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THE KOLKHOZ PARTY COMMITTEE

Tender Sprout at the Grass Roots of Control

The thin spread of Party members in the countryside has characterized Soviet agricultural institutions since the collectivization of the peasantry. Strengthening the rural Party apparatus and diffusing the membership into the main stream of kolkhoz production have been very difficult organizational tasks for the Soviet leaders. The supervision of an unspirited, passive mass of collective farmers was no easy task -- Party officials were isolated and resented. Stalin's policy of mobilizing urban cadres for temporary ad hoc service in the villages was discarded by his successor as impractical. Instead, Khrushchev aimed at creating and expanding permanent cadres of experienced Party members to manage agricultural production on the collective and state farms. The inducements offered went beyond the ideological call to duty: for once, bread-and-butter incentives became part of the appeal in the drive to staff the farms with Party members.

Meanwhile the amalgamation of collective farms and the take-over of the MTS machinery and staffs by the kolkhozy concentrated the Party cadres at the center of production on the farms. At the December (1958) plenum of the Central Committee, Khrushchev was able to report that "practically all collective and state farms now have fully staffed, active Party organizations," whereas in 1953 over 20 percent of the 93,000 farms were without a primary Party unit.<sup>1</sup> The average kolkhoz Party organization comprised 20 members, or a total of 1,350,000 Communists in the USSR. Thus about 16 percent of the CPSU personnel were engaged in the collective farm sector of the economy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pravda, 16 December 1958.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of the XXI Party Congress there were 8,239,000 members of the CPSU. In recent years workers and collective farmers comprised two-thirds of the influx of new members. Khrushchev's report, Pravda, 28 January 1959.

Soon after Khrushchev's call for a strengthened Party organization in agriculture, the Central Committee issued a decree (26 January 1959) authorizing the establishment of a Party committee on the larger collective and state farms so as to enhance "the role of the Party in agricultural production, strengthen the Party-organizational work in the brigade, on the farms, and the divisions, and further intensify the mass political work among collective farmers and state farm workers." The decree stipulated that Party committees should be set up on those collective farms having 50 or more Party members, and on state farms where the strength was at least a hundred Communists. Heretofore, the Party organization at a kolkhoz level was considered a primary unit with the district Party committee (raikom) as the higher echelon. Now the primary Party organization would be rooted in the brigades, farms, and divisions with the farm's Party committee as the nucleus of local power, subject to the direction of the district Party committee.<sup>3</sup> Thus, at the grass-roots of production -- the farm brigade -- the Party would be represented by a primary political unit, and not by a lone Party member. Logistically this would have been the most effective Party control over primary production since the forced grain deliveries following collectivization.

The work of the Party committee was to be headed by an unpaid secretary, and only in exceptional circumstances would the official be remunerated from Party funds. This would distinguish the new office from that of the chairman and deputy chairman of the collective farm, who, although paid by kolkhoz funds, are on the staff of the district regional Party committee and enjoy such emoluments and prerequisites as the apparatchiki.<sup>4</sup>

Almost two years have passed since the Party committees were ordered activated at the farm level. By the end of 1959 there were 53,400 amalgamated collective farms and 6,496 state farms to work with. Both December plenary sessions of the Central Committee had urged the implementation of the decree, in fact the 1959 session extended to the primary Party Committee on the state farms the right to establish control committees for the purpose of checking/auditing the management of

<sup>3</sup> Spravochnik partiinogo pabotnika, 2nd ed., 1959, pp. 545, 574. The raikom staffs had already been cut back about 20 percent by CC decree, 19 September 1957.

<sup>4</sup> Following the agrarian reforms of 1953-54, the chairman of a collective farm was placed on the "nomenklatura" of the regional or republic Party committee, while the deputy chairman was listed on the staff of the district (raikom) Party committee. In both cases, their remuneration remained a kolkhoz function. (Kolkhoznoe Pravo, 1958 ed.; p. 305.

farm production.<sup>5</sup> With such exhortation it would seem that the drive to build the Party committees would be directly accomplished. But what has been the harvest in this non-hazardous field?

In an editorial insert to an article on Party life in the villages, Pravda reports that "at the present time over 4,000 state and collective farm Party organizations have Party committees.<sup>6</sup>

This is surely no great achievement in almost two years' time, especially when seen in the light of Khrushchev's memorable speech on agrarian policy before the Central Committee, September 1953.

"Many collective farms have fairly big Party organizations. In a number of farms the Party organizations are headed by secretaries who have been released from other duties. Responding to the request of regional and district committees, the Central Committee of the Party has established the post of full-time secretary for the bigger Party organizations in 3,747 collective farms.<sup>7</sup>

It may be assumed that farms with a Party organization so large as to warrant a full-time secretary in 1953 would qualify for the 50-man minimum, set by the decree of 1959, needed to establish a local Party committee. What accounts for this sharp lag in progress, given the drive of the district, regional, and republic CP committees to enroll more collective farmers into the Party so as to represent the Party to the peasantry as a local unifying force rather than an alien coercive body? Surely a third of the 60,000 farms met the requirements on membership. Why the glacial drift?<sup>8</sup>

The question is complex. As previously noted, the amalgamation of farms and the influx of Party personnel from the MTS reorganization concentrated the members at the farm level and lightened the task of organization of the district Party committee. In the rural areas the raikom is mainly concerned

<sup>5</sup> Based on the CC decree of 26 June 1959 pertaining to the work of the Party control committees in production and trade enterprises. (Ibid., p. 575-8)

<sup>6</sup> Pravda, 25 October 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Pravda, 15 September 1953.

<sup>8</sup> The time-lag between formulation and implementation of agricultural policies has often been excessive. For example, on the important issue of changing kolkhoz labor payments to an all-cash basis, only 3,800 collective farms have adopted the monetary measure since its proclamation almost three years ago. (Background Information, 19 December 1959)

with collective farm problems. Any extension of Party power from the central district unit to the actual production unit would obviously reinforce this link in Party control. Furthermore, the process of moving the Party cell from the kolhoz headquarters down through the sub-farm into the working brigade fits into Khrushchev's policy of decentralization of the administrative process where minor internal decisions can be locally determined, at the same time insuring that major Party policies are carried out. At Kalinovka, he defended the three echelon organization of farm administration: central farmstead, sub-farm, and brigade. Some officials were intent in abolishing the sub-farms, but Khrushchev insisted they represented an ideal organization of production. There was no need to elaborate that the retention of the sub-farm would add a third nucleus of Party power structure in the countryside.<sup>9</sup>

The failure to expand appreciably the Party committee units on the larger collective and state farms ought not to be considered as evidence of a struggle between the Party-State apparatus at either the lower or high levels of authority. Rather, it illustrates the hereditary drift, the rooted inertia, or what Pravda calls "superficiality," and "irresponsibility" in the rural administrative process.<sup>10</sup> At a time when Khrushchev's solution to sparking an upsurge in agricultural output is epitomized in his slogan "cadres are everything," this chronic stickiness within the rural apparatus appears as formidable to success as are the vagaries of the weather in the virgin lands towards a solution of the perennial grain problem. Not all decisions of the Central Committee have been carried out with dispatch in the villages. But the recognition of the need to augment the number of Party units and personnel in agriculture, and the leaden pace in the progress to date, are viable measures of the unfinished task in making Soviet agriculture and its population productive and prosperous. The end of the long furrow is still over the hill. Meanwhile the Party Committee on the farms remains a tender sprout.

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<sup>9</sup> Pravda, 2 September 1960.

<sup>10</sup> Pravda, 11 November 1960.