

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR: Agriculture

11 November 1965

### THE FLIGHT FROM THE LAND IN FIGURES

Of the many disclosures made during the March Plenum of the C.C., CPSU, Akhundov's comments on the state of affairs in the rural areas of Azerbaidzhan deserve a high priority. V.Y. Akhundov has been the First Secretary of the Azerbaidzhan C.C. since 1959, and he is only 49 years old. Of the same generation as Mazurov, Polyansky and Shelepin, he showed himself to be no proponent of state farms and an advocate of the kolkhoz-cooperative system.

More significantly he sought to identify the real causes of the mass migration from the land, which Brezhnev had attributed in his keynote speech largely to the lack of public services in the countryside. Akhundov commented that in 1963, 42% of Azerbaidzhan's population was engaged in agriculture and also told the Plenum that

26% of the able-bodied population in our republic is occupied in domestic or private business.

[Emphasis supplied]

This astonishingly high proportion of non-socialized Azerbaidzhanis should be seen in relation to the total population, which is now about 4,520,000. Akhundov was in fact implying that some half a million Azerbaidzhanis of working age have either not yet found jobs in the state or kolkhoz systems, or are not available because of their domestic duties. In addition the proportion appears to be rising due to technological unemployment, because in the next breath Akhundov added:

Moreover, as a result of expanding mechanization, people are being released from work.

[Emphasis added]

One of Akhundov's major headaches is the astonishing fertility of the ladies of Azerbaidzhan. The birth-rate in his rural areas is 5.7%, compared with 2.7% elsewhere in the more advanced republics. Consequently he asked the Plenum to authorize a policy of varying the level of subsidies for schools, creches, kindergartens and housing in accordance with the local birth-rate.

Of the four thousand population centres in Azerbaidzhan, 2000 have fewer than 100 inhabitants. These villages, according to Akhundov, have neither schools, water, hospitals, polyclinics, clubs nor heating. Under the circumstances the awesome rate of the flight from the land is readily understandable.

#### The Wage Gap

Another major motive accelerating the migration to the cities is the large wage gap between the incomes of peasants and workers. On this subject a compelling statement was made by I.S. Gustov, the First Secretary of Pskov Oblast. Gustov rules over about 900,000 people, and in his kolkhozy the number of able-bodied farmers has fallen from 200,000 seven years ago to about 110,000 in 1964. The annual average rate of loss is therefore more than 10,000, and although he told the Plenum that in 1964 the loss had been reduced to 3,500 he added pointedly:

If under the present state of affairs the loss of able-bodied people in the countryside continues at the same rate, in 10 years time there would be no able-bodied farmers left in the kolkhozy.

[Emphasis supplied]

Low wages are the primary reason for the mass migration in Pskov Oblast. Gustov reported that:

On 1 January 1965, the monthly pay of an able-bodied kolkhoznik in Pskov Oblast was 29 rubles 20 kopecks. The average monthly pay for a sovkhov

worker was 54 rubles and for an industrial worker it was 83 rubles. We do not have any of the industries in which pay is higher, such as coal-mining, metallurgy etc.

What happens then, comrades? A man leaving the kolkhoz to work in a sovkhos gets twice as much, and if he goes to industry he will improve his economic conditions three times over ..... The kolkhozniks know this well, and they try by every means to leave the kolkhozy and go to industry or sovkhosy.

Added to the alarming wage gap, to the lack of services and of electricity in the rural areas, the inadequate housing program is one of the driving forces behind the flight from the land. V.V. Grishin, the Chairman of the AUCCTU who is also a candidate member of the Presidium, criticized in his speech to the Plenum the fact that between 1961 and 1964 the rate of building of individual houses for the peasants had been reduced by one-third.

In the light of Akhundov's, Gustov's and Grishin's remarks, it seems inevitable that the migration to the cities will continue on a large scale, though probably not as fast as in the years prior to 1964. However many billions of rubles Brezhnev and Kosygin may pour into fertilizers, irrigation, farm machinery and farm buildings, the drain is likely to go on until the wage gap between town and country can be significantly reduced. The introduction of pensions for kolkhoz workers was a step in the right direction, but it was not enough. Now what is needed is a sustained effort to raise real incomes in the rural areas, but that implies as a corollary that the rise of living standards in the town will have to be slowed down, since otherwise the gap cannot be closed. And if it is not, Pskov Oblast, and many others like it, may soon find themselves in the position of witnessing the involuntary erosion of their agricultural man-power base.

r.r.g.