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SPRING TOUR OF THE PROVINCES-1959

On the eve of the Foreign Ministers' Geneva Conference, and fully two months since his last formal speech, N.S. Khrushchev returned to the hustings at Kiev (May 11) on the occasion of the award of a second Order of Lenin to the Ukrainian republic for meritorious achievements in agriculture.¹ In a speech that may well be recorded in the collected works of the First Secretary-Minister as "a rocket is not a cucumber" effort, Khrushchev dealt almost exclusively with agricultural problems in the Soviet Union. This preoccupation with his favorite topic again emphasizes the vital role agrarian policy continues to play in the development of an industrially oriented society. The 1959 census report gives timely credence to this view - 52 per cent of the total population was classed as rural (Pravda, 10 May 1959).

Khrushchev's main points opened up no new furrows on farm policy. Rather he approached his announced goals from new paths of departure. Such well expounded topics were again reiterated; improvement of collective farm management by promotion of qualified men; greater farm efficiency by increasing output and reducing costs; reorganizing the Ministry of Agriculture, experiment stations and scientific institutions with the view to bringing their work more directly in line with actual farm production; continued praise for corn as an expanding crop for the Ukraine, as well as for buckwheat and peas, two newcomers among K's botanical favorites.

But the most revealing shafts of light were cast at the new orders of village reconstruction.

"It is pleasant now to pass through a village. It used to be that when going through a village one got the impression that Mamay² and his horde had gone

¹On April 26, 1958, the First secretary did the honors at the ceremonies when the Ukraine was awarded its first Order of Lenin for superior agricultural achievements. Apart from rural topics in the speech, he launched the attack on the M-K-M. anti-party group (Pravda, 28 April 1958).

²A Mongol warlord who with his Golden Horde laid waste much of Muscovy in the 14th century.

through it before. Not only was there nothing new built, but even the old was not repaired. At that time most collective farms did not have the conditions for building."
(Pravda, 12 May 1959)

This is a startling admission of the posture of village affairs almost 40 years after the revolution. Even the most backward peasant in the audience must have known it referred to Stalin's era. To make certain, Khrushchev reminded them

"Now conditions have changed...The peasantry are building their homes...I recently visited a collective farm where 200 homes of shell rock were built last year. The houses are good but the village is spread out very wide. Is this wise? We believe it is not...we are following our grandfathers who tried to build farther away from neighbors so that they would not look over the fence or that the hens would not stray away into the neighbor's yard..."

As a rule bungalows (one story buildings) are being built in our villages. This is not rational as they cost more than a house of the same size...We should consider building 2, 3 and perhaps 4 story houses. This would create a more compact, cultural order of living. We need not adopt this at once, but it is something we need to think over carefully. My attitude is this: people must not be forced or coerced. One must explain to them patiently what is better and what is worse. If some comrades wish to adhere to the old ways, it is their affair." (ibid.)

Here are persuasive words for the "voluntary" adoption of the agrogorod scheme for the resettlement of collective farmers into a compact city-type housing pattern without benefit of private plots and personal livestock. This was the essence of Khrushchev's abortive agrogorod idea in 1951, which however has reappeared in the Soviet press in recent months. This theme will reappear with greater frequency and become a positive plank in the overall Party policy for the countryside.

On the crucial issue of income distribution among the collective farmers, Khrushchev left some disturbing notes among the Ukrainians:

"Many leading collective farms strive to pay out as much money as possible for working day units. I am not a champion of payment of large sums of money and produce for working day units. A man must be paid for his work day units enough to keep his family comfortable; the children must eat well and be clothed and shod, the family must live in a good house; that there be enough, as the saying is, of all that is necessary.

Nowadays, however, a certain kulak-like unhealthy psychology had made an appearance among some people: to pay out more money so as to put it away in the moneybox. What for? It is necessary to create for the people a truly good life. Our aim is to make people rich not through

the money they accumulate, not through personal riches hidden in trunks and moneyboxes, but through a good and joyful life which must be created for every person and the whole society alike. However rich a man may be he cannot eat more than his stomach can digest. Consequently the question is not only of people being able to eat well, but of creating all conditions for a good life; and these conditions, are made up of many elements. It must be encouraged in every way that more deductions be appropriated for the nondistributed funds of the collective farms, that more clubs, schools, boarding schools, be built, that children receive a good upbringing."

Such investments in communal projects imply a high extraction of farm earnings into the indivisible funds. Those suggestions must be viewed in the light of actual income from collective farm work. In the Ukraine, this amounted to 3.70 rubles per labor-day in 1957 (the last year data were available) and for the 1958 season the average income at best was 4.00 -4.50 rubles plus about 1.5 kilograms of grain per labor day (Background Information, 30 April 1959). Seen against this background of subsistence income for the rank-and-file collective farmers, Khrushchev's agrarian reforms will need vastly more time than the 7 Year Plan for peasants to reach the abundant life.

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