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COMMUNIST AREA

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RSFSR BUREAU RAPS 'METAL-EATERS'

With the next meeting of the Supreme Soviet now only two weeks away, the Central Committee's Bureau for the RSFSR has chosen to make an unusual intervention in the protracted battle for light industry versus the "metal-eaters". This is the first occasion on which the Bureau has shown its hand so clearly on the controversial issue.

The Bureau is at present presided over by A.P. Kirilenko, its first Deputy Chairman; since the fall of Khrushchev no new Chairman has been appointed to it, and therefore the vacancy remains open for the next Central Committee plenum to consider (perhaps before the end of this month).

The Bureau's move is reported in a Sovietskaya Rossiya editorial of 14 September. The Bureau discussed the progress made by light industry in Rostov Oblast and found it wanting, despite an increase in consumer goods output there of 36 percent since 1958. It complains of slow construction, and says that not a single building site on the consumer side has been finished on schedule.

Rostov Oblast is unusually favored as regards light industrial investments, which have been more than doubled this year by comparison with 1964. For the USSR as a whole, the increase in capital investment in the light and food industries is planned to be 23 percent in 1965, as against what was achieved in 1964.¹

1) Pravda, 8 August 1965.

The Bureau for the RSFSR finds that the main reason for the delays in light industry completions is "the under-estimation of these branches by individual leaders of the economy." Sovietskaya Rossiya adds sarcastically, but also with an unmistakable note of menace:

Some people still regard light industry sites as secondary. And according to them heavy industry is another question!

The Bureau of the RSFSR, in selecting Rostov as its "teacher by negative example," is focussing on a much more widespread problem, and the lesson is deliberately being given a general application throughout the RSFSR:

Heavy industry is not an aim in itself; it is the launching pad for a sharp increase in all branches of the economy, for raising the social and cultural level of the Soviet people. Those who forget this lose their way, and slide into the position of crude, hopeless management.

[Emphasis supplied]

Last month Pravda saw fit to warn the metal-eaters in only slightly less pointed terms, when the Head of the Construction Section of the Central Committee, CPSU, wrote:

It is apparent that all directors have not yet relinquished their old opinions of factories which manufacture consumer goods, and they do not consider this a matter of primary importance....²

2) Pravda, 8 August 1965.

By comparison with that relatively mild warning, the reprimand for Rostov issued by the Bureau for the RSFSR has a much sharper tone. Evidently there is still plenty of resistance to the pro-consumer orientation at the lower and middle levels of the Party apparatus and of Gosplan. Moreover, the case of Rostov suggests that even some 1st Secretaries of Oblast Committees, who are also members of the Central Committee (like M.S. Solomentsev of Rostov), must be included among the "metal-eaters". They are not in a majority in the Central Committee, still less in the Presidium, but they constitute a recalcitrant minority against which Kirilenko has launched his latest well-timed broadside. The pro-consumer faction in the Presidium, which includes Brezhnev (see his speech to the March plenum), Kosygin, Podgorny (see his Baku speech) and now Kirilenko, is unlikely to let the matter rest there. More will probably be heard of the controversy when the Supreme Soviet meets on October 1st.

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