

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR: Agriculture

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### NEW FURROWS: THE FIRST UNRIGGED PLENUM

With the appearance of the stenographic report of the March 1965 Central Committee special plenum on agriculture, it is now possible to view the whole spectrum of the party proceedings that condemned Khrushchev's "subjectivism" in agricultural policy and set out guidelines for a new agrarian program.<sup>1</sup> Up to now, only Brezhnev's speech had been published in the press and no release was made even of summaries of the remarks of other leading party figures who spoke during the three day session. This was the first of the eight agricultural plenums in which a major news blackout had been invoked. The stenographic report amply illustrates the reason why.

Brezhnev's speech, by comparison with the others, was a model of objectivity and restraint. The speeches of the secretaries of union republics and leading regional party committees, along with those of government officials, were more sharp and gripe-ridden reflecting the particular interests of the region and the cross-currents of controversy in many branches of agricultural policy. There was, however, unanimity of agreement on some major issues: the unprofitably low purchase prices set for farm products; the excessive delivery quotas for grain; Khrushchev's splitting of the party into two industrial and agricultural sectors and the resultant confusion in party work; and finally some pet projects of Khrushchev's, such as the anti-grasslands campaign, command corn raising, and the big poultry factory scheme. Khrushchev was directly cited by name in the complaints of three speakers - an unheard-of procedure. Many problems from the past were revived and blame for their non-solution directed at various officials. The speeches reflect considerable inter-regional rivalry over priorities and by no means indicate a consensus on policy.

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1) Plenum tsentralnogo komiteta kommunisticheskoy partii Sovetskogo Soyuza, 24-26 Marta 1965, Stenograficheskiy otchet, Moscow, 1965.

The priority of investments in agriculture and special pleas for certain sectors were a common denominator in the discussions. The scarcity and high price of farm machinery and repair work came in for heated argument.

Inadequate motor transportation and the lack of roads were other sore issues. The creation of a Ministry of Rural Construction was strongly advocated in view of the stagnation in farm building, a decline which was dramatically described by several speakers.

The stenographic report provides an illuminating insight into the chronic and current shortcomings in Soviet agriculture. They also reveal the dissatisfaction and frustration within the leading ranks of party officialdom concerning the stagnation in the countryside. The main value of the document is that it provides the first and perhaps last occasion for the party leaders to "let their hair down" by making an unfettered criticism of agriculture. (That is, until the next turnover in the Kremlin). As remarked by one Party secretary, it was "the first plenum at which we could speak openly and frankly" about the mistakes, shortcomings and tasks ... This suggests that Khrushchev so dominated all the previous plenums that leading party bosses were cowed into submission and compliance. That the Brezhnev leadership afforded a breath of relief from the past tyranny is attested by the remark of the chairman, Podgorniy, that the requests to speak were so numerous and persuasive that a time limit of 20 minutes per speaker had to be staked out.

This paper will present the significant, new material contained in the speeches of the more important party leaders. The main task of the members of the C.C. was to discuss Brezhnev's report and draw up a resolution for action.

2) Page 88.

3) Page 52.

4) Reports are discussed here in the order in which delivered and footnotes refer to pages in the original document. Underlining implies emphasis supplied.

The speakers are first secretaries of republic or regional party committees unless otherwise indicated. Present for the three day session were 160 of the 174 C.C. members, 134 of the 141 candidate members, and 56 of the 62 Auditing Commission members were present.

The Line-Up.

Shelest, First Secretary of the Ukrainian C.P.

"Violations of the economic laws of development of the economy can lead to adventurism in politics. We know the slogan: equal and surpass the USA in the per capita production of milk and meat in the immediate future. We know the slogans: The Seven Year Plan in 3-4 years; today we live well but tomorrow we will live still better -- and yet we have queues for bread!

"Can we say today that our officials have already gotten rid of the errors of subjectivism? No, we cannot say this, because this has been worked into people's consciousness for years.

"Had we yielded to the pressure to sell one billion poods of grain to the state, livestock raising in the Ukraine would have been ruined.

"Last year for the first time in five years 311 million poods of fodder grains were distributed. Although this is only 40 percent of the requirements .....

"The C.C. of the Ukrainian communist party has recommended that collective farms pay to the collective farmers as labor payments 45-50 percent of the cash profits, 15-20 percent of the total grain output, 10-15 percent of the potatoes and, depending on local conditions, a predetermined amount of roughage feed.

"In order to provide collective farmers with a guaranteed daily wage equal to that of Sovkhoz workers it is necessary to allocate one ruble and two kilograms of grain per labor day -- which would require the kolkhozy to raise their cash wage fund as against the three year average (1962-64) by 750 million rubles and also by 100-120 million poods of grain." (pp 36-44)

Zolotukhin, Tambov Oblast (a leading livestock region)

"During 1964 the farms in the oblast spent over 100 million rubles, equal to 40 percent of the value of the gross agricultural product of the oblast, for the purchase and repair of farm machinery. Thus the expenses are excessively great.... although the level of mechanization of labor-consuming processes is low .....



"The report mentioned the writing off of kolkhoz debts amounting 1.8 billion rubles. Although a big help, it still does not resolve the problem of farm debts since 65 percent of the indebtedness remains. This debt is mostly in the northwest."

Rashidov, Uzbekistan

"Farm machinery has now become very expensive. For example, a cotton combine costs 4050 rubles, and with actual seasonal earnings, it can pay for itself only in 19 years."

Shkolnikov, Volgograd oblast (one of the biggest granaries)

"On the farms in the oblast there exists an acute shortage of field tractors and grain combines. Per 1000 hectares of cropland we have only two crawler-type tractors and for 1000 hectares of grain crops only 3.1 combines."

Mazurov, Byelorussia

"Profitability in agricultural production was ignored in planning. In Byelorussia livestock products comprise over two-thirds of marketable farm output, yet their production is unprofitable. It is well known that the wages of collective farmers are the lowest in our republic."

"Gosplan must draw serious and profound conclusions from this situation."

Goryachev, Novosibirsk oblast

"A turnover of skilled cadres in our oblast is occurring. During two years over 4000 machine operators, 210 specialists, 890 medical workers and 266 teachers left the farms. There is now a shortage of over 1000 specialists on the state farms alone..... The average pay for sovkhos workers is now 30 percent lower than for industrial workers, and almost 45 percent lower than for construction workers. Besides, the level of pay for farm workers falls in poor harvest years."

"Earlier, measures to improve intraparty work were a formal appendage to economic tasks, and this caused dissatisfaction among party workers.... Evaluation of the work of party and state leaders... sometimes was even insulting. I recall how Comrade Khrushchev at the June Central Committee plenum reproached them that "they neither sow nor reap, but eat up the grain." During recent years there have been difficulties in

selecting cadres for party work, for example, as secretaries of party organizations of state farms, although in the past this used to be respected work."

Mzhavanadze, Georgia

".....this is the first Plenum at which the members could speak openly and frankly about mistakes and shortcomings and about the big tasks which face our people, party, and state... We had to hear many sermons about how important it was to raise agriculture.... It is well known that many members of the Central Committee spoke about this when the party and executive committees were divided. The members whom I met expressed indignation about this and told Khrushchev that this would complicate work and that it could not be done, but he did not want to listen to anyone.... It was clear such a venture was the product of a sick imagination....."

"The Central Committee members stood everything but they did not stand for and tolerate encroachment upon the party and they acted completely correctly."

Nuriyev, Bashkiria (a productive farm republic)

"Of 602 collective farms in the republic, only 150 are fully electrified: among the 85 state farms only ten are. Until now, 60 percent of the inhabited centers of the republic with a population of over a million do not use electricity at all."

"For an upsurge in agriculture huge capital investments are necessary, otherwise it will continue to be our Achilles' heel."

"One often hears that there is no one in Gosplan to defend the interests of agriculture."

"The great Russian scientist, Mendeleev, in a thorough study of the agrarian problem in Russia ..... in relation to that of the United States, said:

'We see..... the USA, despite the fact that wage payments are three to four times higher, is successfully able to compete against us on the world grain markets.... The reason -- lies not in the soil, not in labor, but most of all in capital.'

This was spoken at the end of the 19th century."

Kunaev, Kazakhstan

"The agriculture of Kazakhstan would have been ruined..... had we followed the recommendations from above (reduce fallow, grow peas and beans).

"In 1964, some nine million hectares in Kazakhstan were sown with run-of-the-mill unadapted seed..... with great damage...

".....we must organize a Ministry of Rural Construction. After all, we used to have one. Now it has been liquidated."

Brezhnev: (interjecting) "And why was it liquidated?"

Kunaev:

"You know well we were not asked. This was decided arbitrarily..... You know how everything happened: They came, gave instructions, and commanded. Now we speak quietly about this, but everyone knows this was the work of Comrade Khrushchev.... It is unpleasant to disclose all this at a plenum."

Brezhnev:

".... I will tell you about one case during my work in Kazakhstan .... We sent a telegram to Moscow asking permission to expand fallowland by 18 percent. The answer was: even a fool can get along with fallow. (Laughter, commotion in the hall). There are documents on this in the Central Committee."

Solomentsev, Rostov oblast (a big granary)

[Lack of mechanization and transport] cause delayed seeding of winter grains and the seedings accordingly do not attain sufficient growth to live through the winter. In recent years winter-killing of fall sown wheat reached over 800,000 hectares a year....

Gustov, Pskovsk oblast

"About 70 percent of the rural population in kolkhozy have no electricity and use kersene lamps, often even without lamp chimneys.

"Of 478 kolkhozy in the oblast, 200 are backward....."

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- 5) He had been First and Second secretary to the Kazakhstan Party Central Committee, 1954-55.

Garbuzov, USSR Minister of Finance

"What immense work remains to be done to create an upsurge in our socialist agriculture ..... is evident from a comparison of some economic indicators between our agriculture and that of the USA.

"The prime production funds in USSR agriculture per average worker during 1963 came nearly to 2000 rubles, in the USA 10,000 rubles, or 5 times larger. For 1000 hectares of cropland in the USA there are almost four times more tractors and 3.4 times more grain combines than in the USSR. The number of trucks is three and more times larger in the US, despite the fact that our cropland area is considerably greater.

"The subsidy from state funds will exceed three billion rubles a year [to compensate for the price increases in farm products announced by Brezhnev].

"I will tell you about one case during my work in Kazakhstan. .... We sent a telegram to Moscow asking permission to expand fallowing by 18 percent. The answer was: even a fool can get along with fallowing. .... The answer, however, is the same: there are dogs on this in the Central Committee."

Garbuzov, Minister of Finance (A life history)  
Lack of mechanization and transport cause delayed seeding of winter crops and the seedlings accordingly do not attain sufficient growth to live through the winter. In recent years winter-sowing of fall sown wheat reached over 800,000 hectares a year....

Garbuzov, Kazakh oblast  
About 90 percent of the rural population in Kazakhstan have no electricity and use kerosene lamps, often even without lamps.

"Of 111 villages in the oblast, 200 are backward...."

He had been first and second secretary to the Kazakhstan Party Central Committee, 1954-55.



Yezhevsky, chief of the Agricultural Equipment Administration

Persistent and sharp complaints were levelled at the farm machinery industry for the serious lag in new models of power equipment, spares shortages, and over-pricing of the machines. Yezhevsky blamed it all on the uncoordinated planning of the previous administration. With the deemphasis in corn growing, the industry is stuck with 33,000 corn seeders, 26,000 cultivators, and thousands of corn harvesters.

"Why is the cost of repair of equipment high? The substance is that during these years the repair base in agriculture was weakened so much."

Lomako, chief of Gosplan

While his super planning agency was sharply attacked for undervaluing the role of investments in agriculture, Lomako himself was strikingly indifferent to criticism and upheld his agency's primary position of power. He did throw out a sop to the agriculturalists, implying that Khrushchev had been to blame in the capital rationing of agriculture but that the main stress had been on industry which he held as correct. (Lomako was dropped as Gosplan chief in October 1965. Apparently it is a losing game to oppose the phalanx of indignant secretaries).

Zarobyan, Armenia

The border Asian republics generally make the most radical proposals -- this is due mainly to a long standing tolerance the Kremlin showed to these south border republics. Even collectivization had not been as severe and ruthless a policy here as in Russia proper and the Baltic states. So it came as no surprise that the Armenian secretary proposed that the MTS be revived in one form or another.

"When we analyze the tractor data, we see that during the last five years the average earnings from a 15 h.p. tractor has not risen but have noticeably dropped. This was due to the fact that the quality of repairs has worsened...the equipment became scattered...cadres were lost.

"The reorganization of the MTS cannot in any way be considered a progressive measure. It was done prematurely and poorly thought out. It was not a reorganization but simply a means to ensure a repair base of the machine tractor park in agriculture.

Voice: "Correct!"



"We thought seriously about this...but it would be inadmissible now to reestablish the MTS, but there are other forms of organization which would help improve the use of equipment.

"...there is nothing wrong with also using the experience of some European socialist countries in raising personal incentive."

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Against such blanket charges and recriminations against the arbitrary rule of "that master of kolkhoz affairs," one wonders at a political system which tolerated the rule of a Khrushchev for a whole decade. Actually he enjoyed only three fairly good agricultural years, the others were lean. But the picture of several hundred "leading" party officials -- the elite echelon of power -- being cowed and held submissive by the will of one man is a striking parallel to the Stalin years and a deadly commentary on the democratic collective leadership ethos. For almost a decade the party elite overtly hailed Khrushchev's wisdom and leadership as an agrarian authority -- while inwardly in opposition to many of his policies, the "product of a sick imagination." Today they unanimously condemn that leadership. The criticism of agriculture will now lie quiescent for a while -- the new leadership will be defending its own farm policy. The next official insight into Soviet agriculture will have to wait until the next change of leadership in the Kremlin. Meanwhile, according to the leaders' own admissions in the "first plenum where members could speak openly and directly," the high noon of abundance in the countryside still lies beyond the horizon.

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