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"TOWARD THE PLENUM" (III)

Kolkhoz Chairman Vs. the Minister

The recorded judgments of collective farm chairmen on the state of agriculture are common coin in the Soviet press. Their convertibility, however, lies in the sharply focused picture they present to the world of the realistic conditions confronting agricultural development in the Soviet Union as against the formalized reports of the Central Statistical Administration and the laudatory perorations of high Party officials. The best of this harvest of comment is readily differentiated from the chaff.

In an unusually personalized letter to "dear Nikita Sergeevich," a former deputy regimental commander of the Red Army, one of the famous "thirty-thousanders," who in 1955 "answered the call of the Party" to take up duties as leaders of backward collective farms, sums up his five years' experience on the kolkhoz front in a 14-point thesis on what's wrong with Soviet agricultural policy. Given the personalized approach, "beg you, dear Nikita Sergeevich...I hope I don't offend you with my frankness" along with the prominent display given the letter in the Central Committee's daily rural paper,¹ indicates that the author and his thesis are clearly above the usual functional appeal of prominent Party officials.

S. Davidyuk took over the management of a backward kolkhoz in Kiev Oblast² and in five years the farm's output rose by 2-3 times. Despite this record, nonetheless, the former army officer, who now considers his work as kolkhoz chairman "more difficult and demanding" than his duties as a front line combat officer during the war, still considers the farm backward and his primary accusation for the state of affairs is given with obvious understatement.

"Under the present conditions of farm policy it will be very difficult to catch up with the leading, economically strong collective farms."

This concept is counter to Khrushchev's belief that cadres -- not capital -- decide all. So capital limitations

¹ Selskaya zhizn, 13 December 1960.

² Kolkhoz Lenin, in the village of Sulimovka, Baryshevskaya raion, about 50 km east of Kiev, in what appears an advantageous area near to the markets.

consign the backward collectives to a near permanent status of poverty. The advanced farms have State credits readily at their disposal for investment and labor-day payments, but those farms without cash and ready capital assets are given short shrift by banking authorities. Even the chairmen of the front-ranking farms are held in "greater esteem" by the Party and State than the heads of the poorer farms, a distinction not justified by the relative capabilities of the managers. This could be a new version of the class struggle between the kolkhoz managerial elite.

The existing discrimination by the State in granting credits and other resources is given a new slant by Davidyuk. He cites a nearby case where several collectives were summarily transformed into a state farm; at once credits and new machinery appeared in abundance. "If you compare the machines of our kolkhoz with the new state farm's, it makes us look as if we were in another world."

"New machinery has become expensive. Accordingly, Nikita Sergeevich, all farms should be equally supplied machinery on the basis of long-term credits."

"It is known to everyone that the leading collective farms created their wealth through large grants of credits from the State. Now they too the farms should help the more backward.... They should now furnish herds of foundation livestock to the backward farms...not at State expense, but at the cost of the economically strong farms..."

Even in the new inter-kolkhoz building organizations, the distribution of the supply of building materials is determined by the capital each farm contributes. Thus, Davidyuk complains, the poorer farms unable to invest a sizeable character levy are starved out in obtaining essential construction material so they are forced to repair and store their machinery out in the open for poverty of building material. And the high cost of inadequate repairs charged by the State repair stations force the farms into such costly practices.

In the overall administration of agriculture, Davidyuk presents a rather novel innovation -- the regional sovnarkhoz should take over the direction of agriculture as well as industry. "Somehow the sovnarkhoz is closer to its enterprises than our Ministry of Agriculture is to us kolkhoz chairmen." He cites the Ukrainian Ministry of Agriculture as having eleven deputy ministers, but in the past five and one-half years Davidyuk "has not seen one deputy minister on the farm or in the raion, or even at an oblast conference, even if in the presidium of a conference."

Davidyuk seconds Khrushchev's criticism of USSR Minister of Agriculture V. V. Matskevich at the December plenum last year, and adds that Matskevich "used to be more active somehow

and appeared in the press, but now for some reason he is silent."3 Hard on the heels of this criticism comes another attack on Matskevich's ministry of agriculture. This time, in the same paper, a group of pace-setting farm workers ask in a signed declaration: "Why has the USSR Ministry of Agriculture with its army of experts not yet become a genuine center for the dissemination and introduction in production of the experience of advanced workers?"4

In the drive to make Soviet farming units profitable, farm managers have been driven to adopt "advanced" merchandizing practices. Davidyuk describes with feeling such cases:

"I consider that collective farms should be concerned with production, not trading. At our oblast conferences these chairmen are actually praised for delivering

3 "Attacks on Matskevich are not new. This past April at the 4th congress of officials of the trade union of workers and employees of agriculture and deliveries 'delegates were astonished that Minister V. V. Matskevich was absent...and that he was not even at the preceding congress.' (Trud, April 2, 1960). In July Matskevich was attacked in Stroitel'naya Gazeta (July 13) for the fact that in opening up the Hungry Steppe new-comers did not stay due to the lack of bearable living conditions -- he had consented to the building of three-storied houses while 'the Central Asian peasant has a deep attachment to the soil. It is hard for him to live in a three-storied house, without access to his soil, to his little plot.' The newspaper also did not fail to note that Matskevich took only a bird's-eye view of the building site:

"Several weeks ago, a helicopter flew over the Hungry Steppe. It hovered over the Yangi-Yer, over the sovkhos settlements, over the canal under construction. V. V. Matskevich, USSR Minister of Agriculture, and A. A. Sarkisov, Chief of the Main Hungry Steppe Building Project, sat in the cabin. Of course, this bird's-eye view did not reveal any flaws of the construction. Nevertheless, the huge site and the offensive against the desert were discernible." -- (Cited from Radio Liberty Bulletin, 20 December 1960.)

4 Ibid., 16 December 1960.

strawberries and cucumbers by airplane to Leningrad, and lining their pockets with millions. Such chairmen are considered progressive."

To Davidyuk, and Khrushchev will agree, they are not progressive chairmen but "people with old ideas."

Besides going over the familiar furrows of agrarian policy on lack of spare parts, restricting the size of private plots to less than .60 hectares, the need for permanent, trained cadres on the farms, Davidyuk winds up his paean to his chief:

"You, Nikita Sergeevich, some time ago said that a collective farm congress should be convened to decide the issues of the kolkhoz charter and other questions.

"All others have held their congresses, but not the collective farmers. I consider that such a congress should be convened."

It is a plausible conclusion that the stature and ideas of Davidyuk may be more evident at the kolkhoz congress, whenever it is called, than those of Matskevich.

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