The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Worst is Yet to Come at Sayano-Shushenskaya and in Moscow, Petition Warns

By Paul Goble

January 24, 2010



VIENNA &mdash The freezing of the reservoir behind the Sayano-Shushenskaya dam is creating a situation that threatens an even greater technogenic disaster than the one there last August, a disaster that could lead to "tens and hundreds of thousands of human victims," according to an online petition directed at President Dmitry Medvedev.

According to the petition, which is being circulated by Plotine.net, approximately 100,000 tons of ice is now pressing against the dam, making it impossible to regulate the flow of water through it. Moreover, cold temperatures mean that the amount of ice is likely to increase to 300,000 tons in the coming weeks.

As a result, the petition says, there is now arising a "direct threat" that the dam will collapse, something that will result in "the greatest technogenic accident of the 21st century," one "accompanied by enormous destruction and human losses," with "a tsunami immediately

destroying several major cities."

Despite this obvious threat, "it is becoming perfectly clear that the current leaders are not attempting either to restore or preserve the dam but only to hide the problems from public view." And consequently, the signatories of the appeal call on the president, the prime minister "and other representatives of the political and business 'elites'" to take action.

"Having built the so-called 'power vertical' for the convenience of the distribution of financial flows," the petition says, the Moscow powers that be have not taken the necessary steps to protect the interests of "99.9 percent" of the Russian people from technogenic disasters and other social and political ills.

Indeed, the appeal says, "namely your policy is the cause that over the course of the last decade of the influx of petro-dollars, on the basis of which it would have been possible to modernize two Russias, the country has stumbled into an epoch of uninterrupted technogenic catastrophes."

That is because, the petition says, "you" &mdash the members of the powers that be &mdash "have preferred to invest your money in the economy of the United States and not in the development of your own country." Consequently, if there is another accident, as now seems likely, "you ... will bear personal responsibility before the people of Russia."

The petition makes five demands: First, it calls for immediate measures up to and including the draining of the reservoir in order to prevent a disaster. Second, it seeks "objective" coverage of what is going on there in the media. Third, it demands the development of plans for evacuation if things go wrong.

Fourth, it calls for the powers that be to allow "independent observers" to visit the site to evaluate the situation. And fifth, the petition calls for bringing to justice those responsible for the Aug. 17, 2009, accident, which claimed at least 75 lives, and also those responsible for doing nothing and thus allowing the situation at the dam to deteriorate.

RusHydro, operator of the dam, continues to insist that it has everything in hand, the same claim it made before the August disaster. But Dmitry Verkhoturov, who exposed RusHydro's earlier malfeasance, now says the situation at the Sayano-Shushenskaya dam may be even worse than the petition suggests.

His report is truly disturbing in its implications, but perhaps the most significant aspect of the appearance of this petition is the way in which its authors link the specific problems at the dam site to the general policies of the Moscow powers that be.

To the extent that ever more Russians are inclined to do that, any future technogenic or other disasters are likely to present a far greater challenge to the current political system than those in the past, at a minimum exacerbating tensions within the elite and perhaps under certain conditions even challenging its control of the situation.

Original url:

https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/01/24/worst-is-yet-to-come-at-sayano-shushenskaya-and-in-moscow-petition-warns-a35085