

A ton of pulp is worth about 70 dollars on the European market but this currency is unavailable to Archangel Oblast exporters. After several years of heated discussions about expanding the independence of pulp and paper combines the Ministry of the Timber Industry has made things slightly easier for them in the field of production, but, as before, trade in their products - the key to market relations - remains in its hands. Today, there is a new intermediary between the combines and foreign consumers of their pulp: the "Exportles" directorate.

"This directorate, despite what is specified in the agreement with it, conceals from us information on the state of the external market and terms of contracts with foreign partners", says N. L'vov, Director of the Solombala PPC. "We have no idea to whom and for how much our pulp is being sent. The plans for deliveries are being corrected virtually every day: today we are to ship to Eastern Europe, tomorrow to the capitalist countries, and the day after, make a rush for the domestic market. How am I to know what the prospects for deliveries are, and in which direction we are moving?"

The grudge borne by the Director of the Solombala Combine towards "Exportles" is understandable. But let us try to analyse the situation calmly: could a monopolist operate differently in the current situation? Privatization of the economy of the Eastern European countries has sounded the death knell for the interlocking state of the market for member countries of the CMEA, or to be more precise, for intra-bloc distribution, with a collective unit of settlement, the transferable rouble. At the same time, long-term agreements on reciprocal deliveries have remained in force. In this contradictory situation it would have been logical to give the immediate producers (in our case, the pulp and paper combines) the opportunity to make direct contacts with foreign consumers of their output. Even though they have tried to find a path to a mutually advantageous arrangement, the Ministry of the Timber Industry has remained true to monopolist tradition, which is being perceived today as a bull in a china shop.