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KOLKHOZ-SOVKHOZ DUEL (III)

The remuneration from farm labor in the Soviet Union has been sharply differentiated by the institutional structure of agriculture, by price subsidies for industrial crops in certain areas, and the prerequisites (fringe-benefits) indigent to the regional organization of the industry. Of primary interest, however, have been the institutional differences in income and returns from farm work between the 45 million persons working whole or part time on the collective farms and the 4.3 million workers on the state farms.

The disproportion between peasant and industrial incomes, which in the Party nomenclature is euphemistically called "the differences between town and country," has narrowed considerably in recent years. From the abysmal lows in the Stalin era kolkhoz labor-day payments have risen by three times to an average of approximately 7 rubles a full ten-hour day.¹ Vast variations occur between regions and among farming units, as the December (1959) plenary session of the CPSU so abundantly documented. In regions of price subsidized crops, kolkhoz work remuneration in instances exceeded the wage level of industrial workers in the same locality; even the state farms in such areas could not compete with the leading collectives.² This does not hold, however, for the rank-and-file work returns on the vast majority of the general farming (grain/livestock farms) collectives in the Soviet Union.

Among the issues of contention between the collective and state farm workers are the status positions each occupy in the Soviet labor pyramid. State farm workers are classed as industrial cadre; as such they are assured a guaranteed monthly wage, social security benefits, and regulation of the working day, and trade union membership. They are also permitted a private garden plot, but beginning in 1961 their private livestock holdings will be prohibited. Although the labor policies of the state farm are on a "hire and fire" basis and highly seasonal in character such optimum benefits are limited to the permanent families on the sovkhozy.

Now, yet another benefit will accrue to the state farm worker. By year's end the seven-hour working day will be introduced. But not on the collective farm, where ten times more

1 Background Information, 22 December 1959.

2 Pravda, 23 December 1959.

workers are employed. Accordingly, a new wage schedule for the sovkhozy has been introduced with six wage categories ranging from 17 to 30 rubles a day for ordinary horse-hand labor to 22 to 65 rubles spread for mechanizers and tractorists.³

Apart from 3,858 elite collective farms now on an all-cash basis,⁴ the millions of peasants on the remaining 50,000 odd collective farms have no assurance of a minimum wage whatever.

Meanwhile, the collective farmers will continue to work a ten-hour day, while the privileged sovkhozniks will put in a seven-hour stint. This may well sound as an inducement to transfer loyalties from collectives toward the state farms, but state farm hiring policies are ruthless, as astonishingly pointed out by an Academy of Science economist, Rozhin, who charged that state farms accepted only one-half of the able-bodied collective farmers during the "sovkhozization" process in Moscow oblast in 1960.⁵ The rest were dismissed and constituted a "grave problem."

This discrimination against the collective farmers has not gone unchallenged (see appendix). The formalized reply is a measure of what the Party expects: greater labor inputs into the socialized sector so that the collectives build the reserves for their own social welfare and labor policies.

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3 Ekonomika selskogo khozyaistva, No. 7, 1960, pp. 99-101.

4 Ibid., No. 9, 1960, p. 86.

5 Nash sovremennik, No. 5, 1960, p. 177.

-1-

"SOVETSKAYA LATVIYA" REPLIES TO READER WHO ASKS
WHEN KOLKHOZNIKS WILL BE ABLE TO GO ON 7-HOUR WORKDAY

by R. Soms
Sovetskaya Latviya
23 September 1960

The editor received a letter from one of our readers, V. Burnovich, who writes: "Much is being written now in newspapers concerning the fact that workers and employees in our country will change over to a shortened workday. I began to wonder when the transition to a shortened workday will be made by kolkhozniks, who now have to work a great deal on the collective farm, and in addition at least 3 hours a day on their personal plots. Please give me an answer. Regards, V. Burnovich." Below we publish the answer to this letter.

Dear Comrade Burnovich!

The editor of Sovetskaya Latviya instructed me to answer the questions raised in your letter. Actually, the conditions of labor in industry and in agriculture are dissimilar today. This is one of the manifestations of the essential distinctions between the city and the village which are still preserved in our country.

The transition to the 7-hour workday in industry is being completed in 1960. This was possible because of the huge successes in the creation of a first class industry in our country, which is equipped with all types of advanced equipment. We can now produce as much in 7 hours as was previously produced in 8 hours, and even more. It is highly important also that the transition to a shortened workday in industry and construction is being made simultaneously with the regulation of wages.

A shortening of the workday will gradually be made in agriculture also. An increasing level of the mechanization and electrification of agricultural production is the prerequisite to this....

The Central Committee CPSU and the Council of Ministers USSR recently adopted a special decree on increasing the production and drawing up of plans for tractors and machines for the comprehensive mechanization of work in agriculture. Comprehensive mechanization and use of electricity and chemicals will permit a further increase of agricultural labor productivity and will give it the variety of industrial labor.

There is, however, one more characteristic which distinguishes agriculture from industry: its seasonal character. This explains the fact that, as a rule, the length of the workday grows during harvest time and other urgent field jobs.

...

As is well-known, several sovkhoses of Latvia will change over to a shortened workday in October 1960. The workday in these sovkhoses will not exceed an average of 7 hours; but on certain days, taking into consideration the seasonal character and urgency of several kinds of agricultural work, the length of the workday may increase, but to no more than 10 hours. For any earned overtime, a worker will be given additional days off. Obviously it is also possible to proceed in this manner on kolkhoses, to organize shift work. Farm administrations already have the right to introduce a 7-hour workday on a kolkhoz, on condition, however, that the volume of agricultural work which is now being fulfilled does not decrease.

You are right, kolkhozniks do labor a long time on their own plots. How will the labor of kolkhozniks be lightened in this area? With further development of the collective farm, the requirements of kolkhozniks, some of which are at present being satisfied by their own personal plots, will be more and more fulfilled by the collective farms themselves....

The Communist Party and the Soviet government are striving to achieve a situation whereby the conditions of life and the way of life in a village are the same as those in a city. Future villages will be well-built towns of multistoried houses with plumbing, lighting, sewage disposal, central heating -- in other words, all the comforts which are enjoyed by city dwellers. There will be schools, hospitals, maternity homes, day nurseries, dining halls, etc.

All these problems are closely tied to the resolution of the most important task of liquidating the essential distinctions between city and village, between agricultural and industrial labor, which still exist.

When will all this be, you may ask. The answer is simple: it depends on all of us, on the labor resources of our nation, Comrade Burnovich....