

The figures are impressive. And one could vote for them wholeheartedly if it were not for the fact that this unquestionably progressive program was already being implemented using the same old wilful administrative methods. That is, slashing group "A" without careful consideration or serious economic analysis of what it is in fact that needs to be corrected. It is true that much of what has been cut are the chronic interminable construction projects, the veritable "black holes" of the economy. But it is accurate to describe the entire "A" group - the production of the means of production - as a protracted period of developmental infancy? Take natural gas, for example. Even the enormous capital investments required to recover natural gas in remote regions of Western Siberia, thousands of kilometres away, and to transport it to consumers can be totally recovered with only one year. In other words, a ruble invested in Tyumen returns to the state treasury within a year. After that, it's pure profit. It may be that no other single sector of heavy industry is as profitable as natural gas. But it is precisely this ruble which, according to reports, is slated to be cut.

"This year, centralized state capital investments for development of the Urengoi group of deposits have been reduced by a third," says R. Suleimanov, general director of the "Urengoigazprom" (Urengoi Gas Industry) Association, "even though the projections in the thirteenth Five-Year Plan call for further increases in natural gas production. This is understandable. A sober analysis of the situation in the petroleum, coal and nuclear sectors suggests that one should not expect these sectors to grow quickly in the coming years. That means that the main burden of supplying the national economy with fuel and energy resources - 92% - will be shouldered by gas industry workers. But there won't be any miracles. To extract more gas from the ground we will have to construct new production facilities, drill wells, and build roads.

"About 30 booster pumping stations, that can extend the life of a deposit by 15-20 years, will have to be built in Urengoi itself, which has already reached planned production