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KOLKHOZ CHAIRMEN (V)

Free Bread and Town Houses

In recording the rise and downfall of one of the leading personalities among rural leaders in the Soviet Union - Nikolai F. Lyskin, former chairman of kolkhoz Rossiya, Stavropol territory, in the north Caucasus - the final disposition of the case had been left upended. (see Background Information, 30 November 1959, "Kolkhoz Chairmen (IV) - Downfall of a Khrushchevian Symbol"). In substance, one of the most publicized farm leaders, head of a model collective farm, a pace-setting innovator, an impeccable symbol of Khrushchev's new organization man in agriculture had been unceremoniously dismissed from a kolkhoz chairman post by his own collective farmers as "a sycophant... trading speculator...for fraud against the State."¹ What distinguished the case from the usual chaff of discarded kolkhoz bosses were Lyskin's formidable achievements: Hero of Socialist Labor, member of Supreme Soviet, candidate member of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, holder of an advanced degree. In essence he was cast in the mould of Khrushchev's farm leader, educated, tooled with practical experience, a steadfast Party man. The hero's forced fade-out was fully recorded, but the depths of his downfall were unknown. On the contrary, the thought was expressed that the irrepressible Lyskin would pop up in another farming area where a harvest of 100,000 rubles a year was on the contour of probability.

Now a national literary figure provides the epilogue to the affair Lyskin. Fedor Panferov, following the furrows now fashionable among the literati of exploring the economic and ideological movements of the collectivized peasantry towards communism, returned to the Stavropol area for the first time since he witnessed the "difficult and stormy epoch of collectivization" 30 years ago. His contacts were mainly local Party officials and collective farm leaders - rank and file peasants are visible but not audible. - and his rambling sketch in Oktyabr magazine² provides bench-marks of the trend in the rural temper. From the chairman of the Pyatigorsk city council he learned that the nationally known Lyskin had not only been dismissed as kolkhoz chairman, but had been placed under arrest for

¹Izvestia, 28 August 1959.

²January, 1960, What is Communism? pp. 103-122.

embezzlement of kolkhoz property. All his numerous cohorts suffered the same fate. Lyskin, he found, was one of those operators more concerned in his own career than in working for the people. The city official summed up the verdict on Lyskin:

"The greed for primary accumulation consumed him: he earned a lot, built himself a home, in short acquired property, and moreover (with) an undue hue and cry - notoriety; all this combined to drive him on toward greater accumulation and even speculation."³

Here we have the profit motive given justification - the material incentive concept of the post-Stalin farm policy - but only permissible up to a point where speculation threatens the fiber of Soviet man. The validity of the private profit motif Panferov reflects in the work and attitude of one of Lyskin's colleagues and acknowledged friends, "on whom he exercised influence", another neighborhood kolkhoz chairman, Lutsenko,⁴ who was "very concerned over Lyskin's fate". He too had built himself a home in the resort town Pyatigorsk, "which he now would be glad to give up." Kolkhoz leaders building themselves town houses presents a sharp cultural switch from the urban pattern of building rural dachas!

Yet Panferov holds Lutsenko up as a model - as long as his sights are on building communism in the countryside the personal accumulation of property is legitimate. For Lutsenko has the obsession of fitting kolkhoz production into a factory production line", an approach to farming, Panferov ought to have remembered, that was a common panacea during the early years of collectivization.

But the dynamic contribution of Lutsenko's which Panferov fits into his road toward communism is free bread for the kolkhozniki. The average wage paid by the suburban collective farm headed by Lutsenko amounts to 25 rubles a day (not per labor day) and in addition to each ruble earned 100 grams of bread are issued free of charge. In the same way were issued sunflower oil, even meat (in unstated amounts); plans call for free issues of milk, fruit, vegetables in the future.⁵ To Panferov this is communism:

"Here Lutsenko has been administering the collective farm for thirty years and it never dawned on him till now that with these "gratisses" he had found the road to a communist society. People working honestly in collective labor...create the wealth of a kolkhoz and are entitled to receive food products without cost, especially bread, the basic food."

³Ibid, p. 120.

⁴Proletarskaya Volya kolkhoz.

⁵Op. cit., p. 121.

"When the kolkhoznik works on the communal sector he is a collectivist, when he works in the private field he is a man of property."

"Naturally all private property corrodes the will of mankind. But do you propose to do away with the peasant's cottage?"

"Yes, by building two - three storied communal houses with all amenities... Let the farmer live in city comforts... A factory-like order of production must be introduced. Therein lies the real path to communism."

To the forty-five odd million collective farm workers earning on the average 4-5 rubles cash per labor day, supplemented by 2-3 rubles worth of payments in kind, the affluence of free bread and high wages of a preferential collective on the outskirts of the Caucasian resort spas presents no powerful incentive towards climbing the road to communism. To the elite of kolkhoz chairmen, however, the prospect of a town house (non-communal) is a real blazer on the reverse path towards communism in the countryside.

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