



THE TRUE STORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION  
AND THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM

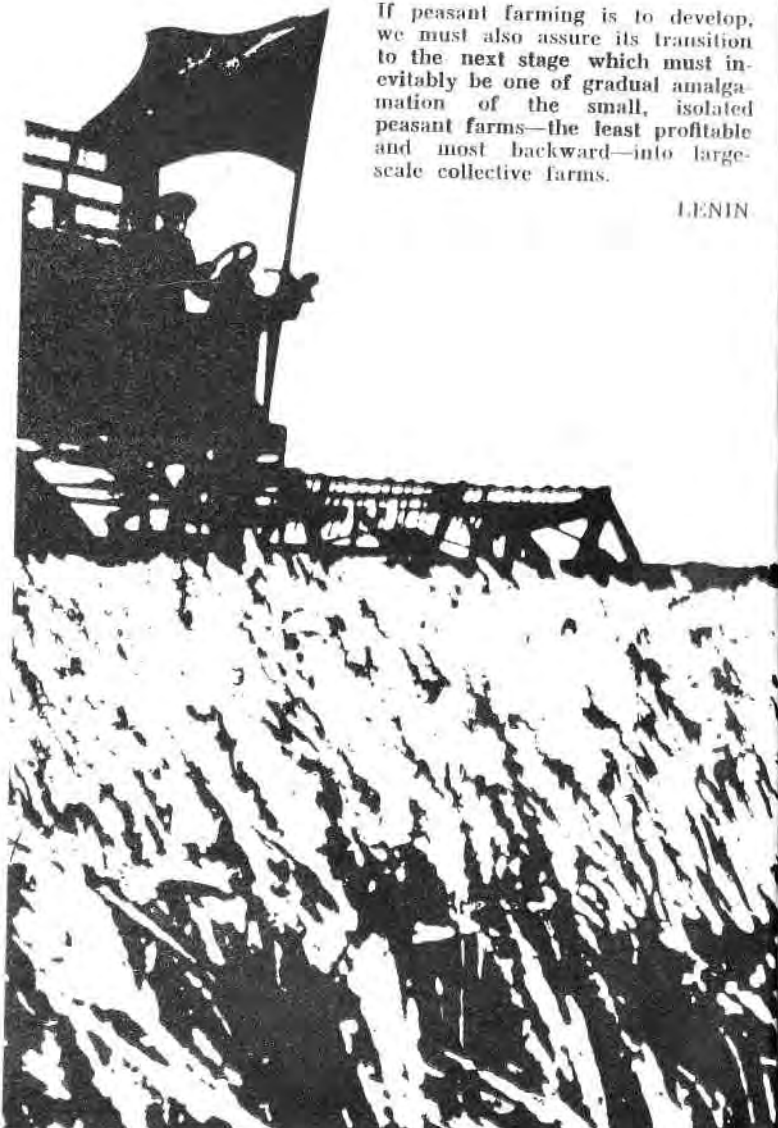
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## How Collective Farming Was Established in the USSR: Facts and Fiction





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AND THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM



If peasant farming is to develop, we must also assure its transition to the next stage which must inevitably be one of gradual amalgamation of the small, isolated peasant farms—the least profitable and most backward—into large-scale collective farms.

LENIN

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## How Collective Farming Was Established in the USSR: Facts and Fiction

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General Editor: Academician Isaac MINTS

Novosti Press Agency Publishing House  
Progress Publishers

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Moscow 1982

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## THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE OF COLLECTIVISATION

For over half a century the collectivisation of agriculture in the USSR has been at the centre of public attention in all countries of the world. This is only natural, for in the Soviet Union many millions of small peasant households were transformed into large, well-equipped and highly productive farming enterprises. It is not only because the farmers managed within the historically short period of ten years to switch from ploughs to tractors, but because technical reconstruction was followed by the establishment of a new social system in the countryside.

This was the socialist transformation of rural life as a result of which more than a hundred million peasants and millions of peasant households delivered themselves from the shackles of exploitation and chronic poverty, from cultural backwardness and the burden of back-breaking manual labour, from the fragmentation of agriculture into small and tiny units, from everything which Marx aptly called "the idiocy of rural life".

Some in the West seek to present collectivisation in the Soviet Union as a kind of "Bolshevik experiment" of narrowly national significance. They hold that "Soviet collectivism is a *national* system—

unique, with its roots deep in the political, economic, social and cultural subsoil of Russian history".<sup>1</sup> They are not at all anxious to spread the truth about collectivisation in the Soviet Union and are trying to discredit it and make it unattractive.

But one must not forget that 1,600 million people in the newly developing countries are mostly peasants, that the modern "world village" embraces about two-thirds of the Earth's population and that the overwhelming majority of peasant households in Asia, Africa and Latin America are on the brink of ruin and poverty. According to statistics in 1978, 800 million people, mostly in the developing countries, suffered from malnutrition, and some of them starved to death. The outlook for farming in these countries is far from encouraging. From 1970 to 1978 the average annual growth of agricultural production was 2.1 per cent, which is far from sufficient, allowing for the rapid growth in population, especially in Africa and Asia. The effectiveness and speed of the solution of the food problem will largely depend on the road of social development which the newly independent countries choose for themselves, on the mode of production and methods of economic management and on the social institutions which together constitute a country's social system and way of life.

Hence the keen interest displayed by many countries in the Soviet experience of the socialisation and transformation of peasant households, experience which has been widely adopted in the countries of the socialist community. For all their national and regional diversity in forms, rates and methods

<sup>1</sup> Adams A. E. and Adams J. S., *Men Versus Systems. Agriculture in the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia*, The Free Press, New York, 1971, p. 3.

of organising peasant households on a co-operative basis, these countries reaffirmed the general law—socialist co-operation socialises the means of farm production and ensures the transition of farmers from private to collective, socialised ownership.

It is precisely because collectivisation of peasant households has fully embodied this general law of the transition of petty producers to socialism that Western historians have for fifty years been so intransigent towards it. Sovietologists in many capitalist countries allege that collectivisation had "disastrous effects on Russian agriculture"<sup>1</sup> and describe it as an act of violence against the Russian and non-Russian peasantry.

Significantly, this interest in the solution of the agrarian problem in the USSR is not abating. As Prof. Harry G. Shaffer of the University of Kansas has pointed out, "more has probably been written on Soviet agriculture... in the West than on any other aspect of the Soviet economy."<sup>2</sup>

In this booklet you can read about how Soviet farmers fought against their exploiters, the rural capitalists, how they shed their illusions and their delusions and how they came to understand and accept Lenin's co-operative plan as an expression of their age-old aspirations. It also tells you how the example of the pioneers of collectivisation developed into a mass collective farm movement, and how millions of farmers gradually joined in building a new system in the countryside and establishing a new way of life.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Political Economy*, August 1953, Vol. LXI, No. 4, p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> *Soviet Agriculture: An Assessment of Its Contributions to Economic Development*, Edited by Harry G. Shaffer, New York, 1977, p. vi.

## THE PEASANTS' ROAD TO SOCIALISM

### A Difficult Start

The bulk of the population in prerevolutionary Russia—130 million out of 159 million—were engaged in agriculture. But the land was distributed among these 130 million people very unevenly. Small and tiny peasant households had a total of 135 million hectares, while the rural capitalists (or kulaks as they were popularly known), who exploited the hired labour of landless farm hands, owned 80 million hectares. Several thousand big landowners, the most important of whom were the Russian tsar and his relatives, owned 152 million hectares.

So a simple tally shows that a landowner held an average of 2,300 hectares, or as much land as 300 peasant households had. Moreover, the small peasant households owned the worst land, and one in every three peasant families had neither a horse nor their own farm implements.

The staple diet at that time was mainly bread. So almost 90 per cent of all the arable land was taken up by cereals. The primitive nature of farm tools and agricultural techniques was the main reason for low crop yields. The per capita production of grain in tsarist Russia was about the lowest in

the world: 18 centners in Canada, 11 in the United States and 4.8 centners in tsarist Russia (including seed grain). When drought struck—a fairly frequent occurrence—severe famine was the result. The big landowners and rich peasants (kulaks), of course, did not starve but millions of peasants who had no food reserves literally starved to death.

After the October Socialist Revolution of 1917 the peasants' age-old dream came true: they received for their free use a total of more than 150 million hectares of land confiscated from landowners, the tsar and his family. This land was distributed among the peasants on an egalitarian basis, that is to say, according to the size of their families, which was what the peasants had wanted.

On the eve of the October Revolution the Russian peasants had demanded that the egalitarian principle be enforced in the belief that the ending of private ownership of the land (nationalisation), its equal distribution among those who tilled it, abolition of the burdensome land rent and prohibition of the exploitation of hired labour in agriculture would automatically bring about equality and social justice. They also thought that free market distribution of the surplus produce, together with egalitarian land use, would create the ideal system which would help solve the vital problems of peasants.

The Soviet government headed by Lenin was perfectly well aware that the egalitarian distribution of the land held out little promise for the future, because the small fragmented peasant households could not end the dire poverty of the mass of the peasantry. Analysing the economic core of the principle of egalitarianism in conditions of commodity production, even when the land was nationalised,

that is to say, state-owned, Lenin pointed to the inevitable social consequences of managing the economy in this way. He wrote that "even on land belonging to the whole nation, only those with capital of their own, only those who have the implements, livestock, machines, stocks of seed, money in general, etc., will be able to farm independently. As for those who have nothing but their hands to work with, they will inevitably remain slaves of capital even in a democratic republic".<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party from the very beginning guided the peasantry towards the socialisation of land cultivation. The bulk of the peasants, however, preferred individual land use and this gave rise to millions of new farms run by individual peasants. There were altogether 24,600,000 such farms. They were not all of the same type, of course. One-third belonged to poor peasants, about four per cent to the rural capitalists (kulaks), the rest (almost two-thirds) to peasants in the middle income bracket.

Lenin proved to be right in his forecast. The egalitarian distribution of land failed to produce the results expected by the peasants and by society as a whole. It is true that the material position of the poor and middle peasants somewhat improved. They ate better and consumed more of what they produced on their individual plots.

The farmers worked hard, but however much they tried they had little to show for their labour. The poor peasants often did not even have the simplest implements and draught animals. The land was ploughed and cultivated by hand, the sowing was done in the most primitive way, with the peasants

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol, 10, p. 42.

going from one furrow to another broadcasting the seed from a basket. Crops were harvested also by hand, the only implements being the sickle and scythe. The poor peasants could hardly make ends meet and soon found themselves again in bondage to kulaks. Those who loaned their neighbours a plough, seed drill or other farm tools usually claimed a considerable part of the crop. This meant that the simple transfer of the land to the peasants did not improve their lot. Nor could this raise productivity in agriculture and make it able to produce enough food to meet the needs of the towns and of the entire nation.

The Soviet government tried to help the peasants in every possible way. It undertook to supply them with farm implements at low prices within the reach of all. As early as on November 25, 1917, the Soviet government passed a decree to the effect that all the farm machinery and implements manufactured in the country were the property of the Soviet state. By the spring of 1918 farm machinery plants had started producing the farm machinery which peasants needed so much. As a result, thousands of ploughshares, harrows, harvesters, threshers and scythes were made in the two years 1918 and 1919.

Despite the economic dislocation and the difficulties caused by the imperialist and civil wars of 1914-1920, in April 1918 the Soviet government assigned 50 million roubles from the national budget to be loaned to the peasants for purchasing seed grain. In June of that year, 300 million more roubles were earmarked for this purpose. The workers' and peasants' state helped the peasants out of its meagre stocks of seed grain. Workshops were set up in villages to help repair farm machinery and agricultural



implements at low cost to the farmers. Nevertheless, agricultural production was growing extremely slowly. So what was the solution?

## Pioneers of Collective Farms

Under Soviet law the peasants were entitled to look for and freely choose their own forms of farming and farm management. The first to exercise this right were the village poor and demobilised soldiers. Driven by want they formed communes and artels as they soon realised they could not run their farms alone on the land they had been given. These communes and artels were, however, small and constituted a very small number of islands in a sea of individual peasant holdings. At first they did not have much to show for their efforts. What in fact could poor farmers pool? Their land, their labour, their very simple farm implements and a few head of cattle. Significantly, even this simple addition of means of production and collective labour enabled the members of communes and artels to achieve results such as individual farmers could not attain.

The first communes, which united the most revolutionary-minded section of the rural poor were the main support of Soviet rule in the countryside. The initiative of members of communes was encouraged in every way. In 1918 the Soviet state forged a special fund to give financial help to collective farms.

Members of the first communes often had to live and work "with one hand on the plough and the

other holding a rifle", as they used to say in those days. Civil war was raging, the counter-revolutionaries, former big landowners and their hangers-on, who had stayed behind in Russia and who were fighting against Soviet rule, committed terrible atrocities against the members of communes. For example, in the spring of 1921 in a bid to intimidate the local population bandits murdered 23 members of the Lenin commune on the River Volga. They drove them almost 40 kilometres along a road, naked and barefoot, beaten to within an inch of their lives, to the village of Krasny Yar and there flung them into a dungeon and starved them for several days. Twenty-eight workers from Petrograd, who had come to the Altai region to set up first rural communes in 1919, were shot when Admiral Kolchak's counter-revolutionary armies occupied Soviet Altai. There were hundreds of such instances.

These people were the pioneers of the collective farm movement. By the time the Soviet rule was six months old the People's Commissariat for Agriculture had received copies of 21 statutes from the founders of collective farms in different parts of the country. These documents fully reflected the striving of the pioneers of collectivisation for equal rights and social justice. "Freedom, equality and fraternity not in words but in deeds are the principal aim of the commune," reads the statute of the first Moscow commune. The *Trud* (Labour) commune set up in the Shadrinsk district had as its emblem a spear, a sickle and a sheaf of wheat symbolising the struggle against the class enemies, hard work and its results.

Through their statutes most of the communes voiced the desire of farmers for knowledge and cul-

ture. "It is the bounden duty of the commune to provide an education for children who will study at one educational establishment or another at their will up to and including a school of higher learning, at the expense of the commune," read the statute of the Ust-Ikinsk commune.

Joint work and the collective use of the socialised farm implements put the members of communes at a clear advantage over individual peasant households. In 1922, for example, when famine struck the Volga region and death decimated the peasants, especially the poorest of them, there was not a single case of death from starvation in the communes of the Samara province.

Despite the fact that the first collective farms were formed mostly of poor households and the equipment they used was of the lowest order, they nevertheless managed to prove to the peasants the advantage of pooling farm implements and of using draught animals collectively. At that time the communes had 52 per cent more arable land per person than individual households. At the same time they used 20 per cent less horse power per hectare than an individual peasant household did. The crop yield at collective farms was on average 20-30 per cent higher than that on individual plots of land.

Collective farms took root in the first few years of Soviet rule. In 1920 their number rose to 10,500, embracing 131,000 peasant households (0.5 per cent of all households). The socialist sector--collective farms and also state farms which arose on lands formerly belonging to big landowners--accounted for 3.7-4.0 per cent of the arable land.

That was the initial stage of organising collective farms which showed that the most politically ad-

vanced and socially active section of Russia's peasantry--in fact, tens of thousands of enthusiasts--were seeking new forms of socialist farming.

Western commentators give prominence to the mentality of the peasants, claiming that "the petty-bourgeois aspirations of the peasantry made it a natural enemy of any form of collectivism".<sup>1</sup> As for Russia, they say, back in the 1920s "the anti-social attitude" of the Russian peasant was "expressed by chronic hostility to all attempts on the part of the Soviet regime to press him into collective enterprises".<sup>2</sup>

Judging by Soviet experience, when the peasants were convinced that joint work freed them from dire want and from back-breaking labour, small holdings, although their own property, lost all appeal and the peasants opted in favour of collective farming. This choice was undoubtedly influenced by the age-old customs and traditions of communal relationships: the Russian peasants had long since used grassland and forests in common, had built their villages and roads together and formed artels for various kinds of work. That is why most of Russia's peasants were not at all hostile to the efforts to organise collective farming under Soviet rule. They were interested in those efforts and watched closely what was going on around them; they drew comparisons and examined the possibilities of their own small farms and the budding large-scale collective farms.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Meyer, *The Soviet Political System. An Interpretation*, New York, 1965, p. 58.

The early experience of building socialism in the countryside was important for testing the effectiveness of different forms of collective farming and choosing those which the peasants found suited them best. It was in those years that three types of collective agricultural enterprises emerged: *communes*, *artels* and *associations*, differing in their degree of socialisation of the means of production by the peasants, especially the land, and in the proportion of the common effort that the peasants put into different farming operations.

A *commune* was run on the principle that its members shared all the land and all the agricultural implements which were used in their common effort. In an *artel* the peasants had common use of the principal means of production, while retaining as their personal property meat and dairy cattle, poultry, the plots around their homes, and some agricultural implements. The *associations for the joint cultivation of the land* were set up only on a part of socialised farm fields which were worked collectively with machines and implements bought by all their members.

In the first year after the 1917 Revolution more than fifty per cent of all the collective farms were communes, while in subsequent years the most stable form of collective farming was the agricultural *artel*.

The number of collective farms in those years was, of course, much too small to solve the problem of transforming agriculture and to ensure the steady supply of raw material to factories and foodstuffs to the urban population. But the Communist Party regarded this initial experience as the prototype of the large-scale farming of the future.

## Small-Scale Farming Will Not Bring Deliverance From Want

Lenin was a passionate advocate of the large-scale socialist mode of production in agriculture and insisted that "small-scale farming will not bring deliverance from want".<sup>1</sup> In his works he made the first ever scientific analysis of the practical experience of collective farming in the Soviet countryside.

Lenin firmly believed that the road of Russia's peasantry to socialism lay through agricultural co-operatives, with the trade co-operatives playing a leading role in the first phase of this process. After merging their scattered individual farms into a trade co-operative the peasants were then to take another, decisive step along the road of transforming their whole lives, a step towards a producers' co-operative. In his brochure *The Tax in Kind*, which he wrote in the spring of 1921, Lenin formulated his idea of co-operation growing from its simplest form into its highest producer form. He wrote: "The co-operative policy, if successful, will result in raising the small economy and in facilitating its transition, within an indefinite period, to large-scale production on the basis of voluntary association".<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of the collective farm system in the USSR is rooted in Lenin's co-operative plan which provided for gradually drawing the peasantry into the collective mode of production through the simplest forms of co-operation, such as marketing, supply, credit and joint tilling co-operatives. As the material and technical basis in agriculture

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 30, p. 148

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 349.

(the building of factories manufacturing tractors, harvesters and other farm machinery) grew stronger, the cultural level in rural areas would rise and peasants would become increasingly convinced of the need to carry out socialist transformations in the countryside, conditions would be created for setting up producers' co-operatives on a large scale.

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It was not until 1920 that the Soviet government could concentrate its whole attention on peaceful construction.

During the period of the Civil War and foreign military intervention (1918-1920) when Soviet rule was in mortal danger, the economic policy of the state was geared to one goal: defeating the enemy. The counter-revolutionary activities of the Russian bourgeoisie forced the Soviet authorities to speed up the nationalisation of industry. This was extended to embrace not only large plants but also middle-sized factories and even small enterprises. Private trading was banned. The peasant had no right to sell his food surplus but was obliged to turn it over to the state at fixed prices (the requisitioning of farm produce).

While the war continued, the peasants supported the requisitioning policies of the Soviet government, realising that it was necessary for the consolidation of Soviet rule. But when the war was over they demanded the right to do what they saw fit with surplus grain and other produce raised on their farms. The peasants needed manufactured goods and sought a free market for their produce. The economic policies of the war period could not bring about the necessary balance between the interests of socia-

lised industries and of private agricultural production. Yet precisely such a balance was necessary in order to restore the war-ravaged economy, to strengthen the alliance of the working class and the peasantry, and, in the final analysis, to secure all the socialist gains of the country.

The working class, which had been weakened by the war, had neither the strength nor the experience to organise production at all the nationalised factories and plants. Workers were flocking from industrial centres to rural areas because most of the industrial establishments were closed down. The process that set in was one of the fragmentation of the proletariat which was losing its class identity. This process was undermining the social basis of the Soviets. As a result, the working population found itself in dire economic straits owing to lack of food, fuel and clothing.

Only a radical change in the government's economic policy could ensure the stability of Soviet rule and the socialist development of the country. By the spring of 1921 such changes began to take shape. The Communist Party outlined a number of economic measures to be taken in the transition period from capitalism to socialism. It was necessary to learn how to run the economy, to train new managerial staff from among workers and peasants in order to create jobs, provide food and clothes for the population.

The new economic policy (NEP) boiled down to the following: the proletarian state allowed free trade for small producers and the temporary existence in the economy of a capitalist mode of production, i.e. the existence of small private enterprises employing not more than 100 workers.

The question arises whether NEP was a "renunciation" of socialism, as the move was immediately described in the capitalist press. No, it was a temporary concession to small-scale commodity production, necessary for the restoration of the war-ravaged economy of the country and the building of socialism. At the same time all the political power remained in the hands of the working class with the Soviet state retaining control of such key areas of the economy as the land, banks, large-scale industry, transport and foreign trade. All this ensured the firm priority of socialist over capitalist forms of managing the economy, thus making it possible gradually to oust the latter.

In order to revive agriculture quickly the Soviet government replaced the policy of requisitioning farm produce with a tax in kind. Unlike farm produce requisitioning, the size of the tax in kind varied from one year to another and the peasants were told about it before they started the spring sowing. After paying taxes the peasants were free to dispose of their surplus produce. This new approach created an important material incentive and made the peasants interested in producing more.

The Soviet state allowed free trading. At first this was dominated by private capital but later the government began to build up a state and co-operative trade network and to oust private traders. One of the most important elements of NEP in rural areas was the development of trade co-operatives which helped the peasants to see the advantages of joint farming and to get used to collective work.

In industry the transition to NEP took a specific form when the Soviet state leased small enterprises to private individuals, while retaining all the large and medium-sized enterprises under its control.

These small factories were no longer maintained by the Soviet state but were supposed to pay their own way. This enabled the Soviet government to concentrate all its efforts and funds on restoring more important factories and plants.

Four years later the national economy had been restored. Another important step was taken in 1925 with the adoption of a policy for industrialising the whole country. It envisaged increasing the production of means of production and rapid progress in developing heavy industry. This was the only way to strengthen national defence, to put an end to unemployment and create conditions for the restructuring of farming.

In 1926 farm production for the first time exceeded the prerevolutionary level. The peasants put to good use the land which had once belonged to big landowners and which had been abandoned during the war years. The area under industrial, fodder and market garden crops had grown, while the productivity of crops and gross yield of grain had increased.

The further expansion of grain production at such a high rate was impossible, however, something which the peasants were themselves aware of because they lacked modern farm implements and were handicapped by the small scale of their operations and their primitive organisation. Compared to the rapid progress being made in socialist industry, the lower growth rates in agricultural production were particularly striking.

The rural capitalists in the countryside possessed 30 per cent of all the complex machines used in agriculture in those days, while the poor peasants, who constituted one-third of all the households, possessed less than one per cent of all the farm machin-

ery. As the kulaks became increasingly rich, they put up increasingly stiff resistance to the Soviet government's policy. Proprietary relations laid a heavy burden on the majority of the rural population and retarded the development of the agricultural sector in the national economy. It was urgently necessary to decide which road agriculture should take.

On the ideological front a sharp struggle was under way between the supporters of the two different ways of developing, enlarging and transforming peasant households. Within the Communist Party Lenin's co-operative plan was opposed by a group of Right-wing ideologists headed by Nikolai Bukharin, who believed that trade co-operatives were the "highway" to socialism. By counterposing trade co-operatives to collective farms Bukharin sought to prove that "of all forms of co-operation the main one is sale, purchase and credit". According to Bukharin, the kulaks were to play the leading role in such co-operation and he insisted that all the other sections of the peasantry should try to keep up with them. The other aspect of Bukharin's platform was his theory of the peaceful transition of capitalism to socialism and of the gradual waning of the class struggle. The Right-wingers were against the elimination of the kulaks as a class, although this task was an essential part of Lenin's co-operative plan.

This platform rested on the same principles as those advocated by many Western historians. Prof. A. Ulam, of Harvard University, for example, pointed out that in the late 1920s Russia faced two ways of rural development and one of them was to let the kulak "grow into a full-fledged farmer and become the strongest force in the countryside..."

As a result "the process which had taken place in the West would be repeated in Russia".<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party succeeded in defending Lenin's co-operative plan from revision by all kind of political opportunists and guided its practical implementation, the success of which was largely due to the fact that the bulk of the peasantry opted for socialist co-operatives.

Already in 1918-1919 the experience of the Civil War had convinced the middle peasants that only in alliance with the working class, only through active support of the Soviet power of workers and peasants and only by fighting the kulaks could they prevent the restoration of the rule of capitalists and big landowners. And then the middle peasants came to give Soviet rule their firm support.

The main principle of Lenin's co-operative plan, which aimed at the socialist collectivisation of peasant households through co-operation, was the principle of a voluntary choice. Lenin said that "socialism cannot be imposed upon the peasants by force and that we must count only on the power of example and on the mass of the peasants assimilating day-to-day experience".<sup>2</sup> For ten years the Soviet government worked consistently to strengthen the alliance between the working class and the middle peasants and gradually prepared the peasantry as a whole for collectivisation. That is why when the middle peasants found themselves at another turning point in history they again supported the policy of the Communist Party.

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<sup>1</sup> A. B. Ulam, *The New Face of Soviet Totalitarianism*, Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 26, p. 458.

## A SHARP TURN

### Objective Conditions for Collectivisation

At its 15th Congress held in December 1927 the Communist Party set a course towards the total collectivisation of agriculture. This was the most complex social and economic task undertaken since the victory of the revolution in October 1917.

The socialist transformation of the countryside was a problem which had come to a head and brooked no further delay. At a time when large-scale socialist industry was rapidly developing on the basis of extended reproduction, the countryside was dominated by small peasant households using manual labour and barely able to achieve simple reproduction. This gap between the development rates of industry and agriculture was particularly evident already in the mid-twenties. In 1926-1927, for example, the growth of industrial output was 18.2 per cent, as against a mere 4.1 per cent in agriculture. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the volume of marketable farm produce—grain, meat, milk and other important products—was 33.4 or 50 per cent of the 1913 figure.

The development of industry caused a massive influx of manpower into the towns from the countryside. The rapid industrial development and the

rise in the urban population increased the demand for foodstuffs and raw materials. The small peasant households were unable to meet this demand. Freeing a large number of farm hands while at the same time increasing the output of farm produce could only be achieved by introducing more machinery in farming. But it was impossible to accomplish this task on the old basis, that is to say, on the basis of small individual peasant households. The fact that the peasant holdings were so small hampered the mechanisation of agricultural production and the application of modern science to farming. The small holdings of poor and middle peasants, which in those days constituted the overwhelming majority of all farms, made impossible the use of even the simplest farm machinery, such as seed drills, reapers, mowers, threshers, let alone tractors and combine harvesters. Use of a two-horse plough was profitable only on a plot of land the size of three average individual holdings, and use of a double-row seed drill on a plot as large as that worked by twelve peasant families. A reaper to be profitable had to be used on the land of 15 peasant households, a mower—30 and a small tractor—40 peasant households.

Only large-scale farming could provide enough foodstuffs and raw material.

The class aspect of the problem must also be considered if we are to understand properly how badly the Soviet state needed collectivisation. Some Western historians interpret the Soviet government's policy of collectivisation as a measure to counter "...a terrible danger from kulaks".<sup>1</sup> At the same

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Millar, A. Nove, *A Debate on Collectivisation: Was Stalin Really Necessary?*, in *Problems of Communism*, Washington, 1976, Vol. XXV, No. 4, p. 57.

time they allege that the kulak did not pose any danger to socialism. In fact, some say, the kulaks did not exist at all. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example, says that the "Bolsheviks divided the rural population into rich (or kulaks), middle and poor peasants".<sup>1</sup> Playing down the existence of profound class stratification in the countryside, Western historians are silent on the main point: the active counter-revolutionary role that the kulaks were playing in those days.

In 1927 there were 1,400,000 kulak households in the Soviet Union. The policy of collectivisation adopted at the 15th Congress of the Communist Party dashed the hopes of the kulaks that capitalism would be restored in the countryside. They were clearly aware that their future depended on whether or not they would win the decisive last battle against Soviet rule. The kulaks resorted to different methods of opposing the Soviets. In 1928, for example, the kulaks sabotaged grain deliveries. As a result, despite the good harvest and the large amount of grain in the countryside, grain deliveries to towns, industrial centres and the army were threatened.

The kulaks also refused to sell their grain at fixed government prices and terrorised middle peasants who sold their surplus grain at procurement centres. At one of their secret meetings the kulaks said: "We have only one wish: to see this government replaced or war break out, so we can turn our weapons against the Soviets".

Supported by the overwhelming majority of peasants the Soviet government overcame the resistance

of the kulaks during the grain deliveries period. The Soviet government took some extraordinary measures, such as introducing bread rationing. It also imposed higher taxes on the rich peasants. The kulaks and those who deliberately concealed their grain stocks from the government had their goods confiscated and they were tried in court for hoarding and profiteering. A special decision was taken on the organisation of new grain-growing state farms, which could help solve the grain problem and by force of example promote socialist changes in the countryside.

The events of that period showed, however, that there were two antagonistic forces in rural areas. On the one hand, the peasants acting in alliance with the working class led by the Communist Party, and, on the other, the last exploiting class, the kulaks. The conflict between Soviet rule and the kulaks reached its peak in the late 1920s. The Soviet government would have committed an act of political folly and shortsightedness if it had not tried to disarm the counter-revolutionary forces inside the country. This was another reason, no less important than the purely economic factors, for speeding up collectivisation in the Soviet countryside.

It was absolutely necessary that the peasants themselves should feel it economically expedient to form collective farms and should wish to join them voluntarily. Western historians, as we have already pointed out, present the peasants as "natural enemies" of any form of collectivism. Naum Jasny, an American "Soviet expert" specialising in economic problems, wrote, for example, that "... a certain degree of hypocrisy was involved in all the enthusiasm for large-scale farming" and that "... the col-

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago, London, Toronto, 1962, Vol. 19, p. 714.



lective farms... did not show any substantial superiority over average individual peasant farms".<sup>1</sup> In making such allegations, Western historians, as a rule, argue that the peasants had land handed down to them from their grandfathers and would therefore never agree to part with it.

It is true that the peasants were greatly attached to their personal plots. But the ten years since the victory of the October Revolution had not passed unnoticed by the peasants. The poor peasant, for example, could see from his own experience that collective efforts brought greater returns, while the middle peasant began to show an increasingly keen interest in the artels and state farms, sized up their possibilities and compared them to his own.

By denying the fact that Soviet peasants were economically interested in the socialist transformation of agriculture and that the collective farm movement was free of any coercion, some Western historians try to paint the following picture. The revolution of 1917 gave the land to the peasants. Pleased by their good fortune and by the way things were going, the peasants went on working the plots of land they had been given and in every way sought to expand their operations. Then, like a bolt from the blue, came collectivisation. As a rule, these historians say nothing about the long process of the peasants uniting into the simplest forms of co-operatives, which was a preparatory step towards the next and higher phase of co-operation.

By the summer of 1929, 13 million poor and middle peasant households had formed over 100,000

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<sup>1</sup> Naum Jasny, *The Socialized Agriculture of the USSR, Plans and Performance*. Stanford, California, 1949, p. 31.

agricultural co-operatives of the simplest kind. It would have been impossible to draw the masses of peasantry into producers' co-operatives without this stage of co-operation, which taught them how to work together and why it was to their advantage to unite.

The peasants, who were members of supply-and-marketing co-operatives, gradually with the help of the Soviet state got rid of the intermediary traders, usurers and profiteers who took advantage of the needs of the rural poor. Co-operatives were the main weapon of the poor and middle peasants in their economic struggle against the kulaks. But, as was mentioned earlier, the kulak farms were better equipped with machinery and agricultural implements.

To succeed in their economic struggle against the kulaks the peasants had to mechanise their farm operations. For them that was the only way out. But the middle and poor peasants could purchase complex agricultural implements, especially tractors, only through co-operatives. Yet even this could by no means solve the problem. The point is that the use of farm machinery on small plots of land could not produce the desired results. Here is an example. In 1927 the Sychevka credit association in the Odessa region had 15 tractors which were used on the fields of 320 individual farmers. It was, however, highly unprofitable to operate these tractors in such conditions, because in one year they drove 14,000 kilometres just moving from one plot to another, at a total loss of 5,000 roubles. On the other hand, the use of even the simplest machinery on socialised farms raised labour productivity considerably. The use of a thresher instead of a flail, for instance, increased labour productivity five

times, and the use of a reaper-binder instead of a sickle was 32 times more efficient.

The existence of a material base is an essential prerequisite for introducing co-operation in production. But at the time collective farms began to be established on a large scale there was little machinery in the countryside. So large-scale production co-operation was carried out with the use of horse-drawn and other simple farm implements.

It was also established that the same volume of field work done by collective farms and individual households, both using the same machinery, entailed 28.9 per cent less effort by the former as compared with the latter. In the Khoper district in 1929 the single-furrow ploughing of land by teams of horses of similar strength yielded results which were twice as good in collective farm fields as in the same fields in the year before collectivisation.

More effective use of land and machinery, better cultivation of the soil and observance of rules of agronomy at collective farms made it possible to obtain better harvests. In the Urals, for instance, collective farm wheat yields were 25 per cent higher in 1927, 14 per cent higher in 1928 and 40 per cent higher in 1929 than those at individual farms. In the main grain-growing areas of the Soviet Union crop yields at collective and state farms were 20-40 per cent higher than at individual farms. Thus, practical experience helped farmers realise why co-

The merging of peasant holdings into collective farms on a mass scale took place in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Every collective farm was issued with a state deed granting it the use of the land in perpetuity

Working together it was easier to till the land and gather the harvest: here members of one of the first communes are ploughing the land



operative farming and collective labour in general had economic advantages over individual farming.

State farms had a great impact on the social outlook of the peasants and, consequently, on their attitude to collective farming. In 1929 in the North Caucasus alone there were 14 large-scale grain-growing state farms, equipped with the latest farm machinery.

One such grain-growing state farm, called *Gigant* (Giant), was set up in the North Caucasus in 1928. It occupied a total of 120,000 hectares of arable land, using 300 tractors and many other machines which made it possible to mechanise all the principal farm operations, such as ploughing, sowing and harvesting, within a very short time in accordance with the rules of agronomy. The first harvesting season was a triumph for large-scale farming. The yield of spring wheat, which had been sown over 43,000 hectares, was twice as high as at individual peasant farms. The individual peasants were also greatly impressed by the assistance that the state farm gave them. In the spring of 1929, for example, the state farm provided its tractors to plough up 3,200 hectares of land in individual households.

State farms extended their influence not only to nearby areas. In 1929 the *Gigant* state farm was visited by 50,000 peasants coming from afar. The mechanisation of farm operations tremendously impressed visitors. This is what peasants from the lower reaches of the Volga wrote in the visitors' book: "The thirteen of us who have come here from the lower Volga region wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for what you have done here to build a socialist sector in the country. The state farm has made a tremendous impression on all of us and

given us the idea of following in your footsteps. On our return home we shall work hard to organise collective farms..." Thousands of other peasants became ardent supporters of collectivisation after visiting the *Gigant* state farm which, incidentally, was by no means the only large-scale farming enterprise of this kind.

But that was not all. In 1928 the country's first machine-and-tractor station (MTS) was set up in the Odessa region. Soon afterwards a whole network of such stations sprang up across the Soviet Union. Their task was to provide technical services to collective farms and co-operative associations on a contract basis. The use of tractors, harvesters and other machinery showed the peasants the undisputed advantages of large-scale mechanised collective farming over small holdings.

One could say that the first few thousand tractors at work in the countryside not only ploughed up the boundaries dividing peasant holdings but they also made a break with old ways and customs and in fact transformed the small-scale farmers. The peasants became convinced that collective farming with the use of machinery provided on easy terms by the Soviet state was the only road to liberation from back-breaking labour and kulak bondage, the only road to a better life. This explains the fact that for a certain period the social revolution was outstripping the technological revolution in the countryside.

In 1929 Soviet industry manufactured 3.6 times as much machinery and agricultural implements as tsarist Russia had produced back in 1913. It is true that all this farm machinery was operated largely by horses and other draught animals. In 1929 there were only about 35,000 tractors in use on Soviet

farms. Since industrialisation provided for the priority growth of production of means of production, it ensured the rapid growth of machine-building in the USSR. In the first five-year plan period (1928-1932) the output of machines increased 4.5 times to a level ten times what tsarist Russia produced in 1913. The Soviet Union now had a tractor and automobile manufacturing industry, something it had never had before, and it began to produce grain harvesters. As a result, Soviet farmers received more than 120,000 new tractors in the first five-year plan period, and 242,614 tractors in the second five-year plan period. The manufacture of other farm machinery was also proceeding apace.

What the newly organised collective farms very badly needed at that time was experienced managerial staff who knew how to run farming on socialist lines.

To this end in 1929 the Communist Party decided to send to collective farms and machine-and-tractor stations about 25,000 workers with organisational experience. Whole industrial enterprises took collective farms under their patronage, providing them with machinery and teaching them how to operate it.

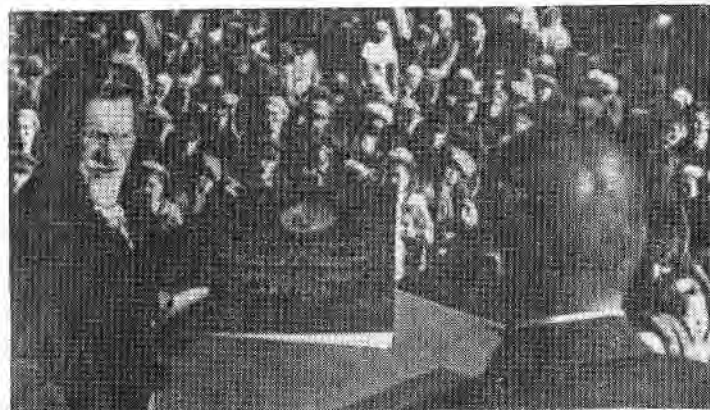
## Peasants Plough Up the Field Boundaries

The economic policy of the Soviet state in the countryside, a policy aimed at helping the poor and middle peasants, at developing the collective farm movement and at promoting the peasants' cultural level and political awareness, along with the experience of large-scale socialist enterprises in rural areas convinced the peasants that collectivisation

was the only correct and sure path to follow. All this explains the sharp change that came about in the mood and behaviour of the peasantry. In the autumn of 1929, middle peasants followed the example of the village poor and joined collective farms in the grain-growing regions. In many regions collectivisation was acquiring a mass character. In the North Caucasus, for example, about 25-30 per cent of the peasant households had joined collective farms by the beginning of November 1929. A similar situation had arisen in the Lower Volga region, in the Ukraine and some other parts of the Soviet Union. B. Sheboldayev, First Secretary of the Lower Volga Regional Party Committee, said in the autumn of 1929 that the events of the past two or three months had utterly changed notions about how fast collectivisation could proceed. "The wave is rising so fast that the figures cannot keep pace with life," he pointed out.

Over 1929 alone the number of collectivised peasant households rose from 445,000 to 1,040,000 as against the target figure of 564,000 that the Soviet state had planned to reach in that year. This rate of collectivisation, achieved in excess of the targets set for the first five-year plan, is sometimes used in the West to support the allegation that peasant households were pooled into collective farms by force. American journalist Anna Louise Strong, who worked in the Soviet Union for many years and witnessed these events, commenting on the statements of Western authors about "forced collectivisation", wrote: "This is untrue. I travelled the countryside in those years and know what occurred. . . I saw collectivisation break like a storm on the Lower Volga in autumn of 1929. . . Farmhands and poor peasants took the initiative, hoping to better themselves

1929: Ukrainian collective farmers discuss their problems and set tasks for the future



1935: in Kazakhstan Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin presents to collective farmers a state deed granting them the use of the land in perpetuity

In 1930 peasants began to join collective farms in large numbers

by government aid. Kulaks fought the movement bitterly by all means up to arson and murder. The middle peasantry, the real backbone of farming, had been split between hope of becoming kulaks and the wish for machinery from the state. But now that the five-year plan promised tractors, this great mass of peasants began moving by villages, townships and counties, into the collective farms".<sup>1</sup>

At the time the Soviet government was setting targets for the first five-year plan, it could not foresee that the collective farm movement would assume such tremendous proportions. But when in view of the new conditions socialist changes in agriculture were being effected at a higher speed the Communist Party repeatedly warned its local organisations and the local Soviets of the need to observe the principle of voluntary collectivisation in the countryside. On January 5, 1930, the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution *On the rate of collectivisation and on measures taken by the Soviet state to promote the building of collective farms*, which described as inadmissible any attempts at "decreeing" to the collective farm movement.

Never before in history had tens of millions of peasants in a country as large as Russia changed their age-old style of life so radically and taken the socialist road of development. The revolution was sailing uncharted ways and encountered serious problems, as was inevitable. One must also take into account that all these revolutionary social and economic changes were taking place in a country

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<sup>1</sup> A. L. Strong, *The Stalin Era*, New York, 1956, pp. 35, 36.

which was relatively backward technically, economically and culturally.

The situation was also exacerbated by the increasingly sharp class struggle in the country. The peasants had always regarded the kulaks as exploiters. In Soviet times this hatred of the kulaks on the part of the peasants became even deeper and at the same time more socially motivated, as the revolution had speeded the process of stratification of the class forces in rural areas.

The kulaks put up a stiff resistance to collectivisation. They engineered provocations and acts of sabotage, including arson, brutally murdered Communists and village activists. During the first five months of 1929 the kulaks committed 1,141 acts of terrorism. The kulaks incited the peasants to slaughter their livestock before joining the collective farms, ostensibly because, as they said, the livestock would be taken away from the peasants in any case. Many peasants fell for this line of argument and slaughtered their livestock. In 1929-1930 the number of cattle was reduced by 14,600,000 head, of pigs by one-third, and of sheep and goats by more than one quarter. Such actions struck a serious blow at livestock farming, one from which it could not recover for a long time.

The struggle that the kulaks mounted against Soviet rule and their attempts to restore capitalism and to intimidate their fellow villagers came up against growing resistance and aroused the indignation of the peasant masses. In fact the kulaks by their actions put themselves beyond the pale of the law. Marxists never regarded expropriation by force as the only, let alone the best way of abolishing the exploiting classes. But in the situation which had emerged at that time the Communist Party was



compelled to pass from a policy of restricting the kulaks to a policy of their expropriation. The authorities confiscated the means of production in the possession of kulaks. The fate of the kulaks themselves depended on their attitude to Soviet rule. The leading counter-revolutionary kulaks were placed in corrective labour camps, the most active among the rich rural capitalists were exiled to remote areas, while all other kulaks were removed from the collective farms they were living in but were allowed to stay in the same administrative district.

The policy of total collectivisation caused the peasants to give vent to their long pent-up hatred of the exploiting class. Mikhail Kalinin, who at that time was the Soviet President, holding the post of Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, said, after visiting regions in Central Russia that "in 95 out of 100 cases the authorities have to exercise a restraining influence in the course of measures being taken to dispossess the kulaks". The peasants' mood had filtered down to local Party functionaries and Soviet officials and it affected their work. There were cases when these officials had failed to realise the complexity of socialist reconstruction in rural areas and did not carry out the Party directives which required them to put an end to Leftist excesses. Some of them concealed the existence of these directives from the masses. For example, the Arbatsky Regional Party Committee in Kotelniki district passed this

The agricultural implements used by the first Soviet collective farms were primitive by modern standards

After finishing work at their collective farms its members would often help smallholders on the threshing-floor and with other tasks

resolution with regard to the directive aimed at preventing distortion of the Communist Party's policy in the rural areas: "We cannot bring the directive to the knowledge of those concerned with kulak dispossession without risking dampening their enthusiasm for the job".

The middle peasants were vacillating as to whether or not they should join the collective farms. There were thousands of cases of middle peasants first joining a collective farm and then, in a month or so, leaving it, and then again asking to be admitted. These vacillations were largely the result of the fact that a part of the village poor were still hostile to the well-to-do middle peasants. Sometimes even these middle peasants were dispossessed like kulaks. In its address on April 2, 1930, the Communist Party pointed out that "*the policy of strengthening the alliance with the middle peasants, with reliance on the village poor and relentless struggle against the kulaks, has been gradually supplanted by a policy of ordering around the middle peasant, a policy which is utterly hostile to Leninism*".

The Communist Party succeeded in rectifying the mistakes in its policy of collectivisation. On February 20, 1930, it adopted a special resolution, *On collectivisation and on the struggle with the kulaks in non-Russian economically backward regions*, in which it emphasised the inadmissibility of the excessive rates at which collectivisation was being accomplished. A major role in correcting these mistakes was played by Stalin's article *Dizziness from*

Experienced workers went to all parts of the Soviet Union to help the peasants organise collective farms: here they are being given a send-off by their workmates





*Success* published on March 2, 1930, in the newspaper *Pravda* on the instructions of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party Central Committee.

A letter was circulated on March 10, in which some local officials were criticised for gross distortions of Party policy on the collectivisation of agriculture. The Party urged that the errors committed be immediately rectified.

These and other political and economic measures helped to bring stability into the collective farm movement. Neither the mistakes nor fierce anti-Soviet propaganda by the kulaks could hold back collectivisation. The peasants did not lose their faith in the advantages of collective farming. By July 1, 1930, six million (23.6 per cent of all) peasant holdings had been brought together in collective farms. This fact made it necessary to revise the targets of the first five-year plan as regards agriculture because it became quite feasible to complete collectivisation of agriculture in the course of the very first five-year plan period. The main principles of collectivisation were still the principle of voluntary membership of collective farms, reliance on the agricultural *artel* as the main form of collective farming, the heeding of local economic conditions, and material and financial assistance from the Soviet state.

The tremendous organisational and political work that was carried out in rural areas and the economic support given to the collective farm movement by the Soviet state produced good results. The autumn of 1930 saw a new upsurge in the collectivisation of farming. In the October-December period more than one million peasant households joined collective farms. Collectivisation proceeded at

different rates in different parts of the Soviet Union: in some places it was accomplished quite quickly, by the beginning of the autumn of 1932, while in other areas, as for instance, in the republics of Soviet Central Asia, it lasted several years.

Collectivisation radically transformed social relations in rural areas and the conditions of the peasants' life and work, which completely altered the very appearance of the countryside and changed the peasants themselves.

## HOW DID COLLECTIVE FARMS BENEFIT THE PEASANTS?

The victory of the collective farm system established large-scale socialist farm production based on the use of machinery and modern science.

From the economic point of view this victory made it possible to develop agricultural production in a planned manner and more efficiently and profitably.

From the social point of view this victory made it possible to establish a new system of social relations in the countryside, relations which were to eliminate all class distinctions in Soviet society.

The establishment of the collective farm system proceeded side by side with the cultural revolution in rural areas. One of its direct results was the emergence of the rural intelligentsia, of such professional people as agronomists, veterinary experts, engineers and teachers.

In 1937 the collective farms embraced 93 per cent of all the peasant holdings and 99.1 per cent of the arable land. The 23,700,000 small holdings had given place to 243,700 collective farms and 3,992 state farms. The principal form of collective management of the economy in the countryside was the agricultural artel, that is to say, the collective farm. The key principles of organisation of collec-

tive farms were laid down in the Model Rules of the Agricultural Artel adopted at the Second All-Union Congress of foremost collective farmers held in February 1935. The Model Rules pointed out that all the land held by collective farms was secured to them for their free use in perpetuity. This provision was enshrined in law. On July 7, 1935, the USSR government issued a decree *On the issue to agricultural artels of state deeds for the use of the land in perpetuity*. By the beginning of 1937 such state deeds had been issued to 218,059 collective farms. On the strength of these deeds the collective farms received 370,800,000 hectares of land—more than twice as much as the poor and middle peasants had owned before the revolution.

Collective farms socialise only the principal means of production: the land, agricultural machinery, economic and cultural facilities. Moreover, the socialist property in a collective farm is of a co-operative, group character, and not national, belonging to the nation as a whole.

Under the USSR Constitution adopted in 1936 collective farmers had the right to the personal use of a plot of land around their home and a subsidiary farming operation, a right which was reaffirmed in the new USSR Constitution of 1977. Thus the collective farmers drew their income both from the collective farms and from their individual plots.

The 1936 USSR Constitution, which laid the foundations for the legal status of collective farmers, also allowed the existence, alongside the socialist system of farming, of small individual peasant households in which all the work was to be done by peasants themselves and in which the exploitation of hired labour was ruled out. Shortly before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War

(1941-1945) there were 3,600,000 individual peasant holdings in the USSR.

## Technical Reconstruction

During the first five-year plan period from 1928 to 1932 agricultural production underwent a period of reorganisation: the process of collectivisation was under way and the socialist sector in the rural economy was rapidly expanding to embrace more farms, villages and whole regions. Like any other reorganisation, the restructuring of agriculture was accompanied by considerable economic problems: there was a decline in the overall output of grain and of livestock produce. It was clear, however, that this temporary drop in farm production would not deter efforts to achieve the great goals of the future. There were also other reasons for the decline in farm production, especially the terrorist activities of the kulaks, who set fire to collective farm property and slaughtered livestock—this could not but do serious harm to the economy.

As a large-scale socialist operation the collective farm offered tremendous opportunities for raising labour productivity. But at first these opportunities were not used the way they should have been, because the collective farmers who had only recently given up their individual holdings, had no experience of working together and could not organise their work properly.

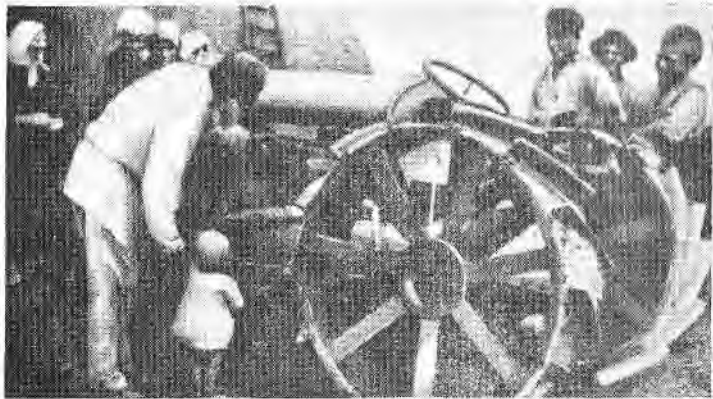
The Soviet state was doing its utmost to help collective farms to get on their feet as soon as possible. It loaned them large sums of money and speeded up the building of factories and plants to manufacture tractors, harvesters and other farm

machines. Tractor plants sprang up one after another in Stalingrad, Kharkov and Chelyabinsk. Harvester manufacturing plants were built in Rostov-on-Don and Saratov and farm machinery plants in Rostov-on-Don, Zlatoust and Gomel. The flow of farm machinery of various kinds kept increasing all the time. From 1928 to 1932 the farmers received 120,000 tractors—whereas in 1927 there were only 18,000 tractors in operation on farm fields. The collective farms were catered for by machine-and-tractor stations, which had all the farm machinery and equipment the collective farms needed. At first farm machines were operated by workers who had come from industrial centres for this purpose. The workers trained local mechanics and technicians so they could themselves repair machines and other farm implements.

At the end of 1932 about 150,000 tractors and more than 14,000 harvesters and a large number of other machines were in use throughout the Soviet Union.

In addition to this the Soviet state set up short courses for training collective farm personnel and sent engineers, agronomists and land surveyors to rural areas.

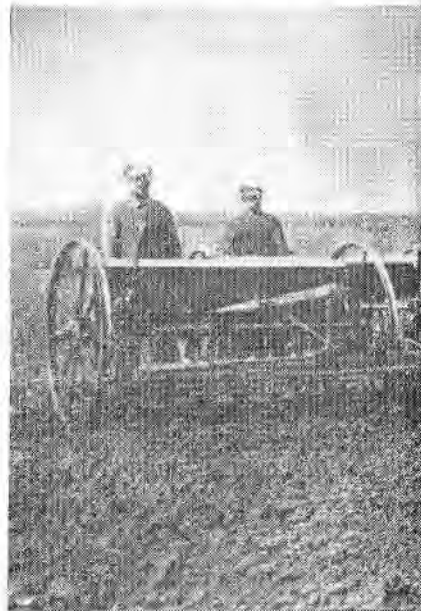
The second five-year plan for the economic and social development of the USSR (1933-1937) aimed at further technical modernisation of the whole of farm production and provided more material and technical aid for the farmers. In 1940, 531,000 tractors, 182,000 harvesters, 228,000 lorries and a large number of other farm machines were operating on farm fields. In that year 69 per cent of the spring ploughing, 61 per cent of the grain sowing, 93 per cent of the sugar beet planting and 81 per cent of the cotton sowing were mechanised. In the period



The Soviet state did its utmost to provide the farmers with the necessary implements and machinery. 1926: peasants examine their first tractor



1930: the tractor plant in Stalingrad began mass production of tractors



1934: mechanised sowing of grain at a Ukrainian collective farm

between 1928 and 1940 the power-to-man ratio of all operations in agriculture increased 22 times. Figuratively speaking, as a result of collectivisation the Russian farmer moved from the horse's saddle into the tractor driver's seat. This played the decisive role in the nationwide effort to increase agricultural output. The living standards of collective farmers also rose considerably.

Western historians in the 1920s alleged that in its policies the Soviet government was discriminating against the countryside and that socialist industrialisation in the USSR was carried out solely by pumping money and resources into it from the agricultural sector. According to Arthur Wright, "the entire history of Soviet policy toward agriculture is a record of impatience with the constraints imposed on industrialisation by peasant agriculture".<sup>4</sup>

The Soviet government never concealed the fact that in a country that had achieved industrialisation using only its own resources, accumulation involved the farmers as well as the workers. But no money or any other resources were pumped out of the countryside to carry out industrialisation. Western historians' "argument" was supported by the allegations of unequal exchange between town and country in the period of the first two five-year plans. It is true that in 1928 the sum of 2,400 million roubles was withdrawn without compensation from the agricultural sphere and transferred to the non-agricultural sphere. In subsequent years the amounts of money withdrawn from agriculture were gradually re-

duced. This fact, however, does not bear out the sweeping conclusions made by Western historians that industrialisation in the Soviet Union was carried out at the expense of the peasants.

In *The Balance of Cost Exchange between Town and Country* (Moscow, 1969), a book well known to Western historians, Alexander Barsov makes a comprehensive study of this problem. He writes that in the years of industrialisation in the USSR town and country maintained an economically even relationship which was not limited to commodity exchange. There were also other economic links. For example, state capital investment in agriculture rose ten times over from 1928 to 1930. In the first five-year plan period alone the Soviet state allocated 4,700 million roubles to finance the work of collective farms and machine-and-tractor stations.

The farmers also gained a lot from the government's policy of maintaining low prices for farm machinery. The point is that the collective farms, which started out as financially weak organisations, were unable to buy machinery on the basis of equivalent exchange. That is why the tractors and other machines they used were supplied to them on easy terms. In addition the Soviet state spent large sums of money on maintaining schools and hospitals and bringing down the price of manufactured goods. A graphic illustration of this relationship between town and country in the industrialisation period is provided by the 7,703 million roubles the Soviet state invested in capital construction in the countryside in the period from 1926 to 1931. Withdrawals from agriculture in the same period totalled 5,804 million roubles. This means that the farmers were 1,902 million roubles to the good. Some Western

<sup>4</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Washington, January-February 1975, Vol. XXIV, p. 51.

historians admit that industrialisation in the USSR was carried out not at the expense of agriculture. Prof. James Millar, of the University of Illinois, for example, basing himself on Alexander Barsov's research, said the main fallacy prevailing in Western accounts of Soviet economic development was that industrialisation was achieved at the expense of the peasantry. A similar point of view has been voiced by some other Western authors, such as French economist François Labouesse and British economist Erich Strauss.

Western historians and economists as a rule remain silent about the economic results of the socialist transformation of agriculture in the USSR.

But these results speak volumes. In 1937 overall agricultural output was 34 per cent greater than in 1913, when prerevolutionary Russia had its best harvest ever. Western historians consider that collective farms were unable to replace the highly productive farms that belonged to the kulaks. In actual fact, it was precisely because of collectivisation that the Soviet Union managed to increase the productivity of agriculture, without which the growing urban population would not have had enough foodstuffs and Soviet industry would not have been able to advance at such a high rate. In 1932 the collective and state farms produced more than 84 per cent of the marketable grain and sugar beet. As a result of collectivisation the average annual proportion of marketable grain rose from 26 per cent in prerevolutionary times to 40 per cent in the period from 1933 to 1937. During the second five-year plan period the supply of cities with livestock produce also considerably improved. In 1937, for example, the collective farms delivered to the state almost twice as much meat and milk as

they had done in 1933, and delivered three times as much wool to the textile industry.

A new system of state purchasing of farm produce was introduced to ensure stable supplies of bread to the cities, which made it possible to abolish food rationing in January 1935. The working class hailed this move as the result of comradesly co-operation with collective farmers in their common effort to build a socialist society. The variety of foodstuffs on sale in cities also expanded. The consumption of wheat bread by industrial and office workers in the second five-year plan period increased threefold, that of butter by 150 per cent, of pork by 250 per cent and of fruit fourfold.

All these facts show that the collective farm system created the necessary conditions for a more rapid growth of farm production.

## Living Standards Rise

The socialist transformation of agriculture radically changed the life of farmers. The setting up of collective farms put an end to economic inequality in the countryside and to the exploitation of those who worked on the land. No less than six million poor peasant households, that could not even afford a horse, and this meant a total of nearly 20 million work hands, including adult members of the family, people who had been cruelly exploited by the kulaks, now joined collective farms and began to use farm machines and tractors which neither the poor nor even the middle farmer could afford on their individual plots.

The socialist mode of farming ensured a steady rise in the incomes of collective farmers and in their

consumption of foodstuffs and manufactured goods. On the whole the real incomes of peasants were by 1940 2.3 times greater than in 1913. The per capita consumption of meat and milk had almost doubled, and that of eggs increased fourfold. In the old days the amount of grain the peasant and his family had in their possession barely lasted until the following year, whereas now the peasants had food all the year round, as could be seen from the family budgets of all collective farmers. Now existence at starvation level among the poor was a thing of the past, as was the back-breaking work on which their very life had depended. The mechanisation of agriculture enabled the peasants to reduce the length of the working day and the amount of effort expended.

Trade between town and country was gradually expanding to embrace the sale of goods at collective farm markets. This stimulated the farmers to produce more because it gave them an additional source of income. Collective farm trade turnover rose fourfold from 1932 to 1939. For its part the industrial sector increased the output of consumer goods. In 1939 the amount of clothing and textiles sold in rural areas was more than double the figure for 1932. The sale of footwear rose by more than 60 per cent, of soap and other health and hygiene articles by more than 150 per cent and of various educational and recreational goods by almost 500 per cent.

The rising incomes of collective farms and their members can be judged from the growing deposits in savings bank accounts. In the six years from 1934 to 1940 the total sum of money deposited by collective farms at the State Bank of the USSR increased elevenfold, while personal deposits of col-

lective farm members in savings banks trebled from 1934 to 1939. This, in turn, increased the floating assets of the Soviet state and served to strengthen its economic potential and defence capability.

The collective farm system linked the countryside with the industrial towns in one integral socialist system based on public ownership of the means of production. Workers and peasants had their sphere of common interests expanded, since both sought to contribute to the nation's well-being and to the national income. The Soviet state helped the newly established collective farm system to amass nondistributable assets (that is to say, all the commonly owned property not to be divided among the members of the collective farm). In 1932 these amounted to 4,700 million roubles, while in 1940 the figure was 27,700 million roubles. If reckoned per family the nondistributable assets increased fivefold from 1935 to 1939 to reach a figure as high as 118,000 roubles. Ninety per cent of these assets were created by the collective farmers themselves and by the contributions made by the Soviet state in this historically short period of time. Only 10 per cent of them were made up of the socialised property of the peasants (entrance fees).

## Social Changes

The socialist transformation of the countryside brought closer together the social and class structure of the urban and rural communities, making them socially uniform and socialist in substance. Neither town nor country had exploiting classes and all channels for their revival were closed.

Collectivisation removed all the barriers that had existed between the different strata of the peasant population, so that there were no longer any farm labourers who hired themselves out to rich farmers, there were no poor and no middle peasants.

Every peasant in the countryside was aware of the results of socialist changes. Whether he looked at the vast collective farm fields ploughed by tractors, or at the new school, community centre or nursery school, it all reminded him of the fundamental changes in his own life too.

Socialism had come to every peasant family. The women no longer depended on their husbands' earnings, because members of the collective farm were paid for the work they did and women had their own earnings.

Young people began to play a tremendous role in agricultural production. They, too, had become economically independent of their elders at home. It was young people who formed the backbone of the technical staff on the farm.

There were also marked changes in the cultural level of the countryside in the course of the first and second five-year plan periods. Whereas before the 1917 revolution the rural population was basically illiterate, in 1939 90 per cent of the 16-50 age group could read and write. The abolition of illiteracy in rural areas fostered political awareness among the peasants and helped them join in the nationwide effort to build a new life in the Soviet Union.

In the latter half of the 1930s there was a swift rise in the number of industrial and office workers in the countryside. These included agronomists, land improvement specialists, builders, engineers,

machine operators and school teachers. In the late 1930s and early 1940s these numbered about 30 million, with eight million of them (seven per cent of the rural population) working at state agricultural enterprises—the machine-and-tractor stations (MTS) and state farms.

The collective farmers, state farm and MTS workers were pursuing one goal: to provide food for the nation and raw material for industry. They mastered new technology, learned to operate farm machinery, they improved the organisation of labour at large agricultural enterprises, learned to combine public and personal interests in accordance with the socialist principle of the priority of national interests over all others. All this was directed towards one goal: strengthening the socialist social system and the ideological and political unity of the Soviet people, boosting the economic might of the USSR.

In the 1936 Constitution the alliance of the working class and the collective farmers was referred to as the social and political foundation of the state system of the USSR.

The political awareness of the peasants and their attitude to the socialist system is shown by the following facts. Taking part in local government elections to Soviets of working people's deputies in 1939 were 99.3 per cent of the rural population (as against 69.1 per cent in 1931 and 82.6 per cent in 1934). Of this number 97.78 per cent cast their votes for the candidates of the bloc of Communists and non-party people. The rural Soviets in the Russian Federation, for example, were made up of collective farmers (70.2 per cent), workers (5.9 per cent) and office employees (23.9 per cent).



## Years of Trial and Tribulation

The collective farm system was put to the test with the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against German nazism in 1941. The enemy's hopes that bonds between the classes and the peoples of Soviet society would crumble failed to materialise.

During the four long years of the war collective farmers supplied the army and the cities with foodstuffs and industry with raw material. Solving the food problem came up against many difficulties. The principal farming areas were under enemy occupation, while the bulk of the active rural population had gone to the war front. Many collective farmers—men and women—were mobilised to work in industry, transport and various defence projects. The manufacture of tractors and other farm machinery was suspended in the early period of the war, while the production of spare parts for farm machinery was reduced to a minimum. The farm machinery plants switched to war production. Moreover, a considerable part of the machinery which had formerly been used on the land was used for the needs of defence. Thanks to the great potential of the state and collective farms, however, and thanks to the selfless labour of state farm workers and collective farmers, especially women (during the war 71 per cent of all land workers were women), the food problem was solved.

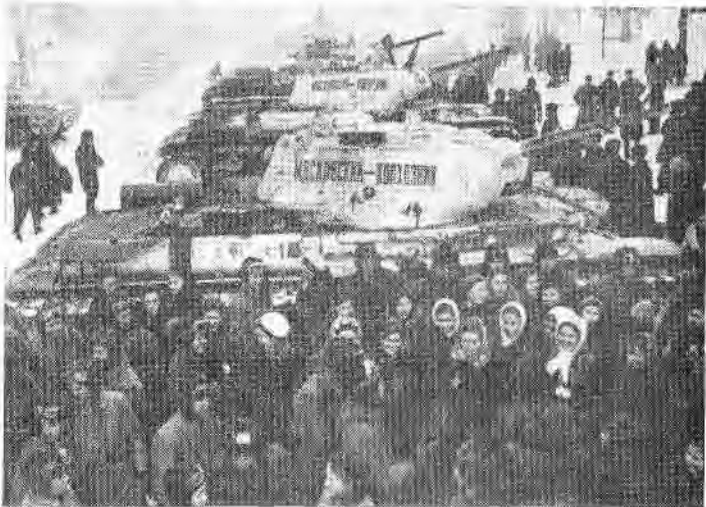
The nazi armies, taking advantage of their sudden treacherous attack and also of the fact that they temporarily outmanned and outgunned the Soviet forces, in the early stages of the war moved eastward deep into Soviet territory. But this suc-

cess hung in the balance as the invaders came up against stiff resistance.

The workers and peasants in the occupied areas mounted a fierce and relentless struggle against nazi attempts to use local industry and agriculture. Collective farmers refused to supply food to the enemy, they hid the property of collective farms, machine-and-tractor stations and state farms and failed to report for work. Significantly, in some areas where the partisans were on top of the situation the farmers kept their collective farms going, which testified to the vitality of the ideas of collectivisation.

The number of such partisan collective farms was especially great in Byelorussia and in the western part of the Bryansk region. Operating there in March 1942 were 16 rural Soviets and 60 collective farms, which carried out spring sowing over 6,000 hectares. Some collective farms also operated in the nazi-occupied Kalinin, Leningrad and Pskov regions. The produce harvested in nazi-occupied territory went primarily to the partisans whose commanders set delivery targets for local collective farms. As a rule, these targets were met twice and even three times over. The collective farms also sent whole convoys of foodstuffs across the front line for the army and the population of, for example, besieged Leningrad.

One of the popular forms of national assistance to the war effort was the establishment of the Defence Fund. On July 31, 1941, workers at the *Krasny Proletari* factory in Moscow took the initiative of donating one day's earnings every month until the end of the war. Collective farmers supported this initiative of the Moscow workers and began to send their contributions to the Defence



Fund. This money was used for building tanks, aircraft, self-propelled guns and other weapons.

After the war the Soviet people had to do an enormous amount of work to repair the damage that the nazis had inflicted on agriculture. The nazis plundered more than 90,000 collective farms, about 1,900 state farms and 3,000 machine-and-tractor stations, they drove to Germany or slaughtered more than 70,000,000 head of livestock.

In the first postwar year the overall output of Soviet farms was only 60 per cent of what it had been in 1940.

During the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) hundreds of thousands of collective farmers formed partisan detachments in nazi-occupied territory to fight the enemy

A tank column built with funds raised by collective farmers in the Moscow region

## SOVIET FARMING TODAY

The postwar history of Soviet agriculture is very complicated and very instructive. The main feature of this period is the experience Soviet farmers gained from tackling very difficult problems in agriculture. The prewar level of agricultural production was surpassed only in 1954, whereas in 1980 the overall produce of Soviet farms was 2.5 times that in 1953.

In assessing the performance of Soviet agriculture Western specialists usually compare it with the achievements of American farmers. This is a wrong approach. The farming areas of the United States and the Soviet Union have different climatic conditions. In the USSR, for example, 60 per cent of the arable land is in "high-risk" crop-growing zones, marked by lack of moisture, a long vegetative period, late spring and early autumn frosts, and so on. Nevertheless, the overall volume of farm production in the USSR in the 1976-1980 period was 85 per cent of that achieved in the US. The historically formed gap, however, is gradually closing. The Soviet Union has outstripped the United

States in the production of many items of produce. For example, in 1913 tsarist Russia produced half as much butter as the United States, whereas in 1980 the USSR produced 165 per cent more than the United States. In 1913 Russia produced only seven per cent of the amount of cotton grown in the United States, while in 1980 the USSR produced 102 per cent of the amount grown in the US. The corresponding figures for milk are 95 per cent and 155 per cent. At the same time, however, the gap that existed in meat production has been only slightly reduced. The production of mineral fertilizers in tsarist Russia was three per cent of the American level. Today the Soviet Union leads the world in this sphere, producing 41 per cent more than the United States. The Soviet Union also holds first place in the world in the production of cotton, sugar beet, sunflower, milk and other items. It holds second place in the head of sheep and third place in the head of cattle.

As a rule, Western commentators emphasise the difficulties facing Soviet agriculture. Some authors, however, take a more objective view of the Soviet farmers' performance. Prof. Harry G. Shaffer, of the University of Kansas, for example, quotes UN statistics in sizing up the achievements of Soviet agriculture, which are particularly noticeable when comparing the share of the Soviet Union in the world output of farm produce. "With less than 7 per cent of the world's population, the Soviet people have, in recent years, seen their agricultural sector produce over 11 per cent of the world's meat..., 23 per cent of the world's milk and 25 to 30 per cent of the world's wheat. In comparison with the United States the Soviet Union has long produced more milk, even on a per capita basis;

in good years it approaches equality in grain output".<sup>1</sup>

## Postwar Years

In the early postwar years the Soviet state invested heavily in farming. In the fourth five-year plan period (1946-1950) it initially allocated 19,900 million roubles for agricultural development. Later, despite the tremendously difficult economic situation, the government invested an additional 5,200 million roubles. As a result capital investment in the agrarian sector constituted 11.8 per cent of all capital investment in the national economy. In subsequent five-year plan periods this proportion continued to grow and in the 1955-1960 period rose to 14.3 per cent.

To provide agriculture with an adequate amount of farm machinery, building materials and fertilizers, it was necessary not only to restore the war-ravaged farm machinery plants, but also to build many new ones. Most of the investments were directed into the industrial sphere, since industry was the backbone of the national economy as a whole. This was the only acceptable alternative in the situation prevailing at that time.

The results of this economic policy were not long in coming. New tractor plants were built in the Altai region, in Vladimir and Lipetsk. The existing plants increased their output of tractors, harvesters and other farm machines. In 1950 600,000 tractors were already working on the land, as against

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<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Agriculture: An Assessment of Its Contributions to Economic Development*, New York, 1977, p. 81.

531,000 in the prewar year of 1940. In those years, of course, the level of mechanisation was far from sufficient, that is to say, the USSR was still unable to put farming on an industrial basis.

Progress in this sphere was also held back by some mistakes in the management of agriculture and miscalculations in farming policy in the postwar period, particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s when the principles of material incentives for farmers were ignored, the obligatory quotas for the delivery of farm produce and the taxes on individual plots were increased excessively, and so on.

The shortcomings in the development of agriculture were carefully examined at a plenary meeting of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee in September 1953. The meeting outlined measures to eliminate these shortcomings with the emphasis on the rapid growth of grain production, the backbone of agriculture. At that time any further substantial increase in grain production hinged on development of virgin and fallow lands in Kazakhstan, Siberia, the Volga region and other parts of the Soviet Union.

The results of agricultural development, however, failed to meet the growing needs of the country.

## Charting a New Course

An essentially new stage in the development of Soviet farming began in March 1965, when the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee met in plenary session. By that time the Soviet state

had enough strength to redistribute its national income to the benefit of agriculture. As a result the proportion of capital investment in this sphere sharply rose. In the eighth five-year plan period (1965-1970) it stood at 17.2 per cent, in the ninth (1971-1975) at 20.1 per cent and in the tenth (1976-1980) at more than 27 per cent. In ten years alone (1971-1980) the Soviet state invested more than 300,000 million roubles in agriculture, which is more than twice the total investment in agriculture during the previous eight five-year plan periods.

But let us go back to the year 1965. Despite the growing economic potential of the Soviet Union, many outstanding problems were facing agriculture by the mid-1960s. Also some new complicated problems of a theoretical and practical nature had to be solved without delay.

The keynote of the policy outlined by the March plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee was to improve economic relations between town and country, to put the development of agriculture on a firm economic footing. An analysis of the lag in agricultural development showed that the main mistake lay in underestimating the objective economic laws of the development of socialist production, in violating the principle of material incentives. The managerial practices of those days were largely influenced by subjectivism and voluntarism, manifested in the flouting of the recommendations of farming specialists, and in the adoption of scientifically ungrounded decisions. All this led to grave errors in agricultural planning and financing and in the government's pricing policy. It often happened that local farming conditions were ignored and the farmers often received stereotyped direc-

tives from above on agronomy and farming practices, crop composition, and so on.

The March plenary meeting called for an end to be put to these malpractices. It called special attention to the growing importance in the modern conditions of the economic factors in the organisation of agricultural production, to the need to make a profound study of the objective economic laws of socialism and make good use of them in the agrarian policy. The plenary meeting outlined a whole system of economic measures aimed at promoting agricultural production.

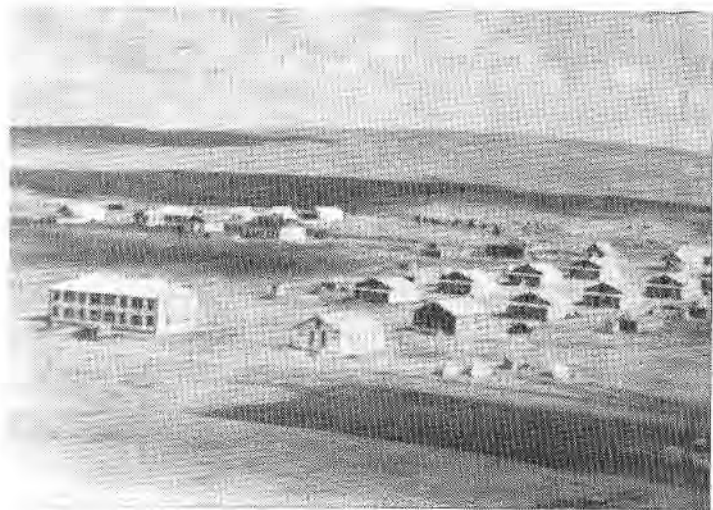
At that time Soviet industry was powerful enough to organise the mass production of farm machinery. Whereas previously collective and state farms had been able to mechanise only the more difficult and labour-intensive jobs, now they were in a position to mechanise all the production processes in agriculture.

The new comprehensive programme for the further development of agriculture in the Soviet Union provided not only for more investment in this sphere but also for better scientifically-based planning, for improving the system of procurement of farm produce, for fixing economically justified purchasing prices and for drawing up a fixed and comprehensive purchasing plan. Economically the collective and state farms now enjoyed more leeway than before. On the whole the role of economic factors had increased, creating a situation in which the principles of cost accounting in relations between agricultural enterprises and the Soviet state were affirmed. These principles, in turn, stimulated the development of the productive forces in rural areas. Of all the measures indicated at the March plenary meeting of the Soviet Communist Party's

Central Committee special significance was attached to creating material incentives for collective farmers and workers at state farms and to raising the cultural level of life in rural areas.

A great deal has been said and written about Soviet agricultural policies by Western historians,

In the early 1950s work began to bring under cultivation the virgin lands in Kazakhstan, Western Siberia, the Altai region and other parts of the Soviet Union. Large state farms specialising in grain production were set up there. The Soviet state supplied the settlers with machinery and housing



many of whom, however, were biased and tendentious. But Western researchers admit that the changes in this policy were for the better, that these changes "...met with considerable success", that "...agricultural policies showed good results"<sup>1</sup> and that the new policy was undoubtedly highly beneficial. They also described it as "...a firm commitment to the scientific and technical revolution"<sup>2</sup> in agriculture. Such a favourable assessment of the performance of Soviet farming does not, however, in any way modify the general attitude of the authors of these papers to the collective farm system.

According to them the reasons for the slow growth of the agricultural sector are to be found in the organisation of production in the countryside. Most Sovietologists explain the lag in agriculture, as compared with industry, by the allegation that collective farms are inefficient, that they increasingly serve as a "brake" on the nation's economic development, that their very existence proves their uselessness, and so on. The critics go far beyond the collective farms and criticise the planned Soviet economy as a whole.

The actual state of affairs, the results of the course adopted by the plenary meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee in March 1965 can well be judged by the changes which have taken place in Soviet agriculture in the past period. The material base of the collective farms has been

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Agriculture: An Assessment of Its Contributions to Economic Development*, New York, 1977, p. 77; *An Introduction to Russian History*. Edited by R. Auty and D. Obolensky, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Washington, 1976, Vol. XXV, No. 2, p. 34.

considerably strengthened. The production assets increased more than two and a half times in the period from 1965 to 1980. The number of tractors increased from 1,613,000 to 2,580,000, grain harvesters from 520,000 to 713,000. In addition, 344,000 tractors were fitted with attachments for land amelioration and other purposes in 1980. Every year Soviet farmers receive ever more advanced and power-intensive machinery and other facilities. As a result the electric power available per farm worker has increased six times in the past 15 years.

In the eleventh five-year plan period (1981-1985) the Soviet Union will continue to modernise its agriculture. The Soviet state will supply farmers with 1,870,000 tractors, 1,450,000 lorries, 600,000 grain harvesters and a great number of other machines. In the eleventh five-year plan period the power-to-man ratio at collective and state farms will increase by 50 per cent and the electric power-to-man ratio by 40-50 per cent.

The increasing degree of mechanisation will assure the further rapid growth of labour productivity which is expected to rise by 22-24 per cent in the 1981-1985 period. This means that the farm output will rise with a simultaneous reduction in the number of farm workers.

Since the Communist Party's strategy for the national economy, including agriculture, gives priority to the intensification of production, the comprehensive agricultural development programme provides for radical measures to improve the condition of the soil and to apply more chemicals in various agricultural operations. The Soviet state has invested heavily in agriculture to provide farmers with mineral fertilizers and pesticides.

Women tractor drivers are a common sight in the Soviet countryside



The central premises of a fishing co-operative in Estonia

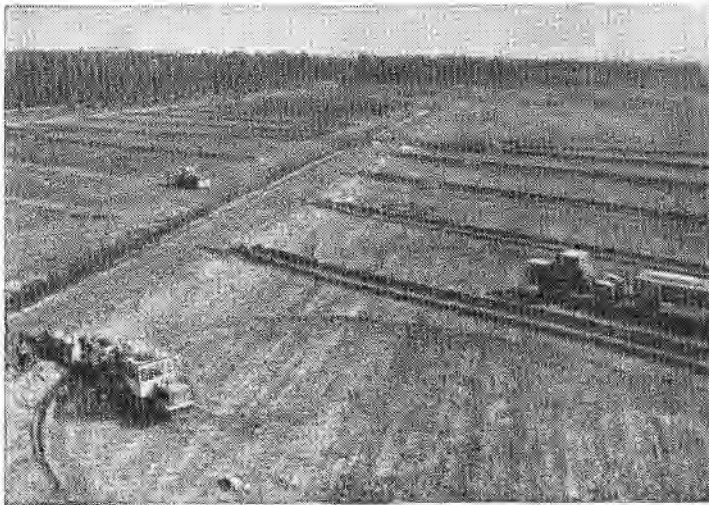


It is difficult to overestimate the importance of fertilizers for agriculture, because it has proved to be the principal factor in raising crop yields. The average annual yield of cereal crops from 1961 to 1965 was 10.2 centners per hectare and averaged 16 centners from 1976 to 1980. Over the same period the yield of cotton rose from 20.6 to 29.3 centners, of sugar beet from 165 to 236 centners and of vegetables from 116 to 152 centners per hectare.

Crop yields in the Soviet Union, especially stable high crop yields, are determined not only by the amount of fertilizers used. As noted earlier, the soil and climatic conditions in the Soviet Union are very complicated and are often extremely adverse. Three quarters of all the arable land used for cereals and legumes lie in zones of insufficient and variable humidity—the Volga region, Central Asia and certain other areas. On the other hand, some vast areas suffer from excessive humidity—the non-black earth zone of the Russian Federation, Byelorussia, the Baltic region and the Soviet Far East—and good and stable harvests can be achieved by amelioration of the soil and improving its fertility. Large-scale amelioration work has continually been carried out since the mid-sixties in the non-black earth zone of the Russian Federation. A typical example of what can be achieved by land amelioration has been provided by the Smolensk region in the central part of this zone.

The Smolensk region was once notorious for its poor farmland, where no considerable rise in production was possible without improving the quality of the soil. Between 1974 and 1978 the overall output of farm produce there rose by a mere one per cent. Marshlands and waterlogged soil covered





about 750,000 hectares. The vast floodlands and peatbogs could be put to agricultural use only by extensive amelioration work. The uneven terrain of the region retarded the development of farming and is still a great problem. Suffice it to say that the size of a farm field averaged 4.5 hectares, with not enough room for the efficient operation of farm machinery.

A collective farm has the means and the funds to carry out amelioration work on a large scale. Such work has been conducted in the Smolensk region with good results. The *Rodomanovo* state farm, for example, has ameliorated 5,500 hectares, so that today the average size of its farm fields is 150-200 hectares, instead of 3-4 hectares a few years ago. Farm machinery has also been put to good use, which has helped to bring about a sharp rise in crop yields.

The lands in the non-black earth zone of the Russian Federation respond well to fertilizers. This gives every ground to believe that by 1990 agricultural output will increase two and a half times, as planned.

Large-scale irrigation work is being conducted in the Volga region, in the North Caucasus, in the steppes of the Ukraine and in Central Asia. The North Crimea canal, the extensive irrigation system in the lower reaches of the River Kuban in the North Caucasus, as well as the Amu-Bukhara and Kulunda canals in Central Asia are functioning too.

The North Caucasus: farmers have to work hard to wrest land from the mountains

There are many boglands in the non-black earth zone of the Russian Federation: collective farms are conducting land amelioration operations on a large scale

On the arid lands where harvests of grain and vegetables were wholly dependent on the weather, farmers are today getting stable yields.

So far a mere eight per cent of the arable land has been ameliorated. Significantly, this eight per cent accounts for 30 per cent of the produce raised at Soviet collective and state farms. A good example of the progress made by irrigated farming is the Crimea. The once lifeless sun-drenched steppes of North Crimea have since become a leading granary of the Soviet Union. The 400-kilometre-long North Crimea canal has brought water from the River Dnieper to more than 300,000 hectares of land. The 503 million roubles invested in constructing the first section of the North Crimea canal have been recouped in full.

In the past 15 years more than eight million hectares of irrigated land and about 10 million hectares of ameliorated land have been opened up to farming. In addition to this a total of 94 million hectares of pastures have been irrigated in desert and mountainous areas. Altogether 30 million hectares of irrigated and ameliorated land have been put to good use. The long-term programme for land reclamation has not yet been completed and a great deal of work has still to be done to expand the farming area that will yield stable harvests regardless of weather conditions.

There is yet another important aspect of this programme. In any country industrial progress and urban development inevitably lead to a gradual reduction of arable land. Meanwhile the earth's population is steadily growing. This means that the per capita area of arable land is shrinking. What can be done?

From 1954 to 1960 about 42 million hectares of virgin and fallow land were brought under cultivation in the USSR. In the course of 25 years the Soviet state purchased from farmers on these territories 721,500,000 tons of grain, 71,500,000 tons of livestock and poultry and 216,900,000 tons of milk. The newly ameliorated lands are also referred to as "virgin lands reborn". A total of 300,000 hectares of the lifeless saline soils in the Hungry Steppe of the Uzbek SSR has been irrigated and brought back to life. Land amelioration not only reduces the dependence of harvests on the caprices of weather and the climate, such as drought, but also helps expand the area under cultivation.

Another example. A vast area was recently brought under rice in the lower reaches of the River Kuban. What used to be Kuban floodlands unfit for farming, has been turned into a complex of 12 storage lakes, 34,000 kilometres of canals, 1,235 pumping stations and other facilities which have made it possible to use 600,000 hectares of land for growing rice and ensure stable rich harvests of rice, which is an important addition to the country's food balance. The problem of supplying the population of the Soviet Union with this cereal has been solved.

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We have glimpsed only some aspects of the programme of the development of Soviet agriculture from 1965 to the present day. It is a comprehensive programme, in which a special role is assigned to science as an important factor for intensifying production. A great deal of importance is attached to the training of personnel for agriculture, to the problem of the infrastructure, and so on.

Mention was made earlier of the sums invested in agriculture. What are the returns on this outlay and what has been the increase in farm production?

	1961/1965	1976/1980
	(million tons)	
Grain	130.3	205.0
Raw cotton	4.99	8.93
Sugar beet	59.2	88.4
Meat (slaughter weight)	9.3	14.8
Milk	64.9	92.6
Vegetables	16.9	26.0
Eggs (million)	28,700	63,100

During the past two five-year plan periods total farm production was worth 272,000 million roubles more than the total in the two previous five-year plan periods.

The recent rise in state purchasing prices sharply increased the incomes which collective farms and state farms derived from the sale of their agricultural produce. As a result the living standards of the rural population rose rapidly. Collective farmers' total earnings increased from 11,500 million roubles in 1965 to 18,800 million roubles in 1980. The institution of guaranteed wages for farmers, the uniform pensions scheme and other social measures raised the ratio of collective farmers' real incomes to those of industrial workers and office employees from 75 per cent in 1965 to 89 per cent in 1980. These figures show a marked tendency towards higher incomes over an even longer term. For example, the real income of workers in

1980 was 3.9 times the 1940 figure, whereas the real income of collective farmers had risen 6.7 times during the same period.

We have cited only the most general figures illustrating the growth of farm production and the rise of living standards in rural areas. To this we shall add some more figures showing the targets of the eleventh five-year plan. Under this plan the output of farm produce is expected to rise by 12-14 per cent. The average monthly earnings of industrial and office workers will rise by 16-18 per cent, whereas the remuneration of collective farmers will grow by 20-22 per cent.

The above figures clearly show that the Soviet state is not pursuing a discriminatory policy against farming and the farmers, as some Western researchers are trying to prove. Significantly, the changes that have taken place in Soviet agriculture in the past 15 years have considerably modified the views of some historians and economists, who are now revising their old notions. In the first place, this relates to their views on the investment the Soviet state is making in the agrarian sector. Many Western commentators have discarded their pessimistic prophecies and now say that the March 1965 plenary meeting of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee made "a firm commitment to the scientific and technical revolution" in agriculture (R. F. Miller), that the Soviet leadership has been making heavy investment in agriculture (H. Shaffer)<sup>1</sup>. In his assessment of the development of Soviet agriculture James Millar expressed confid-

<sup>1</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Washington, 1976, Vol. XXV, No. 2, p. 34; *Soviet Agriculture: An Assessment of Its Contributions to Economic Development*, New York, 1977, pp. 91-92.

ence that "the current Soviet heavy expenditures on agriculture might not be a bad investment at all!"<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, modern Western historians have made yet another turnabout. Some specialists in Soviet affairs who until recently regarded Soviet agriculture as some kind of "victim" of industrialisation and a source of financing it, now seek to prove exactly the opposite. For example, A. Nove has admitted that Soviet agriculture is forging ahead, that the incomes of collective farmers and state farmers are drawing closer and closer to the level of the earnings of the urban population. Hence he concludes that "it may no longer make sense to speak of the 'exploitation' of agriculture, if by this is meant the pumping out of resources for the benefit of industrial investment".<sup>2</sup> The big outlay for agriculture, A. Nove believes, is a heavy burden on other sectors of the Soviet economy.

It is true, though, that the intensification of farm production caused some financial losses which were, however, of a temporary nature. But basically the Soviet government has always pursued a policy aimed at boosting the various sectors of the economy so that they develop in a balanced way. The current redistribution of the national income in favour of agriculture only reflects the objective laws governing the development of the socialist economy and progress in Soviet agriculture has not been at the expense of industry.

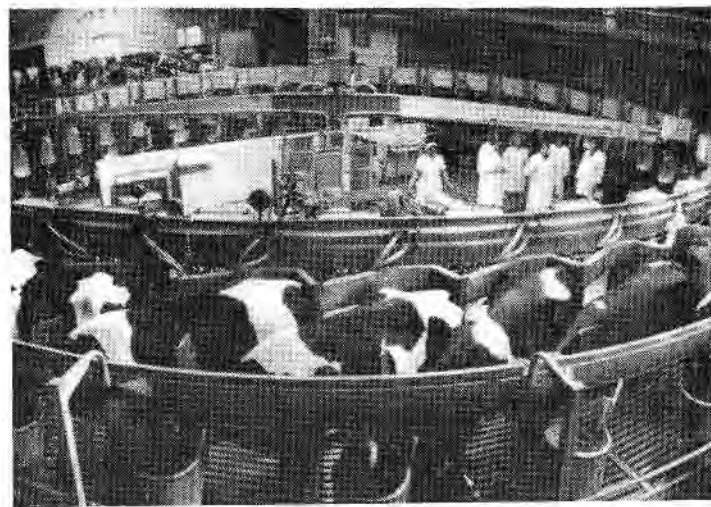
<sup>1</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Washington, 1977, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> A. Nove, *The Soviet Economic System*, London, 1977, p. 121.

## Agro-Industrial Integration

The processes taking place in Soviet agriculture cannot be rightly evaluated with the help of statistics alone. The changes that have taken place in different periods of our history are not only quantitative but also qualitative. At the time when socialist industry became strong enough to supply the agrarian sector of the economy with a steady stream of modern machinery, when the time came to put agriculture on a firm industrial footing, as it were, the old forms of organisation of production on the land proved to be inadequate. For example, the collective farms were run mostly without any sort of specialisation, and any attempt to apply new machinery was a difficult job which often proved to be counter-productive. In the first place, the purchase of the full complement of machines (the complex mechanisation of agricultural production provides for the use of a full set of machines) was beyond the means of many collective farms. Second, collective farms which could afford all these machines (many of them power-intensive) could hardly use them to advantage in the conditions of a diversified farm economy.

These two circumstances created yet another problem. The somewhat limited demand for modern technology on the part of the collective and state farms held back the development of the farm machinery manufacturing industry and technological progress in this sphere in general. In other words, the non-specialised system of farming, which was the prevalent form of agricultural production at collective and state farms, fell short of the modern level of development of the productive forces. The qualitative and quantitative changes in the material



Hot-house farming in Moldavia

A collective farm livestock complex in Byelorussia

and technical base necessitated improvement in the forms of organising farm production.

It has been proved both in practice and in scientific experiment that modern farm machinery can be put to good use only when there is the economic integration of farming enterprises. This means that scientific and technological progress has made it necessary to advance from intra-collective farm specialisation to inter-collective farm specialisation. Any further division of labour and any further specialisation will inevitably lead to an even higher concentration of production. This important factor has opened up great prospects for developing the productive forces, including the application of new power-intensive machinery and the achievements of agronomy.

The number of inter-farm enterprises, organisations and amalgamations rose from 3,354 in 1965 to 9,638 in 1980. These specialise in livestock breeding, poultry farming, in the production of mixed feed and so on. Thus in the process of economic integration, agriculture, which is a sum total of diversified collective and state farms, is split up into farms specialising in primarily one type of produce: grain, meat, milk or mixed feed. There are also inter-farm enterprises which have charge of the repair and maintenance of farm machinery, or engage in construction work on the farm, in seed-growing, land amelioration work, and so on.

The agro-industrial complex has become a new form of organising agricultural production. It includes crop-growing and stock-raising farms, various branches of industry manufacturing farm machinery, producing mineral fertilizers, pesticides, mixed feed, and so on; industrial enterprises which process farm produce; and trading, transport and

other organisations. The agro-industrial complex supplies more than 95 per cent of the foodstuffs entering the retail trade network.

Over the years the agricultural and agro-industrial enterprises have proved their effectiveness. At first the agro-industrial associations emerged as a form of co-operation between state farms and factories specialising in the processing of fruit and vegetables. For example, an association of fruit-growing state farms was organised in the Krasnodar territory in the Russian Federation in 1962, with 24 fruit-growing, eight fruit and tree nursery farms and one tea-growing state farm. Helped by local industrial enterprises the association has built several canning factories, which processed a total of 1,500-2,000 tons of raw material a year, and also fruit storage facilities.

Gradually this agro-industrial integration spread to the collective farms of the Krasnodar territory, turning them into veritable industrial enterprises. By 1974 a total of 28 factories for processing and canning fruit and vegetables had been built in the collective farms of the Krasnodar territory, with a combined annual output of 22 million tins of preserves and 12,000 tons of fruit and berry juice. Similar agro-industrial associations are now functioning in other Soviet republics too. In Byelorussia, for example, 277 collective and state farms had by 1980 been drawn into inter-farm production associations. The specialisation and concentration of production have yielded good economic results. The creation of large stock raising farms and the adoption of new industrial technology have made it possible to release 6,000 people for other work, to raise labour productivity in stock raising 5-6

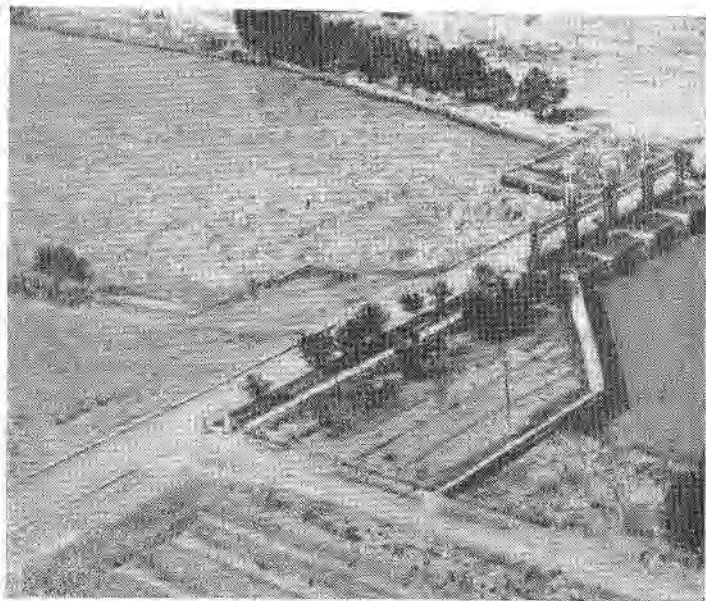
times over and to reduce by 25-30 per cent the expenditure of fodder per kilogram of produce, to save in 1978 alone a total of 27,100,000 roubles by raising the efficiency of milk production, as well as fattening of cattle and pigs.

Another typical example is the inter-farm amalgamation set up in 1975 in the Gomel region in Byelorussia on the basis of the Uritski collective farm. The aim of the amalgamation, which included 17 collective farms, was to increase the output of meat and to reduce its production cost and also to start several other profit-making operations.

All these tasks have been accomplished through specialisation of each of the above collective farms. The Uritski collective farm concentrated on producing meat and fodder. Share contributions from its members were used to build a highly mechanised livestock complex for the intensive fattening of 12,000 head of young stock and to improve the fertility of the soil. The other collective farms, which were members of the amalgamation took on the commitment of increasing the production of milk and grain and supplying the Uritski collective farm with two-week-old bullocks. As a result the output of all types of farm produce has increased. In the first year of its existence the amalgamation produced 298 centners of meat for every 100 hectares of pasture, and in the second year 691.2 centners. The whole outlay on building and equipping the complex was fully recouped in two years.

The process of economic integration in Soviet agriculture is far from complete. The search is continuing for the most effective forms of production, for the optimal size of agricultural enterprises.

The life of the peasants in Central Asia has changed radically in Soviet times: large irrigation systems have brought life to once lifeless deserts. Collective farms specialise in stock raising, horticulture and growing cotton and grain



Dam sluice-gates along the Karakum canal

Inter-collective farm co-operation and agro-industrial integration remain the key directions in the present-day agrarian policy of the Soviet state.

The qualitative changes taking place in Soviet farming are a constant subject of discussion by Western historians and economists, whose views on the subject often differ. Some of them admit that the emergence of the inter-collective farm associations is the result of an objective economic process. Others are doubtful about the expedience of the policy aimed at merging agricultural enterprises into large-scale operations. Most of them concur in the belief that economic integration is bringing closer to one another the two forms of ownership of the means of production—collective farm-and-co-operative property and state property—and is leading to the eradication of distinctions between industrial and agricultural labour. Nevertheless the interpretation of the substance of these processes and their results is extremely biased. Curiously enough, Western experts on Soviet affairs here come out in “defence” of not only Soviet farmers, but also of . . . collective farms.

Some of them explain the results of economic integration, that is to say, the evolution of collective farm-and-co-operative property into state property (belonging to all the people) by giving not objective but purely subjective reasons, such as the preference Soviet leaders show for the state farms, ideological considerations, and so on. But on the basis of the few examples cited here the reader can see that the emergence of inter-farm amalgamations, and the process of the two forms of property drawing closer together were stimulated by the growth of the productive forces, which is in itself an objective factor.

The view which has gained the widest currency in Western literature and was advanced by Naum Jasny, an American expert on Soviet agriculture, as far back as 1951 is to regard Soviet agriculture as the “Achilles’ heel”<sup>1</sup> of the Soviet economic system. This thesis is the keynote of many writings on the history of Soviet agriculture published in the West. One such author is Prof. James R. Millar, of the University of Illinois, who supports his line of argument with the same old platitudes. For example, he juxtaposes Soviet agriculture and American farming and says that whereas tsarist Russia used to export its grain, the Soviet Union imports grain, suffers from a chronic shortage of foodstuffs, and so on.

Since the days of total collectivisation in the USSR Western historians have maintained that collective farming is economically unviable. The “Marxist dogma” about the superiority of large-scale production in agriculture has been attacked by many Western authorities on the agrarian question. They are particularly vehement about the Marxist idea of co-operation in production, in other words, the socialist mode of production in agriculture which first emerged in the USSR. At the same time they try to pit the “inefficient” socialist system against “efficient” capitalism. It is from this angle that we should analyse and compare the two systems of agriculture, and particularly those existing in the Soviet Union and the United States.

As we said earlier, the total output of Soviet farming is 85 per cent of what the farmers produce in the United States. American farming is superior

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Studies*, October 1951, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 161.



to Soviet farming in labour productivity, the power per man ratio, and in certain other respects. But would it be correct to say that the capitalist mode of farming is more effective than the socialist?

Let us first take a look at the historical conditions in which agriculture developed in the United States and in the Soviet Union. American farming as it is today, with its level of mechanisation, output and consumption of foodstuffs, is a product of more than two centuries which have been extremely favourable to the economic development of that country. The territory of the United States was not touched either by the First or the Second World War, which, by contrast, left a trail of devastation in Soviet farmlands. Harry Shaffer wrote, for example, that the losses sustained by Soviet agriculture from the Nazi invasion were nothing short of appalling. The countryside was ruined, the farms bled white. According to Shaffer, those were the reasons for the slow development of Soviet agriculture in the postwar period.

The years that followed the Second World War saw the rapid rise of farm production and of the incomes of the farmers in the United States. In their book, *An Economic History of the United States*, G. Fite and J. Reese provided convincing facts in support of this view. For example, the income per farm worker rose from 700 dollars in 1939 to 2,450 dollars in 1945. Per capita consumer expenditure in the United States over the same period rose by 30 per cent. The Second World War widened the gap between the performance of Soviet and American farming, which, of course, cannot fairly be blamed on the socialist mode of agriculture. The real culprit was imperialism, which brought about the Second World War.

In his book, *The Soviet Economic System*, A. Nove compares the climate and soil fertility of the two countries and concludes that these factors make the United States "greatly superior"<sup>1</sup> to the Soviet Union. There is no denying this fact. For example, the northern border of the United States coincides with the 49th parallel, which, if you look at a map of the USSR, passes through the South of the country (Poltava, Volgograd). The southern border of the United States lies on the 26th parallel which, in the eastern hemisphere, passes through North Africa and South Iran. It goes without saying that the vegetative period on the territory of the United States is longer than it is in the Soviet Union. Also large territories in the Soviet Union are prone to drought and about 40 per cent of the farmland gets only 400 mm of rainfall a year. Such territory in the United States constitutes only ten per cent of the total area, while 60 per cent of the farmland (as against one per cent in the Soviet Union) receives 700 mm of rainfall.

The same thing could be said about the quality of the soil. In the non-black earth zone of Russia, for example, 82.1 per cent of all the farmland consists of clays and loams, which has an adverse effect on the general state of farming in that part of the country. Hence the correct conclusion drawn by James R. Millar, who wrote that "climatic and other natural conditions in the Soviet Union are much less favourable to agriculture than is the case in the United States".<sup>2</sup> We may add here that

<sup>1</sup> A. Nove, *The Soviet Economic System*, London, 1977, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Washington, 1977, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, p. 6.

the shortage of moisture and insufficient fertility of the soil do not stem from the socialist mode of farming in the Soviet Union.

Western economists are right in saying that the capital investment made in Soviet farming is not as effective as that made in American farming. In the period from 1918 to 1965 of the total volume of capital investment in agricultural production 53 per cent went to building various farm facilities and only 31.2 per cent was used for purchasing farm machinery. In the United States over roughly the same period (1916-1965) 78 per cent of the total investment in agriculture was spent on the purchase of farm machinery. Although the structure of capital investment in Soviet agriculture has greatly improved since 1965, it is still lagging behind the United States in this sphere. This, however, is again the result of objective historical and climatic conditions. For example, back in 1945 the United States spent a mere 487 million dollars on housing and on the building of industrial facilities in rural areas. For the Soviet Union, which had to raise whole war-ravaged villages from ruins, this sum would have been a drop in the ocean.

Western researchers are right in saying that the poorer returns on capital investment in Soviet agriculture, as compared with those in American agriculture, are also the result of the heavier soils in Soviet farm fields, which add to the wear and tear on the farm machines that are used to work them. There are other reasons, too, including the poorer quality of certain farm machinery used in Soviet agriculture. But all these reasons do not stem from the socialist mode of production.

The capitalist press is very vociferous about what it calls a shortage of certain foodstuffs, especially

meat, and misinterprets the reasons for Soviet grain imports, recalling at the same time that tsarist Russia used to export grain.

It is true that before the socialist revolution Russia used to export grain and other food items in order to build up its foreign currency reserves. "Eat less, export more", said the tsar's finance minister, Vyshnegorodski. Yet it was not he and his colleagues who "ate less", but millions of peasants and other working folk who starved to death in the lean years.

The structure of food imports and exports in the USSR has changed over the years as compared with tsarist Russia. In 1913 54.7 per cent of Russia's exports were made up of foodstuffs and raw materials, as against 1.9 per cent in 1980. In 1913 the import of foodstuffs and raw materials for their production constituted 21.2 per cent of all Russia's imports. In the USSR this figure stood at 24.2 per cent in 1980.

These figures testify to the growing import and diminishing export of foodstuffs at a time when agriculture in the Soviet Union is producing ever more foodstuffs. Between 1913 and 1980 the annual volume of food production (in comparable prices) rose 3.7 times from 32,500 to 121,200 million roubles. Given that the population of this country increased by about 65 per cent in that same period, it is obvious that the small volume of Soviet food exports and the growing import of foodstuffs by the USSR spring not from alleged poverty but from the rising living standards of the population.

Indeed, many Western authors take this fact for granted. Harry Shaffer has pointed to the steadily growing share of the Soviet Union in the world output of agricultural produce and concluded that



Harvest festival at a collective farm in the Mordovian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in Central Russia

the Soviet Union had reduced its food exports in order to provide its population with more foodstuffs. At the same time, he said, the USSR has increased imports of grain, mostly forage grain, in order to boost its meat production.

The fact that a given country imports foodstuffs does not in any way testify to the backwardness of its agriculture. Otherwise how can one explain the fact that the United States, of all nations, should import agricultural produce in such large quantities? The import of foodstuffs by countries with developed agriculture can be explained by the international division of labour and by other reasons, such as climatic conditions. No matter how high the standard of agricultural development in the United States, the Soviet Union or any other country, international trade will continue to expand more and more.

This does not rule out the possibility that a country must import foodstuffs precisely because the home production of certain items falls short of consumer demand. In the USSR, for example, the demand for meat is not fully met by its own steadily growing production. Suffice it to say that from 1965 to 1980 meat production rose from 10 to 15 million tons. In the same period the per capita consumption of meat rose from 41 to 57 kilograms a year. The problem centres upon the fact that consumer demand for meat is growing much faster, due to the rapid growth of the real incomes of the Soviet population (by 95 per cent from 1965 to 1980), which has considerably changed the diet pattern: less bread and potatoes are being consumed, but more meat, milk, eggs and other high protein products. Hence the disproportion between the purchasing power of the population and the

production of such valuable items as meat and butter.

In its drive to boost meat production the Soviet state is in every way trying to strengthen the fodder base for livestock. This is why the Soviet Union has been importing considerable quantities of forage grain. H. Shaffer points out that "in their all-out endeavour to improve the diet of the Soviet people...", the Soviet leaders have sharply reduced the export of agricultural produce and have started to import it on a large scale. He writes further that "...the much maligned grain 'shortage' in the USSR does not mean that the Soviet people would go hungry were it not for grain imports from the West... The shortage, such as it is, is the result of the shift in diet that comes with greater affluence".<sup>1</sup>

In the past few years the changes that have taken place in the agrarian sector of the Soviet economy have aroused heated debate among Western historians over the future of Soviet farming. In their study of the agrarian policy of the Soviet Communist Party, many Western commentators have come to the conclusion that progress in Soviet farming in the future will be even more apparent. There are problems, of course, says James Millar, but these are "...essentially a matter of time and cost"<sup>2</sup> and are not inherently insolvable.

After studying the latest data on Soviet agriculture H. Shaffer drew this conclusion: "Would it not

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Agriculture: An Assessment of Its Contributions to Economic Development*, New York, 1977, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Washington, 1977, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, p. 5.

be difficult to assess all this as a 'miserable failure'?"<sup>1</sup>

For his part F. Labouesse believes that the Soviet form of organisation of farm production must be given the closest consideration. He writes: "Regrettably, the prejudice born of ideological and political conflicts prevents us from studying it as calmly as we should."<sup>2</sup>

The Soviet Union has not yet solved all its agricultural problems. We still have occasional hold-ups in the supply of the population with meat, dairy products and other commodities due to objective (three years of drought in a row) and subjective causes.

The key problem of the eleventh five-year plan (1981-1985), both economic and political, is the problem of food supply. This does not, of course, mean that the socialist system of agriculture has not proved its worth. Collective and state farms have been and remain the principal link in the agro-industrial complex. What is required is only an improvement of the economic mechanism and the system of management. A plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee held in May, 1982 approved the Food Programme of the USSR up to the year 1990 and adopted several decisions specifying the ways and means of implementing it. As for the policy for further developing the agro-industrial complex, its underlying feature is the concern that the state shows for the well-being of the Soviet peoples.

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Agriculture: An Assessment of Its Contributions to Economic Development*, New York, 1977, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> F. Labouesse, *Point de vue sur l'évolution de l'agriculture soviétique depuis 1929*, Revue Tiers-Monde, Paris, 1977, t. XVIII, No. 70, avril-juin, p. 429.

The heyday of myths about Soviet farming is over and is giving way to a sober assessment of the socialist mode of production in agriculture and an all-round evaluation of the historic experience of the Soviet Union in this field.

Valeria SELUNSKAYA  
Vladimir TETYUSHEV

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