

Land Socialization in Soviet Agriculture, 1917-1949

By WILL LISSNER

IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION of 1917-18, land was seized by the landless and landlordism was abolished by law. The mujhik, after centuries of oppression, became—alas, for a brief time only—a free citizen rooted upon his own soil. The socialization of agricultural land became a basic policy of the new Soviet State. This at first aroused the sympathetic interest of students of land economics throughout the world, among them Lawson Purdy. Mr. Purdy's concern over the process as subsequently perverted, and his compassion for the Soviet peoples involved in it, have been sustained through three decades. Thus it is fitting that this volume of essays in his honor include an appraisal of Soviet experience with social policy in agricultural land tenure, based on the researches of the best-informed specialists.

Studies of Soviet socialism frequently overlook, for lack of readily available information, this aspect of Soviet experience, although it is fundamental to the understanding of the nature and direction of Soviet economics and politics. The foremost authorities are well aware of this. Vladimir Zenzinov, who, as a leader of the Russian Social Revolutionary party, was at the center of events, has written that "essentially this was the very core of the revolution, the clue to all its developments." Zenzinov points out that "the problem of the disposition and use of the land and of its re-allotment produced the revolution, the lofty aims and the enthusiasm which it inspired and, above all, its unprecedented range." Leon Trotsky attributed the survival of the Bolsheviks (in his history of the revolution) to the socialization of the land.

"Land and Peace"

IN 1917 ALL THE MISERY that Czarist injustice and oppression had produced in the Russian empire came to a head. Of 864,000,000 acres in the Russian agricultural economy, according to Soviet statistics, 557,280,000 belonged to the aristocratic landlords and large-scale farm operators. The character of the revolution was determined by the Czar and his predecessors and their system. As Zenzinov notes, the real revolution took place in the villages, not in the cities; its essential content was the tremendous elemental process initiated and carried through by the peasants themselves.

In the revolution the great estates were dismembered, the landed proprietors expelled and all private and State land was forcibly appropriated.

by the landless. In November, 1917, and in March and April, 1918, three wholesale land distributions took place.

Alexander Kerensky's provisional government formulated fundamental principles for the land reform. These were that the land should be placed at the disposal of and made available to the entire laboring population; and that the unproductive owners should cede their estates without any compensation. The legalization of the wholesale seizure of the land and the regulation of its use by law was left to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly.

The assembly met on Jan. 18, 1918. The Bolshevik coup had already taken place. The deputies of the Social Revolutionary party had the absolute majority of seats, 370 out of 707. Nikolai Lenin's cohorts, Kronstadt sailors and Petrograd soldiers, menaced the speakers with their rifles. But above the din, according to the eye-witness account Joseph Shaplen gave me, Victor Chernov, who presided, read the Fundamental Agrarian Law that he had formulated with his colleagues of the Social Revolutionary party. It provided that all the land should be placed at the disposal of the people, that land should be no longer a marketable commodity and that it should be made available to anyone who would till it without the aid of hired laborers. At 5 A.M. on Jan. 19 it was adopted. Then the Bolsheviks dissolved the assembly.

Within a month the Bolsheviks convened a rump body called "the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies," from which the majority of the delegates absented themselves in protest. It adopted a resolution on the land question that was formulated into a decree called the "Basic Law on the Socialization of the Land," promulgated on Feb. 19, 1918. "Land Ownership is abolished forthwith without compensation," it provided. Private ownership was to be replaced by public or State ownership and the soil was transferred to "the free use" of the toilers. The oil, coal, mineral and forest lands became "the property of the people." These were meaningless phrases. The essentials were article three, providing that only those who tilled their tracts themselves without the aid of hired laborers were entitled to a land allotment, and article forty-three, forbidding the transfer of allotted land from one person to another.

It was no accident that the law of Feb. 19 was essentially identical with the law of Jan. 19. Zenzinov, Chernov, Lenin and Trotzky agreed that the Bolsheviks, who previously had dealt with the land question only with a vague slogan, "the nationalization of the land," took over the program of the Social Revolutionary party. Lenin said that

the peasants swung over to the Bolshevik side "because we adopted an agrarian program that was not our own but that of the Socialist-Revolutionaries"; but this was a part-truth. The revolution was, on the one hand, an effort by the peasants to solve the land question and, on the other, an effort by the people of a defeated and dispirited nation to force their government to make peace.

The first resolution adopted by the rump congress called for an immediate truce and it raised the banner of world revolution. Never again was the Russian empire to know peace; never again would peasants be secure on their holdings. But the slogan "Land and Peace" won enough popular support to the banner of the Bolsheviks to enable them to consolidate their dictatorship. Trotzky, in a cynical comment, disclosed that the slogan was a mere tactic in a strategy aimed to expropriate the peasants themselves: "The political expropriation of the Socialist-Revolutionary party was a necessary prerequisite to the economic expropriation of the landlords and the bourgeoisie." The only landholdings after April, 1918, were the smallholdings of the peasants and they were the only individual owners. The war on the mujik was declared.

The "Kulak" Problem

BY THE PEASANTS' SOLUTION of the land question, Russia became a land of smallholdings. Some 1,400,000 hired laborers acquired plots of land that they worked for the sustenance of their families. The appropriation increased the total area of cultivated land by 19.5 per cent; new allotments varied between 2.5 and 5.5 acres. Those who had large holdings divided them into smaller units to avoid losing all, keeping livestock, household goods and farm equipment at the main farm. They became the symbol of all those, small and medium-sized operators, who wished to remain independent individual farmers, the "kulaki," so-called "well-to-do" farmers.

In the cities the socialization of the factories brought production to a dangerously low level and ushered in the period of "war communism." No longer was there a surplus that the cities could trade with the country for food. Those of the large landlord estates on which the Bolsheviks could get their hands were turned into State farms, or *sovkhosy*, operated by agricultural laborers as employes of agents of the State. These enterprises, counted upon to provide the huge grain surpluses needed to feed the cities, proved as profitless as the factories. The Bolshevik authorities were obliged to rely on taxes and, after 1919, on collective farms, the *kolkhozy*, for the food surpluses that formerly came from the landlords' estates.

The peasants paid their taxes from their currency hoards or not at all. On their holdings they produced only enough food for their own use. By 1922, when the situation had become desperate, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy. It was aimed to maintain the dictatorship in the cities by importing food from abroad in exchange for surpluses (chiefly mineral) produced by concessionaires. This was, as Lenin admitted, a retreat. But the Bolsheviks also developed at this time an agrarian program of their own by which they hoped to end peasant resistance for all time. The strategy was to extend the system of collective farms, the kolkhozy, and the State farms, the sovkhozy, into a universal one directed and controlled by the State, embracing all agriculture and replacing all individual and independent communal peasant holdings.

Early in the Twenties the Bolsheviks unleashed the "civil war in the villages." Complicated laws were decreed putting the larger peasants at a disadvantage and pretending to favor the operators of dwarf-holdings. Farmers who were better off became the victims of demagogic attacks by the local organizations of the Communist party. "Committees of the Village Poor," organized by the government, despoiled peasants who had a little property by seizing their land, livestock, houses and goods. The plundered families were condemned to exile or the new slave labor camps.

Joseph Stalin, who succeeded Lenin and Trotzky at the head of the Bolshevik dictatorship, raised in 1925 the slogan, "the liquidation of the kulaki as a class." Soon he found it necessary to extend the campaign to the "middle peasants," those with plots large enough to support a family, by hard work, in frugal comfort. Now the great bulk of the peasantry was the target of the persecution directed by the Communist party and its dictatorship. Soon it developed into open civil war provoked by the State, and waged through its army and its secret police.

In spite of the relentless persecution, the peasants refused to enter the collective farms. Zenzinov cites Soviet statistics which reported that in 1920, 1.7 per cent of all the cultivated land was in kolkhozy. The percentage dropped by July 1, 1928. Then it was reported that only 1.7 per cent of the cultivated land in peasant holdings—excluding the areas in State farms—was collectivized.

Thereupon, in connection with the first five-year plan, the Stalin dictatorship decreed ruthless collectivization. It was a war to the death between the counter-revolution directed by Stalin, and the peasants who faced the loss of all the gains they had made in the Russian Revolution of which they had been the prime instruments. The Soviet censorship was

able to conceal from the world the details of this civil war. But the peasants fought bravely though they fought alone; they failed only because they drowned in their own blood.

The collectivized portion of the peasant holdings rose rapidly. From 4 per cent on July 1, 1929, it rose to 21 per cent on Jan. 20, 1930, and to 58 per cent on March 10, 1930. As Zenzinov points out, "in eight months of 1929-30 more than half of all the peasant holdings were collectivized."

How many peasants were killed, tortured or exiled to bring this about we do not know; it is clear that the total, if known, would be in the millions. Fighting back, the peasants adopted a scorched earth policy. They killed off their livestock rather than allow it to become the loot of the State and they planted barely enough grain for their own needs, though large areas of Soviet agriculture are under constant threat of repeated drought.

The effect was two-fold. *Izvestia*, organ of the Soviet government, reported on Jan. 28, 1934, Zenzinov notes, that the number of horses dropped from 34,000,000 head in 1929 to 16,600,000 in 1933. In those four years the number of horned cattle dropped from 69,100,000 head to 38,600,000. The slaughter of sheep was greater. They fell from 147,200,000 head to 50,600,000. Hogs dropped from 20,900,000 to 12,200,000. How catastrophically the cultivated area dropped was indicated in 1932 when the Ukraine—the breadbasket of the Russian empire—and the Northern Caucasus and the Lower Volga regions were stricken by a severe famine. From four to five million peasants died from starvation, Walter Duranty reports, and officials of the Soviet government of peasant origin have told me privately that the government's estimate is seven millions. Duranty rightly described the famine as "man-made."

Nevertheless, collectivization was enforced without mercy until the Russian Revolution in the countryside had been completely liquidated. By 1938, 93.6 per cent of all the peasant proprietorships had been transformed into collective holdings. By 1940 the individual peasant holdings (apart from dwarfholdings) had almost completely disappeared. The 25,000,000 individual holdings that had been largely the fruit of the Russian Revolution were turned into some 240,000 collective holdings.

The Kolkhoz and the Kolkhozniki

THREE TYPES of collective farms or kolkhozy emerged in the experimentation of the Twenties, according to the researches of Dr. Naum Jasny.

One was the commune, which in principle collectivized everything, including the members' housing and their feeding, provided in communal kitchens. In the early period it was the most subsidized form but it proved to be too expensive and, as Jasny reports, was abandoned. It is well to remember it, however, for the aim of the Bolshevik authorities and the direction of kolkhoz policy, as Alexander Vucinich has shown, is to realize it universally through development of the present type of collective farm.

Another was the type known by the initials of its name, the TOZ. This was a compromise type. It collectivized only part of the arable land, leaving the remainder under individual cultivation. The members held their livestock individually. From the point of view of the State, it has two serious objections. The TOZ itself did not have a large enough yield for State exactions of grain deliveries, a cardinal objection. For the primary purpose of collectivization was to bring about a form of enterprise from which the greater part of the product could be drained away in the form of forced levies and taxes to support the Soviet State and its bureaucracy. Almost equally serious was that the peasants were not dependent enough on it and hence enjoyed a measure of independence from the dictatorship.

The third form was the artel, which collectivized all the arable land and the livestock, but not the home life of the members. By the 1930 Charter of the Agricultural Artel, the artel form was settled upon as the universal form of the kolkhozy. As its name indicates, it has certain roots in pre-revolutionary Russian culture. But there was a significant modification in the early Soviet type. By their unyielding resistance, the peasants won a concession from the State intended to reconcile them to collectivization. They were permitted to have dwarfholdings consisting of garden plots about their houses. Soviet law emphasizes, however, that this is a "temporary" concession, ultimately to be withdrawn.

These individual holdings originally were limited by law to one quarter of a hectare—about two thirds of an acre. Later the size was increased by decree to about one acre. In practice (Soviet practice frequently varies significantly from the law), many actually are slightly larger, running to one and a half acres, although some instances have been reported of these individual holdings running up to three acres. The size tolerated varies from one region to another and from one period to another. During the second world war, as control relaxed and theory gave way before the pressure of the need for foodstuffs, the average size

expanded. After the war, by ruthless prosecution in 1946-7, it was shrunk. The peasant may have this garden plot, however, only so long as he is a member of and fulfills his work norm on a collective farm. Actually, this means only so long as he retains the favor of his superiors, for underfulfillment of work norms is the rule, norms demanded by plans handed down from above frequently being beyond fulfillment. Expulsion from the collective farm carries with it the loss of his individual holding.

In the principal agricultural areas, according to Jasny, the collective farmer or kolkhoznik is allowed to keep the following livestock on his individual holding: one cow with offspring; one sow with its litter; five sheep, and such rabbits and poultry as he can get feed for. How much livestock he actually keeps depends upon his ability to feed it. Some pasturage can be obtained, legally or illegally, on the lands of the kolkhoz. Sometimes uncultivated lands can be used, as well as the edges of roads. During the winter he and his family must share their grain with the livestock. Lack of feed has been more effective than the law in keeping down the numbers of individually-held livestock.

Along with the concession on dwarfholdings, the State enacted a measure that was designed to assure State control over the kolkhozy. All tractors and tractor-driven machinery were concentrated in 1930 in the Machine and Tractor Stations, the so-called MTS. In 1932 these became the property of the State. In some areas horses and horse-drawn machinery also became part of the equipment of the MTS. To obtain their services, the kolkhozy were obliged to pay fees fixed by the State. The MTS were manned by members of the Bolshevik party; currently they are paid a wage eight times that of a typical collective farmer. They could be counted upon to deny their services or give them grudgingly to kolkhozy known to the authorities as recalcitrant. Except where the kolkhozy have their own horses, they are at the mercy of the MTS for basic farming operations.

Some features of the kolkhozy may be sketched briefly. The land is granted "in perpetuity" to the kolkhoz, subject to taxation according to ability to pay. The fields are assembled in one artel, except for the members' garden plots which usually surround their homes in huts on the unpaved village street. The farm buildings are usually centered around an administration building. The kolkhoz holds its own hand tools and farm equipment other than tractor-drawn machinery, and in many cases horses. Seed is drawn partly from the collective's own reserves and is partly distributed by State agricultural organs.

All the members of the kolkhoz form the kolkhoz assembly. Theoretically this body makes all the important decisions and elects the officials of the kolkhoz. In practice, cases are frequent in which the assembly never meets. It is admitted by Soviet sources that the elections actually are endorsements of the selections of the Communist party and the agricultural administration; opposition candidates are not tolerated.

The chief official is the farm manager, appointed by the local organ of the All-Union Council on Collective Farm Affairs, a body subordinate to the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers. Vladimir Gozovski found that in 1948, after a purge, more than 50 per cent had only one year actual job experience. The farm manager calls meetings of the general assembly; proposes new activities; acts as a liaison between the kolkhoz and local and district government agencies, and represents the kolkhoz in all outside dealings, according to Vucinich. On what Soviet sources call the "backward" kolkhozy, he makes all decisions without bothering about a general assembly.

On the model or "progressive" kolkhozy, the farm manager, as chairman of the kolkhoz, heads an executive committee of five to nine persons elected for two-year terms. This is responsible for the rational use of tools; the technical training of members; the maintenance of the members' dwelling places; the cultural activities and the appointment of work brigade leaders and supervisors of the livestock barns and of the auxiliary managerial personnel. On these farms there is also an auditing committee which is supposed to be independent of the management. This committee is elected by the assembly, but it may select only members acceptable to the district government authorities, as Koselev, a Soviet authority, states. It is required to audit the books four times a year. Since on many farms there are no records at all and on others the records are inadequate, the auditing committee's task is not an exhausting one. Some farms, the Soviet government admits, do not bother to name one.

The initiative of the kolkhoz management is highly restricted. The government decides, through the annual plan, the nature of production. The plan is not always adhered to, however, particularly when it is not adapted to the situation of the particular kolkhoz. In theory the State admits no deviations; in practice they frequently are winked at. The State also decides the distribution of the produce and the use of the farm's manpower outside the kolkhoz.

The obligation of the peasant to labor on the kolkhoz was stated in the 1930 Charter. This prescribed that all operations were to be per-

formed by the personal work of the members and that the members were not supposed to refuse the work assigned them. The prescription was not sufficient to get the peasants to labor on the hated kolkhoz. In 1933 a decree was promulgated setting out measures, relatively mild, that might be taken against non-complying kolkhozniki. But the passive resistance of the peasants continued.

By a decree of May 27, 1939, more severe punishment was prescribed. Under it, non-complying kolkhozniki were to be expelled from the kolkhoz and, thereby, were to lose their huts and garden plots. This is equivalent to a sentence to death by starvation, for if the peasant moves to another locality, he is obliged to report to the police and state his business, as well as present his workbook, which is his passport. Admission to a kolkhoz is by election of the assembly, a right exercised as a privilege by the members of the more fortunately situated kolkhozy, and according to I. Laptev entrance fees must be paid. The expelled peasant can only seek work as an agricultural laborer on a State farm, as a laborer in a timber collective, or as a common laborer in the least desirable branches of industry. At the mercy of the State, he can be shut out altogether from the country's economy.

In the same decree the labor exactions upon the peasant were spelled out. His hours of work were set as from sunrise to sunset, with fifteen to sixteen hours of work a day required at harvest time. A minimum work year was prescribed, consisting of forty to forty-five days for men and forty-five to fifty days for women. Women averaged 100 days of work in 1938; only 29.3 per cent in that year did not meet the minimum. By a decree in 1942, labor by women was made obligatory. As a result, even as late as 1949, 65 to 75 per cent of all kolkhoz members were women, although it was planned to reduce this to 55 per cent at the end of the next five-year plan. By draining men from the farms to the army and the factories, the large army and the huge bureaucracy can be maintained without loss to the rapidly growing industrial labor force, which still in 1949 was composed, to the extent of slightly less than 50 per cent, of women also. In the same 1942 decree the work minimums were increased two-thirds and children between the ages of 12 and 15 were ordered to work at least fifty days a year.

The Exploitation of the Peasant

ALMOST 80 PER CENT of the marketed food in the U.S.S.R. is procured from the collective farms and the dwarfholdings of collective farmers, Jasny estimates. The balance is supplied by the State farms and, to an insignificant extent, by private production, as among the nomadic peoples.

On the State farms all labor is hired, there is no free trade union movement and the State maintains rigid control over the State farm labor force. There is no problem in characterizing the exploitative relationship between the State as farm operator and its hired farm laborers. Worse off than wage slaves, they are clearly serfs.

But the position of the collective farmers is more complicated. To a very large extent the peasant economy in Russia is still self-subsistent. All but a very small portion of the marketed commodities of food, fiber and timber in the U.S.S.R. is extorted from the farm population for sale to the non-farm population or to customers abroad. The process is ramified.

What the Soviet government calls the "First Commandment" to the peasants is the requirement that the first fruits of the harvest be delivered to the State. These compulsory deliveries, according to Laptev, the leading Soviet authority, are exacted both from the kolkhoz itself and from the dwarfholdings of the kolkhoz members. The State purchases these products at nominal prices which bear no relation to the prices at which it thereupon sells a portion to the peasants when their needs require it. This is done, Laptev admits, to further "planned" accumulation by the State. Zenzinov reports, from data supplied by a former Soviet agronomist, that in 1939 the State bought a kilogram of wheat, in compulsory deliveries, at 0.08 ruble, but sold it at 1.92 rubles to the peasants. The State bought rice for 0.13 ruble and sold it for 4 rubles; butter, bought for 1.80 rubles, it sold for 38 rubles, and cheese, obtained for 0.80 ruble, it sold for 24 rubles. Jasny estimates that 25 per cent or more of the harvests is taken in forced deliveries.

These compulsory deliveries, Laptev admits, "have the force of a tax." They were first calculated on the basis of the sowing plan and the numbers of collectively-owned livestock. The peasants refused to expand or improve the farms, since this meant proportionately heavier taxation of this type. Hence, Laptev reports, beginning in 1940 compulsory deliveries have been calculated per hectare. The compulsory deliveries now are thus a revival of one of the most anachronistic forms of taxation, the kind that has helped ruin Chinese agriculture, a land area tax. Laptev admits that the more fortunately situated and the more fertile farms benefited from the shift from a tax on production to a tax on land area.

That, in certain cases, this creates a privileged class of members of the benefited farms does not trouble Laptev. His reply is an illogical hodge-podge. His first point is that differential rent under socialism is

different from differential rent under capitalism because it is not the fruit of exploitation of the labor of others. This argument assumes as true the very conclusion that the argument is intended to prove. Next, he says it does not go to landed proprietors or capitalist-rentiers; and it does go to the collective farms, the collective farmers and the State. All this proves is that it does not go to persons the Soviet government recognizes as landed proprietors or capitalist-rentiers. But the point is not whether the Soviet State recognizes the bureaucracy of which it is composed, and its supporting privileged classes in industry and agriculture, as the beneficiaries of the exploitation. The point is whether there is exploitation and who benefits. His next point is the assertion that "differential rent does not appear as rent on land, since land is secured to the collective farms, according to the Constitution of the U.S.S.R., for their *free* use in perpetuity" (italics supplied). He quotes the constitution correctly. But since he is defending the burden of a levy on land which he admits has "the force of a tax," it should be clear to him that the constitutional phrase is the reverse of the truth. And it should also be clear that if the land were given "free" to the collectives, the realized differential rent would be higher, not non-existent. His fourth point is that the State controls the size of differential rent since it fixes its purchase and sales prices for the product and controls the collective farm market prices. This has a measure of validity; as in the ruble conversion operation of 1947, State control of price formation can set a limit beyond which the incomes of the privileged class cannot go, and it can even reduce them. But since prices are uniform, this approach must weigh more heavily on the less fortunate farmers; by it the State can tax realized differential rent, but only in the most regressive inverse ratio. Obviously it can do this only to a limited extent. His fifth and last point lets the cat out of the bag. The income with which we are concerned, he notes, "is not a surplus over average profit" but appears "as a form of additional net income." This is the point that it was sought to prove against him.

But the compulsory deliveries are only the first exaction in kind. As Laptev notes, there are others. A portion of the harvest must be given to the Red Army Fund. Payment must be made in kind (as well as in money) according to contract for the services of the MTS. This payment is fixed not according to the cost or value of the services, but according to the needs of the State. "The rate of payment in kind for the work of MTS is established in relation to the size of the harvest," Laptev reports; it is a tax on production. Another portion of the har-

vest must go to the repayment of seed and food loans from the State.

To what is left the "Second Commandment" is applied. This is that the farm sell enough of its produce to State institutions, and on the collective farm market, to pay various taxes and meet various obligations in money. As enumerated by Zenzinov and Laptev, these are the MTS fees, the general tax, the tax for cultural purposes, the contributions to the State Treasury for social welfare disbursements, the air defense tax, the international proletarian relief fund and other so-called "voluntary" contributions, the payment of interest on monetary loans and the amortization of the loans, the salaries of the administrative staff and a 12 to 20 per cent contribution to the farm's capital funds (the latter averaged 10,989 rubles per farm in 1939, according to Laptev). In addition, a contribution in kind must be made to the farm's basic and emergency supplies of feed and fodder.

If the harvest is above the planned goal, the difference between these deductions from the harvest and the planned yield of the farm is set aside for the reimbursement of the collective farm members, along with 25 per cent of the amount of yield that is above the plan. (The remaining 75 per cent of the above-plan yield, after payment of bonuses to the administrative staff, goes to the State). If the harvest is equal to, or, as is usual, below the plan, the remainder after deductions goes to the members.

This is divided according to the days of work the members put in, multiplied by the *trudodni* (*trudoden*: literally, workday, a confusing term). As Jasny has reported, the various operations are divided into seven groups ranging in value from one-half to two *trudodni*. On a small number of farms premium payment is given, on the same basis, to those workers who overfulfill their individual norms. This, amounting from 15 to 35 per cent of the remainder, reduces the amount distributed at the standard rates to the members. Vucinich notes that the premium payment system is not widespread because it calls for minute bookkeeping that has not been attained on most farms.

The first claim on the pay of the *kolkhozniki* is for repayment of food advances, permitted up to 25 per cent. When the pay is large enough income taxes are taken. The peasants also are obliged to make "voluntary" contributions. Jasny estimates that before the war the highest average wage per *kolkhozniki* was 55 kopeks a day, equivalent to 27 cents, and that the average income on the dwarfholdings was equal to 120 to 130 kopeks per workday. This is a wage level comparable to that of China or India. Zenzinov says that as a general rule, the share

of the kolkhozniki's family in the collective harvests is enough only to support it for six or seven months. The rest of its sustenance it must obtain from its dwarfholding.

An Epic Struggle for Freedom

THESE DATA EXPLAIN why the Russian economy is an economy of poverty, as evidenced (as M. E. Bennett says in reporting material developed by V. P. Timoshenko and Jasny) by dependence upon grain and potatoes for well over 70 per cent of the calories of the Russian diet, by use of only a third or less of all grain milled for animal feed, and by the feeding of straw and chaff. They explain Jasny's and Timoshenko's estimates that somewhat less grain, animal products and sunflower seed oil was available per capita in 1938-41 than in 1928—a shortage only partly offset by a larger volume of potatoes from the dwarfholdings, an expansion of sugar output by increasing sugar beet acreage and the successful expansion of the cotton output of irrigated lands. The Soviet government, after the disastrous crops of 1946, claimed recovery in 1947-48, and in 1949 asserted that harvests were only slightly under pre-war. Few experts accepted the claim, particularly since figures on grain imports from Rumania, and foodstuff imports from the Russian empire's satellite States in Eastern Europe, were suppressed.

The data, finally, explain Jasny's estimates that the productivity of Soviet agriculture is less than a quarter that of pre-war United States agriculture, despite mechanization. The average peasant earns from his labor for the State and for himself barely enough for the minimum of subsistence. Since the tax system demands all that the traffic will bear, there is no incentive for him to work except grudgingly, to escape a worse fate. The only incentive given him is to steal and cheat. Dr. Harry Schwartz calls attention to complaints by I. Yermolinski in the organ of the Agriculture Ministry that, on many farms, products are sold illegally to the farmers, and to "speculative elements" unconnected with the farm, at very low prices, for resale on the collective farm markets.

"In this vastly inadequate remuneration of the kolkhozniki, in the incompatibility of their adequate reward with the maintenance of the military-economic superstructure," Jasny writes, "is the crux of the whole economic problem of Soviet Russia, its Achilles' tendon." And Bennett, recalling Lenin's formulation of the revolutionary objectives of the Bolsheviks in October, 1917 ("Power to the Soviets, land to the peasants, peace to the peoples, bread to the hungry"), says:

The twenty-one years of Communist dominance up to 1938, or the thirty-one years up to 1948, have certainly not put land in the hands of the peasants but have seen it taken away; and bread for the hungry became not more but less freely available than in czarist times. One has difficulty in perceiving the advent of 'peace to the peoples.' On the other hand, 'power to the Soviets,' or at least to the central government and the chiefs of the Communist party, has emerged.

But the record is even blacker. Not only have the peasants lost the freedoms they won in the real Russian Revolution. In the countryside as in the city, the Soviet regime has created a new privileged class, the heirs of the old landlords. Schwartz quotes data from Yermolinski, a Soviet authority, that while in Omsk province many farms in 1947 had money incomes of less than 25,000 rubles, one had an income of 589,000 rubles and the Beriya Collective Farm in Georgia had an income of 9,500,000 rubles. These differences, Yermolinski says, cannot be explained by the different sizes of farms. Moreover, in the bureaucracy, there is the equivalent of the old rentier and of the old aristocratic class. Finally, it is to be noted that the Soviet peasant works for a bare subsistence, has no voice in the government, and is tied to his soil unless he is willing, and can get official permission to take a more onerous job. Also, that he has a garden plot and hut, by law, only so long as he toils on the collective. In other words, he too, like the sovkhoznik, is a serf.

In the name of socialization, through the forms of a program designed to win land and freedom for the mujhik, Soviet agricultural policy has turned the clock back 100 years. It has wiped out the gains from the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 to the genuine land reforms of 1917-18. In agriculture as elsewhere, the counter-revolution led by the Bolsheviks has triumphed.

But the Soviet peasant fights on against overwhelming odds. The story of the mujhik's struggle for freedom is a saga of courage and invincible determination without parallel in history.

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