

The General Survey of Agricultural Conditions in U.S.S.R

By

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April 1933

Out of all other crisis with which Soviet Russia is now beset the crisis in agriculture is undoubtedly the acutest and the gravest.

It will be remembered that in 1926-1927, a discussion was started in the Russian Communist Party on the question whether Socialism could be built up in one country only and whether a Socialist State could maintain itself amidst the capitalist world. It was finally agreed that this aim could be achieved in such a huge country as Russia, fabulously rich in all natural resources, if only she could be made safe of an outside military attack. If such an attack would come it could find Russia helpless and at any rate unprepared to meet it with a reasonable chance of success. Consequently the most important objective was to build up the defence of the country.

But under conditions of warfare it has been insufficient to have a few and well organised army. This army must be supplied with modern weapons, and the supplies of these weapons and all other war materials must be so plentiful as to permit to stand the strain for a considerable period of time. Hence sprang out the logical conclusion that the basic task of the government was to create, at any cost, heavy industries on which national defence so largely depends nowadays. Russia had to be industrialised, and, besides as speedily as possible.

It was evident however that the speedy industrialisation of the country depended on two primary conditions, firstly the growing industrial population should be well supplied with food products and the industries - with agricultural raw materials; secondly a large quantity of machinery and industrial equipment should be imported from abroad and paid for by agricultural exports.

But the state of Russian agriculture though considerably improved during the period of New Economic Policy, still has been too uncertain to provide for both purposes. The peasants who tilled their small farms individually, very often could not produce much surplus of agricultural products, and those peasants who could, resisted ever more bitterly the forcible exchange of their products for paper rubles which they could not convert into commodities needed by them because of the Soviet factories were never able to provide the necessary supplies of such goods.

On the eve of the introduction of the Five-Year Plan the Soviet Government was able to collect more not more than 500-600 million poods of grain products per annum from the peasants although at least twice as much had been needed to meet all the requirements.

The peasants were to be persuaded, or if the persuasion would fail, compelled to produce more grain and other agricultural products necessary for feeding the industrial population and for exports.

Stalin in his speech at the primary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party delivered on January 7th, 1933, made this quite clear. He said: "The objective of the Five-Year Plan in respect of agriculture has been firstly been to unite small individual peasant farms which were unable to use - the tractors and modern agricultural machinery, into large collective farms equipped with up-to-date means of production, and to organise model State farms, sovkhozy, on the free lands. Secondly, we had to convert the U.S.S.R. from the backward country of small peasants into a country of large-scale agriculture, into a country organized on the basis of collective labour and capable of producing large surplus of agricultural goods." (Pravda, January 10th 1933).

There were also purely political motives behind this scheme. The Communist leaders realised that if the peasants were allowed to retain the land in private ownership they would in the end, destroy all the attempts to establish Communist order of society in Russia. To prevent Russian peasants from becoming gravediggers of the Bolshevist dictatorship they have been brought into collective farms where the very sense of proprietorship innate to these individualist souls, should be starved, and where the peasants would be made the servants of the Communist State in exactly the same manner as industrial workers.

The Soviet leaders claim that so far they have been successful. Stalin in his speech already cited said that over 60 percent of the total peasant population have joined the collective farms; that over 70 percent of land under cultivation is tilled collectively; that the amount of grain collected annually by the state has risen to 1200-1400 mil. poods; that the kulaks especially addicted to bourgeois mentality, have been destroyed though not yet finally exterminated; that a sound economic foundation has been laid in the villages for the Soviet regime; that the U.S.S.R. has already been recognised as the country of large-scale agriculture.

But are all these contentions justified by the facts? If they are, why then is there crisis in agriculture of which so many distressing signs are observed in Russia, nowadays? First of all, there is theoretical soundness of the contention that the large-scale agriculture is more solvent economically and more advantageous to the interests of the Soviet State than the small peasant economy, is open to most serious doubts. It is well known that is there is the whole school of the students of agricultural economy who maintain that the small peasant farms can achieve better economic results than the large-scale agricultural undertakings, if these small farms employ scientific and up-to-date methods of production and apply the principal of co-operation to some of the branches of their economic activities. Such countries as for instance, Denmark, Belgium, France, Holland and Eastern provinces of Canada supply practical examples of what small peasants may achieve if they run their farms in scientific manner and with the proper efficiency. On the other hand, large-scale farms in the United States have proved to be failure from the economic point of view although they had been organised and run in accordance with the most modern methods and employed a good deal of the most perfect and if it and efficient machinery.

As regard to Russia the most authoritative Russian economists and students of the Russian agricultural conditions have always maintained that small peasant farms were from purely economic point of view far more advantageous than large-scale agrarian undertakings.

Stalin said that the amount of grain collected by the State during the recent years has reached the figure off 1200 or 1400 mil. poods per annum instead of 500 or 600 mil poods

collected in 1928-1929, as the Soviet official statistics show, the total amount of crops gathered confirm these statistics. I have compiled the following table:

Years	Gross crop's	Exports	Balance (in million metric tons)
1913	81.6	9.6	72.0
1921	42.2 (imports)	1.5	43.7
1924	51.4	--	51.4
1928	73.3	--	73.3
1930	75.2	6.6	68.6
1931	63.9	4.0	59.9
1932	58.5	1.0	57.5

These figures show that from 1921 the total amount of cereals gathered has a marked tendency to increase. This tendency has been however, checked in 1931, the year when collectivisation of agriculture begun in earnest in 1930, had made itself felt in Russian national economy.

More striking results will be shown if we will calculate the crops in relation to the number of population in Russia.

Years	Reserves of Grain (mil.tons)	Number of population (million)	Per head of population (kilogram)
1913	7.2	138.0	522
1921	43.7	131.0	334
1924	51.4	137.0	375
1928	73.3	150.6	487
1913	68.6	157.7	435
1931	59.9	160.6	373
1932	57.5	163.6	351

It will be remembered that in 1921 Russia was visited by a severe famine which was responsible for the death of over 5 million people. We may presume consequently that when the total amount of grain per head of population falls below 334 Kilograms, the country must experience the most severe famine. In 1931 the quantity of grain was 373 kg per head and we know that in some districts there was a state of famine and in the spring of 1932 the government had been compelled to provide the population of these districts with grain loans in order to give them a chance to sow their fields and tide over difficult times. The quantity of grain in 1932 fell to 351 kg per head.

The conditions in respect of livestock are perhaps even more appalling. It is well known and has been confirmed by many Soviet leaders themselves that the peasants when the collectivist drive began, slaughtered a large number of the animals. According to the Soviet official statistics during the first two years of collectivisation, 1929 and 1930, 3,400 000 horses, 18,100,000 heads of horned cattle, 4,600,000 heads of sheep and pigs were slaughtered. This process continued in the following years and goes on at present though less rapidly.

Basing on rather incomplete and somehow too optimistic Soviet official data I have compiled the following table showing the number of various kinds of livestock in Soviet Russia at the beginning of each year.

Years	Draught horses	Cattle	Pigs	Sheep
	(In millions per head)			
1916	27.7	60.6	20.9	113.0
1922	20.2	45.8	12.1	84.3
1928	22.4	70.5	20.3	133.0
1930	22.4	52.5	13.3	113.0
1932	17.0	35.0	10.0	77.5

The losses in the livestock are disastrous not only from purely consumptive point of view (shortage of animal food products) but also because of the great decrease in manure and in draught animals. The natural manure remains the chief fertiliser in Russia and consequently its decrease tells disastrously in all those districts the U.S.S.R. where the natural richness of the soil is not sufficient to produce good crops. As to the mineral fertilizers the Soviet chemical industry has not been able to supply anything adequate to the needs. According to data collected by Prof. Prianishikoff ("Socialist agriculture", January 9th 1931) the amount of mineral fertiliser in 1930 averaged about 0.04 poods per hectare while in Belgium it is 6 poods per head, in Germany - 3.1 poods and in France - 1.2 poods. The decrease in the number of draught animals is even more disastrous.

It has been intended to replace horses by tractors. It seems however that very little progress has been made in this respect. Nobody knows how many tractors are actually working in Russian villages. In September last year it was calculated that the total number of tractors in the U.S.S.R was 176,000 of which of which 147,000 were employed in agriculture. In January of this year the number of tractors was given as 150,000 of which about 120,000 were employed in agriculture. If we will accept the latter figure and remembered that a tractor by its draught power replaces 16 horses, we will find that the loss in horses has been made good by the introduction of tractors only to the extent of 27.5 percent. Furthermore, the tractors in Russian conditions can be able to perform not more than 10 percent of all the agricultural operations which makes the loss of horses much more disastrous.

The majority of tractors are in state of disrepair. It has been efficiently calculated that about 94,000 tractors in engaging in agriculture were in need of repairs in the beginning of the last winter. By March 25th 1933 only 70,577 tractors or 76.7 percent of the total have been repaired ("Pravda" March 30th 1933) although the spring surveying has already begun at that time in the southern districts.

But the correctness of this figure is open to grave doubts. One can find in the Soviet press numerous complaints that the local authorities exaggerate the number of repaired machines thus 'deceiving the government and the Communist Party'. "Pravda" (March 15th 1933) said that "there are 14,032 tractors in the Ukraine Machine-and-Tractor stations. How many of them are in need of repairs? Nobody knows. According to the official data on March 5th, 7908 tractors were repaired. But this figure should not be trusted."

The Soviet papers were full of complaints that the repairs were going on everywhere very slowly and that the factories failed to supply the necessary spare parts. According to the official data orders of the spare parts for the first quarter of 1933 were executed on March the 25th 1933 only to the extent of 56.1 percent of the aggregate value. The production of especially needed parts lagging behind even if this percentage. ("Izvestia" March 1st 1933)

According to the same paper (March 1st) a special investigation carried out by the government revealed the fact that owing to the bureaucratic methods of management and congestion of railway traffic between one and two months are needed for the transportation of spare parts from the factories to the repair shops in the villages. It is evident therefore that these shops cannot get necessary spare parts in time for spring sowing and that a large number of tractors will not be repaired at all or repaired rather late in the season.

Repairs, as a rule, are done very badly. On March 30th "Pravda" published a letter from the Atamansk (Northern Caucasus) Machine-and-Tractor Station stating that all 40 repaired tractors "proved to be useless although the quality of the repairs had been tested by three different commissions and found satisfactory". At another station (Rossoshansk) out of 57 repaired tractors only three proved to be thoroughly sound and fit for work. ("Izvestia" 28th 1933) The Soviet press abounded during the winter and early spring in similar reports from various parts of the U.S.S.R..

In some places the tractors are dismantled in order to get spare parts for the repairs of other machines this with characteristic Bolshevism humour is called "raskulachivanie" ("de-kulakization") of the tractors. At one of the Machine-and-Tractor Station in the Northern Caucasus out of 52 tractors 28 were dismantled in order to repair the rest. ("Izvestia" February 13th 1933).

The number of Machine-and-Tractor Stations on January 1st 1933 was 2446. It has been intended to establish during this year, 2000 new stations in those parts of the U.S.S.R. where the kolkhozy had not been provided with sufficient number of up-to-date machinery. On January 15th it was announced that the number of new stations will only be 500. But as a Commissar for Agriculture, Yakovlev stated at the Congress of the Kolkhoz shock-workers on February 16th the ultimate number of new stations to be opened this year will be only 156. It is apparent that the Soviet Government finds itself unable to supply enough tractors and agricultural machinery for the equipment of the new Machine-and Tractor Stations.

No wonder therefore, that realizing the shortage of horses and tractors that peasants have composed of a humorous doggerel which is being sung throughout the Soviet Union:

"Cats, not tractors will work the plough,
"In the collective farms of now a days."

This situation in respect of other kinds of agricultural machinery seems to be really bad. Besides during the last two years Soviet factories were ordered to produce only such machines which could be driven by tractors as there is the lack of tractors and to switch back to the production of horse driven machinery is impossible in short time. The factories were not able to supply much of the machinery needed by the kolkhozy.

Thus according to "Pravda" (March 31st 1933), the program of production of ploughs (or horse power) was fulfilled by March 4th to the extent of 47 percent and of drilled-ploughs to the extent of 44 percent.

According to the Soviet press the process of extermination of horses and other draught animals (bullocks, camels) continues and many animals perish either of various epizootia or from bad treatment and shortage of fodder. The Soviet Government found it necessary to issue a special decree in order to protect the remaining horses from extermination. Article 13 of this decree orders "that any person guilty of irregular and rapacious exploitation of horses

(overloading, beating bad harnessing) must be severely punished. The local authorities must investigate every single case of death of a horse or other draught animals and bring to justice those responsible for the death". (Izvestia 19th 1933)

Speaking at the Congress of the kolkhoz shock-workers the Commissary for Agriculture told of the case when a member of a kolkhoz left a horse in the field because it could not go farther and having been exhausted and hungry. The horse dies of exposure. "The guilty scoundrel" continued the Commissary, "was arrested. I have no doubt that you all will agree with me that the sentence of death which must be passed by the court on the scoundrel shall be considered just and proper". (Izvestia) February 19th). Evidently, the things really became desperate if the government must use such severe measures in order to stop the widespread maltreatment of horses.

Another serious problem with which agriculture in the U.S.S.R. is confronted now, is the extreme shortage of skilled labour – mechanics, drivers and engineers in the villages. The attempts on the part of the local authorities to train sufficient number of tractor drivers and mechanics seem to be entirely unsuccessful. The course of training is usually very short four or six weeks only. During this period the men can obtain only a very superficial knowledge of the machine and their handling; the most they can be taught is how to drive. The result, is of course, mass damage of tractors and other machinery. As an illustration I shall quote one case out of hundreds reported in the official Soviet press. "In July of 1932 the Birzulsk Machine-and Tractor Station received 58 tractors. By October next half of them were damaged. Today 40 machines are in need of major repairs. The cost of these repairs will be three times as high as the value of the work the tractors had done during the last summer and autumn. Such are the results of poor training of the tractor drivers. The machines were handled by boys of 16 and 17 who were trained for four weeks only". ("Izvestia", February 9th).

The ultimate test of Stalin's contention that large-scale State and collective farms have overwhelming advantages over the small farms, is of course, whether they are capable of paying their way and of bringing profit to the State. And on this question we have the evidence of no less important authority than Stalin himself. In his speech at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (see Pravda January 10th) he said: "They say the kolkhozy and sovkhozy are not solvent and bring no profit, that they swallow up a good deal of money, that there is no economic reason to support such bankrupt undertakings, that it would be much more expedient to dissolve them and to preserve only those which are economically sound." Stalin, of course, denounced with scorn such 'opportunist' and 'petty shopkeepers' views. Continuing these denunciations he said: "We have thousands of kolkhozy and scores of sovkhozy which are economically sound even now." It must be remembered that the total number of kolkhozy is now over 200,000 and that of the sovkhozy - 5800. Thus, according to Stalin's own admission, only a very small proportion of the 'collectivised' agricultural undertakings are financially solvent and economically sound. The overwhelming majority of these undertakings exist only because the State gives them large subsidies and exercises all sorts of pressure and terrorism in order to support them

Stalin expressed conviction that in the short time the kolkhozy and the sovkhozy will be able to justify themselves economically. This conviction, however, can hardly be shared by those who follow developments in Russia during all the period of Communist Dictatorship. The collective farms mean, practically introduction of serfdom for the peasant and the history tells that serfs could never work well and conscientiously and compete with freemen. As to the State farms (sovkhozy) these 'grain factories' as the Communist Party call them, they have been in existence for about 14 years. If they could not have justified themselves economically hitherto,

how can it be expected that in a few years' time that they should become sound business undertakings? In 1927 there was talk in the high Soviet institutions on the necessity of closing down of all the sovkhozy on account of losses which they brought to the treasury. During a discussion one of the leading agricultural experts (a German) said: "The sovkhozy were factories indeed, but not grain factories, anyhow. They are working up the capital invested in them by the State into smoke. They are smoke factories." Apparently, they still continue to be run as such 'factories'.

Collectivisation of agriculture has been meant to accomplish not only economic and but also social revolution. By one stroke the Bolsheviks wanted to destroy the individualist Russian peasantry, a constant political menace to the Communist regime, and to convert the peasants to collectivism and thus, consolidating their grip over the country. Obviously, such a radical revolution could not have been achieved in the short space of four years and it will be unfair to indict the Russian Communist leaders on that account. But still, there must have been some traces that the objective was on the way to its realisation, if the things that really developed in the direction laid out by the Soviet leaders. So far, however, the 'collectivised' peasant shows no sign of been converted to collectivism. The peasants still continue their silent war against the Soviets, and invent more supple and sometimes more destructive methods of resisting the efforts to impose upon them Communist creed entirely alien to their mentality and outlook.

Out of the massive evidence on this subject one may find in the latest Soviet papers, I shall quote remarkable revelations made by comrade Kaganovich at the Congress of the kolkhoz shock-workers (see "Izvestia" February 18th). He complained that even in the good and proficient kolkhozy the control over labour on the members and over the kolkhoz property is organized very badly. Labour discipline, as a rule is very poor. It seems the peasants work listlessly despite a very elaborate system of piecework remuneration introduced into the kolkhozy. The rotation of crops is not observed. In the great majority of the kolkhozy the fields are sown with the same crop year after year. This results in exhaustion of the natural resources of the soil and in speedy deterioration of cultivated plants. The land is tilled and cultivated very poorly. The shallow plough with many patches left not ploughed at all; absence or insufficient quantities of manure and fertilisers put in the soil; bad and negligent harrowing; inefficient weeding: all this can have only one result, namely the poor yield of crops. "Instead of wheat and rye weeds flourish in the kolkhozy and sovkhozy fields", said Kaganovich. He confirmed that every kind of agricultural operations – sowing, harvesting, threshing, tending of cattle and horses is all done extremely badly, and that the waste, consequently is simply enormous. The pilfering of the kolkhoz property is very widespread. The grain is being stolen not only from storehouses but from the plough-drills during the sowing, from the riping machines during the harvesting and from the threshers during the threshing operations. It is stolen even when the crops are not ripe yet. As a matter of fact the pilfering is so common that is not looked upon by the peasant as a crime. "Everybody's property is nobody's property", such as the firm conviction of the collectivist Russian peasant and it appears that no punishments, no terrorism can ever be able to eradicate this conviction from the minds of the vast majority of Russian peasants.

The traditional incentive to work for his own benefit having been taken away from the peasant he, naturally, developed unwillingness for work. Numerous instances are quoted in the Soviet press and in the speeches of the Soviet leaders where the actual working day in the kolkhozy has been only 4½ hours, where the total output of labour equalled to 50 days a year where half of the kolkhoz members did not do any work at all, where the work is being done extremely negligence etc..

The Soviet leaders try to explain away all these shortcomings and crimes by the influence of the kulaks and counter-revolutionaries who manage to 'worm their way into the responsible posts in the kolkhozy', and by the insidious designs of 'class enemies' bent on wrecking and sabotaging the efforts of the Communist Government' to enrich the people by the introduction of Soviet methods of production. (Stalin).

It is apparent, however, that only a small amount of farm damage and sabotaging is done maliciously. Undoubtedly the main cause a part of (apart of the damage caused owing to the poor training and general cultural backwardness of the peasants) of bad and inefficient working of the kolkhozy is the absence of incentive for productive labour. Realising that their work does not and cannot improve their immediate economic and social conditions, that kolkhozy mean the restoration of serfdom, peasants go on mass strike against the Communist State. On many occasions this strike is accompanied with acts of violence such as murdering of local Soviet officials.

The general attitude of the peasants towards the kolkhozy has been, according to Kaganovich, very tersely summed up by a peasant to whom he had spoken when visiting a kolkhoz. "In one of the kolkhoz," tells Kaganovich, "I spoke to a member, the foreman of the kolkhoz stables. I asked him: 'Tell me are you better off now than on your own farm? He replied: 'Yes, of course, I am. I cannot dispute the fact. But I was own my master on my own farm, and now I am no master at all'" ("Izvestia", February 18th).

And how are the Communist leaders combating this anti-communist attitude of the Russian peasantry? It seems that the only weapon in their arsenal of force and fear, spying and prison, in short, ruthless and merciless terrorism. During the last ten months the great number of decrees of the central government and the host of administrative orders of the local authorities were issued all of which were intended for making out of the individualist muzhik a conscientious and true citizen of the Communist State. The first in the series was the decree of august 7th 1932, regarding the integrity of the 'sacred' public property. Explaining the reasons which let the Soviet government to issue this decree Enukidze, the Secretary of the Central Soviet Executive Committee said, that there has not been a single branch of national economy where acts of sabotage had not been discovered. "The enemies of the Soviets the enemies of the kolkhozy" continued Enukidze, "must be subject to the severest reprisals. Persons convicted of thefts, pilfering etc. are to be punished by death. Only when there are special reasons for clemency the death sentence may be commuted to ten years imprisonment with confiscation of all property. Persons convicted under this decree are to be excluded from any further amnesty." ("Pravda", February 2nd).

In the next decree of August 22nd 1932 deals with 'speculation'. Under this term in is understood every kind of private trade, and, especially, the trade in food products. The penalty provided for the infringement of this decree is the imprisonment in concentration camps with compulsory labour for terms of five to ten years. The offenders are also excluded from any amnesty. Members of the kolkhozy, if they sell their products at free market without special permission from the authorities are liable to prosecution under the provision of this decree.

Especially rich crops of decrees appeared in January and February of this year. I shall mention here the decree of January 19th regarding the delivery of grain to the state by the kolkhozy and individual peasants. The decree fixes the quantities of grain which are to be delivered to the State's per hectare of the planned (not actual) area under cultivation and the time limits on which the grain is to be delivered. According to this decree between 30 and 50 percent

of the gross crops are to be confiscated by the State. The penalty for non-fulfilment of this decree is very heavy fines of the kolkhozy and the criminal prosecution for the individual farmers.

The resolution of the central Soviet Executive Committee passed in January 30th 1933 orders that the Articles of Association of an agricultural artel should be complemented by the following provision: "If a member of the kolkhoz would refuse under non-satisfactory pretext, to carry out a task allotted to him, the kolkhozy management must fine the culprit to the amount equivalent of five days' wages and in case of a repeated offence to expel him from the kolkhoz." Another provision stipulates: "To apply the decree of August 7th 1932 regarding the integrity of public property, to all the persons convicted of sabotaging of agricultural operations, pilfering of grain seed, malicious decrease of the quantity of seeds normally sown per unit of land, negligent work during ploughing and sowing which might result in damaging of the fields and in the decrease of the crops, malicious wrecking of tractors and machinery and destroying of horse." The resolution which to all practical aims and purposes is equivalent to Government decree, gives practically unlimited powers for applying death penalty to any offender however trifling his offence might be.

It must not be imagined that all these threats so profusely promised in the recent Soviet legislation and administration orders, are to remain on paper. They are applied with ruthless energy and vigour and thousands of persons are being shot and hundreds of thousands are being deported for the offences which are considered trifling in civilised countries.

It appears from all the evidence in my possession that the Soviet leaders are firmly bent on dealing with the agricultural crisis which has already produced such dreadful results, only by fear and force and repudiate as ruthlessly as before the measures which are dictated by commonsense, economic necessity and the practice of civilized countries.