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PRIVATE PLOTS TO DATE

The communique of the conference of East bloc communist Party leader, ostensibly devoted to problems of agricultural policy, contained a key phrase that focuses the issue of contention in the Communist countryside.

"The working peasantry is coming increasingly to realize, from experience, all the advantages of the collective forms of agriculture."¹

This touches on the nerve center of conflict between the Party and the peasantry since the collectivization of agriculture in the USSR and in the Eastern satellites - the issue of enforced socialist farming as against private farming. In some bloc countries the struggle has been institutionalized between the collective farms and privately owned farms. In the Soviet Union, and in the more collectivized satellites, the conflict has been polarized in the private plot of the collectivized peasant. And it is in the Soviet Union where the patterns of the quarter century conflict of interest can best be documented.² The most recent account of the ever-changing pressure in the private plots and reaction of the peasants comes from the Georgian republic. It stands in sharp contrast to the confident tone of the communique; "the advantages of collective forms of agriculture" have not been convincing to many Georgian farmers.

In the reports of the first secretary of the Georgian CC, V.P. Mzhavanadze, it was established that Georgian state and collective farms, alone of all the Union republics, did not fulfill their 1959 livestock products obligations.³ Earlier at the December plenum of the CC he had reported:

"During 1959 the CC of the CP Georgian Republic carried out a number of measures in regard to the regulation of private plots, the number of livestock kept for personal use...

"In spite of these measures we have been unable to reach a level where the number of communal livestock exceeds the privately owned cattle of collective farmers."⁴

¹Tass, 4 February 1960.

²For the series on Private Plots, see Background Information, 17 July 1959, 4 October 1958, 22 August 1959.

³Radio Tbilisi, 26 January 1960.

⁴Pravda, 25 December 1959.

For example, 65% of all the cows in Georgia are in private hands, the highest rate among all the republics. Chislennost skota v SSSR 1957, pp. 15,144; of hogs, 72%; sheep 30%. ibid., pp. 67, 151; 30,157.

When these indices are placed alongside yet another indicator of the economy, vineyards, the most valuable farm asset in the republic, of which 51.6% are privately owned,⁵ it becomes readily apparent why the private holdings command the support among the peasantry. No wonder Mzhavanadze complained of the weak labor discipline on the farms: 14.6 per cent (79,300) of the able-bodied kolkhozniks failed to work the compulsory minimum of annual labor days in 1958, and 5.4 per cent (30,600) of the able-bodied male and female collective farmers did no communal work whatever.⁶ This after 37 years of Soviet rule in Georgia!

Communal work on the collective farms offered few attractions, and prior to the 1953 reforms, most of the farms paid "scarcely one ruble a day and about a fourth of all the collective farmers in the republic received practically nothing from the kolkhozy."⁷ Nonetheless, because of high earnings from their private plots (as reflected by high prices on vineyard products, fruits, meats), Georgian peasants enjoyed a level of living among the highest in the Soviet Union since collectivization. The relative peace that has prevailed in the countryside, however, has on occasion been disturbed by half-hearted implementation of some of Khrushchev's farm policies. Grape owners were ordered to sell all marketable wine in 1958 to the State; livestock owners were subjected to persuasion to sell their stock to the central authorities.⁸ And finally, the private plots are now being ideologically re-examined but in the present implementation stage a distinctly Georgian ambivalent approach seems to prevail.

Mzhavanadze reports "many collective farms" cutting down the size of plots from .70-1.0 hectares to .25, .40, .50 hectares.⁹ In Abkhaz oblast, a leading fruit-tobacco region, kolkhoz meetings set the size from .25 to .50 hectares depending on soil and other conditions.¹⁰ Cow numbers were cut to one per household suggesting that more had been the rule; ten sheep or goats were recommended, while the density of poultry, rabbits and bees was unlimited.

What is unusual however, are the recorded cases of two collective farms¹¹ where the members convened in annual meeting voted to increase the size of the private plots from .20 to .33 hectares in the first case, and from .25 to .50 hectares on the second farm. These upward revisions were approved in principle by the Bureau of the Georgian CC. It seems unlikely

⁵ Background Information, 4th October 1958.

⁶ Radio Tbilisi, 26 January 1960. During the first three periods of 1959, more than 15% failed to work the required minimum of labor days (ibid.)

⁷ Pravda, 18 December 1958.

⁸ Background Information, 17 July 1959.

⁹ op. cit.

¹⁰ Radio Tbilisi, 27 January 1960.

¹¹ Eredvi village kolkhoz Stalin raion, and Kvemochala kolkhozy in the Kaspi raion. Radio Tbilisi, 13 Oct. 1959.

that this is general policy as the enabling decree of the CC, CPSU of 6 March 1956 on amending the kolkhoz statutes specifically limits the land devoted to private plots to an area less than the previous total for each farm. These voluntary group actions, if only in two recorded cases, demonstrate again the temper of collectivized peasantry on the primacy of the private plot and their ideological lag toward the "collective forms of agriculture." It is significant that no Georgian collective farm spokesman, let alone a Party leader, has "called for the voluntary abolition of the private plots as has been voiced in the Ukraine. On the 2,253 collective farms in Georgia - amalgamation has played no vital role (in 1957 there were 2302) - there appears no undue concern over the future of the private plots among the rank- and-file.

HOUSEHOLD ALLOTMENT FARMING

Comparisons of United States and Soviet Economies
Joint Economic Committee
Congress of the United States
Part I
Washington, 1959
Extract

While the dichotomy of the MTS and the collective farms was eliminated by Khrushchev's 1958 reform, another dichotomy remains; namely, the coexistence side by side of the large collective farm enterprise and the small household allotment farming (*priusadebnoe khozyaistvo*). The collectivist Leviathan has not swallowed as yet the individualist dwarf.

At first, a few words about the nature of the allotment farming. Peasant households in collectives as well as worker's families on state farms and some others are allotted small plots of land on which they grow potatoes, vegetables, sunflower seed, and other crops. These plots are allotted to a whole family and not to an individual member of the collective. This seems to be a survival of the old Russian institution of family property, although the plot, of course, is not legally owned by the peasant family; it is merely set aside for the family's use at the discretion of the collective. Furthermore all adult members of the household must do a certain amount of labor on collective farms or work in state enterprises to obtain the household allotment. The peasant households are also permitted to own a small number of livestock and an unlimited number of poultry. They can sell their produce direct to the consumers on the free, so-called kolkhoz market in the cities, but they cannot use middlemen.

Household allotment farms accounted for only 3 per cent of the sown area in 1956 but for a much larger proportion of the livestock population, including almost half of all the cows. Such allotments were originally conceived as a subsistence, "an acre and a cow" farming, merely auxiliary to the collectives' farm economy at a time when they were not considered strong enough to take care fully of their members' needs. As so often happens, "the tail began to wag the dog." The household allotments not only helped greatly to feed the collectivized peasant population, but they frequently became the chief, or the only, sources of the peasants' cash earnings through sale at higher prices (not the low government fixed prices) on the free kolkhoz market.

How important the free market was as a source of peasants' cash earnings during the Stalin era can be gathered from the fact that, for some years, at any rate, the volume of sales on the kolkhoz market, mostly by members of the collectives, exceeded total cash income of collectives. This "acre and a cow" farming, however, is important, not only for the economic welfare and morale of the peasants, but also for the food supply of the nonfarm population, especially the sale of livestock products - products sold not only through the kolkhoz market, but also through government controlled outlets. Even in 1957, when the share of allotment holdings in state acquisitions of agricultural products was considerably less than formerly, they accounted for 19 per cent of meat deliveries, 16 percent of milk, and 11 per cent of wool.¹⁸

¹⁸ Pravda, July 5, 1957. (Decree on abolition of compulsory deliveries by allotment holdings.

Yet the household allotment became a thorn in the Kremlin's side, since it competed with the collective farm economy for the labor and loyalty of the peasants. The official view, therefore, has been that, as the collective farming becomes stronger and better able to satisfy the needs of its members and of the nation, the importance of house-hold allotment farming should decline and eventually wither away. But, like the Soviet doctrine of the withering of the State - it is still in the future. Accordingly, the Soviet policy toward this kind of farming has been ambivalent, now restrictive, now relaxed - then again restrictive.

As during a short period in the mid-1930's under STalin, so in 1953 after the late dictator, the "thaw" in agrarian policy began with a more encouraging or tolerant attitude toward allotment holdings. The cumbersome money tax on allotment holdings was simplified and taxes reduced in the fall of 1953. Acquisition of cows by peasant households was facilitated. Compulsory deliveries of farm products to the government were first reduced and since January 1958 were entirely abandoned.

This new liberal phase again did not last long. In 1956, legislation was passed ostensibly for the purpose of permitting collectives to set up their charters without modeling them on the general model charter of 1935. The really consequential provisions of this law was to enable each collective to set its own minimum of labor, the size of the household allotments and the number of privately owned livestock. This was accompanied by a declaration favoring, indirectly but not prescribing, reduction of the size of the plots. Subsequently there had been cases of reduction of plots., some apparently for the purposes of equalization of such holdings between different families. But this has not assumed so far a mass character.

However, the government attitude toward private ownership of livestock, the most valuable component of household allotment farming, has become more restrictive in recent years, as was foreshadowed by Khrushchev in 1953 at the outset of the new post-Stalin course in agrarian policy. Khrushchev has been advocating during the last few years the sale of cattle by members to the collectives. He "recommended" to the peasants of his native Kalinovka to sell their cows to the model kolkhoz, and the "recommendation" was acted upon. But such liquidation is to be gradual with no definite time limited placed, depending upon when collectives are ready for the transition. Steps taken by authorities in some districts to hasten the process by pressuring the peasants were strongly rebuked. A much sterner attitude, however, has been adopted by the government toward private ownership of livestock by workers on state farms and by nonfarm population which is marked for elimination.

To sum up: household allotment farming is again being deflated. But, so deeply rooted is it in the rural fabric of the USSR, that it would be premature to conclude that its doom is near at hand.