

mandate of fellow countrymen who dispatched you to the conference for the purpose of airing problems of the utmost importance for northerners?

O.Z.: Not completely, I'm afraid to admit. And when I returned, I was reproached by my fellow countrymen for not speaking about the artificial limitation of northern earnings. I'll say right away that there was, of course, absolutely no "censoring" of reports. It was I who, at the last minute, had deleted this question from my address. The conference was tackling major issues; fundamental, global problems were being discussed, and it seemed inappropriate for me to divert delegates' attention on an apparently local, "regional" bureaucratic paradox.

I now think I may have made an error. In the end it is questions such as the North's fall in prestige, the drain of qualified workers, and the fact that there will eventually be nobody to mine our natural resources, which, incidentally, are of strategic importance to the country, that are of national concern. Not long ago, 20 people left our concentration plant to return to the mainland. At least five of them comprised our most valuable specialists, whose replacement will take some time. And how many such people do enterprises in Yakutia lose every year! The reasons for turnover are many, but the primordial one may very well be the wage system. In the days when the administrative style of economic management reigned supreme and when directives establishing various "ceilings" multiplied, the USSR State Committee for Labour and Social Issues made the decision to limit the northerner's direct earnings. This undertaking, rather than effecting "savings" on people, turned to be a loss for the State.