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THE PARTORG AT THE GRASSROOTS

While the spotlight of publicity has fallen more on the inspector-organizer as the key man in Khrushchev's new model for agricultural management, the role of the party organizer (partorg) as the strategic power figure in the Territorial Agricultural Production Directorates has been emphasized in recent Soviet announcements. There are now 966 Directorates charged with the managerial task of "increasing the production of farm products in order to secure the fulfillment of state procurement plans..." on the 8,300 state farms and 41,300 collective farms in the Soviet Union.¹

As each directorate for the USSR as a whole services on the average slightly less than four administrative districts (raions) embracing approximately 500 state and collective farms, its staffing is extensive and complex. For the second largest republic, the Ukraine, the data on personnel are complete. There each of the 190 Production Directorates maintains forty farm specialists and officials on its staff, exclusive of service personnel. At the head of the directorate stands a chief and a deputy, without exception party members and experienced administrators,² almost all with higher or incomplete higher education. The operative link between the directorate and the farms are the inspector-organizers, who are responsible for the management of production functions on five or six farms but "must not take the place of the kolkhoz chairman or sovkhoz director." These practical managers are mainly experienced technicians: in the Ukraine again, of 2,338 inspector-organizers 2,034 were former agronomists, zoo-technicians, and diverse agricultural specialists, some of them undoubtedly non-party members.

1 Of which, 452 are in the RSFSR, 190 in the Ukraine, 60 in Byelorussia, 69 in Kazakhstan, 29 in Uzbekistan. Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta, 4 August 1962

For a detailed analysis of the structure and functions of the Production Directorates, see Background Information, "Reorganization of Agricultural Management," 9, 10, 12 April 1962.

2 Of the 190 appointed heads of Ukrainian directorates, 85 were former first secretaries of raikoms, 43 chairmen of raion executive committees, 49 chiefs of regional agricultural organs, and 13 deputies of regional party committees. From report of 1st Secretary Podgorny, CP Ukraine, in Pravda, 8 July 1962.

A Pravda editorial recently reaffirmed the decisive role of the Party organizer as an "organizer and tutor" whose main task is to work through the primary party organization on the farms in carrying out organization and mass political work, and "organizing socialist competition among farm workers for the successful fulfillment of plans for the production and procurement of agricultural produce."³ As a mark of their status, the partorgs are carried on the "nomenklatura" of the union republic Central Committee, in contrast to the inspector-organizers who are on the appointment lists of the regional party committees (obkoms). Here the clear chain of command from the union republic seat of power directly to the operating farm is unmistakably evident. As a representative of the republic CC, given the power concentration in the CP pyramid, the partorg will inevitably dominate the decision making processes at the operative farm and district working levels. Few farm leaders, raikom officials, or even among the Directorate councils will countermand the "suggestions" of the prime mover of power in the countryside.

Podgorny revealed the leading role of the partorg in the agricultural administrative structure when he confirmed the selection of key posts in the Ukraine were made from a roster of the best first secretaries of the raikoms in the republic. In this he followed the counsel of Khrushchev himself, who earlier had suggested the partorgs should be recruited from among the most able of the raikom secretaries.⁴ With 3,400 raions to choose from the selections represent the first echelon of successful party apparatchiks.

The assignment of the partorg to work through the primary party organization on the farms assumes sharper focus when seen in the light of the speech made by A.P. Kirilenko, presidium member of the CC, CPSU, on improving party management in industry, transport, and construction in the RSFSR in which the party policy was clearly enunciated:

"the most important questions of production activities are decided precisely within the primary party organization."⁵

It is in this nucleus of party power that the partorg's weight will be decisive and final. Whether this dichotomy in the investiture of power will make for a rationally operating farm board and contribute towards "kolkhoz democracy" remains, at best, a dubious premise. Theoretically, the final say on questions concerning the "production, financial and economic state" of the farms rests with the kolkhoz and sovkhoz chairmen and directors. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that the Production Directorates, their operative inspector-organizers,

3 Pravda, 11 August 1962.

4 Pravda, 30 June 1962.

5 Pravda, 1 August 1962.

and the partorgs are all charged in the decree with the responsibility "to organize the management of production and procurement of farm products..."⁶

And as the vast majority of representatives in the administrative bodies as well as in the councils of the directorates are party members, it goes without saying that their "style of work" will be shaped within the primary party organs. And it is here where the partorg has been assigned his duties. It is in this locus of power then that the partorg's influence will be decisive and final as he is independent of the raion and oblast party committees, being the direct representative of the union republic Central Committee.

The partorg will be logistically assisted by a "group of instructors", about five or six in number. Thus their strength will be equal to their more practical counterparts in the directorates, the inspector-organizers. The Pravda editorial spells out the duties of the partorg and his group in more descriptive tones than in the decree:

"they will spend much of their time directly on the farms, in the fields and barns, among people...will provide dynamic, practical assistance to the primary party organization, will concentrate their strength on the decisive problems of production so that the local Communists will perform with a militant solidarity and impart a decisive tone to all kolkhoz and sovkhoz affairs. This will characterize their style of work."

As to the operative details of the partorg's work since their introduction in March, only a few specific cases have been recorded. The progress reports by obkom and union republic secretaries have dealt in generalized, positive appraisals. The first secretary of the Vladimir obkom, perhaps inadvertently, described his own model for the surveillance of local farm officials. The obkom ordered that a special journal be set up on each farm for the inspector-organizer to write down his advice and recommendations. Leading officials of the regional organizations, partorgs, would then check to see if the orders were carried out.⁷ This form of control was initiated by the MTS instructors' group during the post-war Stalin era when the field operations of collective farms were under rigid surveillance by the Machine Tractor Stations. The unpopular system was scrapped in 1958 when the collective farms were allowed to purchase farm machinery from the disbanded MTS.

In the final analysis the task of solving the production problems in Soviet agriculture will be resolved directly at the farm level, on the fields and in the barns. These year-around operations involve endless decision-making processes, often on short notice at lower levels. Initiative and experience become the necessary attributes of local leadership. Just how the dualism of authority dispersed among kolkhoz/sovkhoz heads, Directorate chiefs, and partorgs can solve the

⁶ Pravda, 24 March 1962.

⁷ Pravda, 26 July 1962.

complex issues of production on the farms remains to be demonstrated. It will more likely lead to indecision, confusion, and disincentives among the rank-and-file farm workers and leaders. Over thirty years of collectivization have shown a built-in resistance among peasants and working farm officials alike to the stranger official-inspector type of overseer, sent from a distant headquarters. The counter-measures directed at these overseers as a form of self-defense by the local leaders have been "eye-washing", statistical manipulation and unwillingness to assume responsibility.

Of the upsurge in kolkhoz democracy there can be little question. Not since the forced collectivization in 1929-31 has there been such a concentration of party power in the villages, this time however, of a persuasive propagandistic posture. It is significant that a legal authority writing in the party's ideological journal charged that the annual general meetings of the kolkhoz members had virtually ceased to exist and that even in the amended statutes of some collective farms the role of the general meetings has been reduced.⁸ It would be as far-fetched to expect the partorg and his retinue of instructors to lift up the kolkhoz general meetings toward the level of "kolkhoz democracy" as Stalin's party instructors at the MTS were charged with the upsurge in farm products that failed so dismally in the post-war period.

The concentration of party power and administrative-technical control appears now at near saturation point - at the operating farm level. One wonders at the quality of educational training imparted to the more than one million persons schooled in higher and middle agricultural schools since the war if more concentrated surveillance is Khrushchev's primary innovation in boosting farm production. It is a poor substitute for the inputs that can spark the upsurge in agricultural production: massive capital inputs, expansion of the private plots, decentralization in decision making, and other fundamental changes in the economic organization of Soviet agriculture. These innovations will be long in coming, if ever, so the immediate outlook for the collectivized peasantry and the Soviet consumer does not auger well for that abundance of food products Khrushchev so often holds out as within ready reach.

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⁸ Kommunist, No. 11, 1962.