

I put all these and many other questions to V.A. Chuiko, the Deputy Minister responsible for the operations of 153 pulp and paper enterprises. Here is the gist of Vladimir Alekseevich's unexpected response:

A. "Aren't you journalists getting tired of writing the same old thing? Wouldn't it be better after all this time to look for the root of the problem? For the subscribers themselves are all experiencing a paper shortage. They are currently paying out of their own pockets a dual price for each edition. We too are fed up with the acute shortage of paper. In the last 25 years our country has hardly built a single paper mill and has done nothing to arrange for the manufacture of modern, sophisticated papermaking equipment. Consequently, it has had to purchase it abroad."

Q. "But even so, Vladimir Alekseevich, how was the management of the sector able to keep quiet about this? For if you don't speak out, no one knows what you are thinking..."

A. "If you were to heap together all of our "plaintive" memoranda to USSR Gosplan and the government, you would find there was a pile of correspondence. Their replies said "The country doesn't have the funds for this. Virtually all the currency earned from timber sales has been spent on other more urgent needs: purchases of grain, meat, clothing and footwear." And what a lot of currency this is! Moreover, during each Five Year Plan the sector has been receiving from Treasury in the form of ordinary "timber" rubles only half of the amount the USA has been spending in dollars on the development of its pulp and paper industry in a single year. Compare the figures: during the period from 1981 through 1986 our country allocated to the sector less than three billion roubles, but during those same years the U.S. invested more than 34 billion dollars, or eleven times as much."

Q. "Does this mean that Gosplan and the government are guilty of an oversight?"