

Stalin's Perversion of Land Reform

IT IS A SINGULAR THING that, in spite of the failure of Joseph Stalin's program of land reform, not only to serve the interest of the Russian peasant, but that of the Russian nation, it has been imitated in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Yet the explanation is singularly simple: it is the best system yet devised for the exploitation of the peasant class by a ruling class.

Stalin's analysis of the agricultural problem was as naive as the genetical ideas of his protege, T. D. Lysenko. Agriculture, Stalin told the central committee of the Russian Communist party some twenty years ago, "continues to employ the old equipment, the old methods of tillage practised by our forefathers, the old, primitive, now useless, or nearly useless technique, the old, small-peasant, individual forms of farming and labor. Think of it! Before the revolution there were nearly 16,000,000 households, and now there are no less than 25,000,000! What does this indicate if not that agriculture is assuming a more and more scattered, fragmentary character?"

The program Stalin outlined to "remedy" the situation as he saw it was the one forced upon the Russian peasants: "We must begin thoroughly to re-equip agriculture on the basis of modern technique. But in order to re-equip it we must gradually amalgamate the scattered peasant farms into large farms, into collective farms; we must build up agriculture on the basis of collective labor, we must enlarge the collective farms, we must develop the old and new State farms, we must systematically employ the contract system on a mass scale in all the principal branches of agriculture, we must develop the system of machine and tractor stations which help the peasant to assimilate the new technique and to collectivize labor—in a word, we must gradually transfer the small peasant farms to the basis of large-scale collective production. . . ."

The result? Despite mechanization and improved technique, the productivity of labor dropped lower and lower. Despite amalgamation of holdings on an unprecedented scale, the Soviet Union is one of the few countries where more than half the population gets more than half its subsistence from the most primitive type of dwarf holdings. Even the rise in marketed output is relatively slight. By its own criteria, the Stalinist "remedy" proved to be a witch-doctor's brew.