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The following is a translation of an article by M. Mondich which appeared in the Radio Liberty Bulletin of 2 Sept. 1966. It concerns the story by B. Mozhaev "From the Life of Fedor Kuzkin" which was published in Novy Mir, No. 7 1966.

The Bolsheviks have always treated the peasants as a potentially hostile class. So it was before the Revolution, so it was afterwards. Even now the situation has not essentially changed - the Kholkhoz farmers are regarded by the Party leadership as the basic source of "private ownership tendencies."

As a consequence the peasantry has always been the class which was most exploited by the Party leadership. This exploitation caused resistance, and the resistance resulted in the use of repressive action against the peasants as a class. Until now there have been no literary works which accurately reflected the life of the peasant under Soviet rule. There have been individual attempts (the essays by Ovechkin, the stories by Soloukhin, the novel "Round and About" by F. Abramov etc.) which illustrated various aspects of peasant life but the whole truth has not yet been written.

Mozhaev's story also does not tell the whole truth, but nevertheless when compared with previous works it is a step forward.

Mozhaev, whose work has previously been printed in the magazine "Oktyabr" is known as an expert on peasant life. All his previous works have described the life of the collective farms. He is particularly well known for his work on Ryazan province. His essay "Experiments on the Land" which was published in Oktyabr No. 10 1964 correctly describes the life of the Kolkhoz workers there who are on the verge of ruin as a result of the "Ryazan Miracle." (This "Miracle" consisted of the following: the Oblast pledged itself to deliver almost four times more livestock products in the course of a year, the experiment failed, and the first secretary of the Oblast, Larionov, shot himself).

The action in Mozhaev's new story also takes place in Ryazan. It deals with the first years of collective leadership, after the death of Stalin. Fedor Fomich Kuzkin, a collective farmer, decided at the end of 1963 to leave the Kolkhoz. He was living with his large family

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in the village of Prudki and he was employed as a supplier of harness, nails, boards and other materials which at that time were hard to obtain. Fomich was skillful, he always supplied the goods, but being naturally honest he did not prosper, but on the contrary was extremely poor. The trouble was that although he was credited with many workdays, he received extremely little for them. Consequently after working for an entire year and earning 840 workdays together with his wife, he was paid only 62 kilograms of buckwheat. He had a family of seven - and that worked out at several grams of buckwheat per person per day, less than was supplied to feed a hen.

Fomich saw that this was unjust. The chairman of the collective farm, the brigade leaders, the bookkeepers and others who were part of the management were paid in cash with which they could buy the necessary goods on the market. But the collective farmers were paid in workdays in exchange for which they were given grain, vegetables and fruit. But after the deliveries of grain to the state and after payments into the farm funds, there was almost nothing left over for the peasants. And the children were demanding food. They did not know the meaning of state plans.

Fomich asked to be transferred to field work - because there it was possible to steal grain during the harvest. Every day you could bring back several kilograms in your pockets. But he had no luck.

Then he asked to leave the collective farm and began to work by himself - mowing the hay in private meadows in exchange for cash.

The chairman of the collective farm, Guzenkov, ordered Fomich to stop this type of work and to return to work on the farm. Fomich refused. Then the collective farm board of management (who were all Guzenkov's yes-men) expelled him from the farm. This brought a number of misfortunes in its train - he was deprived of his private plot, accused of idleness and brought before the court.

At first he was tried at a meeting of the rayon executive committee. The chairman of the committee, Motyakov, was a typical low grade party member - blindly carrying out the orders of the leadership which amounted to cruel exploitation of the collective farmers. The remaining members of the committee were the same kind of speed-up enthusiasts.

At the meeting of the executive committee Fomich said firmly that he would not work for nothing on the farm. If they would give him his passport he would find work somewhere else. At that time party policy

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did not allow this. The Kholkhoz workers were not allowed to leave the farms.

The session of the committee decided not to give Fomich a passport and as a warning to consider him as part of the private sector. As a private peasant^{he} would have to deliver to the state twice as much meat, milk, wool, eggs and other produce.

When Fomich protested against this decision, Motyakov rudely interrupted him:

"Say that again! I'll beat the whims out of you..... Once and for all. Put this down! 'In connection with the expulsion from the collective farm of Kuzkin Fedor Fomich, living in the village of Prudki he is to be transferred to the private sector and doubly taxed, i.e. the tax on his private plot of 0.25 hectares is to be multiplied by two. Namely he is to pay within one month 1700 rubles, 88 kilograms of meat, 150 eggs, 6 kilograms of wool or two hides....'"

Fomich snarled at the executive committee, despair lent him courage. Repeatedly he told his family that he had nothing to lose.

The executive committee sent his case to the rayon prosecutor's office. The young prosecutor, Fateyev, was very courteous during the interrogation but simultaneously evil. He wanted to have Fomich sentenced to one year in a concentration camp.

Fomich was insolent in his conduct to the prosecutor, as he had nothing to lose. However, on his return home after being refused permission to leave the farm he wondered about the outcome of the trial. If the old judge heard the case he would not avoid prison. The old judge never examined the essence of a case, he was only interested in imprisoning the accused for as long as possible. But if the young judge heard it, there was some hope for a favourable verdict.

Fomich was tried in his home village..... By using false witnesses the Kholkhoz board tried to prove that Fomich was an idler (but at that time he was already working as a guard on a neighbouring farm), and that he had ploughed some one else's private plot. In fact Fomich had ploughed a private plot, but it was his own which had been his from ^{time} immemorial. But the Kholkhoz board thought otherwise because on his expulsion from the farm Fomich had lost the right to a private plot. Fomich refused to accept this view, since he had the right to a

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plot of .15 hectares both as a worker and as a citizen of the USSR.

The prosecutor supported the Kholkhoz board, did not accept the arguments put forward by Fomich and demanded a sentence of corrective labor.

The Kholkhoz workers took the side of Fomich, and when it was discovered that the board had used false witnesses, the young judge acquitted him.

However his trials were not over. He had to seek regular employment. It was very difficult to move to a town with such a large family as his, since he had no money, no property and no food for the first few weeks.

But he was helped by kind people. He was given work for the summer at the loading ramp.

Fomich is sharply different from previous collective farm heroes in earlier Soviet novels. As a rule they were mostly passive people. They suffered all their torments in silence until their "redeemer" from the party oblast committee came to punish the guilty and bring happiness to the suffering peasants.

But Fomich is active, he answers his tormentors back, he baits them and speaks his mind openly. He is a great family man, he likes to work till he drops, he could not live even for a day without working, but he does not want to work for nothing, without his due reward.

He can be bad-tempered when he is hard driven, but in his heart of hearts he is a good man. He knows that people do not live only to work as Motyakov seems to think, but also to enjoy the good things of life.

In conclusion, a few words about the story as a whole. The first half of it is more boldly written. There are direct attacks on the policy of the party towards the collective farmers. The second half is weaker. Here Mozhayev seems to be apologizing for his sharp criticisms in the first part and trying to smooth things over. Yes, he says, Fomich had a hard time, but with the years things went better for him. He was driven, he was deceived, he was exploited but he never became disillusioned concerning the Kholkhoz system. When he was confronted with the question of where to go to build a better life he did not go to the cities, but to a neighbouring Kholkhoz which had a good chairman and where he could earn more.

Therefore, it may be assumed that Mozhayev's story will not provoke much angry criticism from the party.

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