

countries in terms of oil reserves has suddenly been stricken with such a famine in fuel and lubricants, and especially kerosene, the principal form of aviation fuel. Candidate of Economic Sciences V. Pushkarev, with whom our correspondent spoke, shares his thoughts about the crisis in the area of our economic life.

Q. "Some information suggests that oil production in the Tyumen region will decline by a factor of two by the year 2000, and that no other oil patches comparable to those in the Tyumen region have been found. It would appear that the golden age of Tyumen oil is a thing of the past. What can the Tyumen northland expect for the near future?"

A. "Not much that's good, to judge from all indications. Just maintaining the production of hydrocarbons at current levels - not to mention increasing the volume - demands a sharp increase in capital investment, but as everyone knows there isn't anything to invest. There is a real spectre of unemployment hanging over the oil cities and towns of the North."

Q. "So the situation even today in the Tyumen north is rife with social tension. And one probably shouldn't dismiss the threats of strikes either..."

A. "It goes without saying that the social situation is far from rosy. The once mighty flow of oil is dwindling before our eyes. Just last year the level hit a ten-year low, and this year the amount of oil recovered has dropped by another five percent (approximately 30 million tonnes of oil)."

Q. "But these problems didn't just start yesterday..."

A. "For a long time we've been boasting about our planned economy apparatus, but in fact we couldn't see ten years ahead. We stubbornly lived one day at a time and didn't give the future a single thought. And here's the result. Fifteen years ago the oil specialists and the geologists were warning the economists about the impending crisis in the sector.

"The other major oversight was the fact that we were totally ignoring the interests of those by whose labour the oil wealth was being harvested. Over the past twenty years or more our country has taken in more than 300 billion roubles in hard currency from the export of oil, petroleum products and natural gas - over 150 billion roubles of this coming from the West Siberian Oil and Gas Complex. And what is most shocking is the following fact: over the same period of time the country spent approximately the same amount on the import of foodstuffs - billions simply eaten up, so to speak. And approximately another 50 billion went to purchase pipes and equipment designed to pump oil and gas to other countries.