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COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR: Agriculture

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GOOD HARVESTS MAY BOOMERANG ON SOVIET

FARM DEVELOPMENT

The decisions of the Plenum of the CPSU of September 26, 1967, as published in the Soviet central press, indicate that the highest Party body failed to ratify the five year economic plan for the 1966-70 period. Instead, the draft plans of economic development for 1968, 1969, and 1970 were approved separately "in principle." No mention whatever was made of the five year plan.

The issue of priorities in resource allocation between sectors of the Soviet economy has again been demonstrated to be the contentious issue in top echelon decision-making in the Kremlin. The interplay of domestic and foreign issues, as advanced by contending groups within the Central Committee, is holding up decisions on the intermediate allocation of resources. The 1966-70 draft plan was originally adopted in February 1966 but final ratification was repeatedly postponed and now appears to have been tabled for good.

Indications that the controversy over priorities in resource allocation was the nub of contention cropped up from several sources, but from none more authoritative than Politburo member and First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, D.S. Polyansky, the agricultural specialist in the Politburo. In an election speech last March before his agrarian constituents in the Altai territory, Polyansky charged that the record harvest of 1966 had produced an attitude among some Soviet leaders

1) Pravda, Izvestia, 27 September 1967.

favoring reduction in the level of capital investment currently being made in agriculture:

Some comrades are beginning to argue that the collective and state farms are now able to develop with less essential aid, that the volume of amelioration work can be cut back, and that the supplies of machinery and fertilizers reduced. Such conclusions are extremely dangerous. They need to be resolutely suppressed.²

These are strong words, particularly from the agricultural spokesman of the Politburo. Moreover, for an official of Polyansky's stature to charge that opposition to agricultural investment from certain other leaders was "extremely dangerous" is a telling measure of the intensity of the struggle over economic priorities in key areas of the Central Committee, Gosplan, and the defense hierarchy.

Polyansky's defense of continued high agricultural investment is all the more understandable in that Soviet bumper harvests have been axiomatically followed by restrictive measures imposed on the farm sector while poor harvests in turn produced liberalization of the terms of trade for the peasantry. Last year, the first year of the current plan, gross farm output for the first time outpaced industrial output, a 10 percent growth in agriculture over the previous year as against 8 1/2 percent in industry. With the 1967 harvest shaping up to be only a little less than the record one of last year, the goal set by the current plan of an increase of 25 percent in farm output over the average of the preceding five years should be handily fulfilled. With such an unusual record, and given the existence and intensity of the political controversy over priorities in resource allocations, it stands to reason that Polyansky's warning of last winter is indicative of a struggle among contending groups over resource priorities that bodes no good for the agrarian sector.

Thus, in the current flushness of agriculture, historically an unaccustomed institutional posture, it comes as no surprise that some influential individuals or groups actively oppose the current level of investments for agriculture. If those investments are cut back, it would only be following the historical pattern of bumper harvests yielding restrictive measures for the peasantry.

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2) Pravda, Radio Moscow, 3 March 1967.