

Pros and Cons of Building a Railroad on the Yamal Peninsula

Some time ago a decision was made concerning the integrated development of an oil and gas industry in Western Siberia in 1986-1990, but those involved in the decision cared little for economic calculations, gave barely a thought to the ecological consequences and did not consult at all with the local inhabitants, in particular with the region's native people. The decision, by way of an exception, authorized the Construction Bank of the USSR and the interested departments to finance the construction of a railroad to the Bovanenkovskii gas condensate deposits without a plan, and also to build industrial and civil structures without setting aside the land, as required by the law.

So the work got underway in full force. Powerful machinery was turned loose in Yamal. The Nenets and the Khanty become nervous:

"What are you doing here?"

"We are doing what were told to do", came the reply.

In the good old days of the period of stagnation the dialogue might have ended right there. Not now. The public intervened, and so did the scientists. The ecological submissions resulted in the technical and economic justifications for the construction of a railroad being rejected. The financing of the project was stopped following a decision by the Executive Committee of the Yamal-Nenets district.