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KOLKHOZ CHAIRMEN (VI)

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INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the Collective Farm Charter of 1935 the "elections" of kolkhoz chairmen by the full membership of the collective farms have almost invariably been cited as illustrations of "kolkhoz democracy". There have, of course, been countless reports of "isolated" instances of violations of this vaunted democracy in the countryside, but always in the context of the constructive self-criticism from real life or in the framework of approved socialist realism in literature. With the accelerated amalgamation of the collectives under Khrushchev and the changes in planning introduced in March 1955, the demands placed upon the administrative directors of the collective farm economies have increased considerably and the Party's search for qualified personnel has been intensified. Nevertheless, neither the highly publicized, but relatively brief campaign for the tridsatitsyachiki -- the 30,000 "volunteers" who were to replace one-third of the kolkhoz chairmen in 1955/56 -- nor the steady flow of party apparatchiki and agricultural specialists into the kolkhozy has yet solved the problem of providing efficient and reliable managers for the Soviet farms which are increasing in size as a result of the sharp decline in numbers.

In view of his preoccupation with agricultural policy, Khrushchev rarely fails to point out the shortcomings of cadre policy in the countryside. At the June 1959 Plenum, the First secretary¹ chastised those Party organizations which

"cannot select good chairmen (managers) for the backward collectives. The result is as the proverb has it: 'With 7 nurses in attendance -- the child still manages to lose an eye.' And what does it mean to select a good chairman of a collective, good brigadiers? It means success of the enterprise * * *. Why is it that collective and state farms do not organize their work as well as factory personnel? Because some collectives have been headed by poor chairmen for long stretches at a time; some have brought as many as three collectives to ruin and are looking toward a fourth * * *. And the party organizations put up but a weak fight against such an evil * * *."

Six months later, however, another aspect of the chronic administrative dilemma faced by Party officials was exposed by the architect of current Soviet agricultural policies. Subjecting an obkom secretary and member of the Central Committee² to ridicule for having promoted a successful kolkhoz chairman to the post of secretary of a raikom, Khrushchev identified himself with the views of the kolkhozniki who felt that

"it was easier to find a man to do the job of a raikom secretary than...the job of a kolkhoz chairman (animation

¹ Pravda, 2 July 1959.

² V. S. Markov was removed as secretary of the Orel Oblast shortly thereafter (Sovetskaya Rossiya, 14 Jan. 1960).

in the hall.) with the great love for the job and the wholehearted devotion shown by Comrade Fak."³

As an example of a new type of appeal to the leader of the Party-State,⁴ the letter from the Orel kolkhozniki is of more than passing interest; of far greater importance, however, is the formulation by Khrushchev that such a transfer for a former Party apparatchik (a zonal secretary of the raikom) "runs counter to the Party line." As a demonstration of the workings of kolkhoz democracy it is no less instructive: first the beloved

"chairman, Comrade Fak, was sent to the kolkhoz in 1954 ...and now without the kolkhozniki knowing about it, Comrade Fak is taken away..."

Thus, although Khrushchev's paternalistic intervention from the summit of the Party hierarchy in favor of the collective farm peasantry is intended to demonstrate the functioning of "kolkhoz democracy," it, in effect, reveals the utter helplessness of the collective farm peasantry when facing the wielders of power at the lower levels of the Party bureaucracy. Throughout the Stalin era the appointive authority for the position of kolkhoz chairman had remained in the hands of the Raion Party committee, i.e., the smallest territorial Party unit in the countryside, and this to a considerable extent still seems to be the practice under Khrushchev.⁵ According to a C.C. decree, however, since March 1954 this post has been listed in the "nomenklatura" of the oblast committees:⁶

"In order to increase local Party agencies' responsibility for correct selection, placement and training of collective farm administrative personnel, it is considered necessary for collective farm chairmanships to be included among those offices which appointments are subject to confirmation by province and territory committees and Union republic Party Central Committees, and for the posts of vice-chairman, brigade leader and livestock section manager to be subject to confirmation of district Party committees."

³ Pravda, 29 December 1959; see below p. 3.

⁴ A letter to Khrushchev from the grateful kolkhozniki recorded the "happy ending" of this case. Pravda, 15 January 1960.

⁵ See, for example, Pravda, 25 Feb. 1960 which publishes a letter of complaint from members of a Ukrainian kolkhoz which has had 20 chairmen since the end of the war, the last of whom "was sent by the Raikom in 1958." A second letter also employs the standard terminology: "the Raikom directed him to work on a backward kolkhoz."

⁶ Pravda, 6 March 1954.

It is obvious, nevertheless, that this upward shift of responsibility for what Khrushchev six years ago described as "the most important and as yet unsolved problem" in farm cadre work has not yet provided the answer. Even in the Ukraine, where the number of kolkhozy has declined from 15,600 to 11,200 since then,⁷ the turnover of chairmen has not lessened in the last 7 months, and "from August 1959 to February 1960, a total of 1,189 oblast and raion organization employees were directed to work as kolkhoz chairmen, including over 100 Rai-kom secretaries, 170 Raiispolkom chairmen and their deputies, and many agricultural specialists."⁸ Thus, more than 10% of the collectives in one of the most advanced agricultural areas of the country, have been replaced primarily, but not exclusively, for inefficiency.⁹

A similar phenomenon has also been noted in the tiny republic of Azerbaidzhan, thus demonstrating once more the general character of this managerial malaise. Moreover, while the statement by Podgorny suggests that the obkoms in the Ukraine are faithfully implementing -- in a formal sense at least -- the 1954 decree, in Baku the first secretary of the Republic Central Committee has stated that -- at some unknown date in the past -- the highest Party body has taken this thankless task upon itself:¹⁰

"Together with the raion Party organs, the Central Committee reviewed the cadres of kolkhoz chairmen after the December (1958?) plenum of the CPSU Central Committee; agricultural experts and experienced Soviet and Party workers were placed in these jobs. The post of kolkhoz chairman was included in the nomenclature of the Central Committee of the Azerbaidzhan Communist Party. At the beginning of 1959 only 39.4% of the kolkhoz chairmen were people with higher, incomplete higher or intermediate education. After the enforcement of this measure, their number increased to 60.6% and the number of kolkhoz chairmen with higher education rose to 25.7% from 16.8%."

In percentage terms, therefore, since the Azerbaidzhan C.C. began to appoint chairmen for the collective farm members to "elect," at least 30% of the kolkhozy¹¹ have been "sent" new managers. For the chairmen of the amalgamated kolkhozy in Azerbaidzhan, at least, and in the other smaller republics as

⁷ Ekonomika Selskogo Khozayistva, #4, 1959, p. 40; see Background Information, 23 July 1959.

⁸ Speech by N. Podgorny at Ukrainian Party Congress, Radio Kiev, 17 Feb. 1960.

⁹ See Kolkhoz Chairmen (IV) -- Downfall of a Khrushchevian Symbol, Background Information, 30 November 1959, for disgrace of a too enterprising chairman for "market operations."

¹⁰ V. Akhundov, Radio Baku, 17 Feb. 1960.

¹¹ The present number of kolkhozy, according to Akhundov, is 1,092, a decline from 1,337 "in the past" and 1,411 at the end of 1958. (Narodnoye Khozyaistvo SSSR v 1958 Godu, Moscow, 1959, p. 502.

well it may be assumed, the same cadre rules now apply as those which prevail in the selection of directors for industrial enterprises and state farms.

There is no documentary evidence which illustrates the reaction of the lower Party organs to this extension of personnel controls from the center into the depths of the countryside. From the remarks of N. Belyaev in one of his first appearances as 1st secretary in Kazakhstan two years ago, it is clear that the attempt to remove the post of state farm director from the jurisdiction of the C.C. had failed in the virgin lands:

"It is a matter of surprise that from the nomenclature of the cadres confirmed by the C.C. the directors of sovkhozy have been excluded, while the directors of factories have been left in the nomenclature of the C.C. What is the difference between a director of an industrial enterprise and a director of a factory for grain or livestock? This was certainly an error.... Now the situation has been corrected. No raikom nor oblast committee alone can, without the approval of the C.C. of the Kazakhstan CP transfer or dismiss from work a director of a sovkhoz."

To the rhetorical question as posed by Belyaev in 1958, no reply is necessary; in 1960, the fact that the position of kolkhoz chairman is now, in practice as well as in theory, in the nomenclature of the Central Committee of the Union Republic provides a partial answer to the manner in which Khrushchev intends to accelerate the approximateion of amalgamated farms to industrial enterprises. From the aspect of selection and appointment of the leading managerial personnel, the chairman of the kolkhoz is now identical with the director of a factory and a state farm.

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NomenklaturaRussian Political Institutions

London, 1958

Derek J. R. Scott

A principal concern of the party from the first has been staffing, or, as the terminology has it, cadres work. This is not merely the provision of a civil service. The party's concern with cadres extends to the political posts, both representative and administrative, as known in other countries, to managerial and technical posts in industry and to key posts in all other walks of life and, to some extent, to lesser posts as well. The Soviet Union is best regarded as a single concern with vast commitments and limited resources of educated manpower. The party is not the sole agency concerned with this problem. Ministries and enterprises have their own cadres departments, and in fact it is usual for the responsibility for appointment or election to any important office outside the party's own staff to be divided among as many as four authorities: the soviet or economic organ to which the appointment is to be made, the appropriate ministry or other superior authority and the party committees, or the responsible departments in them -- at present, as we have seen, divided according to the kind of activity rather than united in a single cadres department -- of both levels.¹ But the party as the 'leading nucleus' bears, as in other business, a greater responsibility than the other organs. We find the good district party secretary moving his party forces about to 'the decisive sectors of production'. The work is of the first importance and seems to have formed the basis for the earlier career of Mr. Malenkov.

The party committee at each level has a schedule of appointments (nomenklatura), for which it is responsible as appointing or confirming authority, including those of leading officials of machine-tractor stations, factories and other enterprises, banks, agricultural procurement agencies and collective farms, in addition to official posts in the soviets or in the party. Like most other organizational matters in the Soviet Unions, the allocation of responsibility for appointments varies with time and place according to a debate in the party mind between the voice of necessity, which demands centralization, and the voice of conscience, which speaks for decentralization. For instance, until early in 1954 appointment to posts as chairmen of collective farms was apparently in the gift of district party committees but perhaps because these were evidently apt to be moved by improper considerations such posts were then removed to the regional nomenklatura.² Vice-chairmen, field-work-gang ('brigade') leaders and livestock-farm managers were left to the district.³ At a moment of large-scale emergency recruiting for such work the district seems still to have been important as a provider, if not as appointing authority. Thus it is reported that in the Smolensk region, 'In the spring and summer of 1954, 825 district and regional workers were sent to leading work in the collective farms. Among those recommended for posts as chairmen of collective farms were fifty-six secretaries of district party committees, more than 200 heads of departments of

¹ Rigby, Thesis, p. 367.

² Pravda, 6th March 1954, decision of a plenary session of the party Central Committee in February-March 1954.

³ I. V. Pavlov (in. N. D. Kazantsev, I. V. Pavlov, A. A. Ruskol (eds.), Kolhoznoe Pravo (1955), p. 305) speaks of this assignment of the presentation to posts of chairman and vice-chairman as if it were a devolution down the administrative line 'to raise the responsibility of local party organs.' It may be that there is now less interference from the centre, but the recent mass drafting of suitable people from the towns into agricultural management hardly suggests it. On the concern of party organs with the appointment and dismissal of the lower office-holders on collective farms, see H. Dinerstein, Communism and the Russian Peasant, p. 89.

NOT TO BE MICROFICHED

district committees of the party, and deputy chairmen of executive committees.' Under such special circumstances there may even have been some public consultation to learn of suitable persons: 'In all towns and districts of the region assemblies of the party activists have been held. At them selection was made of the most authoritative and experienced comrades for work in the capacity of chairmen of collective farms',⁴ but it seems clear that more normally such appointments are made by the party as a routine administrative matter. On the basis of reports submitted by their own inspectors, examination of subordinate officials, and reports from the public the responsible departments at all levels are expected to maintain records of persons suitable for appointments to any post which may occur within nomenklatura. These are not confined to members and candidates of the party, though they are an important and flexible resource. As the composition of the soviets suggests, non-party men may be used in positions of considerable prestige and even, it seems, of real importance. At the least the district nomenklatura seems to have included some hundreds of types of posts and that of a union republic some thousands.⁵ As usual, however, party responsibility is not limited by formal assignment, so that party organizations at any level are required to keep a general eye on all cadres matters, and are liable to blame for failure to draw attention to suitable persons for even the less important posts which are not formally theirs to fill. Nor can they count on being left alone to exercise their power of presentation. The source quoted on Smolensk region reports that 'in 1955 upon the call of the Central Committee of the Soviet Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. a further 380 persons were selected for the region and sent by the Moscow party organization for work as chairmen of collective farms', and it is probable that such assistance by the centre is general. Probably the principal party posts of all levels -- secretaries, from primary organization upwards, and heads of all the main departments -- are on the nomenklatura of the next higher level with or without higher confirmation. The appropriate party authority is held responsible for the quality of those whom it appoints. Its reconciliation of its own responsibilities in connection with appointments with the rights of others -- the members of a soviet or its executive committee in the appointment of their officials, the members of a collective farm in the choice of their chairman and a ministry in its selection of staff -- is a matter for its own tact. Here, as in many other fields, the party evidently values the ability of an official to enforce the party's will without causing avoidable hard feelings, and will not long tolerate one whose section in this respect repeatedly raises a storm.

4. Kommunist, No. 3 (February) of 1956.

5. Rigby (Thesis, pp. 332-3) gives about 220 for districts and towns in Kirgizia, about 800 for regions and 2,700 for the republican Central Committee (quoting Sovetskaja Kirgizia, 21st September 1952, as the basis of his calculation). Kirgizia, as one of the less-developed republics, probably has fewer categories than most.

THE OBKOM AND THE KOLKHOZ CHAIRMAN

Excerpt from speech
of N. S. Khrushchev
Pravda, 29 December 1959

...The question of cadres, their correct distribution, rearing, and skillful use is the main question in all our work. Yet, in some places this most important matter is sometimes approached incorrectly. I shall quote one concrete example. The Central Committee has received a letter from kolkhozniks of the Leninskoye Znamya artel, Dmitrovsk Rayon, Orel Oblast. The letter was signed by 53 people on behalf of the kolkhoz assembly. This is what they wrote:

"On November 28 the chairman of our kolkhoz, Comrade Stepan Fak, was appointed first secretary of the Dmitrovsk Raykom. We are very sorry and saddened by this. Our chairman, Comrade Fak was sent to the kolkhoz in 1954 after working as zonal secretary of raykom. And now, without the kolkhozniks knowing about it, Comrade Fak is taken away from us. Our kolkhoz was lagging before he came. The farm was in a mess and stockbreeding was neglected. Comrade Fak was able to mobilize the kolkhozniks and to organize labor discipline. We kolkhozniks felt that a real leader had come to our kolkhoz and all of us began toiling honestly. The kolkhoz began to grow fast.

"We feel that the Orel Obkom did not act correctly. Could they not find in the obkom apparatus a man who could be sent to work as secretary of the Dmitrovsk Raykom? In our view, it is easier to find a man to do the job of raykom secretary than to do the job of a kolkhoz chairman (animation in the hall), with the great love for the job and the wholehearted devotion shown by Comrade Fak." A resolution of the general assembly of the kolkhozniks, sent with the letter, says: "1-- Kolkhozniks present the CPSU Central Committee with the petition that Comrade Fak be retained in the post of chairman of the Leninskoye Znamya Kolkhoz.

"2--The general assembly of kolkhozniks deems it necessary not to relieve Comrade Fak of his duties as kolkhoz chairman.

"3--The general assembly requests that the party's Central Committee and Comrade Khrushchev personally, permit Comrade Fak to go on leading the kolkhoz.

Comrades, this is not a bad resolution. (Animation in the hall, applause).

In connection with this letter and the decision of the kolkhoz assembly, I should like to ask the secretary of the Orel Obkom, Comrade Markov, who is an experienced party worker, how it happened that in the obkom they could not understand what was well understood by the kolkhozniks. Why do you staff yourselves with kolkhozniks, disregarding their wishes and will? Such action by the obkom runs counter to the party line. The party does everything to direct good leaders to organizational work. Understand, dear Comrade Markov, we must all profoundly realize where there is a good chairman in a kolkhoz the raykom finds it easier to carry out its leadership duties.

In that event the raykom secretary can visit such a kolkhoz for a rest, so to speak, and taste its honey, that is, of course, if he likes it. (Animation in the hall.)

With a good leader there is no need for various authorized representatives on a kolkhoz. There is nothing for them to do on such a kolkhoz. If you select a good chairman and confirm him as raykom secretary he will naturally be unable to devote himself specifically to kolkhoz affairs. In every rayon, in every kolkhoz, in every sovkhoz, we must now fix it so they have their own eagles, good organizers, with a profound knowledge of the task. The work will proceed still more successfully. Therefore, Comrade Markov, fix it so Comrade Fak remains at the post of kolkhoz chairman. All of us, the whole plenum, appeal to you: Grant the request of the kolhozniks. (Animation in the hall, applause)

It is to our pride, comrades, that kolkhozniks ask that a good communist organizer be left as leader of their kolkhoz. The enemies of communism, say that with the growth of culture in the Soviet Union the social regime will be visibly changed, that Soviet people will no longer tolerate the regime as it now exists. They do not understand what real freedom is for the workers, for the people. The chamoons of capitalism try to present the capitalist world -- the world of exploitation of the people of toil - as the free world.

If they consider capitalism to be the free world, then they are limited and unfortunate people. They are to be pitied because it has not been given to them to understand what is real freedom for the people. Freedom is where man is free from bonds of exploitation by capital. Is the matter we are examining not noteworthy, a situation where kolkhozniks sense themselves to be complete masters in the Soviet country?

We communists can rightly take pride in the fact that it is for a communist, our raykom secretary, that kolkhozniks have sent a deputation to Moscow with the request: Let us have him so he can be our leader, so that he can lead the kolkhoz, because he knows the job well, organizes people able, and we have all worked better with him. (Prolonged applause).

Comrades, it is of unquestionable necessity to meet the kolkhozniks' request and to leave Comrade Fak at his post of kolkhoz chairman. Everywhere this situation arises, send a good organizer to a weak or lagging kolkhoz. It is necessary to go out to meet requests. Every kolkhoz could be given a good Fak. (Animation in the hall.)

This must be done, Comrade Markov, and work in the oblast must go successfully. The soil in Orel oblast is wonderful, and if there is a shortage of experienced cadres tell us and we will appeal to other oblasts and ask for people. We have many good workers and they should be directed to those sectors which are lagging. Everything must be done so that the oblast can occupy its proper place and be in the first rank...

FLIGHT FROM THE KOLKHOZ

By Fyodor Panfyorov
Meditations (Excerpt)
Soviet Literature Monthly
No. 10, 1959

...Along the paths of the ravine -- evidently the dried up bed of a tributary of the Don -- people were carrying on their shoulders bundles out of which stuck kettles, frying pans and other household utensils. Some of the women had children in their arms, others were leading goats, and behind their parents barefoot children were hurrying, shivering in the cold early morning air.

But why follow the twisting paths of the ravine when on the steppe above it the going was quite smooth? Yes, there was something furtive in their movements, as if they had done something wrong and were ashamed to look people in the face. But their own faces showed no guilt, no hatred. As they passed the bush by which he was standing, all of them, grown-ups and children, looked pensively at him as if to say: Why have we come to this? What was the use of dragging us from our native parts?

Morev rushed down the ravine and called out: "Where are you going?"

The people paused. Those who had gone on ahead turned round.

"Where are you off to? Where do you come from?" Morev demanded.

"And what's it to you, my good man -- or my bad man?" a tall, sturdily built old man had separated himself from the others and, leaning on a gnarled staff, stood looking at Morev. "Identity cards? -- Haven't got any! Where are we going -- To join our brothers in the factories. They build cars, for the likes of you. And we go on our two legs, as we always did....Well then, what d'you want?"

"I am secretary of the regional committee of the Party -- your servant. Morev, my name is."

When the chorus of astonished exclamations had died down, the old man said: "So that's who you are? And as for us, we're from the Partisan and on our way people from other kolkhozes joined us." He placed his big, muscular hands on the top of his staff, rested his chin on them and gazed steadily at Morev.

Further talk made it clear that as soon as Morev and Astafiev drove away from the village, Garanin had announced to the village: "The secretary of the regional committee, Comrade Morev, has passed on full authority to me. So -- look out!"

"After that," said the old man, "he started again putting the fear of hell into us. But we are Soviet people and we won't stand for it....And you? What do you want with us?"

"Go back!"

"Back into the jaws of Garanin?" The old man raised his staff defiantly.

"His jaws are the jaws of a mouse," said Morev.

"But he can gnaw with them. Put a mouse inside your shirt and it'll start gnawing away at you. And here we have a mouse that had been given full authority over us. Understand that, you mighty Secretary?" The old man swung his staff menacingly. "The Party Plenum wished us well, but you go and give power to Garanin."

"Go back! I'll meet you there. And at least we'll chase the mouse out for a start," said Morev and went back to the dead camp-fire....

ELECTION OF A KOLKHOZ CHAIRMAN

The streets of the kolkhoz village were so quiet that it seemed as if everybody, old and young, had deserted the place. Gates had been left swinging open, chickens with ruffled feathers were running here and there, pigs were rooting about on the roadsides, grunting busily.

When the car stopped outside Elizaveta Lukinichna's house Astafiev remarked with some anxiety in his voice:

"Where is everybody? They can't all be working. Even the old folks and the kids have disappeared."

Morev, too, was anxious. So they didn't go back, didn't listen to his advice?

He looked along the street and in the distance saw a crowd of people, young and old, standing in a circle outside the kolkhoz office.

"A meeting, I expect," said Astafiev. "Let's drive down there."

"Better to walk and join them quietly. No point in disturbing the proceedings," said Morev and, after telling the driver to remain where he was, started off towards the crowd.

While they were still some distance from the office they could hear the staccato speech of Garanin. Making long pauses between his phrases, he was shouting threats at somebody. As they came nearer they could see him standing on the porch shaking both his fists in the air:

"In nineteen-seventeen I came to the Revolution with my cannon and I joined in crushing the Whites and all the other creepers and crawlers. And now I say: Crush all the creepers and crawlers and all the remnants of capitalism! Enough of this persuading and pleading. For them that block the way to communism there's only one remedy -- crush 'em till the guts are squeezed out of them!"

Beside Garanin stood the sallow-faced, tubby book-keeper Syomin; a little farther away and looking rather uncomfortable was Ivashechkin (the kolkhoz chairman).

If Morev had been asked afterwards about his intervention in the proceedings he would probably have answered: "I don't know what possessed me." He rushed on to the porch and pushed Garanin aside.

This unexpected action brought no change in the faces of the crowd. Their eyes, like the eyes of the people in the revine, seemed to be asking sadly, "Why...? What's the use...?"

Morev scanned the crowd and his glance came to rest on the face of Elizaveta Lukinichna. In her eyes, at least there was no dull apathy but only a sad pensiveness. Morev resisted an urge to address the people as "Brothers and sisters" and began simply:

"We -- that is, I, the secretary of the Prevolzhsk regional committee, and Comrade Astafiev, secretary of the Nizh-nidon district committee, whom you know well -- have visited your kolkhoz and we don't need to be told how things are with you. We can read the answer, 'Couldn't be worse!' in your eyes. Yes, things are bad for you -- couldn't be worse. And the reason for it all is -- these three men!" Morev paused for breath and, losing his restraint, shouted: "Elect a new chairman for your kolkhoz! Here and now! Choose someone you can trust with your life, your work, your future!"

The crowd stood stock-still scarcely breathing. Only the old man moved. Leaning on his staff with his chin on his hands, he swayed from side to side, fixing Morev with his eyes. After some moments of silence he said in his muffled voice:

"Well, sonny, you see how it is. You can't get a sound out of us. They're throttling us, like geese."

"Who would you choose as chairman?" Morev asked the old man. He could only gasp out the words, and there was a loud ringing in his ears. That damned blood pressure again, he told himself as he waited for the old man's reply. But the silence was broken by the hoarse voice of Garanin:

"So you give the orders here -- tramping on the directive of the Plenum? What about us, the elected officials?"

You kick us into the ditch because we threw the truth in your face instead of licking your boots."

Astafiev grabbed Morev's hand, fearing that he would strike Garanin. Then, turning to Garanin, he said:

"You and people like you can't be kicked into any ditch. You're already in it and won't ever crawl out." Turning to the crowd he said: "The secretary of the regional committee has advised you to choose a new chairman."

Still there was no answer. Either they were astounded by Morev's unexpected proposal or they were cowed by Garanin. Again it was the muffled voice of the old man that broke the silence:

"They've taken all the guts out of us, and we don't know yet what kind of man the Party secretary is -- good or bad. We had one, Malinov...." And lowering his head again, he resumed his swaying.

"Give them Chudin as chairman," shouted Garanin, tittering with laughter. "Why not? He might even get the horse-stealing organized."

Fighting to suppress the anger boiling up inside him, Morev said in a quiet voice:

"We called on Chudin and when we were leaving he told us that all he wanted was one friendly word from the Party. Well, speaking in the name of the regional committee of the Party, I say: We give him that friendly word!"

Smiles broke over the faces of the kolkhozniks. Shoulders straightened and in a moment hundreds of work-hardened hands -- and the hands of children too -- were raised. Along the street the cry rang out: "Chudin! -- Chudin! -- Chudin!"

Chudin, who had been standing apart with his shoulders bent and, it seemed, drawing on Matryona for moral support, straightened up and, with tears in his eyes, looked Morev squarely in the face....