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STAVROPOL- THIRD PHASE

Stavropol krai (territory) is one of the largest administrative divisions in the Soviet Union stretching from the mountain peaks in the Caucasus to the barren steppes near the mouth of the Volga. Although better known socially for its famous resort spas in the Caucasian foothills, where the elite of the Soviet order enjoy the mineral waters, Stavropol in a political context has been the proving ground for the greatest agrarian reforms since the mass collectivization of the 'thirties. Trial runs on such crucial kolkhoz policies as amalgamation, liquidation of the MTS, cash wage payments replacing the labor-day system, and expansion of the State farm network were initially carried out in Stavropol before they became established agrarian policy.

But the most sweeping innovation was mass amalgamation of collective farms, where over the years ten collective farms were gradually forced together to form a super kolkhoz latifundium to serve as a working model for the reconstruction of the Soviet countryside.<sup>1</sup> In this new order the collectivized peasantry were cast in the role of a rural proletariat working for wages and deprived of private plots in an economic order where production and distribution processes were fully socialized. Thus as a model for the institutionalization of rural life, the Stavropol area warrants an appraisal of its economic underpinnings to determine whether the mass innovations are logistically feasible to the diverse regions of the Soviet Union.

By 1959 there were 149 collective farms and 110 state farms (compared to 1419 and 68 respectively in 1940) operating the 12.2 million hectares of agricultural land in Stavropol territory.<sup>2</sup> The institutional picture then in the 26 rural raions would show 5.7 kolkhozy and 4.2 sovkhozy dispersed in the average raion. As the Stavropol raions are already among the largest in the Soviet Union, it is apparent the super collective farms after the absorption of the MTS, compare with the "gigantomania" units of the Stalinist era in the 'thirties.

The economic shape-up of the average collective farm in Stavropol territory at the end of 1958 was of the order of:

<sup>1</sup> Another innovation recently brought to light by a Stavropol kolkhoz chairman: the Repair-Technical Stations - the remains of the MTS - are to be absorbed by the collective farms (Pravda, 19 August 1959). Sixty seven RTSs, each serving one farm were reported incorporated into the respective kolkhozy. (Voprosy Ekonomiki, No. 8, 1959, p.51.)

<sup>2</sup> Speech of Kraikom secretary I. Lebedev at XXI Congress, Pravda, 5 February 1959.

Total Farmland	27,300 hectares
Seeded cropland	13,800 "
Gross cash income	14 million rubles
Indivisible fund	16.8 million rubles
Cattle	1,999 head
Sheep and goats	21,245 head
Hogs	1,900 "

(Vestnik statistiki,  
no. 7, 1959, p.41)

It will be seen that the type of farming practiced is sheep raising and grain production, enterprises that are not capital intensive. Sheep farming, in addition, has long enjoyed a preferential "price support" status; the principal product, wool, is classed as a technical crop and its output has been subsidized.<sup>3</sup> Herein lies Stavropol's relative advantage compared to other Soviet regions - had its economic base been grain products, commodities not favored by high support prices, Stavropol would be on the level of Orenburg or Saratov oblasts. At that, grain farming is widely carried out in the southern stretches of the territory, along the foothills and watered plains of the Caucasian range. Corn, small grains, and sunflowers are the principal crops. The vagaries of the weather limit grain output: since 1956 there were two abundant harvests to offset two poor crops. As a model area it is natural that corn (maize) growing has been greatly expanded so that in 1959 Stavropol has the largest sown area of maize in the Soviet Union: 1.3 million hectares; the major portion is harvested as silage however.<sup>4</sup>

Given these natural resources and preferential markets one would expect Stavropol collective farms to enjoy a high level of income. It is strange, however, that no relevant income data have appeared on the rank-and-file Stavropolite kolkhoznik. In fact, almost nothing is known of this crucial index of well-being in all the north Caucasian oblasts. An authentic source recently discussed at length in the pages of the leading statistical journal cash payments among the peasants, but failed to disclose any data which could be determinants in arriving at a useful estimate. We find that kolkhoz gross income grew by 3.6 times over 1953, or a total of 2069 million rubles in 1958; and that labor-day payments totalled 760 million rubles in cash and 2,684 thousand quintals in grain.<sup>5</sup> In the share of payments, whereas previously cash payments comprised 30% and payments in

<sup>3</sup>Wool has not had as sharp price rises as other livestock products since 1953, as it was well priced before the 1953 reforms. Average wool prices in 1958 were 312 rubles a quintal; in 1956 265 rubles, in 1953, 184. (Pravda, 21 June 1956, 29 Sept. 1953.)

<sup>4</sup>Radio Moscow, 16 January 1959.

<sup>5</sup>Vestnik statistiki, Nr. 7, 1959, pp. 39,41.



kind 70% of the value of a labor-day, in 1958 the ratio was about 60% cash and 40% en natura. About the only vital index given is that 36% of the gross cash income was paid out among the peasants for work performed. How many labor-day inputs, and how many households or working members these payments applied to is a closed book! Regional kolkhoz income studies based on official data were determined in a number of regions<sup>6</sup>, so it is rather a singular reflection on the political motives of Party officialdom in not releasing individual peasant income levels for such a pivotal ideological proving ground as Stavropol. True, private plots and herds are a feature of the region: 53% of all cows are privately owned;<sup>7</sup> as 118,500 cows are owned by collective farmers this would indicate a larger number of kolkhoz households. So the cash value of a labor-day would be between 5 to 6 rubles, a rather low remuneration for so famous a region. Another 66,400 cows are owned by rural employees and workers. Of the 1,886,000 people living in the region in 1959, 70 percent were classed as rural.<sup>8</sup> Thus, not all rural residents are engaged in primary agricultural production, as the large number of cows privately owned by non-farmers indicates.

Along with its neighboring oblasts Stavropol has been well known for its dissident ethnic and political groups in opposition to Soviet policies during the collectivization and the war period. As an indicator of such latent anti-Party tendencies among sections of the population, it is significant that the punitive restrictions on urban livestock ownership have not been implemented in any of the north Caucasian regions. This would indicate a not too ideologically fertile soil for the sprouting of new policies on restricting rural income. For the rank-and-file kolkhozniki, with the value of a labor-day at about 9 rubles, including payments in kind, (60% cash, 40% PIK, supra) living levels still remain too low for a frontal attack on the private holdings of the peasantry. The switch-over to a regular cash wage system for kolkhoz work will be carried through, but the zero hour point for the private plot is still far at the end of the long furrow.

Stavropol will continue as one of the operational beacons of Khrushchev's shifting agricultural policy. In the amalgamation issue, with its implicitly regional advantages of scale, Stavropol has clearly shown the way. Now even such oblasts as Kostroma, an area of small backward dairy farms west of the Urals, has amalgamated 974 collective farms into 556 in the last twelve months.<sup>9</sup> For the moment only the direction of Khrushchev's

<sup>6</sup> In the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Georgian republics; among the oblasts: Moscow, Kursk, Poltava, Kiev, Stalingrad. See Background Information series, 11 September 1958, 3 March, 1958, 24 August, 1957, 27 June 1957, 24 July 1959.

<sup>7</sup> Chislennost skota v SSSR, 1957, pp. 410-2.

<sup>8</sup> Pravda, 10 May 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Selskoye Khozyaistvo, 23 August 1959.

pathfinder on policy is visible, not the speed or forced draft of implementation. The temper of the peasantry is still a compelling determinant in fixing the tempo of change. At the present kolkhoz income levels, no punitive measures against the private holdings of the peasantry will likely be enforced. The high noon of kolkhoz abundance is still a mirage. Thus far, the continued amalgamation of farms and other Stavropolite measures have not provided the key to solve the historic conflict between the peasantry and the Party - the distribution of farm income, and its attendant issue, the well-being of the farm masses.

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For the series on Stavropol, see

Background Information, 14 March 1958  
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