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SOVIET FARM CHIEFS

Another changing of the guard at the USSR Ministry of Agriculture -- the third in two years, the sixth in ten years -- again points up the persistent and apparently insurmountable problems opposing the realization of the forced targets for developing Soviet agriculture. Lenin's dictum that "cadres decide all" has been faithfully followed by Khrushchev, with diminishing success, in his perennial talent hunt for able agricultural officials. Now the First Secretary has dismissed an experienced agro-apparatchik, K. G. Pysin, and appointed a virtually unknown sovkhoz director, I. P. Volovchenko, to be Minister of Agriculture (Pravda, 9 March 1963). Although the Ministry is no longer responsible for the overall administration of agriculture, it is still a vital administrative and policy-making agency, in charge of all research, education and the introduction of advanced practices into the mainstream of the agricultural economy.

In view of the important role agriculture has played in Soviet history, and given the one-man-responsibility principle in USSR economic management, a review of the officials who have been entrusted by the CPSU with the direction of agriculture since the second revolution (collectivization) is in order:

COMMISSARS or MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE  
SINCE COLLECTIVIZATION: USSR

<u>Name</u>	<u>Tenure of Office</u>	<u>Known Status</u>
Y. A. Yakovlev	Dec. 1929-May 1934	Perished (1939) in purge
M. A. Chernov	May 1934-Oct. 1937	Perished in purge (date?)
R. I. Eikhe	Oct. 1937-Apr. 1938	Executed 1940
I. A. Benediktov**	Nov. 1938-Dec. 1943	See below
A. A. Andreyev	Dec. 1943-Mar. 1946	Member, Presidium Supreme Soviet
I. A. Benediktov	Mar. 1946-Mar. 1953	See below
A. I. Kozlov	Mar. 1953-Sept. 1953	Retired after subsequent demotions
I. A. Benediktov	Sept. 1953-Oct. 1955	Ambassador to India
V. V. Matskevich	Oct. 1955-Dec. 1960	Chair'n Tselinny territory executive committee
M. A. Olshansky	Dec. 1960-Apr. 1962	Pres., Lenin-All Union Academy of Agric'l Sciences
K. G. Pysin	Apr. 1962-Mar. 1963	Unknown as yet
I. P. Volovchenko	March 1963	

Sources for the period from 1929 to 1943 are: Pravda, 4 May 1934, 30 June 1934, 8 July 1937, 30 October 1937; Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia, 2nd ed., No. 4 (1950, p. 596, and No. 49 (1957), pp. 532-3; Khrushchev's speech at the XXth Party Congress (1956).

Sources for subsequent years are too voluminous to list.

\*\* Benediktov was Eikhé's first deputy; he was acting commissar after the latter's arrest, 29 April 1938.

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This period of agriculture can be conveniently divided into two eras: Stalinist and Khrushchevian, each having six agricultural overlords.<sup>1</sup> The Stalin epoch covered a span of 23 years, and Khrushchev's a decade. Thus, the attrition among farm leaders was surprisingly greater in the Khrushchev period than in Stalin's time, with the vital difference, however, that Khrushchev's victims have survived and taken on lesser assignments. Stalin's first three commissars all fell as casualties in the purges.

In the newly organized Commissariat for Agriculture, the first People's Commissar was an old Bolshevik, Y. A. Yakovlev (Pravda, 9 December 1929). His main assignment was to liquidate the kulak as a class and lay the groundwork for the full collectivization of the peasantry. Under his direction Stalin stepped up the tempo of collectivization during the winter of 1929-1930, thus precipitating class warfare in the villages with tragic losses of life and property. This is the period, it is now admitted, which produced Stalin's "cult of personality," as a result of "excessive lawlessness, violations of socialist legality, and the establishment of an atmosphere of fear...."<sup>2</sup> Yakovlev was subjected to frequent criticism during his tenure, yet after his release in 1934 he moved into the Secretariat of the Central Committee. He was then caught up in the purge and perished in 1939.



With the appointment of Eikhe's young deputy, I. A. Benediktov, there began the longest, although twice interrupted, tenure of office of top agricultural officials. Benediktov directed both war-time and post-war agriculture for a total of almost ten years, save for a short stretch during the war when, at the 18th Party Conference in 1941, he was demoted from full to alternate member of the Central Committee, and replaced by the spokesman on agriculture in the Politburo, A. A. Andreyev. The latter was the only Politburo member - Commissar of Agriculture who survived the purge. However, he fell from grace in 1950 during the link vs. brigade controversy on the organization of kolkhoz labor. Benediktov, on the other hand, had the unusual distinction of serving under both Stalin and Khrushchev as agrarian overlord.

The first appointee in the post-Stalin reorganization of agriculture in 1953, was the old-time party agro-apparatchik, A. I. Kozlov. He lasted scarcely six months after "repeated failures," and Khrushchev had to call up Benediktov again, this time teamed up with one of Khrushchev's Ukrainian colleagues (Matskevich) as deputy minister. It was during this period that the great plow-up of the virgin lands was activated with Matskevich in nominal control. He took over as minister following a successful tour of the US to inspect agriculture; the veteran Benediktov was released by Khrushchev, ostensibly for "incorrect conduct" and "bureaucratic engulfment," but more likely by the need to break with all vestiges of Stalinism in agriculture.

The most pronounced growth in agricultural output was during the early Matskevich years, primarily as the result of 38 million hectares of virgin land being added to the total national farmland. The spatial expansion of cropland, changes in the cropping structure, higher prices to stimulate production, the sale of MTS farm machinery to the kolkhozy were some of the main economic factors that brought about the 43 percent rise in output between 1954 and 1958. Since 1958, however, the increment in output has been 1.2 percent, compared to the planned 7.9 percent annual growth envisaged by the 7-Year Plan. It came as no surprise, then, that in late 1960 Matskevich was removed as minister and sent out to the Virgin Lands Territory as head of the executive committee, where his fortunes are receding along with the declining yields of the plowed-up steppes. Little progress was made under his successors, Olshansky and Pysin, and in the recent major reorganization of agricultural production, the functions of the Ministry of Agriculture were restricted to research, education, and extension.

It is crystal clear from the roster of ranking agricultural administrators, that agriculture is a burial ground for an ambitious party activist in search of tenure at a high level. None has ever succeeded in using the Ministry of Agriculture as a stepping stone to the pinnacle power position of the party structure -- the Presidium. Only two ministers were ever members of the politburo (the equivalent of the Presidium), and

both achieved that distinction before they became the top agricultural heads. These were Andreyev (full member) and Eikhe (candidate member). Stalin, oddly enough, selected two of his commissars from among the politburo; but for Khrushchev, "that master of kolkhoz affairs," membership in the Central Committee is not even a prerequisite for the post. Stalin showed no regional nor ethnic preferences -- four of Khrushchev's appointees were Ukrainians or his former co-workers in the Ukraine. Once collectivization had been achieved and farm output had reached a state of equilibrium in the late 'thirties, Stalin showed no great interest in agriculture, so the turn-over of top and secondary agrarian personnel was minimal until 1953; Khrushchev, however, faced with the task of meeting his spectacular production targets, or being discredited in the process, has run through and plowed under agricultural administrators as his plows turned under the virgin soils. On the basis of the production record to date, this process will continue.

One final verdict -- in all the history of Soviet agriculture, no agricultural commissar/minister has yet been able to assure a sustained and abundant output of farm products -- an achievement that many western nations have long realized. The fault lies other than in management.

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