

SELECTED ARTICLES

Agricultural Developments in the U. S. S. R.*

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Prior to the Revolution three systems of farming were practised in the U. S. S. R.: (1) large estates; (2) small peasant farms; (3) peasant land farmed by the peasants under the *Mir*, the village council or commune of very ancient origin.

Some of the large estates were run on good modern lines, some were put into the hands of managers whose business it was to extract all they could for the owner, others were moderately well managed. The peasant farms were small holdings owned by the individual farmers, which had resulted from the various agrarian reforms, the most important of the later ones being those of Stolypin (1905), who had a Danish adviser and was aiming at the Danish model. The peasant land under the commune (*mir* land) belonged to the body of peasants but not to any individuals; it was parcelled out into many strips which were periodically distributed by the *Mir* among the peasants in accordance with the size of family, etc. These strips were scattered over the whole area so that each man should have his share of good and of bad soil. In the time of the Revolution it was estimated that about 45 per cent of the cultivated land was in the hands of the peasants.

All three systems were disliked by the Bolsheviks, the first two because they involved private ownership of land, and the third because of its grave inefficiency and the utter impossibility of introducing modern improvements. The Bolsheviks also disliked the peasant mentality, so utterly different from that of the factory worker. The peasant wanted to sell his products at high prices while the factory worker wanted to buy them cheaply. The factory worker was accustomed to work in masses for an employer, and had before the Revolution no sense of proprietorship; the peasant was used to working alone or in small groups and always felt that he owned the land he tilled.

After some experiments, State farms were set up which accorded well with Bolshevik theory. The peasants were employees of the State receiving a weekly wage, living in great blocks of dwellings in a central area developed like a town. The whole organization resembled that of a factory, and it was expected that the peasants would develop the factory workers' outlook and become one with them. But the peasants did not like them and so they never developed; in 1938 only about 10 per cent of the cultivated land was worked as State farms, and they were used for special purposes. A completely different type of farm was set up on the basis of the old *Mir*. The first were communes in which the whole body of workers was responsible for the full maintenance of each individual family; but this did not answer. The *artel* organization was therefore adopted; another old Russian method which has no English equivalent. In this the workers feed and house themselves but the produce belongs to them, and after all outgoings have been met the balance is distributed according to the work done. The workers are paid in actual produce; mostly grain, potatoes and vegetables, these being the main constituents of the peasants' dietary; usually also there is hay for the workers' animals, and a small amount of cash. This method after suitable modification proved much more acceptable, and by

* Substance of a lecture at the Central Council for Health Education Summer School held in London during August 1943.

1939 a very large part of the cultivated land of the U. S. S. R. was farmed in this way.

The farms were called 'Collectives'. All the cultivated land in the village, whatever its previous ownership, was thrown into one big farm; it might be 1,000--4,000 acres or more, but was not usually unmanageable in size. All the peasants of the village could come into the group, but preference was given to the so-called 'poor peasants'. The plan of production was until just before the War sent from headquarters; it had been discussed during its development, but once settled, it could not be further discussed. The workers elected a committee to carry it out and to allocate the tasks to the different people; the chairman, however, was not freely elected as he had to be accepted by the Party and the Government; he often came from outside and did not usually stay long. The Party always insisted on keeping its hold on the farms, and it had its representative, who was quite independent of the committee.

Payment was always by the piece; a certain job of work was called a "labour day" and when a man had done this he was credited with one day's work. Not infrequently about two hundred would be done during the year, but specially good workers would put in many more. The worker could eat his share of the produce or sell it to the farm, the Co-operative or in the peasant market.

The workers' share of the produce varied with the yields and the outgoings. The Government's share has varied. For some time prior to 1939 it was a fixed amount per acre of winter grain sown, and of spring grain ordered to be sown, also a fixed quantity of milk and meat per animal kept. A small price was paid, much below the market price. In 1939 more latitude in planning was allowed so long as the stipulated Government share was duly delivered. As this was fixed while yields were variable it is impossible to state any definite percentage, but an average of a number would lie between 15 to 20 per cent. Then the machine tractor station, the Government organization that hired out the tractors, combines and other big tackle and supplied the drivers had to be paid; this might take another 15 per cent. Seed for next season and fodder for winter had to be set aside; this also might amount to about 15 per cent. Insurance, administration, sick and needy people, maintenance, capital development, and other farm overheads had also to be provided for. One way and another, more than half the produce would go and the workers' share might be 40 per cent or less.

A great change in the system, and in the peasants' attitude to it came when the Constitution of 1936 gave the collective farms the use of their land for ever, and also gave each member the use of his cottage and its garden and a holding varying from $\frac{1}{2}$ acre to $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres on which he could keep such animals as he and his family could look after. So popular were these holdings that by 1939 much of the peasants' time was spent on them and a large proportion of the livestock of the U. S. S. R. was their private property. So decrees went forth that they must put in a minimum of a hundred days per annum on the farm; this number has since been raised.

There is little doubt that when peace returns this modified system will be able to provide the U. S. S. R. with the food needed for a rising standard of life. The theoretical objection still remains, the peasants are not employees and do not come under the labour code; they have for example, no trade union and are ineligible for old-age pensions. 'Peasant-mindedness' still continues and they are not one class with the factory workers. But so many theoretical difficulties have been brushed aside in the U. S. S. R. for a realistic solution that we may expect this also will disappear and the system will become wholly acceptable.