

More than a quarter of the USSR's pulp production is concentrated in the Archangel Oblast. There, on the banks of the Severnaya Dvina the notorious Solombala, Archangel and Kotlas pulp and paper combines (PPCs) belch forth their wastes. If I were to define the status of this region in one word I would call it a colony.

Deeply etched in our memories - straight from school - is the definition of a colony as a country where the local inhabitants, through their own labour, ravage the natural resources of their land for the enrichment of those who have come to own them. The Archangel Oblast is richer in timber reserves than the Finns, but how they operate here and for whose benefit we shall see presently.

It is already more than half a century since the start-up of the oldest of the combines - the one at Solombala - which assumed the thankless role in the economy of being a supplier of semi-manufactured goods. At first, the pulp was sent to paper mills within the country but after the setting up of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) the northern combines switched over to being suppliers of raw material to the Eastern European countries. Up to 70 percent of the pulp produced at the Solombala PPC is exported. The Kotlas Combine exports half of its output. And in the town of Novodvinsk - the site of the Archangel PPC - with the assistance of Bulgarian specialists a bleached sulphate pulp mill with a capacity of 250,000 tonnes a year was brought on stream in 1976, especially to supply that country on the shores of the Black Sea with a product in short supply.

"This kind of division of labour has converted us into a raw materials appendage attended by low-profitability production and a very serious ecological situation," said A. Lichutin, First Deputy Chairman of the Oblast Executive Committee and head of the Main Economic and Planning Directorate.