

Radio Free Europe/Munich  
Evaluation & Analysis Department  
Background Information USSR

March 17, 1960

KAZAKH SHEEPFOLDS

The X Congress of the Kazakh CP followed the familiar furrows of its Central Committee's decision at the January session with a mass mea culpa gesture of compliance.

"We fully realize the justice of the criticism of the shortcomings of Kazakh agriculture in the decision of the December plenum of the CPSU Central Committee and in Comrade N. S. Khrushchev's speech. These charges are fully deserved...and we will correct them resolutely."<sup>1</sup>

With this leitmotif the substance of the Congress dealt primarily with the tasks in straightening out the disorder in agricultural organization.

The sequence of events that followed Khrushchev's description of the grain harvest, "things are bad, very bad indeed,"<sup>2</sup> was the removal of N. I. Belyaev as first secretary and the sudden importation of a leading Leningrad apparatchik, N. N. Rodionov, as second secretary of the Kazakh republic CP. Soon thereafter a "Ministry of State Farms of the Kazakh Soviet Republic" was established under the direction of the rehabilitated A. I. Kozlov, former USSR Minister of Agriculture and later head of the agricultural department of the CC. The jurisdiction of the new minister will be confined to the six northern and eastern provinces where 85 percent of the grain area is located: Akmolinsk, Kustanai, Kokchetav, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, and Karaganda oblasts. He is to be headquartered at Akmolinsk, the heart of the virgin land country, and presumably deal with all substantive problems in the organizational operation of both state and collective farms in the virgin lands. No other republic has a similar agrarian proconsul. The second organizational change was the creation of a special Party authority dealing in virgin land territory, the "Party Bureau of Virgin Soil Affairs." As L. I. Brezhnev, presidium member and CC Party secretary, was present at the Kazakh CC meeting at the time the new Bureau was announced, it is likely he will head up the agency and report directly

<sup>1</sup> Alma Ata Home Service, 13 March 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Pravda, 29 Dec. 1959.

to the central Party secretariat. Both these measures portend an intensification of Party control over the organization of agriculture and its personnel in the eastern lands. The proceedings of the Congress revealed that one of the main charges against the Party leadership was the "serious shortcomings of the bureau of the central committee in its selection and guidance of leading cadres." Accordingly the perennial personnel problem was given recurrent emphasis by almost all spokesmen, as the "main task of the Party organizations."

In view of the mismanagement of last year's grain harvest, and though corrective measures to overcome such losses were outlined, it is singular that more time was devoted to problems in an alternative form of land use -- sheep farming. Tashenev, the chairman of the council of ministers, keynoted the issue:

"one of the fundamental tasks facing our republic is its transformation into a livestock economy, especially in the eastern stretches, during the next few years."

He had sheep husbandry primarily in mind, and its distribution was to include the northern wheat lands as well as the western steppes. Kazakhstan is the leading sheep center of the Soviet Union with 24.7 percent of the national flock. The 7-year plan calls for a goal of 75 million sheep and goats, or almost a three fold increase! This by no means implies that grain farming will be completely discontinued in the virgin lands, but it does indicate a shift of resources from the hazards of grain growing into rangeland utilization.<sup>3</sup> Thus the area seeded to grain will be appreciably less in the immediate future.

To achieve the 75 million sheep goal would require, according to Beysebayev, secretary of the Alma Ata Obkom, a stable feed base including corn as fodder, among other tasks, and solving the difficult problem of supplying water to the rangeland districts. In fact, the water shortage, in both its rural and urban potential, was given considerable attention. An interesting side-light on the logistics of Soviet administrative procedure was revealed by Beysebayev while discussing the sheep situation:

"In 1955 a plenum of the central committee, following Comrade Karibzhanov's report, adopted in detail measures for supplying pastures with water, but since then neither the bureau nor Comrade Karibzhanov in

---

<sup>3</sup> The shift from grain to sheep farming and its political implications were predicted in a Background Information paper (24 Aug. 1956), the year of the record harvest, "Sheep Folds in the Virgin Lands."



administrating problems of agriculture have mentioned them a single time."<sup>4</sup>

This occurred during Brezhnev's tenure as first secretary and the silence continued through two subsequent incumbents of the CC head post. As the circa 10 man Bureau is charged with checking on compliance of Party decisions, the silence indicates either a tacit understanding among the principals to avoid the issue, or else it's the old saw of the time lag between policy decision and innovation within the sticky channels of administration.

The plans for sheep farming are impressive: 75 million head by 1965. If the growth during the first year of the 7-year plan is any indicator -- a three million head increment<sup>5</sup> -- it would take 15 years of uninterrupted growth to reach the target. To expect the grain farms of north and eastern Kazakhstan to produce most of 45 million sheep<sup>6</sup> (one-third of the present USSR total) is strikingly reminiscent of another Khrushchevian vision in 1954 that the virgin lands would yield 14-15 centners per hectare (Pravda, 6 March 1954) compared to an actual 5-year average of 7.2 centners per hectare in Kazakhstan, less field and storage losses. In the words of Kleshchov, secretary of the Kokchetav obkom,<sup>7</sup> the road to the green livestock pastures is still an uphill struggle.

"In livestock we do very little. We have not even reached the 1928 totals for cattle and horses."

---

4 In the monitoring report, there is a notation that requests editors to delete from the published text the above sentence. Does it reflect on Khrushchev or Brezhnev? F. K. Karibzhanov, former second secretary of the CC, now Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Kazakh SSR.

5 Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 27 Jan. 1960.

6 250 State farms are to be organized especially for livestock breeding in the next few years. Pravda, 23 Dec. 1959.

7 One of the oblasts where standing grain was lost on 274,000 hectares, according to Khrushchev; in Kustanai oblast 644,000 hectares were lost, and North Kazakhstan had 130,000 hectares ruined through harvest mismanagements. (Kaz. Pravda, 22 Jan. 1960.)

Khrushchev had charged at the plenum: "On November 1, 1,618,000 hectares of grain were left unmown and uncollected in the republic....why is it that the crop did not ripen? I will tell you why it did not ripen. Eighteen thousand of your tractors did not take part in the spring sowing campaign because they had not been repaired. And what does that mean, comrade? It means that collective and state farms have prolonged the sowing season. When it was necessary to prepare for the harvesting campaign, they were only finishing sowing in Kazakhstan."

A balance sheet on plan and performance of the Kazakh grain economy since the plow-up of the new lands in 1954-55 can now be drawn up which is an apt commentary on farm planning (see appendix). In only one out of five years was the plan fulfilled, that of the bumper harvest in 1956. The total shortfall for the republic was 750 million poods for the five year period. Yet the immediate goals remain set at 1,500 million poods total yield with 800 million for deliveries to the State (Pravda, 23 Dec. 1959). On the basis of the performance to date, and in recognition of the declining sown area base, this gross output target is wholly unrealistic. Even the procurement figure appears unattainable year after year, as the five-year average was exactly 600 million poods. And with the expansion of sheep farming there will be an inevitable shift of grain cropland into pasture land.

Kleshchov made another revealing comment on the difficult logistics in harvesting on the new lands. Much is made, for instance, on the inability to prepare more than 45-50 percent of the fall plowing on lands to be seeded to grain the following Spring. Tractor and personnel shortages were assumed to account for this lapse in the annual race against bad weather in the fields. It now turns out that the straw left on the fields by the grain combines cannot be readily put into stacks because there are no machines available to mechanize its harvest. Thus the straw -- a low-grade, yet valuable, roughage feed for livestock in the Soviet Union often yielding 7-8 centners per hectare -- is left on the fields delaying fall and spring fieldwork, according to Kleshchov. Here is evidence again on the capital shortages in providing essential farm machinery, or as the Soviets call it "integrated mechanization," even for the well stocked and favored farms in the new lands. Perhaps the fault was not all with Belyaev and the farm officials for the "bad situation" over the harvest losses. Capital rationing is still a crucial deterrent in the uneven flow of products from Soviet fields and farms.

As a measure of the magnitude of another primary input into Kazakh agriculture -- skilled labor for the operation and maintenance of its farm machinery -- the Congress set an immediate task to train 60,000 mechanizers in schools, and 115,000 at courses on state and collective farms and RTS's. No undue emphasis was placed on improving the primitive living conditions on the farms and the chronic shortages of consumer goods in the countryside, the prime sources for the excessive turn-over of skilled and unskilled farm workers in the virgin lands.

Compared to the endless references by the delegates to the need for drilling wells, digging water holes, even diverting rivers into drainage ditches for water, and more water for sheep, satisfying the basic wants of farm consumers appeared, to the Congress elite, at least from the record, no pressing or urgent problem.