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● USSR: Agriculture

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BREZHNEV THE AGRARIAN

Summary: The economic report of Premier Alexei Kosygin on the plan directives for the Ninth Five-Year Plan amplified Brezhnev's earlier report and added little that was not already known. He reiterated the stepped-up flow of industrial goods and investments into agriculture, a strengthening of the private plot sector, stable retail prices, and stressed quantity and quality in food and consumer goods production. On easing the lot of working peasant women, who do most of the manual labor and hard jobs in agriculture, he and Brezhnev were noncommittal.

"A highly developed agriculture is an integrated part of the material-technical basis for communism and a vital prerequisite for a rapid rise in the living levels of the people," Premier Alexei Kosygin told the 24th Communist Party Congress in its second week of sessions. He did not refer to the problems of agriculture as had Party Secretary Brezhnev earlier in the Congress as the "most difficult and complex sector in our economy." (1)

Kosygin presented the draft directives for the economic development of the Soviet Union during the Ninth Five-Year Plan 1971-75. The delegates found little change or new material to ponder compared to the directives first published in February. Somehow, however, the tone of Kosygin's speech seemed less emphatic than Brezhnev's regarding consumer goods and foodstuffs.

Gross agricultural output during the Ninth Five-Year Plan is set to grow from 20-22 per cent, or from 80.3 billion rubles to an average of 96-98 billion rubles annually. Industrial production, on the other hand, is to expand from 42 to 46 per cent, while the output of Group A is set at 41-45 per cent, and Group B, at 44 - 48 per cent. For agriculture, the anticipated growth represents a slippage of 3 to 5 points over the previous Plan's growth rate.

Kosygin admitted, as have other Kremlin leaders in recent years, that there were still difficulties in meeting consumer demands for individual commodities -- among them meat and meat products.

Agricultural growth rates for the new Plan were set lower than the previous Plan's tempo. Among the major items, the targets are:

Gross Farm Output (billion rubles)	96-98
Grain (million tons)	195
Cotton (" ")	6.95
Meat, dressed (mill.tons)	14.3
Milk (million tons)	92.3
Eggs (billion units)	46.7
Wool (100 tons)	464

Increasing grain production remains the key issue, Kosygin added. It will require raising the average yield per hectare by at least four quintals, "a difficult but attainable task." On the need to expand the feed grains at the expense of the cereal grains to bolster the livestock industry, Kosygin did not elaborate. (2)

Comparison of the livestock herds and a rise in unit outputs will be the basis for more livestock products, following a strengthening of the feed base by increased production of mixed feeds and protein supplements. The Premier told the delegates that it is necessary to assist the private plot owners of livestock and poultry with feed supplies, grazing lands, and animal purchases.

The total volume of capital investment in agriculture is fixed at 129 billion rubles, including state and kolkhoz contributions for both productive and non-productive purposes. (This is 47 billion rubles more than in the

preceding five years.) Brezhnev added the extra seven billion rubles after the February decision was confirmed by Kosygin. Thus, while state investment into agriculture is to grow by 70 per cent, gross investment will rise to apparently 57 per cent. This sum is expected to yield a 20-22 per cent increase in gross agricultural output, not an impressive performance at first sight compared to a 40 per cent investment boost to yield a 41-48 per cent increase in industry.

It must be kept in mind that agricultural investments have a residual effect and, in particular, fully half are directed into building construction work, which does not generate fast returns. However, state outlays, Kosygin reported, will nearly double in tractor and farm machinery production; they will grow by 60 per cent in fertilizers and chemicals; 90 per cent in light industry; and 60 per cent in the food, meat, and milk processing sectors. A clutch phrase of the Prime Minister's speech may well be significant:

...all told for the development in agriculture and the growth in the output of food and mass consumer goods, there will be approximately a 30 per cent increase in state capital investments into the economy.

In addition to direct outlays in agriculture, those industries supplying agriculture with material-technical inputs (fertilizers, machinery, mixed feeds, electro-energy, micro-biology and others) will be supplied with an additional 11.5 billion rubles for the Plan period and amount all told to 29.3 billion rubles' investment.

Wages paid to collective farmers for work done in the social sector are scheduled to rise by 30-35 per cent in the new Plan, compared to a 40 per cent growth during the last five years. There are plans, after 1 July 1971, to raise the pensions of collective farmers who in 1966 averaged 16 rubles a month.

Labor productivity on state and collective farms is envisaged to increase 37 to 40 per cent during 1971-75, as against a 35 per cent increase in the previous Plan period. Much of this improvement will be brought about by greater mechanization, intensified production processes, superior seed and breeds of livestock, and greater implementation of technology.

In the wind-up of their speeches, both B&K envisaged a substantial improvement in the living and cultural levels of the population. In agriculture they were particularly

silent on improving the lot of the peasant women who still do most of the manual and demeaning work in the fields and in the barns. Literary men have spoken out against this obvious discrimination and called for the time when agricultural work would be predominantly done by men and machines, and women would be active at home and seasonally, by wish, in private plots gardening. On this great social issue characteristic of Russia for centuries, B&K remained silent.

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(1) Pravda, 7 April 1971.

(2) The tenuousness of Soviet statistics is clearly illustrated in the grain problem. Kosygin claimed the Plan target was overfulfilled by 0.3 per cent while Brezhnev a week earlier presented figures to show it was one point off goal.