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NOTES ON PRIVATE PLOTS

New light on the continuing primary role the private plots and herds of collective farmers and employees contribute to the most lagging sector of the Soviet economy - agriculture - comes from two divergent sources: the annual report of the Central Statistical Administration and the current number of Voprosy Filosofii, #1, 1960.

Notwithstanding the persuasive and administrative restraints directed at the private holdings of peasants and workers during the past year,¹ the CSA economic report for 1959 again showed the dominant weights of the private economies:

1) 51 percent (31.5 million tons) of the total milk output came from the private herds;

2) 51 per cent (4.4 mil. T.) of the national meat and lard yields were privately produced;

as well as

3) 82 per cent (20.5 billion units) of the gross egg production,

and

4) 52 per cent (17.6 million head) of all cows were privately owned.²

Of the Communist bloc countries, apparently only Poland and the GDR have a larger share of the livestock industry in private hands. The failure to socialize the major share of the industry has remained a contradictory phenomenon in these two major Communist countries.

The above indices are from 3 to 5 per cent lower than the 1958 count, however, as the indicated measures to restrict city and sovkhos private holdings had a modestly negative effect on the growth of the private herds. This pressure will

¹Urban owners of livestock were ordered to liquidate their holdings in the larger cities - the conditions left to the discretion of city authorities (Pravda, 4 July 1959).

Sovkhos employees were to divest their livestock within two years. (ibid).

²Based on CSA report, Pravda, 22 January 1960.

continue, but it will be partly equalized by a hitherto unrecognized growth in the kolkhoz private herds themselves.

In Voprosy Filosofii, two social scientists with obvious access to unpublished data declared:

"Two processes are being unfolded in the personal economies of the collective farmers. The first appears in the growth of the number of cows in the personal auxiliary economies of the collective farmers who previously did not own cows and were unable to satisfy their needs through the communal economy of the collective. The second process consists in the reduction of cow numbers in the private herds of those farmers who are members of leading collective farms where there is no longer need of privately owned cows...The first instance arises from an under-developed level of the communal sector, the second from a high level. Until recently the former process prevailed while the latter has now begun to grow so that the private plots of the peasants will gradually lose their significance."³

The dimensions of this movement can be approximated by a comparison of the number of collective farm households and the number of cows owned by collective farmers (18.8 million households and 12.7 million cows).⁴ Thus, one third of the collective farm households, or over 6 million families, are without cows and many will acquire producing animals. The growth of such cowless households will likely more than offset the decline in cows among the "advanced" collective farms' members.

The authors give (Koselov, N.D. and K.I.) definitive data as to the private garden plots of the collective farms for the USSR as a whole:

"In 1958 the size of the average garden plot was 0.32 hectares, of which 0.03 were in fruits and berries... Throughout the country more than 60 per cent of the sown area of the gardens was devoted to vegetables and melons."

The Koselovs completely overlook the decisive contribution private plots have made to the Soviet nutritional levels: the major share of the protective protein-vitamin-mineral foods - meat, milk, eggs, vegetables - the foundations of modern diet in a temperate zone - have all through Soviet history been supplied by the privately owned, atomistic holdings of peasants and workers. This production process bids well to continue into the future, the Koselovs' vision of a small green-belt around the kolkhoznik's household notwithstanding.

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³Op. cit., No. 1, 1960, p. 17.

⁴Narodnoye Khozyastvo v 1958 g. pp. 349, 447.