

But this is not the only reason for the shortage. It has long been known, and often described in the newspapers, that the paper market is reacting to all this by raising the prices. The paper combines are striving to get a low State production order, so that the remainder of the paper can be sold at a higher price. Many producers are in fact managing to do this. Next year, with the consent of USSR Gosplan and the government the combines are bent on obtaining a State production order that is not 95 per cent of the total, as in the case of present, but only 75 per cent. They will sell the remaining quarter of the amount produced, which totals many hundreds of thousands of tonnes, at higher contracted prices.

By taking advantage of this opportunity, the combines are starting to dictate their own terms to consumers within the Union: "If you want paper, you must pay more for it than you did previously. It would be better still if you were to set aside your own financial resources for the rebuilding of existing mills and the construction of new ones."

How are the government and the State Planning Commission (Gosplan) reacting to all this? Here is what Deputy Chairman V.K. Gusev of the USSR Council of Ministers said recently in reply to a letter from the editors of "Pravda": "In view of the critical situation that has arisen in supplying the country's publishing houses with newsprint, chiefly on account of the cessation of purchases through imports, it is no longer possible to seek out additional quantities of newsprint for publishing "Pravda" on eight sheets. Please work within the quotas for newsprint allotted by USSR Gosplan for 1990, which will fully guarantee the current year's circulations.

In his letter V.K. Gusev, as we see, refers to the cessation of newsprint purchases through imports. But he makes no mention of the fact that our country is selling many hundreds of thousands of tonnes of paper abroad. Surely if we have ceased purchasing it, given the severity of the paper shortage the logical thing to do is to cease selling it.