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Background Information (USSR)

FACT AND FANCY (II)

To reach the planned target of eleven billion pood of grain—180 million metric tons—by 1960 is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious—and most critical—of the tasks set for Soviet agricultural workers and Soviet statisticians by N. S. Khrushchev. The omission of this goal from the 1 May and November anniversary slogans this year reflected the assumption of priority by the "meat and milk" campaign during the past six months; the reaffirmation of this task in Khrushchev's fortieth anniversary speech (Pravda, 7 November 1957) is evidence that the exact total has been maintained as a basic objective, even if the time allotted—"within a few years"—is no longer as definite as before.

Since the renunciation of the Stalinist device of "biological yields" in 1953, there have been no data published by official Soviet sources on total grain output. Instead the subterfuge of percentage increases in respect to an unknown base have been applied as a demonstration of the upward trend resulting from the agricultural program directed by the First Secretary. The striking rise in the grain harvest has been presented as follows:

<u>1950</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1960</u>
100	97	113	101	105	131	157	—	180

(Narodnoye Khozyaistvo SSR 1956, Moscow, p. 107.)

Although, in percentage terms, this places the Soviet statisticians within striking distance of the goal, not even Khrushchev has yet intimated that these figures can be transformed into actual tons of grain. But where Soviet agricultural economists still fear to tread, an intrepid—but unknown—"colleague" from the DDR has boldly ventured. Surveying the prospects of Soviet agricultural output to surpass that of the U. S., Heinz Wachowitz has furnished the first "documentation" of Soviet grain output in absolute figures. According to his calculations (?) the "leadership [of agriculture] by the Party" has led to the following extraordinary successes:

Total Grain Harvested (geerntet)

1953	117 million tons
1954	122 " "
1955	149 " "
1956	179 " "

(Einheit, No. 10, 1957, supplement, E. Berlin, p. 11)

Thus, despite the fact that Khrushchev has already admitted that "this year the country has received less grain than last year" (Pravda, 7 November 1957), there should be no cause for alarm, statistically at least. Either the over-zealousness, ignorance or confusion of the SED Agit-Prop may be responsible for this extreme case of exaggeration. Completely valueless in any analytical sense, this distortion of statistical data, following the bullish trend already noted in reporting grain procurements (see Background Information, 6 November 1957), may be of considerable propaganda—and political—significance. Since no one in the top Party leadership is able, for the time being, to challenge Khrushchev's claims of success in agriculture, the lowly economists, given direct instructions earlier this year, have little choice but to follow the simple arithmetical device contrived by the "leader" to reach the "meat and milk" goals:

"...start with 1956, then estimate the years 1957, 1958, 1959 and 1960, so that at the end of these four years we arrive at the volume [needed to surpass the U.S.A. in per capita production by 1960]." (Pravda, 24 May 1957.)

Having attained an unbelievably high percentage figure while all the opposition factions were still represented in the Presidium, Khrushchev can now, without restraint, order the publication of some absolute data on the harvests—past and present. It may not approach the absurdity of the SED enthusiasts, but it will hardly reveal the reality that this year's harvest—estimated at 100-105 million tons—has dropped to the 1955 level, only 55 percent of the 1960 target.

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