

Each year millions of tons of oil and billions of cubic meters of natural gas flow from here to every corner of the USSR and beyond its borders. The Tyumen deposits account for more than half of all the Soviet Union's hard currency reserves.

Nevertheless, today you could not call this region prosperous by any means, as is reflected in the disquieting mail of Pravda. People complain about poor living and working conditions and the lack of economic autonomy.

As readers will remember, the plenum of the Tyumen Oblast Party Committee met in January. The entire bureau staff, led by its first secretary, filed for retirement. But the crisis did not pass. The editors continue to receive letters requesting that correspondents be sent so that they can examine the situation first hand.

The all-terrain vehicle rolled along the streets of Nizhnevartovsk past the multi-storied residential units and wooden shacks.

Soon the city was left behind. Alongside the winter road stretched the barren land, enlivened in places with splashes of pines and birches.

About 40 minutes later the drilling rig came into view. Fellows from Vladimir Lyapin's brigade approached us.

At first, the conversation didn't take hold somehow. The guys shrugged their shoulders, hid their wind-burned faces in the collars of their jackets. "What's there to say? We work like always." But then, little by little, they began to talk.

"Do you know how much we nurse per shift?" asked a young dark-eyed driller's assistant, Farit Tazhitdinov.

"Nurse who?"