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GRAIN MOUNDS...

Pravda's editorial for 24 June levelled sharp criticism at local Party and State organs for the continued lag in the construction of grain storage facilities to house the new harvest throughout the country.

By June 15, the year's plan for the construction of grain elevators in the USSR as a whole had been fulfilled by only 4.9 percent and for granaries by only 22 percent. In the RSFSR, the source of over half the grain deliveries last year -- the completed storage capacity to date was only to 40,000 tons, or 10 percent of plan. In the heartland of the eastern regions -- Kazakhstan -- only a third of the overall construction plan had been realized. "The serious lags" were attributed to improper planning by the local sovnarkhozy and the lack of control on the part of the Ministry of Grain Products for the proper erection of the vital storage and drying facilities.

This is not a sudden catastrophe for the grain harvest. Rather it has been the "norm of (Party) life" since the plow-up of the new lands in 1954-55. It has been a chronic, ritualized ceremony to exploit the workers into greater efforts to scale down the heavy losses of grain during and after the harvest, all for want of basic capital equipment. For in actuality, the Soviets have been unable to provide the essential machinery and equipment for the proper processing, storing, and transportation of grain in the new lands, and by their own admission each year have suffered heavy losses of grain.

A year ago at the June plenum of the CC Khrushchev, in admitting to the perpetual grain problem as being only "relatively" solved, carried the analysis further:

"Whenever we have a good harvest an enormous quantity of grain, literally millions of poods, is lost or spoiled because of poor storage... An end should be put to such practices and the construction of elevators, granaries, and other grain storages speeded up."¹

¹ Pravda, 2 July 1959.

The June 24 leader contains almost a verbatim account of this remark. It ought better have asked where the materials were forthcoming.

Another supporting source for the cyclical phenomenon of the grain storage lag is a 1959 Pravda account, that by June 1, 1959 construction plans were fulfilled by 26 percent for the USSR, and 24 percent in the Kazakh republic.²

A realistic appraisal of the difficulties of the grain industry was given by Belyaev, secretary of the Kazakh CP, at both the 1958 and 1959 plenary sessions of the CC. He described the dilemma at the grain receiving stations at harvest time as a "grain-phobia" among officials forced to delay grain reception for want of storage and processing facilities.³

"Kazakhstan still suffers large losses in bringing in the grain harvest and in keeping it on the open threshing floors of collective and state farms that lack grain storage and drying facilities and at the state grain-receiving centers.

"The explanation for this is that the collection of the harvest in the northeast provinces, where 85% of all the republic's grain plantings are concentrated, usually takes place in bad weather and stretches out over 50 to 50 days and longer...."

Only a month ago, at the time of the excitement over the Summit Conference, an emergency conference for the new lands was held in Moscow where "concern over the progress of technical preparation" was expressed.³

At the 10th Party Congress of the Kazakh CP (March 10-13), 1960), the construction tasks were discussed logistically. It developed that lumber is a scarce good in the steppe region, and that the republic produces very few building materials and their importation is irregular.⁴ Pre-fabricated concrete blocks were suggested, in the modern version, and clay-reed slabs, in their medieval form, as building materials best suited for the all-out drive to store the grain!

Thus, the crisis in storage structures and processing equipment for the grain harvest has been a chronic problem

² Pravda, 23 December 1959.

³ Ibid., 20 May 1960.

⁴ Kazakh. Pravda, 14 March 1960.

since the reclamation of the new lands. It has not been for want of cash resources⁵, rather the shortages of capital goods -- lumber, cement, hardware -- and skilled craftsmen that, as in other segments of the economy, ~~that~~ have paralyzed the storage building undertakings and made for excessive grain losses. Here again is evidence that whatever the effectiveness of Soviet planning in expanding the grain economy by the reclamation of existing resources, the necessary follow-through in crucial storage facilities is stymied by the recurrent shortages of capital goods. That's why collective farmers are paid off in kind rather than in cash in the new lands -- no grain spoils in kolkhoznik hands -- compared to the policy of all-cash remuneration for the rest of the country.

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⁵ Over 660 million rubles were allocated in Kazakhstan during 1958. (Ibid.)