

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## COMMUNIST AREA

• EE & USSR: Agriculture

16 January 1967

### THE SEASON FOR KOLKHOZ CONGRESSES

This may be a winter of change in the agricultural structure of several East European communist countries. The need to modernize the operative rules under which members of eighteen million collectivized households work and live has become a pressing political issue.

Congresses of collective farmers are being convoked this winter in Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Soviet Union at which changes in the organization and management of the collective farms will be formulated. As kolkhoz congresses are rather rare occurrences in the political and agricultural life in the Communist world, but constitute important landmarks in agrarian policy, it is almost certain that major innovations in the organization of Communist agriculture will be introduced.

The institutional order of the collective farm system will certainly not be abolished; rather far reaching changes in the functional organization of the cooperative farms seem in the offing.

As the kolkhoz congresses are preceded by extensive work of special committees, whose deliberations are not generally disclosed, a review of known agenda points provides some guide-lines to the scope of the congresses set for 1967.

Status and Issues of East European Kolkhoz Congresses

	Kolkhoz Congresses	New Kolkhoz Statutes	Kolkh. Union
USSR	scheduled	on agenda	on agenda
Hungary	"	"	"
Bulgaria	"	"	indicated
CSSR	held April 1964	amended	no action
Rumania	held March 1966	"	adopted

To date, congresses of cooperative farms have been held in two countries since 1964, while three are on schedule for this winter. Poland, where collectivization is negligible, holds instead a Congress for the Agricultural Circles, a gathering not on the political level of the congresses.

In the Soviet Union, with a history of collectivized agriculture exceeding 35 years, only two kolkhoz congresses have been held: in February 1933 and February 1935. It was at the latter session that the kolkhoz statutes were first formulated and have yet to be revised. The third congress was scheduled to convene in January 1959, but the Party Plenum (December 1958) failed to execute the directive of the February (1958) Plenum and the issue was repeatedly postponed. The Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership envisaged a congress for 1966 and appointed a 149 man blue-ribbon committee of leading party officials and agricultural leaders to prepare a draft. The deliberations of such ad hoc committees are confidential, which explains why no progress report has appeared in the Soviet press. The main task of the committee is to revise completely the obsolescent kolkhoz statute which is a vintage of Stalinism. The statute, or model charter, formulates the rules and regulations under which each farm must operate under state charter. It provides the legal basis for the collectivized farm structure. The rights and obligations of the farms and its members are defined, and such functions as income distribution, the priority of investments, the organization of labor, and farm management are delineated. The vexatious issue of the brigade versus the team system, a point over which sharp schisms have risen in party ranks, should be resolved. The role of private plots should be legally formulated. Aside from revision of the kolkhoz statute, the



problem of organizing kolkhoz unions at local, regional, and All-Union levels must be resolved. This decisive issue was last officially discussed at the December Plenum (1959) but was dropped forthwith. Now, however, there is considerable sentiment in the Soviet countryside for a return to the kolkhoz union organization that Stalin liquidated in 1932. As a measure of the political significance of the issues involved at the kolkhoz congress, one needs only be reminded of the protracted postponement of the congress over the years by the Kremlin leadership. The Kremlin has been slow and cautious in revising the rules to bring its agriculture into the mainstream of modern agricultural development.

The winds of economic change in agriculture blew earlier and more forcefully in Bulgaria than in the USSR. Here too, a kolkhoz congress is being convened in early 1967. A 122 men commission has been charged with drafting a revision of the kolkhoz charter. The charter, originally adopted in 1950 on the Soviet model, was repeatedly revised in 1953, 1955, 1958 so it is a distinct achievement for the regime that another revision is under way to modernize the working rules of cooperative farms. As to the agenda of the congress, aside from the charter, Party officials have not been specific but they promised that many problems in agriculture will be dealt with. There is a likelihood that the Bulgarians may wait until the Soviet Congress has met before calling their own. On the issue of kolkhoz unions, Party Secretary Zhivkov spoke more specifically of the central body or trust of cooperative farms as a progressive measure for development. This could be somewhat on the order of the Soviet planned "unions." In the main, Bulgaria has been comparatively progressive in its opportunity to up-date their farm system in a country where almost 60 percent of the population is rural.

The Hungarian Congress, the first in history, is scheduled for April. The agenda is far reaching. The most original issue for action is cooperative land ownership. A considerable part of the arable land in the possession of cooperatives does not belong to the people in the villages; other land has passed to urban residents through inheritance. Unlike the USSR land was not confiscated in Hungary for collectivization. It is being proposed that the cooperatives should be able to buy land from the owners if the latter are no longer living on the farms; the cooperatives and owners will be allowed to come to an open agreement over land settlement. If a person remains in agriculture and retains title to the land, he is entitled to transfer it by inheritance. The problem of cooperative land ownership is a long process and its solution is dependent on the cash

resources of the farms but the Hungarian regime insists that a start be made in the field and the necessary laws be enacted. The other main problem concerns private plots. They are to be regulated in size not on the basis of family rights but by the number of actively engaged family members in agriculture. There have been recommendations made using one-half hectare arable as a base for each working member of a family. This would be unusually generous. Farms are to expand their activities by providing supplemental work in ancillary industries, such as food processing, forestry, cottage industries, and other activities to provide full time employment the yearround on the farms. Guaranteed monthly payments for work done in the collectives are to be spelled out in the statutes. Kolkhoz unions, or federations, are to be organized at local and higher levels who function, among other things, as bargaining agents with industrial and purchasing agencies.

Two Communist countries have recently held congresses for cooperative farms. Czechoslovakia convened a congress in April 1964 at which the model statute was amended. More stress was placed on cash wages, less on payments in kind as remuneration for work in the socialized sector, and a system of premium payments in cash was introduced. Certain changes to allow local decision making in farm operations were established. The technical direction of the cooperative farms will be vested with the chief engineer, rather than as non-specialist Party man as heretofore. The private plot sector remained unchanged and not improved on. Of significance was the recognition that agriculture is constantly in flux and in need of modernization, so a decision to hold a congress every two to three years was accepted. On the issue of kolkhoz unions there was no action taken.

Rumania held its congress in March 1966, the keynote of which was conservatism. With about 65 percent of the population rural this was somewhat of a disappointment for a country with such abundant resources for agricultural development. In the revision of the statutes, there were no great changes advanced. Private plots are being stabilized at 0.3 hectares per family, however, for those with only one family member on the farm were to receive one-half a plot (0.15 hec), while non-farm workers living in the countryside would be deprived of land altogether. Cooperative unions of farms were provided for at three levels: district, regional, and national. Their main task is to serve as a link between planning and organization of production at the local level. Inter-cooperative ventures in irrigation, flood-control, land reclamation are provided for. The co-operatives will be required to allot a greater share of their income into the indivisible fund for investment at the expense of the wage fund. The MTS system of providing the



farms with tractors and machinery is still the order of the day in Rumania, unlike the trend for a direct farm ownership of power machinery in the neighboring Communist countries. In the organization of farm labor the labor brigade will be reduced in size, largely into teams and groups of neighbors and family members. Pensions for collective farmers on a uniform basis were established but the major costs would be born by the farms directly.

\* \* \*

The cluster of congresses of cooperative farmers to be convened this year offers a challenge to the Communist regimes to lift the lot of the peasantry to that of industrial workers and lay foundations for an upsurge in agriculture. Liberalization of the model statute for collective farms is imperative as sort of a Peasant's Bill of Rights to guarantee the social progress of the peasantry. Unlike the industrial worker the working members of the 18 million collectivized households in the three countries are excluded from craft or vertical trade union privileges. Only recently have they been granted pension rights. In the Soviet Union the kolkhoznik is even denied a travel passport. An enlightened kolkhoz statute would erase such discrimination, apart from spelling out new and equitable operating rules for the farms. Then too, an effective system of kolkhoz unions would give the farmers a voice in the councils of agricultural policy making at local regional levels. Clearly, it could be a winter of change in the East European Communist countries if the peasantry were lifted from their second class status -- a just and morally directed imperative in any modern social order.