

with wastefulness? Why are spendthrifts given such a free rein? "Puzzled" by these questions, correspondents of "Sotsialisticheskaya industriya" and TASS departed on an expedition along the gas mains extending from the Tyumen' North to the western border of the USSR.

1. The Problem: why do those who try to save fuel always lose out?

Let's begin with impartial statistics. In the gas fields of our country, 289,000,000,000m³ of natural gas was extracted in 1975, 435,000,000,000m³ in 1980, and 643,000,000,000m³ five years later. In the near future, the Ministry of the Gas Industry plans to extract over a trillion cubic metres of this valuable fuel.

Until recently, these figures sounded exceptional in triumphant communiqués. However, they now appear more often in other contexts. In order to provide an annual increment, the Ministry of the Gas Industry and its partners (construction ministries) have to open up new areas farther north. They are already working in the Arctic, on the Yamal Peninsula. Where do we go after that? The second, highly relevant question is how much will this all cost? If in the past 5-year-plan period a 1% increase in the all-union output of gas cost 16,200,000 roubles, today it will cost 24,800,000 roubles.

On the other hand, if we approach the problem from the point of view of consumption and take the level attained in developed capitalist countries as a reference point, we find that it would be possible to reduce the unit consumption of gas by 40-50% in cement production, by 50-55% for the