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THOUGHTS ON THE KOLKHOZ MODEL CHARTER

Summary: Following a decade of speculation and three years' work by a top level commission containing almost all of the USSR's leading luminaries, except the progressive agricultural economists, a draft of the new kolkhoz charter has finally been released for general discussion and eventual adoption by the Third Kolkhoz Congress to convene this fall. The current document essentially codifies existing regulations, decrees, and practices. There are no break-throughs in Kolkhoz policy -- much of the old remains, but progress is recorded. There are opportunities for a progressive management to exploit the stated rights to improve farm operations, but much depends on the quality of management at the farm level working without hindrance from other agencies.

After over three years of deliberation, a 149-man blue ribbon committee under the chairmanship of L. I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the CC, CPSU, has released the draft of a new decree on The Model Statute of the Collective Farm (agricultural artel). (1) The draft was approved by the Central Committee of the CPSU for general discussion before being submitted for approval in November of this year to the Third All-Union Congress of Collective Farmers.

The new draft updates the obsolescent rules of procedure for operating the collective farms that were originally established under Stalin in 1935. Much of the substance of the old law has

(1) Pravda, 24 April 1969.

been gradually superseded by specific decrees, particularly during the post-war period, so that the current document up for discussion essentially codifies existing practices. (2)

Since 1935 the collective farm system has undergone considerable growth. The average Kolkhoz farm was originally comprised of about 30 families farming 150 hectares of land and depending on an unstable machine supply from the MTS: today's kolkhozy now average 418 households operating 1500 hectares of land with their own cooperative machinery and a staff of specialists. There are now 36,200 kolkhozy, amalgamated and enlarged with other farms on which live 15.3 million families accounting for over 55 million people. The cooperative farms, along with the householders' private plots, account for 60 per cent of the Soviet Union's agricultural output. A significant cultural change has also taken place in the countryside: where most of the peasantry were scarcely literate at the time of collectivization, today one-third of the collective farmers have had a secondary education, some even a higher education. (3)

An immediate view of the new charter's preamble shows a striking difference compared with the original 1935 decree. Gone are the appeals for the class struggle against the kulaks, the exploiters, and class enemies. The new Statute's appeal is directed to the collective peasantry to work with the Communist Party for the general improvement of Soviet society. Only once is the CP mentioned, but then in its leadership role. It is significant that the term "collective peasantry" is used in the document, following Brezhnev's custom. It had been thought likely that hereafter this rather pejorative term would be deleted from State documents and the expression "collective farmers" (kolkhozniki) would be prescribed. Khrushchev in his later years followed this pattern. Maynard, the English social scientist, was greatly impressed with the substitution of the old term with the new during his tours in the USSR during the mid-thirties. But Brezhnev's committee held to the historic term and the new generation of mechanically-minded farmers may consider this an anachronism.

This paper will not take up all 61 sections of the draft charter, but will concentrate primarily on the new features and major divergences of the new document from the 1935 original. The numbers in brackets used in the text refer to the respective sections of the 1969 draft.

(2) SEE RFE Research report "A Preliminary Appraisal of the New Kolkhoz Charter," 25 April 1969, by cz, for an early appraisal.

(3) Pravda, 25 April 1969.

The Issues

The opening sentence of the preamble dispels the thought of any takeover of the collectives by the state farms. The document states that: "Collective farming is an inalienable part of Soviet socialist society" and constitutes the means for the gradual transition to communism. This definite declaration would also seem to preclude the gradual merging of the two systems into a state farm structure as is suggested from time to time in the Western world.

On kolkhoz membership, any citizen of the Soviet Union, 16 years of age, who expresses a desire to contribute his labor toward the social development of the collective farm may now become a member. Apparently this clause applies to adolescent members of the family willing to remain on the land, although in the past they were hereditary beneficiaries of membership. Gone are such odious requirements as poor peasant background, the exclusion of disfranchized persons, departed kulaks and others as a requirement for membership. On the delicate issue of the voluntary termination of membership, the old charter was silent. The new charter [7] now allows a member to submit a request of withdrawal from the kolkhoz which must be acted upon by the management and a regular meeting of the general assembly of the farm within three months. A final accounting is also required to be made within three months after the fiscal year for each member leaving. It must be said the Soviets have at last faced up to the issue of leaving the land in their charter, but then many millions of young kolkhozniki have found effective means to migrate into industry since the war. It's unlikely the flow will be stemmed by the words of the charter.

On funding of the farms' operations, the financial resources are to be divided between two funds: capital and turn-over funds. These sums are to be indivisible, that is, not to be distributed to the members. This sharp delineation of cash funds will disappoint those who argued there could be no way of raising rural labor income to urban levels unless a set share of the gross income was set aside for specific labor payments. The draft merely says that the wage fund is supplied from the gross income of the farm [36].

For the first time there appears in the kolkhoz charter the right of a member to contest in court a decision of the kolkhoz board of directors. This privilege is novel and a gesture toward the democratic process but it does not amount to challenging the Establishment. The right to appeal to a peoples' court is limited to a collective farm member who has been charged with the loss, damage, or negligence of kolkhoz property and is being levied a charge for compensation. The appeal is limited strictly to setting the amount of the alleged damages done, not the principle of fining a member for ill-use of cooperatively owned property. (4)

(4) The right to appeal is also granted to members threatened with expulsion, however not to a court, but to the district executive committee for adjudication. [35]

Production and Finance

The operations of each farm will be based upon the plan approved by the general meeting. This plan considers the farm's capabilities in fulfillment of state functions, agreement on the delivery of agricultural products, the development of the communal economy, and the satisfaction of members' material and cultural needs. [14] The stress in the charter lies with expanding intensification and specialization of production in the drive for maximizing farm output. There are no directives as to what and how to produce products, that decision is reached by the board and representatives of state agencies. So a farm is scarcely free to choose what and how much to produce (apart from specialized crops) or to concentrate on a profitable crop, as long as state agencies participate and influence farm planning. The interests of state agencies and the economic welfare of the farms are not identical in the Soviet planning process.

The new model does offer greater room for a farm's activities. The farms are urged to set up auxiliary enterprises and handicraft trades to provide work in the off-season. They may also enter into agreements with industrial enterprises and trade groups to establish branches and shops for the production of various articles by the farmers during periods when they are free from regular farm work [17]. Another new feature of the draft charter is the right of the farms to pool part of their assets with local soviets, state farms, and other state or cooperative organizations for the purpose of constructing on the kolkhoz, on a cooperative basis, buildings for production or cultural usage [19]. There may be a threat to a farm's identity inherent in this relationship, but it does offer greater employment opportunities to under-employed collective farm members, particularly women, adolescents, and the older members.

Labor Payment and Discipline

The length of the working day, the order for holidays and vacations, and also the minimum labor participation in the communal economy are governed by the kolkhoz's internal regulations. These are set by the board and confirmed by the general meeting. Payment of labor is by piece work rate for a volume of work carried out, output produced, or by contract and bonus, or by a time-rate system in accordance with fixed rates. The norms and rates are developed and raised by the kolkhoz board of directors. A guaranteed remuneration of labor is set forth but without a specific amount. It is to be paid in cash monthly or, with payments in hand, as the crops are gathered. Incentive payments are provided for and each farm sets this schedule.

The titles of "Merited Collective Farmer" and "Collective Farmer of Distinction" will hereafter be awarded to members for outstanding performance.

In the crucial issue of income distribution, it will be seen, the prerogative of the farm board of directors working together in planning the production-financial plan with representatives of state planning, procurement, and financial agencies is clearly decisive in formulating the minimum wage, and the total wage, paid to the members for work done in the communal sector. External factors will hardly play a role in deciding the wage level for collective farmers, as they do on state farms.

The labor fund of each farm is derived from the gross income obtained from all production sales. Some economists had advocated that a definite share (50-60 per cent) of the gross income should be allocated to the labor fund. The new charter, however, states that all primary operating expenses and the labor fund shall flow from the gross income fund. Net income shall provide for payments to the state, capital for basic and working funds, and social services. Old age pensions will be provided from central union funds to which the cooperative contributes.

Private Plots

The right to a private plot of land is clearly defined in the new charter. Each collective farmer's family - the household - may have possession of a house, building, productive livestock, poultry, bees, and other small animals. The precise formulation in the old and new charters compare as follows:

Private Plots

<u>Old</u>	<u>New [42]</u>
"may vary from 1/4 hectare to 1/2 hectare (exclusive of the size of the house) and, in some cases, to one hectare according to local conditions."	"may be had for use as a garden, orchard, or other purposes up to 0.5 hectares, including land occupied by buildings, and on irrigated farms up to 0.2 hectares."

[emphasis supplied]

It will be seen that the actual size of productive land allocated to private farming is less than before. This gap could be offset, however, by the wider use of the farm's machinery and resources which the charter stipulates for the private plots. But the lack of small-scale tractors and machinery on the collectives may well limit the scope of the assistance available.

The comparison between the old and new charters on the number of livestock a kolkhoz household may own privately follows:

Old	New [43]
<u>General Farm Regions</u>	(No designation by regions)
1 cow w/ 2 calves	1 cow w/ calf to 1 year and 1 head to 2 years
1 sow w/suckling pigs or 2 sows w/suckling pigs	1 sow w/ suckling pigs to 3 months or
10 sheep or goats	2 pigs on feed; or
any amount of poultry, rabbits, hives	10 sheep, goats; chickens and hives

Livestock Regions

- 2-3 cows and calves
- 2-3 sows and suckling pigs
- 20-25 sheep or goats

any number of poultry, rabbits, and hives

There is no discernible improvement registered after 34 years; in fact, a distinct regression appears to have been created. The number of breeding females is limited in the new draft, since they are the source of reproductive accumulation in livestock raising, it follows that there will be fewer offspring. It was the concentration of productive females that had made the private plots such dependable sources of young fattening animals. Assistance with supplying feed and fodder to the private herds is spelled out in the charter.

The size of the plot and the number of livestock in private ownership are set by the kolkhoz charter, subject to the special conditions pertaining to regions as established by the decision of the council of ministers of the inner republics.

Management

The administration of the farm business is carried out on the basis of "wide democracy," the new charter avers. The general meeting is still the supreme organ of the collective farm administration; it now is required to meet at least four

times a year, rather than annually. At these meetings all the essential issues in administration are decided on or approved. On large farms where a general meeting would be difficult, representatives are elected from the brigades and other groups to represent the members at the general meeting. The kolkhoz chairmen on the board now serve a term of three years, and are elected directly by the general assembly in secret of open balloting. Whether this will conflict with the Party statute that the kolkhoz chairman is carried on the "nomenklatura" of the obkom is not established, but chairman assignments have not been known to be delegated to other bodies. "Raikom proposes, raikom disposes," has been the operational ethic in kolkhoz selection of its leader.

Members of a kolkhoz brigade elect their own brigade leader as well as a council of the brigade who work together with the farm board on specific management problems. This is a new feature and may well make for a greater expression of autonomy at the brigade level. It is a loss, however, that the team or link system is not emphasized in the entire document.

Changes and amendments in the collective farm charter are provided for in the new draft, whereas in the old it was a complicated procedure.

Balance Sheet

After nearly 35 years' experience with collective farming, the new draft statute reflects the minimum changes needed for the gradual transition to a full mechanized, technologically-oriented agriculture. The main task in Soviet agriculture is still to solve the grain problem in its entirety, and to assure high and stable yields of products at minimum cost. Compared to the revolutionary upsurge in agro-technology and food production achieved in the Western world during the last 35 years, the Brezhnev committee's effort for a modern charter is a distinctly conservative document. It falls far short of a sort of Peasants' Bill of Rights -- the urgent need of the times. The Brezhnev document reconciles for the time the interests of the hard-liners with those of the moderates in the priority scale of resource and preference alignments in the national economy. To the literary agrarians and the economists, the charter falls far short of their proposals for egalitarianism between farm and urban workers. The months of discussion ahead will have no appreciable impact on changing the statute. The charter reflects the political temper of the time in the Kremlin: caution and conservatism.

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