

COMMUNIST AREA

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BREZHNEV'S COMPROMISE - COUNCIL OF KOLKHOZY - A FALTERING STEP TOWARD KOLKHOZ DEMOCRACY

Summary: Brezhnev side-stepped the popular issue of Kolkhoz Unions and had the Third Kolkhoz Congress adopt instead a Council of Collective Farms, which rather than being an action agency as envisaged during the three years discussion period, is little more than an advisory forum. That any seminal ideas of change will be forthcoming from the 125-man body seems implausible, considering that 16 Minsiters of Agriculture dominate the board, all of whom are known for their cautious and conservative views. The "difficult and complex" problems that face Soviet agriculture, according to Brezhnev, will remain.

One of the few original achievements of the Third Kolkhoz Congress was the decision to establish Councils of Collective Farms at local, oblast, union-republic, and finally at national levels. The highest body -- the All-Union Council -- was chosen by the delegates on the last day of the three-day gathering of the Kolkhoz Congress. (1)

A 125-member council was selected, of which 24 members are leading officials at central and all-union republic ministries of agriculture or other central agricultural or state agencies. The balance of the council consists of kolkhoz chairmen, agronomists, brigadiers, and other leaders, many of whom have won

(1) Izvestia, 29 November 1969.

honors as "heroes of socialist labor." In its organizational meeting, the Council elected USSR Minister of Agriculture V.V. Matskevich to the post of chairman, and V.M. Kavun, a well-known kolkhoz chairman who had worked at the Garst farm in Iowa ten years ago, as vice-chairman.

The political orientation of the new Council can be fairly well established, as the dominant influence lies with the 16 Ministers of Agriculture and four other state officials. Both the central and union-republic Ministries of Agriculture have long been citadels of conservatism and caution in agrarian policy decisions: they opposed the kolkhoz union concept, the link system of labor organization until recently, and private plots. As the function of the Council will be wholly advisory, not administrative or executive, it is unlikely that any seminal ideas of a progressive nature will be forthcoming from the new agency.

The decision to organize Kolkhoz Councils on a pyramid structure was first announced by Brezhnev at the opening of the Kolkhoz Congress. It came wholly unexpectedly. The draft charter stipulates that the farms may take part, on a voluntary basis, in the work of inter-collective farm and state-kolkhoz enterprises, joint associations, and unions (Article 18). The reference is clearly to local associations of a productive or service nature, and not the Kolkhoz-Union structure that prevailed in the 1927-1932 period of collectivization.

The Kolkhoz-Union Background

When mass collectivization was promulgated by the Kremlin, an all-union Kolkhoz Center was established. The main task was to improve the management of the farms and act as a policy advisory committee to the central authorities. As the tempo of collectivization was stepped up, the kolkhoz unions system was developed, whereby the farms were first organized into a federation of local unions, regional unions, and republic unions. At the apex stood the kolkhoz center. The function of the unions was to administer the farms' planning, supplies, the orderly marketing of surplus products, and help the smaller, weaker farms by arranging for the pooling of resources. But they were most effective at the republic and center levels, where they became the only spokesmen for the interest of the Kolkhozy. In time, Stalin came

to fear the influence of the unions: they had begun to act as pressure groups for the kolkhozy with demands to supply material assistance to the farms and even grant peasants private plot privileges. Stalin liquidated the unions for fear they would take over the kolkhoz system.

Under Khrushchev the issue was revived. It was widely argued in the press and at meetings that kolkhoz unions would encourage local initiative, assist farms in the specialization of production, reduce bureaucratic surveillance, and improve farm management. Even the distinguished economist, Academician Strumilin, supported the idea, arguing that the unions were a means of sharing wealth and resources between the rich and the poor collective farms. Khrushchev early appeared in favor of the union but, apparently, could not prevail against the opposition, which feared a curbing of ministerial control and a threat to party hegemony. At the 1959 Party Plenum on agriculture, a compromise between the two functions was reached. Matskevich, who clearly saw the dangers the union presented to his ministerial agencies at the oblast level, agreed to set up unions at the raion level, but no higher. But the plenum's final resolution passed the issue on for further study. Khrushchev then turned to a panacea: the kolkhoz-sovkhoz production administration system of agricultural management and the union issue lay dormant. One of the first actions of the B & K regime was to liquidate Khrushchev's "hare-brained scheme."

The B & K Policy

Seldom has more favorable comment appeared in the press in favor of kolkhoz unions than under the present regime. Apart from kolkhoz officials and members, scientists, academicians, and literary people joined in the general advocacy of kolkhoz unions. Polyansky, Politburo member and spokesman for agricultural interests in the Kremlin, was a leading champion. But most of his Politburo colleagues were non-committal. The Ministry of Agriculture, on the other hand, and its newspaper led the opposition against the unions. Sometime in the last year the decision was apparently made to drop the issue, as the let-up in press commentaries indicated. An alternative proposal -- such as Brezhnev's Council of Kolkhozy -- was not at any time under public consideration until Brezhnev proposed it on the opening day of the Third

Kolkhoz Congress. Neither the Unions nor the Council issues were the subject of debate at the Congress. Instead, the Congress passed a separate law setting up the Councils and selecting the 125 members. The election of Councils at republic, oblast and raion levels will follow.

As the Council of Collective Farms functions, as charged by the statute, will be wholly advisory and consultative, they leave much to be desired in activating the sloganized movement toward "full democracy" in kolkhoz life. Brezhnev, like his predecessors before him, and the majority in the Politburo clearly felt the clear and present danger in a pyramid organization of Kolkhoz Unions engaged in action programs in kolkhoz development. They could conceivably take over the whole kolkhoz system. But the creation of a lackluster 125 man advisory council, chaired by the long standing union-opponent, the Minister of Agriculture Matskevich, is a double compromise, and double-talk, toward solving what Brezhnev termed, the urgent and difficult problems facing Soviet agriculture today.

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APPENDIX

I. Composition of the Council of Collective Farms

Ministers and High State Functionaries

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Agriculture Ministers	16
Procurement Ministers	1
Land Reclamation and Conservation Ministers	1
Chairman of the "Soyuzsekhoshtekhnika"	1
Deputy Chairman of Gosplan	1

Scholars and Scientists		1
Civil Servants		4
Trade Union Representatives		1
Bookkeepers		1
Highly Qualified Agricultural Specialists		15
Agronomists	8	
Zoological Technicians	4	
Veterinarians	1	
Economists	2	
Kolkhoz Chairmen		57
Brigadiers		10
Group Directors		5
Farms Directors		2
Tractorists and Combine Drivers		4
Mechanizers		2
Milkers		1
Pig farmers		1
Shepherds		1

II. Composition of the Council According to Republics

RFSR		43
ASSR	7	
Ukrainian SSR	26	
Byelorussian SSR	6	
Uzbek SSR	6	
Kazakh SSR	4	
Georgian SSR	4	
Azerbaijan SSR	3	
Latvian SSR	4	
Moldavian SSR	4	

Latvian SSR	3
Kirghiz SSR	3
Tajik SSR	3
Armenian SSR	3
Turkmen SSR	3
Estonian SSR	3
All-Union Agencies	7

II. Composition of the Council According to Republics

USSR

Ukrainian SSR
Byelorussian SSR
Uzbek SSR
Kazakh SSR
Georgian SSR
Azerbaijan SSR
Latvian SSR
Moldavian SSR