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COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR

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MASTERS OF THE LAND - II

The response of the western press to the challenging proposals of the agronomist V. Zhulin to reorganize the structure of farm labor organization in the Soviet Union was uniformly favorable and widely acclaimed. The reaction of the readers of Komsomolskaya Pravda¹ to the Zhulin proposals remains uncertain, but Zhulin's main charge that no measures of "social control" could compensate for the lack of responsibility among farm workers surely did not go unnoticed among the more discerning young readers. It was a direct admission that party control had failed to provide the incentive for higher labor productivity in agriculture.

Zhulin outlined an ideal order of labor organization that still remained within the ideological framework of the social ownership of the means of production. Essentially, a team or section of six or more mechanizers and workers would be allocated a definite amount of land and machinery on a collective or state farm "for years." They would be responsible for the whole cycle of cropping operations. Much of the decision-making would devolve on the team; they would keep their own records and distribute

1) For a more complete description of the Zhulin article, see Background Information USSR, "Masters of the Land," 10 August 1965.

earnings among themselves. This freedom to decide themselves how to operate the land allocated to them would provide the crucially-lacking sense of responsibility for the harvest "every day and every hour throughout the year." This is the substance of Zhulin's proposal -- almost utopian in its revolutionary sweep.

What is the real state of affairs in farm operational decision making? How big is the gap between proposal and actuality? Who really is master of the land?

By coincidence, the same day Zhulin's article appeared in Komsomolskaya Pravda a decision of the Central Committee and Council of Ministers of Kazakhstan was released in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda.² It dealt with the urgent need to carry out the fall plowing and seedbed preparation for next year's harvest. A harvest failure for this year was clearly implied in the document. Party and agricultural organizations at regional and local levels were charged with exercising "weak control" over fall plowing operations in recent years. The first step to assure a good harvest is to prepare a seedbed in the fall rather than in the spring. Accordingly, in the typical jargon of Central Committee decrees reminiscent of the Stalin-Khrushchev period, all party, state, and agricultural organs "are obliged to fulfill categorically the plan of fall plowing on state and collective farms for the 1966 harvest year."

Each region was given a time limit to complete its plowing operations. Further:

the Virgin Lands territory committee of the party and its executive committee, the regional committees of the party and their executive committees are obliged to set up daily and ten-day norms of fall plowing for each

2) 7 August 1965.

raion, and within the raion for each state and collective farm, and to carry out a systematic control over their fulfillment. [Emphasis supplied]

The decision becomes all the more topical in that it originates in Kazakhstan, the same republic where the Zhulin proposal has been under limited trial in recent years. It is apparent that the concept of local freedom in decision-making on operational agricultural matters has not seeped into the upper layers of the party pyramid in Kazakhstan. Or perhaps, it may be that Stalinist decrees are more effective in combating the aftermath of a harvest failure. At least, the master of the land sentiment expressed by Zhulin: "to lay his hand on the land, to prevent its going to waste without a master, is, in my view, a noble peasant characteristic," seems distant from realization.

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