State Committee for Health and Epidemiological Inspection answered this: "a temporary inspection committee is being formed....a temporary science group is being formed for further study....a letter has been sent with a request that an international group of experts be set up....being created in Sverdlovsk is a toxicological center equipped with modern imported equipment..." Those are all promises. They make people happy. But the enterprises that are supposed to buy the instruments for the toxicological center for hard currency are spending it for the time being primarily for sugar and meat.

18. Could this really be us, who have jabbered so much in the past about the importance of values common to all mankind?

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