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Report of Interrogation : No. 5865

14 November 1945
I/O : Capt. HALLE

P/W : HILGER, Gustav
Rank : Counsellor of Embassy
Unit : Foreign Office
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Report: The collectivization of agriculture in the U. S. S. R.

Under the Czarist regime, the mass of the Russian peasantry had practically no land. The greater portion of the land belonged to the great landowners, the state, the crown, and the church, while the majority of the peasants on the average had no more than 4 hectares at the most, the yield from which in the less fruitful years would not provide for even the most urgent necessities of life. The result was that the peasants transferred into industry, which was still little developed, and into other extra work which would bring in enough to keep their families in the country above water. In addition, after the Russian peasant was freed from serfdom in 1861, a considerable part of Russia came under the control of the MIR constitution, according to which the land did not belong to the peasant personally, but to the peasant communities of the various villages, being redivided about every 15 years according to the number of male inhabitants in the village. This system resulted in the constant reduction of the land allowed to each family; in addition the peasant lost all incentive for cultivating his allotted portion as he always had to reckon with the fact that it would be taken from him in the next division. Shortly before World War I, the Czarist government sought to prevent the resultant proletarianization of the Russian peasantry by means of the Stolypin reform, named after its author. This reform was to create static rural population on the basis of the farmer owning his own property. The period up until the war and the consequent revolution was too short to show any results worthy of mention.

Lenin knew that the support of the Russian peasantry would be decisive for the success of the Bolshevik revolution. Therefore, the Bolsheviks in their propaganda took into account not only the general war fatigue of the population but especially the land hunger of the Russian peasant, and "Peace and Land" became the watchwords of propaganda on which the success of Bolshevik power in Russia rested. Although the creation of individual farms constituted a basic abandonment of the doctrines of the Communist Party, Lenin was forced to allow the peasantry to seize the available estates by force and divide them among themselves. In this way the land suitable for cultivation was divided up into small and tiny parcels with the consequence that within the territory of the Soviet Union not less than 25 million dwarf farms were created, having a total arable surface of about 100 million hectares i.e. an average of only 4 hectares per farm. The number of larger farms dating from Czarist times or created between 1921 - 1926 as a result of the NEP (New Economic Policy), (the so-called "Kulak" farms), was relatively too small to have any considerable weight.

NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT

EXEMPTIONS Section 3(b)

- (2)(A) Privacy
(2)(B) Methods/Sources
(2) Foreign Relations

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The fateful consequences to agriculture as a result of such unrestrained division of the land soon showed themselves. The mass of the small farmers produced just enough with their primitive equipment to keep body and soul together; there were practically no surpluses for the urban population and the Red Army. In addition, the Soviet regime was going forward with plans for an industrialization which could not possibly be effected without previously securing the food supply.

After it was no longer possible to increase agricultural production by reforming the large estates, only two solutions to the problem were open for the Soviet government.

The first method tried by Stalin was to provide the capable middle-peasant (Russian: *Serednyak*) with sufficient land and equipment by means of state aid to make it possible for him to produce the necessary surpluses. Stalin's plan was angrily attacked by the radical part of the Party under the leadership of Trotsky and his supporters, reproaching Stalin for attempting to return to bourgeois agricultural forms, accusing him of treachery to the most important achievements of the Revolution, and urging collectivization of agriculture, i.e. the establishment of closed communities by force and under the control of the state.

Stalin recognized the danger threatening him from the Trotskyites, did not show his face, made their demands his own, and took the other path, carrying through the forced collectivization of peasant farms himself.

Collectivization began in 1927 and reached its climax in 1929/30. It was an extremely hard process to which many persons were sacrificed, as it was of prime importance to eliminate by force those elements from the peasantry who either opposed collectivization or might be expected to do so. These were the farmers who had nothing to gain by collectivization, but everything to lose, i.e., those who enjoyed a certain measure of comfort and had more land and cattle than was necessary to supply their own needs. Every farmer who worked more than 4 hectares, who owned more than one horse and one cow, was declared a "Kulak" (synonymous with "robber") and an enemy of the state, his land was confiscated and he was sent into forced labor in northern Russia or Siberia. The village poor, i.e. that part of the peasantry which had hardly any land and no cattle to speak of, viewed these actions against their prosperous neighbors, accompanied and supported as they were by the thunderous propaganda, at first expectantly and even with a certain pleasure. But their eyes were opened when they lost possession of their own small bits of land, when their own horse, their last cow, and even the few fowl they still had were taken away and incorporated in the collective farm (Russian: *Kolkhoz*). Now also the poor farmer knew what forced collectivization and life in a *Kolkhoz* meant.

The result was a tremendous drop in farmer morale and a very dangerous reduction in production, which led to a new famine in Russia in 1931/32; at the same time industrialization according to the first 5 year plan, which began operation on 1 January 1929, made new and extra requirements on agricultural production.

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Thereupon Stalin made certain compromises without, however, losing sight of his final goal, the complete collectivization of farms. These compromises consisted in allowing a member of a Kolkhoz the private ownership of a cow, some fowl, and permission to work a small parcel of land, not to exceed 1/4 - 1/2 hectare and immediately adjoining his dwelling, for his own personal needs.

Gradually the collectivization measures of the Soviet government gained complete ascendancy. By the outbreak of the war in 1941 there were no farms in the former Soviet Union which were individually owned and worked. What force alone could not accomplish was achieved by taxation, robbing the individual farmer of every means of existence.

The organization of the Kolkhoze is based on the principle of the nationalization of land and the communization of the means of production. The land belongs to the state and is given over by it to the Kolkhoze for exploitation, papers being drawn up for this purpose. The means of production (machines, implements, and horses) are the property of the Kolkhoz and are controlled by it. Thus a Kolkhoz farmer (Russian : Kolkhoznik) cannot own his own horse and is, therefore, greatly limited in his freedom of movement. The houses in which the Kolkhozniki live are usually counted as their personal property; however, there is no question of their exercising a free control over these houses by purchasing them, for instance. Each member of a Kolkhoz has the right to keep a cow; a very limited private stock of hogs, goats, sheep, and fowl is also permitted, the number being determined by the character of the region, soil conditions, etc.

All members of a Kolkhoz are duty-bound to work for the Kolkhoz. This work is set for them by a Kolkhoz director, who is named by the state. They are paid for such work both in money and products. Wages in actual money are extremely low and are of little importance. Members of a Kolkhoz do not receive payment in goods until after all obligations of the Kolkhoz to the state have been fulfilled. These obligations are many and varied (obligations in kind, taxes, insurance premiums, loans for agricultural machinery, etc.).

The extent of the payment corresponds to the amount of the production which remains in the Kolkhoz after its obligations to the state have been fulfilled. The amount due to each of the members is most complicated. It is arrived at by figuring the number of "work days" (Russian : trudoden) the member has to his credit. The trudoden is a measuring stick for work done. Consideration is given to the type of work, the time involved, the soil conditions, etc. in each region. The more work days a Kolkhoznik has to his credit, the larger is the payment he receives. If the Kolkhoznik should have a surplus left over after he has provided for his personal needs, he is permitted by law to offer it for sale on the open market. The sale, however, must be made by him personally or by a member of his family; no third party can be commissioned to carry out the transaction for him.

The Kolkhoz organization means the complete enslavement of the farmer. He is bound fast to his Kolkhoz; in order to leave, a farmer must first have official permission to give up his calling and enter industry as a worker.

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The Kolkhoznik is obliged to execute the work with which he is charged by the Kolkhoz director. He can better his standard of living only when there is a considerable increase in production within the frame-work of the total achievement of the members of his Kolkhoz.

In reparation for this sacrifice the state frees him from the care of marketing the products produced by his labor and protects him from being out of work.

The directors of the Kolkhoze are responsible to the state for the exact execution of all the regulations issued by it for the operation and management of the Kolkhoz and for full and prompt deliveries to the state. Default by a Kolkhoz director is followed by the punishments usual in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand the Soviet government does everything in its power to put the Kolkhoze in a position to attain the production they expect from them. They are provided with seed, agricultural implements, tractors, etc. Where it would not pay the smaller Kolkhoze to own their own tractors, mowing and threshing machines etc., or if it is beyond their means to purchase them, the necessary machines are loaned them, against payment in products, by the MTS (the State Machine and Tractor Stations). An army of agronomists supervises the activities of the Kolkhoze and aids their directors by work and deed. Members of Kolkhoze who contribute more than their normal share of effort are picked out by the Soviet government and held up as examples to the public. Extensive and clever propaganda does everything to convince the Russian farmer that his prosperity and fortune have their roots in the Kolkhoz.

The purpose of collectivization has been proven by the war. Collectivization stood the test. It has shown itself in a time of trial for the Soviet Union as a certain, effective, and dependable method for obtaining the agricultural products needed by the State. Further, it guarantees the Soviet government that there will be no danger of private, capitalistic, economic firms rising in the country.

The Soviet government will, therefore, stick to the principle of collectivization of agriculture in the future, and will continue to take steps to strengthen and extend it.