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Research and Evaluation Department  
Background Information USSR

2 March 1962

TOWARD THE PLENUM

Compared to the cascades of comment which appeared in the Soviet press prior to previous agricultural plenums of the Central Committee, CPSU, the public discussions on farm policy on the eve of the March 5 session of the CC are a meager harvest of rather unoriginal proposals.

The pre-plenum discussions in the press are designed to prepare the seed-bed for the crop of proposals and decisions of the CC, on the overt theme of the session "to improve the management of agriculture." Although Khrushchev called for a "radical reorganization of our agriculture" at the post-Congress regional agricultural meetings during the winter, there have been no extreme measures presented apart from his own inspired anti-grasslands campaign. With this exception, if fully implemented, there is not much likelihood that any radical change will be instituted in the overall structural and functional model of Soviet agriculture. The last series of revolutionary innovations were introduced four years ago: the 1958 MTS take-over by the collective farms, the introduction of a unified higher price schedule for farm products, and the abolition of compulsory deliveries in favor of a direct purchase system of products of the farms. Since then the Kremlin has adopted a more cautious and conciliatory policy toward its peasantry.

One record harvest does not solve the recurrent farm problem in Russia, Khrushchev has learned. Following the third consecutive year of failure to meet the ambitious production plans of the seven-year plan, an 8 percent planned rise each year compared with the average of 1.4 percent actual growth in annual output, a "Time of Troubles" has descended on the already chronically plagued, under-productive agricultural economy whose solution, in Khrushchev's words, requires a revolutionary reorganization.

What harvest, other than a hortatory and propagandistic one, can be anticipated from the March plenary session of the Central Committee, with the largest membership in Soviet history of 175 full members and 155 candidate members? The emphasis, most likely will be on processes rather than policy: on changes in the cropping structure, efforts to create multi-level incomes by way of supplementary payments to farm workers,

on granting greater responsibility to local farm managements in the planning and administration of production problems. In the area of institutional changes, however, no vital reorganization seems forthcoming. The Procurements Committee, perhaps the most hated of Soviet rural authorities, will undoubtedly be changed, perhaps eliminated, on the state farms. With the kolkhozy, on the other hand, there can be no lifting of procurements control; perhaps the apparatus may be merged into existing inter-kolkhoz associations which now extend into virtually all collectives. On the crucial private plots front, there will be no punitive action -- such pressure comes only after record harvests.<sup>1</sup>

The main thrust will be on two fronts: grasslands and incentives. Given to the spectacular when faced with persevering problems, Khrushchev resorts to dramatic innovations whenever possible. He has ordered the plowing up of vast crop areas formerly occupied by grass, oats, and rotational fallow land for seeding this year to inter-tilled row crops: corn, peas, fodder beans, and sugar beets. The object is to expand the area planted to grains and fodder crops -- mainly to provide more feed for the lagging livestock programs. There were 64 million hectares of cropland utilized by "low producing crops" and fallow land last year,<sup>2</sup> which will provide this land. No further reclamation of new lands is planned. Just how many of the potential 64 million hectares (29% of the total arable land) will be seeded down to the row crops this year is an object of the meeting. For 10 million additional

<sup>1</sup> An unusual item appeared in the discussions from Moldavia. A Kaumansk raion official reported that the average size of the private plots varies from 0.2 to 0.35 hectares, all planted to grapes. The average yield is from 2 to 5 tons of grapes, or 1.5 to 3.5 tons of wine -- worth up to 3,000 rubles. This income from private farming must be compared to the USSR average income, cash and kind, from communal work on the collectives. In 1960, this sum totaled 4,100 old rubles per household, or 9 times less than the Moldavian raion's average! Small wonder the peasant clings to his private holdings.

The official continued: of the 40,000 able-bodied collective farmers in the raion, 2,500 to 2,700 do no communal work whatever, and 5,000 do less than the compulsory norm. For all the average number of days worked during the year was 140-150 days. (Selskaya zhizn, 23 February 1962)

<sup>2</sup> 1961 Cropping Structure comprised:

Total arable cropland.....	204.6 mil. hec.		
of which seeded to grain.....	128	"	"
grasses, peren-			
nial and annual	36	"	"
oats.....	11	"	"
fallowland.....	17	"	"

(Ekonomika selskogo khozyaistva, No. 1, 1962, p. 13.)



hectares to be plowed, prepared and seeded down is a massive undertaking that calls for additional demands on more machines and mechanizers, seed, fuel, and fertilizer. Row crops are the most costly of the cultivated plants in agriculture, and unlike grasslands, have exact fertility requirements to ensure normal growth. While the fertilizer shortage remains acute and the time is short, Khrushchev will drive home the need to mobilize the party and state organs to supervise and carry out the expanded cropping area. Just a ten percent expansion in the seeded grain area will require, in many areas, a 15 percent marginal input of men, machines, and seed. (There are slightly above one million tractors operating in Soviet agriculture.) Clearly the grasslands plow-up represents a big operation in logistics and organizational procedures and Khrushchev is mobilizing party resources to command the offensive.<sup>3</sup>

The crisis in incentives among farm workers will again be formally faced, but as with previous plenums, no solid solution can be forthcoming. Kolkhoz incomes have remained static since 1958, and with the diminution of income from the private plots, net farmers' income has actually decreased since 1958. First Secretary Podgorny of the Ukraine reported good results last year with a modified share cropping system, whereby workers were paid in farm produce for their share of a crop which met the planned output. Kazakhstan also instituted this policy last year but the harvest failure precluded any sharing of the crop. A recent Kommunist (No. 2, 1962) account advances a novel rationale for part payment in kind, in that peasants ought not to have "to buy their own products from the farms" as happens under the all-cash wage schedule in use on the more advanced kolkhozy.<sup>4</sup>

The attraction of payments in kind apparently remains as strong as ever -- even in the face of the modest increase of consumer goods available in the villages. This recognition of the principle of paying the collective farmers a share, however modest, of the crop is a full circle reverse from Khrushchev's admission at the 1958 plenum, following the record harvest of that year, that he was "not an advocate of high labor-day payments."<sup>5</sup> This statement the First secretary would gladly forget, for the crucial issue of supplementary payments, given the existing low returns from communal work, will be the primary interest among the rank-and-file farm workers; the grasslands issue belongs to the officialdom.

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<sup>3</sup> See Background Information USSR, "K's Plan to Reorganize Nature," 6 December 1961 for an analysis of the risks involved in replacing grasslands with soil depleting crops.

<sup>4</sup> In the RSFSR one-fourth of the collectives are on a cash wage basis while three-fourths are still tied to the labor-day system. (Sovetskaya Rossiya, 25 January 1962.)

<sup>5</sup> Pravda, 18 December 1958.

Just where the funds for supplementary wage payments are coming from is a moot issue -- thus far, only the rich and favored farms have had resources for such undertakings. The state will not likely subsidize the venture; so in all eventualities the cost will be out of the aggregate income of the kolkhozy.

The prolonged struggle of the Soviet regime against its peasantry indicates that reorganizations and applied technology are not enough to bring about abundant yields in farm output to meet the demands of the growing Soviet consumers. Vast capital and human inputs are necessary to improve peasant incomes and boost output. Of the former there is a chronic scarcity, on which the latter depends. In the final analysis, Khrushchev just doesn't have the resources to lift his agriculture out of the doldrums. No amount of oratory, decisions, and cajoling can take the place of sound economic/social theory and practice.

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