

Sciences, the State Committee for Science and Technology, the USSR Ministry of the Chemical Industry, the USSR Ministry of the Timber Industry, the USSR Ministry of the Biomedical Industry (Minmedbioprom), the USSR Ministry of the Oil Industry, the USSR Ministry of the Fertiliser Industry, the USSR Ministry of Health and the USSR Ministry for the Utilisation and Control of Water (Minvodkhoz). The industrial activities of enterprises belonging to these ministries have resulted in some regions of the country being on the brink of ecological disaster.

During the last 15 years there have been plenty of resolutions on the subject of nature conservation, with considerable sums of money set aside for these purposes. Specialists estimate that total disbursements on nature conservation during the last decade have approximated to 60 billion roubles. What is happening? Why have these huge appropriations not had the anticipated effect? Why is it so difficult to breathe in Bratsk and Angarsk, Kemerovo and Novokuznetsk, Surgut and Salavat, Ufa and Volgograd, and dozens of other industrial centres? Why is it impossible to drink the water from hundreds of rivers and streams without detriment to one's health, and why are vast areas of extremely fertile farmland being irretrievably lost?

A few figures will help to complete the picture. More than 60 million tonnes of harmful substances are discharged into the air every year by a variety of industrial sources and by motor vehicles. At almost all of our industrial centres the sanitary norms for air pollution are being exceeded. For in more than a hundred towns with a combined population of 50 million the gaseousness of the air is often ten times higher than the maximum permissible level. And what is happening to the water? In 1986 alone, hundreds of millions of cubic metres of raw sewage were discharged into the rivers, lakes and seas. How serious this is can be judged from the fact that a single cubic metre of untreated effluent is capable of ruining 60 cubic metres of pure water.

The reasons will long have been known to all: antiquated production technology, poor performance of purification plants and automated monitoring systems or the lack of them, and what can only be