

We contacted the USSR Ministry of the Coal Industry and the secretary of the trade union's Central Committee, A.F. Chebotaev, and asked them to comment on what was happening in Vorkuta.

First we asked the Deputy Minister, Mr. A. Belikov, what demands the miners had put forward.

"There were six demands in all. They were mostly concerned with wages and how their work is organised. Before going into details, I would like to give you an idea of the economic situation in the mine. The miners are working on a cost-efficient basis, using the second model of cost-efficiency, which means they can only transfer to the labour remuneration fund or distribute amongst the employees those resources which they have earned.

"But in this particular case the miners found themselves in a difficult position which was in many ways not of their own doing. They have been mining the coal properly but have serious difficulties transporting it to their customers. There is a severe shortage of railcars, and despite all our pleading with the USSR Ministry of Highways and Transport, there has been no significant improvement in the situation. This not only affects Vorkuta, but the whole country. To date, we have amassed around 36 million tonnes of coal which is waiting to be sent off, of which there are 6000 tonnes waiting in Vorkuta. And since the customer is not getting his coal, we are not getting paid for it. The miners have been given their wages but their bonuses for the last few months have been 40 to 50 rubles below what they should have been.