

A Plea for the Team and New Pay System of the
Kolkhoz Charter

(See end for summary)

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Members of the present Politburo of the C.C., C.P.S.U., are infrequently given to granting interviews to the press, so when one of the eleven man ruling group consents to engage in a extended discussion on current issues with an editor of national paper it would appear the subject at hand is in need of an assist against ideological opponents not always specified.

Intended as a contribution to the national discussion on the draft version of the Model Kolkhoz Statute, G.I. Voronov, Politburo member and chairman of the R.S.F.S.R. Council of Ministers with his colleague Polyansky, the recognized spokesman for agriculture in the Politburo and the Central Committee, elaborated his views on two important subjects to the readers of the Youth Communist daily, Komsomolskaya Pravda. (1)

Both Voronov and Polyansky are generally considered as among the moderates in the ruling Party body and their position on resource allocation favorable to agriculture is a matter of record. In the present issue, Voronov's choice of the youth daily as against the conservative official paper of the Ministry of Agriculture, Selskaya zhizn, as the vehicle for his expression is a further commentary on his ideological position in the resources controversy.

In his interview Voronov argues at length on two important issues - measures the draft version of the Model Kolkhoz Statute permits each collective farm to choose from among alternative systems. Specifically they are the team or link system in the organization of farm labor units, and the unscheduled contract-bonus system of wage payment. That Voronov would support the link system was a foregone conclusion; the R.S.F.S.R. Council of Ministers, of which he is chairman, had previously passed a resolution approving the link system and the contract-bonus method of labor payment and

(1) 11 May 1969.

had further recommended that state and collective farms, and experiment stations, should (if possible) give both systems a try-out. (2) All communications media were instructed to disseminate the results achieved by the leading farms where the systems were successful.

The Link System of Labor Organization

The draft new model charter allows farms a choice in the organization of labor units:

Section 26 - The form of organizing production and labor by sub-farms, sections of farms, brigades, links and other production subdivisions are established and to be used by the collective farms depending on the farms specific conditions, the level of mechanization, specialization and technology of production. Collective farmers are recruited into productive groups according to their qualifications, experience, knowledge, place of residence, and personal preference. Land areas and fields, tractors, machinery, draft animals, basic structures and other means of production are allotted to the collective farm's productive work units for a number of years. The activity of the work units is based on the farm's internal regulations.

Voronov's appeal to the young people on the farms is directed at creating a system of labor organization where the final goal is the harvest itself. Individual operations (plowing, seeding, harvesting) are not a final product of labor, as in the case of industrial workers in a plant. In large complex brigades or sections, he argues, the labor unit is broken up into many hard-to-control operations. Many of the workers are cut off from the land and from the final result of their labor - the harvest. Even the piece work payment system contributes to this estrangement; the peasant tends to put in more time on the land in order to earn more, "to squeeze the hectare," regardless as to yield and cost of production.

Under the team/link system as developed by V. Pervitsky, Volgograd oblast, Voronov cites an impressive performance of both quantity and quality of the harvest. The mechanized team system is rather well known, but Voronov's illustration was a small unit of ten

mechanizers, performing the full cycle of field over 1600 hectares of grain crops. The yields were over 25 percent higher than in the district, 35 percent more than in the regions. A new wage principle, the normless, contract premium system, was introduced which eliminated unnecessary work, reduced costs, because it was based not on fulfillment of separate operations but in the final result, the harvest. Today, Voronov claims, the mechanized team system is widely disseminated in the big grain growing districts in the north Caucasus, Volga region, and other areas in the Federation.

Although the mechanized link system, in its several versions, has been in existence over ten years, and along with the state's agricultural development program, Voronov admits much remains to be done in creating a productive, efficient agriculture system. He cites Volgograd oblast, one of the largest farming regions, and which in the last four years has enjoyed bumper harvests, as a typical case. The oblast's agricultural system in the last decade received large quantities of fertilizer and equipment from the state; in 1958 the horse power available per worker totaled 8.1 hp, today it has risen to 17.3 per worker. This is undeniable progress, but how has it affected labor productivity, Voronov asks. Records show a striking and marked disproportion. While average earnings in agriculture rose 40 percent in ten years in Volgograd oblast, the labor productivity rose only 15 percent in the same period, Voronov declares. In his view, only the mechanized link system used in combination with the contract-bonus labor payment can substantially eliminate this disproportion.

Perhaps the most revealing insights of the Voronov interview was his disclosure that opponents of the link system were working against its adoption. He termed their arguments "outdated;" that the links would cause infringements on labor discipline, that the drive to earn more would strengthen proprietary interests, and would lead to overstrain in working and an urge to understate harvest plans by means in order to receive more for above plan output. These arguments have a resonance that is reminiscent of the opponents of the original link system, advocated by Politburo member Andreev

in 1939 and 1950. It appears Voronov is directing his counter claims against persons not at a lower level in agriculture but at policy makers at a higher level in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Central Committee. He concedes errors were made in organizing the links, "that certain leaders did not realize the need to give credence to able production organizers in deed, rather than in word," and that it is impossible to create a single system for all farms. These argumentative tactics, it would appear, are directed at persons at a higher level than farm administrators and reflect a running controversy over farm labor organization in highest party circles.

The Recommended Wage System:

normless, payment-by-the-job plus bonus system (beznaryadnaya akkordno-premialnaya sistema).

The draft proposal of the Kolkhoz Charter gives farms a choice of three systems for the payment of work done on the socialized sector of the kolkhoz. In general, all are based on remuneration according to the amount and standard of work contributed by each farmer into the communal economy. The three systems are: (1) the straight piecework rate for the amount of work carried out and output produced (till now the dominant choice); (2) the contract and bonus system, and (3) the time-rate system in accordance with fixed rates. All but the second involve setting norms and rates for specific kinds of work, these norms are usually set by the managers and specialists of the farms.

Voronov makes a persuasive plea for the normless, work contract plus bonus system developed by the innovator, V.Y. Pervitsky, to compliment the link system. The essentials of the system involve each team setting an output production plan for various crops to be grown, the limits of direct expenditure, and the projected level of output. The accumulated yields of previous years are to serve as a guide in setting the basic plan. During the year the team members are given an advance within limits of the wage fund worked out in accordance with the technological chart, and at the end of the year,

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when results have been assessed, an output calculation is made. In addition to this, the team receives part of the value of above-plan products for saving direct expenditure. The need for control, for daily measurement of work done, and for harvest protection disappears. Field operations are done according to the rule of performing only the minimum work necessary for the harvest, Voronov maintains. The only norms connected with the system are those plan targets based on a 5 year average performance, but as the yields increase the plan becomes higher. Thus it is not a precise formulation to call the system a normless one because the decisive plan for the team is based on past indicators of yield, costs, and inputs for each crop.

Balance Sheet

The mechanized team system and the contract plus bonus method of wage payment for collective farmers as advocated by Politburo member Voronov represent marked improvements over the rigid one system structure of the original Kolkhoz Charter of 1935. Under the Stalinist model there were no choices involved. Now, the farm leaders and membership may select from one of three systems of labor organization and wage payments. There is agreement that neither system is applicable everywhere in the Soviet Union. Voronov revealed that there is effective opposition to the systems he advocates, implying that it comes from high sources in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Central Committee. As the discussion on the Model Statute will continue until November, when the Third Kolkhoz Congress is to ratify the document, the old controversy between the brigade and the link system started by another Politburo member, Andreev, in 1939 will continue and serve as a splitting wedge between the shifting factions within the Politburo and Central Committee.

Summary: Among the moderates in the Politburo are the spokesmen for the agricultural interests in the USSR, Voronov and Polyansky.

Voronov recently granted a long interview in the youth daily where he extolled the benefits of two progressive measures, the team (zveno) system and contract-bonus payments for farm labor, which the draft version of the Model Kolkhoz Statute offers farms as choices.

Voronov revealed opposition to the two measures, presumably from high quarters: the Ministry and the Central Committee. Thus the controversy between the brigade and the link systems is still an issue that splits the shifting factions within the higher Party bodies, exactly as it did thirty years ago. It is unlikely the Kolkhoz Congress will decide the issue this fall.

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