

"We have received more than two million roubles in CMEA currency", L'vov continued. "But what is the good of it? Even those who used it to pay for our pulp are insisting that we pay for their commodities only in dollars. Once again we have been working for a pinch of snuff. But for how long can we pretend to be benefactors? For we are in the process of becoming extinct!"

Precisely what he meant by this remark is difficult to say. For at Solombala, production machinery installed half a century ago functions to this day. The walls of the digesters have been worn thin. Is this dangerous? "Accidents do happen", L'vov replied evasively. While the Kotlas and Archangel combines are of more recent origin, there too the industrial plant has long been in need of replacement.

The directors of the combines spoke with envy about what they had seen in Finland: "The condition of the machinery at the pulp and paper mill is in our view, excellent. Even so, the managers took us to a site where a new plant is being assembled. It is to come on stream in a year's time and the old one will be closed down. This is normal with them - to regularly renovate production. With us, the eternal refit is the norm".

The Archangel PPC is considered to be the best in the sector. There was a reference to this on the radio on the day of my arrival at the Combine. But if this is the best we have, then how have we managed to survive? In order to keep going, here they have to maintain a vast mechanical repairs establishment and an enormous staff of maintenance people, who are constantly breathing new life into decrepit equipment. Surely it isn't because of these expenditures that the cost of production has almost reached the price charged within the Union, and that sulphide pulp in general has become a losing proposition for the Combine?